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Mizzell, Jennifer

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TELLING STORIES OF RADICAL IDENTITY CHANGE: A STUDY OF DIVERGENCE FROM THE FAMILIAR

Jennifer Mizzell

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the subjective, discursive development of **divergent professional identity stories** and **their nascent consideration** by studying former professional criminals who have made a significant professional change. This thesis investigates how individuals craft, a radical identity change story towards a profession in which they have no previous experience.

This thesis builds upon existing literature on identity stories, primarily focusing on possible, provisional, and identity stories, to provide new and expanded ways of understanding professional identity stories. This project – based in a qualitative, subjectivist framework and interpretivist paradigm – utilized interviews which allowed participants to freely share their experiences and provide their interpretations of how they began to tell this radically new and divergent identity story. This also allowed participants to expand upon the beginning stages of consideration when they said they felt hesitation in sharing it with others. Data for this project was built from 46 semi-structured interviews with former professional criminals. Interview data were thematically analyzed, providing novel insights about how an individual may begin to tell a *divergent professional identity story* and the need for *nascent identity stories* when making a significant professional change. These divergent professional identity stories were told by individuals who recalled instances when they pursued a radically different profession than their previous work experience, and nascent identity stories were told by individuals who said they needed to privately explore this change before discussing it more broadly with others.

The primary contribution of this research is to produce theory that provides new ways for individuals to discuss who one wants to become: divergent professional identity stories. This new understanding of narrating stories of identity change provides novel theory to inform researchers on the processes of voluntary professional identity changes. These stories are focused on shifts away from what is known and familiar in regard to an individual's previous work, which may at times appear to be radical and unconventional to others. A secondary contribution of this research is the proposal of nascent identity stories as an extension of current research on possible identity stories. This research provides a greater understanding of the early periods of

initial identity consideration – a place where many individuals say they hesitate to share new ideas of identities with those around them. The third contribution of this research builds upon this hesitation, explaining ways individuals may temporarily shelter their new identity being explored until they are prepared to share it with an audience. In summary, this thesis answers the call of extant literature to broaden the understanding of identity stories in a way that addresses increasing changes to the professional working world.

1.Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis analyzes the stories of forty-six former criminals to provide a new understanding of professional identity stories. This research project explores how new professional identity stories are constructed and told to the self and others. The resulting insights contribute to sociological and organizational study research by expanding our understanding of how an individual's professional identity story may diverge from previous work identities and how the early stages of divergence are enacted by the individual. Studying radical professional identity changes – professional criminals exploring new identities – this research expands identity story literature beyond the traditional professional path progression. The project uniquely contributes to a growing need within identity literature, particularly concerning professions, to address how individuals think about and enact an identity that significantly differs from their previous experience (Pratt, 2000; Bloom et al., 2021; Ibarra, 1999; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006).

Current sociological and organizational literature often discusses how individuals tell professional identity stories to others when there is a level of familiarity with a considered, possible identity (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Pratt, 2000). While many individuals following traditional or institutionalized professional paths may say they have confidence in their next steps forward (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), individuals hoping to make a significant change to their storyline may not share the same level of assurance. While extant research may show benefits in exploring and embracing ambiguity during a non-traditional or under-institutionalized identity story change (Garsten, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), many individuals may claim to not know how to navigate the uncertainty with enough confidence to begin exploring. This gap in the research creates the need to examine periods of early identity change decisions and how individuals may navigate the time "betwixt and between" their previous and future professional identity stories (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Garsten, 1999). This is especially important within the rise of the

gig-economy and remote work as individuals have greater opportunities for pursuing new types of work than in previous generations. Current literature does not sufficiently take into account significant professional identity changes that may require additional levels of confidence to navigate ambiguity, nor does it provide a significant depth of understanding into how an individual may begin to consider a new identity in its early stages when they may not yet be ready to showcase it to others.

Within current identities literature, much attention is given to identity stories that are temporarily contemplated and then shared with others (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Bloom et al., 2021), stories that follow a traditional forward progression of roles within a profession (Pratt, 2000; Ibarra, 1999), and the process of selecting a future identity story from a range of options that have been built upon previous experiences and role models (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Swidler, 1986; Baumeister, 1998). This literature has largely focused on the telling of new professional identity stories when there are few threats from the external world because of a similarity with previous work, thereby making individuals less likely to experience a rejection of the profession they are exploring. While individuals may trial who they are considering becoming in front of others, this research has failed to recognize those storyline changes which come with significantly more threats, higher stakes, and greater difficulty to pursue. This project seeks to fill in this gap in the literature and helps address the difficulties in non-traditional career changes (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

Professional identity stories are common ways of expressing who an individual says they are, as many cultures have become increasingly work-centric since the rise of industrialization and individuals have increasingly begun to identify who they say they are with their work (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Industrialization has given rise to high-commitment, "total institution" workplaces which are all-consuming as individuals find their personal and work stories becoming intertwined (Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Toubiana, 2020; Goffman, 1961; Gofen, 2009; Ebaugh, 1988). For this reason, individuals may find it difficult to extricate who they say they are as a *professional* from who they are as a *person.* This may present difficulties for those who are attempting to leave their previous profession as individuals report feeling that their

entire sense of who they are may be unraveled by the decision to leave their work (Ebaugh, 1988). What is less known is the impact this extrication may have on *future* decisions related to who an individual hopes to become. As professional identity stories are built from the values, talents, and preferences of an individual's repertoire of previous work experience (Schein, 1978), shifting to a new way of defining a profession may be daunting (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). This research project investigated this shift by selecting a participant group who has a strong interconnectedness of professional and personal identity stories, and whose stakes for leaving their profession are far more serious than verbal rejection or internal ambiguity (Garot, 2011 Paoli, 2019): professional criminals.

Individuals who tell stories of being professional criminals may share similarities in their professional storylines with those in mainstream work. Promotional opportunities, the desire for organizational advancement, complex hierarchical structures that can be difficult to move upward in, leadership development and mentorship, and disciplinary conversations with under-performing employees are all typical types of stories that a professional criminal may share about their time in a gang, the mafia, the cartel, a pack, an international crime ring, etc. (Decker & Curry, 2000; Paoli, 2019; Garot, 2011). There are stories of specialists who choose to specialize in narcotic smuggling, bank fraud, or government take-overs, and there are stories of generalists who prefer "cafeteria-style offending" and employ a variety of activities like burglary, petty theft, or car-jacking in their daily work (Paoli, 2019: 281). Organizational success is often defined in financial performance and expansion of product lines and sales territories. These organizational-level and individual-level attributes draw a variety of parallels between criminal and mainstream professions. One critical difference between the two is the level of risk that accompanies leaving a criminal professional work environment. While mainstream employees report fear of ostracization, rejection by their peers, and the potential for negative financial impacts, employees in the criminal sector may report fear of safety, total financial loss, and an unraveling of their personal identities which are often highly interconnected into family businesses and tightly-knit communities. For this reason, studying professional identity change stories, particularly in this extreme environment, provided valuable insight into the difficulty that accompanies telling an identity story of radical professional change.

This project explores these ideas from a subjectivist perspective, recognizing that each individual may have their own perspective and understanding of what their reality was when undergoing this change (Kuhn, 1962; Bryman, 2008; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This allowed the research to more naturally employ an interpretive paradigm, with participants able to tell about how they subjectively experienced and created their reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As a result, the research allowed for the subjective nature of storytelling to be embraced and fully explored through discourse (Brown, 2004; Grant et al., 2004). This research project does not seek to find one objective answer for how individuals tell diverging professional identity stories, but rather it seeks to subjectively build a guide from how individuals share beginning to craft their stories. Extant literature is reviewed in this thesis to provide a foundational understanding for the project to continue to generate understanding and insight (Bryman, 2008). While not all literature reviewed has been written by its original authors as positioned within an interpretivist paradigm or written from the stance of viewing identities as stories told by individuals about themselves to others, this is the approach that all literature and findings for this project are situated and reviewed within.

Interviews were intentionally chosen as the method for data collection in this project as they provide rich opportunities for individuals to share their experiences through discourse. Particularly, semi-structured interviews were employed to allow the interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to explore insights as they emerged. By providing interviewees the space to freely explore their thoughts and ideas, a wide range of insights were captured to understand the nuances within the significant shifts they claimed to have undergone (Bryman, 2004). Forty-six participants agreed to this study and each story was reviewed to develop a deeper understanding. The data were then critically analyzed for thematic patterns which allowed the ability to move iteratively between the data and extant literature to understand phenomenon and notate potential gaps that needed additional exploration (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In essence, this research project used qualitative methods to provide deeper insight into the ways individuals consider and eventually tell new professional identity stories that may radically differ from what they have previously known.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions explored in this study were developed from an interest in how individuals undertake telling a new professional identity story. The questions were developed to maintain an open-mindedness of exploration and discovery, and allow individuals to freely share their experiences and how they interpreted their thoughts and actions. The semi-structured interview schedule developed from these questions was used as a guide for providing direction to the project. The research questions were as follows:

- Why might an individual tell a new professional identity story that has no connection to previous professional stories they told about themselves?
- How do individuals navigate various internal and external considerations when deciding to undergo an identity change that differs from what they have previously known?
- How does an individual navigate the earliest stages of change when crafting their identity change story?
- How are these early, nascent identity stories constructed and reinforced by the individuals telling them?

These questions and the approach to use them as a guide for exploring identity change stories were developed from taking a subjectivist approach, putting the project within an interpretivist paradigm where the research would seek to build understanding rather than discover a universal truth (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Bryman et al., 2018; Blaikie, 2000).

1.3 Structure of thesis

Seven chapters shape the content of this thesis, each providing a deeper understanding of the research and the resulting insights from the project. Chapter 1 provides an introductory overview of the research and outlines the direction of the project. Chapter 2 provides a thorough overview of relevant literature that served as a guide for this project. Within this chapter, narrative identities are foundationally defined (2.1), various types of identity stories are outlined (2.2), stories focusing on identity change are discussed in greater detail (2.3), and various ways

change stories are approached are outlined (2.4). Chapter 3 situates the project within the various views on epistemological and ontological approaches for research (3.1), and explains the rationale for choosing the selected path for conducting this research (3.2). This chapter also discusses the reasoning for selecting qualitative research as the method of choice for garnering this data, as well as overviewing the methods of access and ethical considerations throughout this study (3.3). Research design (3.4), data collection methods (3.5), and data analysis (3.6) are also discussed. The importance of reflexivity for the project is introduced and outlined at length.

Chapter 4 focuses entirely on data presentation. As all insights drawn from this project were made from the same set of interviews, it was important that all data be presented in one cohesive chapter while still divided by thematic relevance. Each of the three "parts" of the chapter are groupings of related data, further divided into sections (major themes) and subsections (minor themes). These major themes are the broader themes that arose in the data, while the minor themes are more nuanced patterns which provide additional development to the major themes. In Part 1, *Divergent identity narratives: the possible and the enacted* (4.1), themes around possible identity stories and the liminality between those stories are explored. Part 2, *Motivations and approaches* (4.2) are then discussed to provide understanding as to why an individual might be motivated to tell a new professional identity story that differs so drastically from their past experience, as well as the approaches they said they took in order to begin telling those stories. In Part 3, themes of *Sustainment* of the new identity story are explored. This included a variety of external and internal mechanisms individuals recounted using when beginning to craft their stories.

Chapters 5 and 6 serve as the discussion of the data and integration of the findings with extant literature. Chapter 5 outlines the different aspects of a novel way identity stories are told by individuals: *divergent professional identity stories*. Section 5.2 shares the two main types of narratives told by individuals to capture their change: cold turkey and gradual. In 5.3, the initial stages of the divergent identity story process are outlined to provide an understanding of how individuals began to change their storyline. Section 5.4 follows this by framing ways individuals said they reinforced the decision and maintained momentum towards the new identity story. In Chapter 6, *nascent identity stories* are proposed as an extension of possible identity stories.

Section 6.2 provides guidance for *when* these stories were told by individuals, and section 6.3 explicates *why* these stories were said to be necessary by individuals who were hesitant to showcase their stories under consideration. Section 6.4 then provides additional attributes about these nascent identity stories, i.e., extended consideration, increased susceptibility to threats, and sheltering, to provide additional context.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to the thesis. The data are summarized within the context of the current literature and its gaps, providing a succinct outline of the contribution to extant literature for this research project, as well as outlining potential limitations and additional areas for future research.

2.Literature review

2.1 Narrative identities

2.1.1 Foundational definitions

Foundational to the ensuing research of this project is an understanding of the theoretical concepts of *identity, narratives,* and *stories*. Within extant scholarly research, identities have been described in a variety of ways. For this study, an identity is framed as the "various meanings attached to a person by self and others" (Ibarra, 1999: 766; Gecas, 1982). This concept of *identity* has been present in a variety of studies, answering questions such as "Who am I?" and "How should I act?", focusing on the identity and the societal expectations that accompany it (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cerulo, 1997; Kreiner et al., 2006). Identities are said to be personal, social, role specific, or professional in nature (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Ibarra, 1999). Professional identities, or "relatively stable and enduring constellation[s] of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" are of particular interest in the context of this study and will be discussed in greater detail below (Ibarra, 1999: 764; Schein, 1978).

Scholars studying identities have developed various theoretical approaches to understanding an individual's identity and its formation. Employing a theoretical approach assists in understanding these identities and provides a topographical map of influence, impact, and incentives to overlay across stories told by participants in interviews to identify. The *narrative theory approach*, where individuals tell stories about creating and developing new identities, will be used as the way to interpret this data and understand information given in project interviews (Caza et al., 2018).

Humans have told stories for thousands of years, communicating important events and documenting history (Fisher, 1985; 1989). More recently, scholars have begun to explore the ways *stories* shape the development of who we say we *are* and who we say we *become* as individuals (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2016; McAdams, 2001; McAdams, 1985). In these bodies of

research, scholars seek to unravel the complex ways humans talk about their lives (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; McAdams, 2013; McAdams, 1985). In such *narrative identities*, individuals "construct and internalize an evolving and integrative story for life" (McAdams & McLean, 2013: 233; Singer, 2004). These narratives are composed of *stories* or "particular episodes and periods in their lives" that individuals recount about the events that took place throughout the course of their lifetime (McAdams & McLean, 2013: 233). Through narratives, individuals find and create meaning for themselves by collating their experiences, which may be varied and spread across different domains of life (McAdams, 2001). When individuals collate these stories into a composed narrative, they report leading healthier lives when they feel their stories follow a coherent pattern (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Holland et al., 1998; McAdams, 2013; McAdams, 2001).

Narrative theory approach

The psychologically based *narrative theory approach* to understanding identities incorporates continuous introspection where the individual perpetually calibrates their sense of who they are based on their past and present circumstances, creating a *self-narrative* (Miscenko & Day, 2016). These self-narratives contain identity stories through which individuals continually build upon (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Self-narratives enable individuals to maintain stability in uncertainty, providing a sense of understanding that the individual can hold onto (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, scholars recognize self-narratives are not created by oneself in isolation. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) proposed that a refined self-narrative is a result of the iterative narration process, where social acceptance and legitimacy of the proposed self-narrative *must* be given by others to be fully accepted and used by the individual. If a narrative does not follow a socially accepted or conventional route, the individual's likelihood of fully incorporating that narrative into their self-concept remains low (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). By using a narrative theory approach, this research will follow the belief that identities are created and told by individuals through stories that are told to themselves and others; these will be referred to as *identity stories* throughout this research (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Linde, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ricoeur, 1991).

Throughout a narrative's creation, an individual will experience internal and external factors that influence each story's development (Boje, 1991; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013). For example, within a professional identity story that will be further discussed below, changes of professional interests, shifts in roles and responsibilities, or cultural shifts in the workplace may in turn change the story an individual shares with others. These dynamic factors and changes of influence may make waves in a once cohesive narrative (e.g., a high-performing manager who is focusing on work-life balance after the birth of a child) and can result in conflicting narrative stories being told at the same time (Boje, 1991). When such social and environmental shifts occur, individuals begin to work on their identities and try telling new stories (Ibarra, 1999; McAdams, 2001; McLean & Pratt, 2006). If others deem these new stories to be authentic (e.g., executives accepting a manager as a new mom who will not work on the weekends), the narratives will likely be added to a more permanent repertoire of identity stories the individual will tell in the future (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). When taking a narrative approach, any work done to alter or change an identity story is often said to occur when an individual is undergoing a role transition of some kind (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), and will thus be analyzed in this research as individuals transition from one form of employment to another. The narrative approach to understanding identities remains popular as researchers continue to study individuals through the stories they tell to themselves and others in order to make sense of their identities (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 2001).

2.1.2 Context: Professional identity stories

Identity stories may vary, being either personal, relational, or professional, and may be told and worked on throughout the course of one's life (Brown, 2017). The study of *professional identity stories* has gained the particular interest of scholars as stories about professions are becoming increasingly relevant in a work-centric world (Coupland, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Bloom et al., 2021; Pratt et al., 2006; Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2019; Obodaru, 2017). For this project, the definition of professional identity stories to be built upon is "the collection[s] of meanings attached to the self by the individual and others in a work domain" (Miscenko & Day, 2016: 216; Gecas, 1982; Coupland, 2016). While other definitions of professionals have been used within organizational studies to classify what may be deemed as a 'profession' (Abbott, 1981), this

research will focus on professions that are described as an identity within a work context (Coupland, 2016; Ibarra, 1999). A professional identity story is therefore a story that an individual, and others around them, may ascribe to themselves in a workplace (Mead, 1934). Professional identity stories have been studied in many contexts, providing insights ranging from the methods individuals use when choosing a profession to their alignment of work and values. This previous research also highlights the importance of congruence for professionals between the work they say they are currently doing and the work they say they are intending to do (Ibarra, 1999; Petriglieri, 2011; Pratt et al., 2006). An individual's professional identity story not only addresses "Who I am?" at work, but also provides guidance for individuals who still wonder "Who *should* I be?", "How should I act?", and "What should I develop into?" within the workplace (Ibarra, 1999; Gecas, 1982). By studying individuals in the context of their professional identity stories, this research project will provide additional insight into the complexity of individuals in the working world, such as how an individual might say they take on a profession that is different than what they and others might expect, and instances when it diverges from their past experiences.

The specific focus in this research on professional identity stories is important for two reasons. First, while individuals may increasingly change organizations and roles throughout the course of their lives, they are significantly less likely to stray from a professional identity story which has become an integral part of their overarching life narrative (e.g. an individual being an accountant, despite the myriad organizations or various roles where they perform accounting activities) (McAdams, 2006; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). As transient, gig-work is becoming more and more common, these professional identity stories may become increasingly popular as individuals are becoming less permanently attached to specific organizations. Second, individuals can occasionally stray from conventional professional narrative storylines of forward progression and develop unconventional stories that differ from their previous experience. Some professional identity stories are said to be more difficult to diverge from than others. Stories of working in high commitment organizations or "total institutions" may discuss a significant amount of loyalty and devotion towards their organizations, as individuals either share stories of organizational pressures or the interconnectedness of stories for their personal and professional lives (Goffman, 1961; Gofen, 2009; Ebaugh, 1988; Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Toubiana, 2020). In

these stories, there is often an increased difficulty to disentangle the connectedness of who an individual says they are and who they say they may want to become, as external pressures may often influence their ability to pull away and pursue something different. Better understanding diverging professional paths are of primary interest in this investigation. In professional identity stories, individuals may begin to form an identity story based on their values, talents, and preferences through their various work-related experiences (Schein, 1978). A professional identity story, in essence, is formed when individuals experience the working world, evaluate who they are in the context of those work environments, and begin to create an idea of who they would like to become based on those experiences. These professional identity stories can be helpful anchoring points for individuals who face difficulties in a particular role or organization and need to be reminded of who they *say* they are as a professional (see Pratt et al., 2006; Petriglieri, 2015).

While professional identity stories may provide grounding and clarity for individuals who talk about following an accepted path, expressing interest in diverging from the familiar may present risk (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Holland et al., 1998). Current identity literature has investigated traditional forms of professional identity story change, such as sharing about role progression from a junior consultant to that of a consulting manager (Ibarra, 1999; Grey, 1994). In this literature, individuals desiring to grow often say they look to role models, comparing who they currently say they are against who they say they would like to become (Ibarra, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This extant research highlights that by crafting and maintaining a stable narrative, individuals can more effectively perform their work (Ashforth et al., 2000), confront issues they face (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010), and adapt to workplace changes (Ibarra, 1999; Obodaru, 2012). Additional studies by Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) and Petriglieri and Obodaru (2019) have provided foundational insight into the way individuals tell stories about navigating their careers. As the working world is becoming increasingly complex and career progressions less traditional or linear (e.g., gig economies and freelance work), there is an increasing need to study the fluidity of identity stories which follow divergent paths that differ from the traditional development of an individual's past work experience (Coupland & Brown, 2012). These stories of unconventional career progressions are currently less studied and understood, potentially due to their prior infrequency. That infrequency could be attributed to the

increased difficulty individuals report facing when telling stories which stray from past or current stories (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), as well as less opportunities to shift in careers than may currently be present. As Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) propose a variety of insights in their work on professional identity story creation, they acknowledge the tenuous nature of telling an identity story that does not follow a conventional path. By completely changing organizations, work functions, or professions, individuals may contest the well-established models of career progression of one's past identities and risk the danger of a future identity story's rejection (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). For this reason, existing literature argues that individuals' professional identity progressions oftentimes remain predictable and conventional. However, a gap in the literature persists for how identity story formation may occur for those individuals who decide to tell an unconventional identity story—one unlike any previous professional identity or reference point in their past.

2.2 Types of identity stories

There are a variety of identity stories that may provide additional understanding to the types of professional identity stories an individual may tell or say they are considering. *Possible identity stories* and *provisional identity stories* are the primary genres of stories most relevant for this research (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Additional genres of stories are briefly discussed to open the aperture of how stories may be told by individuals who are contemplating pursuing something radically new and different.

2.2.1 Possible identity stories

Possible identity stories are stories which share "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 954). Often these stories of the possible are separate from stories about who an individual currently says they are (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Scholars have referred to these kinds of stories in a variety of ways, highlighting at times the aspirational nature of pondering who an individual says they would like to become (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). These possible identity stories are often socially constructed and reflect the hopes they may one day resemble what they see in others (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Even without the presence of role

models physically present in their social environment, the symbols, images, and other external influences in an individual's social life may also be used to shape these possible identity stories and create vague images of what their future stories may become (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Individuals may create many possible identity storylines throughout their lifetimes, building potential ideas from new life experiences, relationships, role models, or exposure to events in the world. These future ideas form a collective identity *repertoire* of potential identity stories, which may reflect the individual's motivations, desires, goals, and fears (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra, 1999). These repertoires may change as an individual continues to watch role models and outside sources for influence, pulling pieces of behaviors and actions into a coherent possibility that might one day be enacted (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Other scholars may refer to this as a story's *toolkit*, where individuals may pull from a variety of skills or habits to help them develop stories about who they want to become (Swidler, 1986). As an individual's experience in a field or profession increases, a greater number of possible or potential images are created and clarified (Markus & Nurius, 1986). To order to continue to create this repertoire, an individual may rely on role prototyping (i.e., observing role models) and identity matching (i.e., comparing their current identity against a desired identity in the future) (Ibarra, 1999). Repertoires are most likely to be deemed authentic (i.e., maintaining "integrity of self and behavior within and across situations") by an individual if they are coherent, with similar potential identity stories lining the shelves of their identity repertoire (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010: 140; Baumeister, 1998; Ibarra, 2003).

If a possible story diverges from what is traditionally expected, there is a likelihood that the identity may be rejected by external audiences, the individual may be deemed inauthentic, or the individual may experience a prolonged period of transition before an identity is be said to be fully enacted (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra, 1999). Despite this possibility of rejection due to telling an incoherent or diverging possible identity story, some individuals may successfully form and tell their divergent identity stories to others. This research addresses questions investigating how individuals successfully navigate not only *adding* an unconventional identity story to their repertoire, but how they say they *enact* and *tell* a story that diverges from what is known and expected of them.

2.2.2 Provisional identity stories

When individuals talk about the possibilities of who they might become, their stories may turn to discussion of 'trialing' this consideration in front of others. These kinds of stories are often referred to as *provisional identity stories*. This provisional period is said to be a season of "trying on" new considerations of who an individual is debating about becoming (Ibarra, 1999). *Provisional identity stories* discuss "temporary solutions people use to bridge the gap between their current capacities and self-conceptions and the representations they hold about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in the new role" (Ibarra, 1999: 765). As possible identity stories talk about the idea of who one *might* become, provisional identity stories discuss the actions of trialing who one might *be* (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Bloom et al., 2021). Erikson refers to these periods of identity experimentation as when one may find who they are thought to be by others in society (1980). A provisional identity story involves trialing ideas from within the repertoire of potential identities, showcasing these considerations to external audiences for approval, and evaluating the idea for internal congruence with who an individual says they would like to become (Ibarra, 1999). Provisional identity stories provide tangible steppingstones for individuals who would like to move from a potential, future idea of who they say they would like to become into an enacted version of who they say they are.

In the context of profession changes, literature about provisional identity stories has been foundational in guiding conversations about change within traditional career path storytelling (e.g., junior consultants becoming consultant managers) (Ibarra, 1999). However, as stories about career paths are continuing to follow less traditional storylines, it is important to extend our understanding of how professional change stories may be told which are less predictable or linear. If identity changes follow a more traditional development path, a provisional story may face little opposition or threat from external audiences against further incorporation (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In stories where an individual changes a role within the same organization, takes on a similar work function in a new role, or remains within the same profession, they often recall being less likely to receive scrutiny (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Alternatively, possible identity stories that are not related to *currently held* professions and diverge from an "expected" storyline face external opposition and threats during considerations about the potential profession's formation. Internal conflicts may also arise in stories told about

diverging professions, as identity stories which follow a traditional, linear path require significantly less work to reconcile and create a coherent storyline in one's mind (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Divergent professional identity stories may require significantly more work due to the increased level of incoherency in their storylines.

2.2.3 Enactment of identity stories

When provisional identity stories are told by an individual, eventual progression of the storyline can result in the *enactment*, or incorporation, of the short-term consideration into their long-term story. Gecas refers to this as a period when individuals recognize they have the "experience of agency" in their stories (1986:140). Existing literature states that stories of enactment are the key to establishing and sustaining an identity story (Ibarra, 1999; Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Studies have shown the importance of enacting a professional identity for individuals to be able to establish and sustain that identity (e.g., professional chess players who need to enter tournaments to create and sustain their identities as 'chess players') (Leifer, 1988). This research investigates and extends current understandings of enactment stories of professionals.

Traditional enactment literature states that for a provisional identity story to become a story of enactment and full integration of a new profession, an individual must claim and publicly act it out in order to establish and sustain it (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). While this line of enactment theory has historically emphasized the importance of stories with *public* enactment as the means of establishing and sustaining a potential profession, Obodaru (2017) revised this understanding by proposing that identity stories may not necessarily need to be *publicly* enacted in order to be incorporated into a long-term story. Instead, she posits that alternative identity stories, which are enacted imaginatively, are still being enacted by individuals—even if not for others to see (Obodaru, 2017). Athens (1994) also proposes that a significant portion of enactment work may be done with only the individual themselves. In this research, this may be colloquially referred to as individuals claiming to "work themselves out" or "starting to think about something." In both traditional provisional identity stories and alternative identity stories, individuals discuss having to choose either to fully incorporate the possibility they were considering or reject it with no intention of incorporation. This study proposes an extension of

these understandings, one in which an individual may intentionally choose to neither enact (either publicly or privately) nor reject the identity—*yet* (Ibarra, 1999; Obodaru, 2017; Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Instead, in this new type of narrative, an individual may deliberately hide and shelter an identity through nondisclosure while in its undetermined state until it is ready to be presented via enactment for personal and social approval.

In Ibarra's metaphor of provisional identity stories, an individual who wants to begin trialing their identity will quickly come out of the dressing room of repertoires with their possible identity story to provisionally "try out" the new consideration in front of others for approval (1999). However, this research explores the possibility that by instead staying within the confines of the private dressing room for an extended period, an individual may continue to evaluate their attachment to, interest in, and potential consequences of provisionally enacting or eventually integrating this idea. In this somewhat protective state, the germinating seedling of an idea may be sheltered against external forces which could stifle its maturation. While enactment literature suggests the primary way to fuel any identity story's long-term establishment is to exit the dressing room (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Leifer, 1988; Petriglieri, 2011), this research will explore the possibility that an extended, private stage of early identity story development may be a vital part of the route to preparing for long-term establishment. Additionally, premature enactment outside of the dressing room may, in fact, be detrimental to the establishment and sustainment of some professions that are under consideration. For divergent professional stories, individuals exposing themselves to others too soon may result in a level of rejection that is difficult to overcome for a long-term pursuit. Rather than rejecting the outfit if the audience gives a negative response, an individual may be more likely to maintain the outfit regardless of external criticisms if given appropriate exploratory time to build confidence and interest. In this way, a profession under consideration may survive and later be enacted as an integrated part of the identity story repertoire, rather than being immediately quashed or altered (Petriglieri, 2011).

As previously discussed, although current enactment literature states that identity stories may only survive if they include enactment as a part of the early stages of consideration, this research proposes an argument that the long-term survival of professions under consideration

may occur if they are *not yet* enacted. If the belief remains that identity stories only survive when they discuss enactment for the self and others, this may lead to the premature showcasing of some professions under consideration before they are prepared to face threats; thus, the identity stories may falter when threatened and may eventually be discarded (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Petriglieri, 2001). The period of early identity story development, in contrast, may provide a sheltering and bolstering space in which identities can be strengthened against threats. These will be referred to as *nascent identity stories* throughout this research project.

2.2.4 Other types of identity stories

Three additional types of stories provide important themes related to nascent identity research. *Lingering identity stories* are stories in which individuals speak about a previous version of themselves, their mindsets, or behaviors that linger within stories about a new version of who they claim to be (Wittman, 2019). In Wittman's research, she discovers several elements of these identity stories that reveal reasons as to why individuals may continue to have "former roles that persist significantly beyond role change" (2019: 724). Chief among these is ongoing uncertainty that an individual may say they are internally experiencing when trying to move into the next phase of their life story. Ebaugh also discusses instances where an individual may share that they feel remnants of a former way of being still in their stories (1988). In her research with former nuns who left their profession to pursue a different role, many claimed they often identified with traces of their former work even after physically leaving. Several other researchers have found similar evidence that stories may not always follow a typical pattern of clean role or profession change and may contain fragments of former ways of thinking and being even in new roles (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984; Reitzes & Mutran, 2006).

Identity moratorium stories are an additional type of story that play a significant role in this research. In these stories, individuals say they experience psychological closure of their former way of work, providing enough finality to be able to feel they can experiment with a new way of thinking about themselves and future roles. In this "socially acceptable limbo-land of free experimentation" individuals say they can experiment with other career options and explore more fully who they might like to become (Gabriel et al., 2010: 1703; Erikson, 1959). However, in stories of *temporary derailment*, much like lingering identity stories, former attachments with

their profession may still linger. In these types of stories, individuals may *themselves* refuse full closure on a former identity to keep that option available for themselves in the future (Gabriel et al., 2010). While in lingering identity stories, an *outside* source of continued uncertainty and ambiguity may often cause pieces of former identities to remain (Wittman, 2019). Identity moratorium and temporary derailment stories provide additional insight as to the types of stories that may be told by individuals in role transition, as well as why some of these stories may or may not have as clean a transition as individuals may want.

Other identity stories of relevance for this research include stories that highlight extreme difficulty in their storylines. Identity stories may not always exclusively include one way of being. Instead, stories may highlight the presence of multiple views of oneself existing at the same time, some of which conflict with each other (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Ashforth et al., 2000; Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Elsbach & Battacharya, 2001). These conflicting identity stories often tell of extreme difficulty the narrator recalls undergoing as they navigate trying to understand who they are in the presence of these competing ideals and beliefs about themselves. Common stories of difficulty are those told of role rejection by others, where an individual's external environment would not accept who they say they wanted to become. This rejection may be said to occur for a variety of reasons. Some individuals have explained in previous research that their role rejection was likely due to their lack of appropriate behaviors and mannerisms that met the "display rules" of the new profession they were seeking (Ibarra, 1999: 764; Sutton, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Other stories of extreme difficulty may reference feelings of concern in showing a desire to pursue a role or profession because of a fear of rejection. These non-disclosure identity stories often refer to a protected or hidden association with a role that individuals are afraid to share with others. To remain 'socially acceptable,' individuals may be willing to partition off 'undesirable' portions of themselves and only present the parts of their identity stories they think will be accepted by others (Ragins, 2008). Here, a non-disclosed role association remains sheltered because of a desire to be socially accepted (Ragins, 2008). Non-disclosure stigma literature thus explains that individuals remedy rejection by privately holding onto socially 'undesirable' parts of themselves (Ragins, 2008). The result becomes a disjointed narrative, where individuals feel anxious and inauthentic as they are not able to fully display all parts of themselves (Ragins, 2008). This research explores a gap in existing literature to

understand how the development and nurturing of private identities under consideration may provide another route for these individuals, whereby they may shelter an identity until it is ready to be enacted. This has two opportunities to expand our understanding of current literature: first, sheltering an identity until an individual can confidently choose to discard or pursue it without concern of overbearing external pressures; second, for identities which are selected for pursuit, sheltering prepares the individual to mitigate against negative emotional consequences which may accompany social rejection.

2.3 Type of identity change stories

Now that a foundation has been set to lay the groundwork for what identity stories and narratives may be, it is important to investigate beliefs about identity stories that revolve around change. While most *identity change stories* revolve around a basic plotline of coherence, loss of coherence and clarity, navigating confusion, and returning to a state of clarity, there are nuances followed by the types of change stories that may be told (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Lewin, 1951; Erikson, 1959, 1968). This section of the literature review addresses a few key types of change stories. First, it addresses stories of searching for identity coherence, of anxiety-driven high ambiguity and confusion, and of liminality during identity change. Finally, an exploration of change stories of growth will be made, alongside a review of the current understandings of the speed in which individuals are said to experience this growth.

2.3.1 Stories of searching for coherence

Within the typical identity change storyline, a search for coherence between who one says they *are* and who they say they want to *become* is an often-shared story (Holland et al., 1998; Maclean et al., 2012). In a variety of different studies, individuals have recalled going through a variety of *sensemaking* exercises, where they try to create an understanding of their current circumstances (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Weick, 1995). In these periods of sensemaking within stories, individuals recall trying to develop an understanding of themselves within their current environment and create a link with who they feel they might one day become. During this *journey* an individual will try to make sense of who they are in regard to the winding, and sometimes conflicting, path they are on

(Maclean et al., 2015). Other similar stories may involve *dream building*, where individuals tell stories of aligning who they say they are with who they would like to become (Pratt, 2000). In these stories, there is often said to be a theme of discontent and disappointment with who an individual presently is (Pratt, 2000; Lofland & Stark, 1965). Individuals' stories may then reference a type of *seekership* where individuals discuss seeking to find a future solution for the discontent they express currently feeling (Pratt, 2000; Lofland & Stark, 1965). By seeking to find a future solution of who they would like to become and how to get there, individuals express a desire for a level of agency in their decision-making process. While the individual may say they have some agency in these change stories, these changes are not made in isolation without others influencing their change. *Sensebreaking* is a tool that individuals have referenced in their identity change stories where communities assist in breaking the understanding of one's beliefs about themselves. Previous research has outlined the benefits, of reinforcement and refinement, and potential drawbacks, of ambiguity and rejection, the influence a community may have on an individual who is trying to find meaning in who they are in the process of this sensebreaking (Pratt, 2000).

Throughout these stories, individuals may talk about their decisions to make change and find meaning in their lives. However, not all individuals may be as likely to exhibit or discuss a similar level of openness to agency in their storytelling. In some research, connections have been made between an individual's personality traits and their likelihood to be open to having different experiences (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Behavioral psychology research has shown preliminary connections between an individual's personality traits and psychosis with the impact that personality may have on an individual's attachment to their perceived understanding of reality, but further research is needed (Shi et al., 2018; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Further investigations should be made to understand the potential relationship that personality may have on an individual's willingness to be open to change.

2.3.2 Stories of anxiety in change

Regardless of whether an individual is predisposed towards an openness to change, themes of anxiety around change are common storylines, justifying exploration and understanding through research. Anxiety in identity change stories is often recalled when an

individual references significant amounts of ambiguity in their change process (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Ashforth, 2001). When recalling this ambiguity, individuals often reference a variety of causes. In stories of total identity loss, individuals share feelings of having fully lost their understanding of who they felt they were as a professional (Gabriel et al., 2010). In this ambiguity, individuals often tell stories of trying to make sense of their loss and understand how it occurred (Kinicki et al., 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), as well as telling stories of recovery where they try to grasp onto some sense of who they are after a loss (Miscenko & Day, 2018). Stories where this acute sense of loss may be most prevalent is in identity stories of hitting rock bottom, where individuals feel a complete void in understanding who they are (Shepherd & Williams, 2018; Bauer et al., 2005). Other stories where this sense of loss may be referenced is in identity liminality stories (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). In these stories, individuals share feelings of being caught between and betwixt two different understandings of who they are. While individuals may say they are not fully one way anymore, they may also express not feeling they have an idea of who they would like to become either (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Turner, 1967; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). These feelings of being not quite one thing, while also still not feeling like another, are said to be difficult for individuals who recalled having little understanding of who they currently were (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

2.3.3 From confusion to clarity

As research highlights individuals wrestling through periods of ambiguity, liminality, and confusion in who they said they were, it also importantly outlines instances when individuals share feelings of moving from confusion to clarity (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1959, 1968). These are referred to in extant literature as *identity growth stories.* In previous research, individuals recall coming into a sense of understanding of who they were and what they believed in (Erikson, 1959, 1968). By establishing this sense of understanding, individuals said they were able to better move from a sense of confusion to one of clarity (Marcia, 1966). Marcia proposed that there were two main processes individuals' reference when discussing this kind of identity development: *exploration* of new identities and *commitment* to one of them. Combinations of these two approaches can be used as individuals describe both to move into a new way of viewing themselves (Marcia, 1966). *Identity diffusion*, also described as no exploration or commitment to a new identity, was a method of approaching identity growth stories. *Identity*

moratorium was described as the exploration of possibilities without any commitment to a new way of being. *Identity foreclosure* was explained as commitment to a way of being without any exploration of possibilities that might have been available. And finally, *identity achievement,* which was said to be the commitment to a new identity after a period of exploration, is the fourth of the combinations when committing to a new identity (Marcia, 1966).

2.3.4 Speed of change within stories

In research on stories of change, individuals recalled different paces at which they contemplated and pursued new ideas of who they wanted to become. Some of these stories of change occurred slowly and over extended periods of time (Ibarra, 1999; Brown, 2017; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), while other stories of identity change occurred quickly (Maitlis, 2022; Becker, 1997; Ezzy, 1998; Gabriel et al., 2010). Current research distinguishes that these stories of slower change occur for individuals who are both intentionally choosing to make their change, as well as individuals who say the change is outside of their control (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). However, for individuals who undergo quick identity changes, current research only points to stories of forced changes (i.e., layoffs, being fired, etc.) (Maitlis, 2022: 2; Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Hoyer & Steyart, 2015; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). This theoretical gap provides an opportunity to explore when individuals may undergo a rapid change in their identity story, but of their *own* volition. This gap is explored in detail in this research and provides guidance for how one might tell of rapid changes in their identity story when they are considering a new identity. It is important to explore this topic further as identity stories of rapid change are currently understood to induce high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity, and often involve a significant sense of loss (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Kinicki et al., 2000). By investigating the potential of rapid, voluntary identity change stories, this research project further explores whether anxiety must always be present in rapid identity change stories. It therefore outlines a roadmap for how individuals may tell stories of pursuing significant changes in their professions, without exposing themselves to significant amounts of ambiguity and uncertainty.

2.4 Ways change is approached in stories

Identity change stories are told by individuals in a variety of ways. While some stories reference a significant amount of work done by individuals to refine and become who they say they are (Brown, 2017), other stories reference a level of play and experimentation with who an individual says they may contemplate becoming (Petriglieri, 2011). There are also different patterns of change in how an individual may recall their new identity story unfolding. These patterns follow a sequence of institutionalized or under-institutionalized paths and may include additional modifications to their identity.

2.4.1 Identity work

As previously mentioned, different types of identity stories can be formed, developed, negotiated, and told over time (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Caza et al., 2018). The process of modifying an individual's identity story may be referred to as *identity work* and can occur at any stage in which the individual says they hold the identity (Caza et al., 2018; Brown, 2017). Identity work within identity stories is defined as "the many ways in which people create, adapt, signify, claim and reject identities from available resources" (Brown, 2017: 298). It is often work oriented and focused on a set of goals an individual has for themselves (e.g., telling a new story of who they are *or* changing who they say they would like to become) (March, 1976). Primary methods of identity work include, but are not limited to: cognitive, discursive, physical, behavioral, dramaturgical, symbolic, socio-cognitive, and psychodynamic (Brown, 2017; Caza et al., 2018). Individuals are known to combine multiple methods of identity work, creating a richer and more multifaceted understanding of how individuals refine an identity story for researchers (Brown, 2017). This identity work helps the individual make their lives and experiences "sensible" as they interact with others (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). This research will focus on discursive identity work in stories, as narrative is one form of discourse particularly pertinent to this research and therefore of primary interest. However, it is important to understand the other forms that may be used in tandem with discursive work to create a deeper understanding of how a narrative identity may form. Three methods of identity work are therefore outlined in greater detail below: discursive, symbolic, and dramaturgical identity work.

Discursive identity work is the verbal or written expression of a narrative which individuals craft about themselves (Brown, 2017; Chreim, 2002; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1987). *Discourse* is defined as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (du Gay, 1996: 43). As the fundamental building block of discursive identity work, discourse aids individuals who are seeking first to create, and second to develop, "new ways...to be" (Hacking, 1986: 223). While this form of identity work can be similar to other externally-observed identity work methods that are seen or heard by others (i.e., symbolic and dramaturgical), discursive identity work includes the internal, self narratives that create meaning (McAdams, 1993; Ricoeur, 1984). These narratives are told to the self and to others, thus being internalized to oneself and then communicated as an identity story, or narrative identity, to the outside world (Sacks, 1985). These identity stories may be temporary, as they are told and tried on, and may be discarded if they do not suit the present need (Ibarra, 1999). Even after adopting an identity story, individuals may rapidly edit or change who they say they are as discursive identity work is dynamic and fluid (McAdams, 1993; Ricoeur, 1984). This could occur as an individual may choose to discursively work on telling one identity narrative, while soon thereafter narrating an identity story that signifies a different version of who they would like to become (McAdams, 1993; Ricoeur, 1984). This type of significant discourse change is of interest to this research project as it captures the nuance of significant identity changes told by an individual which are not often studied at the juncture of possible and provisional.

Symbolic identity work occurs through an "individual's adoption, display, and manipulation of highly visible and malleable object[s]" that possess meaning (Brown, 2017: 303; Goffman, 1990). These objects can be physically worn or adorned on their personage or can be artifacts that are collected or used to claim an identity from the displayed meanings associated with the object (Callero, 2003; Cerulo, 1993; Norton, 1997). These objects can be displayed in a way that shows allegiance and dedication to an organization and represent a deeper incorporation of the organization into the individual's sense of identity (Casey, 1995; Brown, 2017). These physical objects are not only representations of loyalty and association with an organization but are also an "extension of individuals' identities" (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Brown, 2017: 304). Physical dress is a common use of symbolic identity work, as individuals place meaning on the

objects they wear and signal to others the beliefs about themselves and their work based on their outward appearance (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). Other outwardly facing artifacts like tattoos, make-up, music, hairstyles, and facial hair are also all recognized forms of symbolic identity work that individuals might employ when outwardly signaling their identities to others (Aslan, 2016; Norton, 1997). While symbolic identity work takes on many different forms with various levels of salience, this form of identity work is important to recognize for its usefulness in embodying the potential values and beliefs held by an individual, and the external expression of an identity story to others.

Dramaturgical identity work consists of a variety of actions or interactions that communicate to an external audience who an individual says they are or wishes to become (Goffman, 1990). Professional roles which call for particular ways of expressing oneself may result in modified behaviors resulting in individuals modifying behaviors depending on what they feel their environment requires them to emulate, (e.g., a sales role requiring increased extraversion in associates) (Beech et al., 2016; Burke, 1969; Goffman, 1990). Dramaturgical identity work occurs when the individual employs externally visible actions and behaviors to negotiate an identity that an external audience will accept (Brown, 2017). When used as a means for trying to achieve external acceptance in an organization or profession, individuals will enact or refrain from certain behaviors as a signal of their commitment and alignment with their desired working environment (Kuhn, 2006; Kanter, 1968). These behaviors may be actions that the individual decides for themselves they wish to act upon and emulate (Casey, 1995), while other behaviors are prescribed in workplaces as rituals necessary to be performed to be accepted (Mills, 1940; Kreiner et al., 2006). Over time, these ritualistic behaviors performed by the individual may be adopted at a deeper level and begin to transform who the individual says they *actually* are (Mills, 1940). While these behavior changes are viewed by some scholars as merely an actor trying on different outfits (Ibarra, 1999), other scholars speculate dramaturgical work may result in a core identity change, passing from "surface" to "deep" acting, as the individual internalizes these actions (Goffman, 1990). These "actors" may become individuals experiencing true shifts in their senses of self, and "become what they at first sought merely to appear" (Mills, 1940: 908). In this way, although dramaturgical identity work may initially begin as an appeal

for external audience approval and validation, it may result in the formative development of an individual's identity.

Scholars recognize that social influence may be a significant part of internal and external identity story negotiation (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; McAdams, 2001; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Ibarra, 1999). Stories of identity work during identity change stories are known to be based on two determinants: externally based expectations of what the new identity story should resemble and internally-based desires of who an individual says they want to become while achieving coherence (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Even as professional identity story construction begins internally, these ideas of who an individual may want to become are impacted by a variety of external stimuli and influences (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). These external influences like role models and the media provide discursive resources for the individual to begin shaping a potential identity. External influences can also be situations of destabilization and uncertainty that an individual is undergoing (Kreiner et al., 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Scholars recognize that identity stories continue to be worked on and co-authored by both the individual and their social environment after individuals begin to publicly enact their identities (McAdams, 2001). Scholars recognize that an identity's external environment, and subsequent external discourses, are crucial components of an identity story's development and can influence future development of the story (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Ibarra, 1999). Internally, individuals may continue to try out and bolster their new identity story through a variety of scaffolding and supporting techniques that help them sustain the identity in the long term, providing internal legitimacy to the idea of who they would like to become and supports against external criticism they may face (Brown & Toyoki, 2013). While a robust understanding of discursive identity work has been developed about enacted identities that are currently being trialed and told to others, identity work has been less often studied *prior* to an identity's enactment in front of others. This project provides insight into the discursive identity work and internal monologue of internally negotiating an identity prior to discussing it with others. It is framed through *identity play*, discussed below. In the case of possible identity stories that have not yet been fully shared with external audiences, it is important to build a richer understanding of the discursive identity work that occurs before a

possible identity has been selected for enactment. This gap in the literature I next explored through identity play to further current understandings of possible identity story literature.

2.4.2 Identity play

Identity play is an additional way change may be approached in an individual's story (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Baumeister, 1990). Unlike identity work that is the active development of an identity that has been selected to try in front of others, identity play is the inward trialing and exploration of an identity's fit before showcasing it to others. In play, individuals tell stories where they are "engag[ing] in provisional but active trial[s] of possible future selves" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010: 10). This play tends to occur in the earliest stages of identity consideration, at the juncture of the possible and provisional. Possible identity stories are flexible and can respond in dynamic ways to changing situations (Brown, 2017). As possible identity stories are not yet enacted, and thus not yet publicly shown to a broader audience, the identity play done to alter a potential identity for a possible self may look different than identity work done to a current, enacted identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Brown, 2017). During current understandings of periods of play, individuals are theorized to try out several provisional identity stories and evaluate them (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Returning to the metaphor of trying on a consideration of who one might want to become within a dressing room, there are countless outfits an individual may playfully explore with friends just outside of the dressing room curtain *before* deciding a particular ensemble sends out the desired professional message for a broader audience outside of the department store (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Bolder prints, brighter colors, or interesting designs may be playfully donned for initial audiences, to see what outfits may be saved into their wardrobe for the long term. If individuals are unsure of exactly what they are looking for in an identity story, this season of provisional playfulness lets the audience and the individual explore possibilities together (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). While current literature suggests a season of playfulness occurs in front of, and with, external audiences, this study investigates the possibility of a private phase of play which might be necessary for an individual who is not yet confident enough in the idea of their future self to be vulnerable and showcase it to an external audience (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Before becoming confident in showing a flamboyant or attention-grabbing outfit to others outside of the curtain, playing during a private, nascent stage within the

safety of the curtains may be crucial for confidence to build in the story despite what others may say, and therefore impact its long-term viability. If a period of early identity play is engaged, and an individual becomes more confident and surer of their new story, they may then progress to provisionally telling the identity story to others. Extant literature proposes that understanding both nascent and provisional stages of identity play may help provide a more holistic view of how individuals determine which identities to select for enactment (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Obodaru, 2017).

While individuals may want to develop an identity story, they may first find it useful to reside within an *identity workspace*, or a dedicated place to work on the identity they are pondering (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). In this workspace, individuals may refine a current identity story they are telling, or it may be a place where they can create an entirely new story that differs from what they have known before (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Literature may refer to these workspaces in different ways, sometimes referring to them as *holding environments* where an individual can safely work on a story they are considering and refine the idea of who they would like to become (Winnicott, 1975). These dedicated spaces are highly valuable for individuals who are entertaining a new identity story and are willing to share it with a select group of others, but they may not be ready to share it with the broader world quite yet (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010).

2.4.2.a Identity threats

There are a variety of reasons why individuals may not yet be ready to share their new story with others. Chief among this is the prospect of *identity threats* against their new story (Petriglieri, 2011; Brown & Coupland, 2015). If an individual assumes they will face an unfavorable response, or threat, to an identity story they are considering, the result may be a season of *non-disclosure* of that story (Ragins, 2008). In what follows, identity threats and reasons why an identity may be hidden are examined.

Individuals may feel the need to protect an identity story in early stages of possibility when they believe it will face threats. *Identity threats* have been defined in many ways but are most explicitly described as "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the values,

meaning, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011). Identity threats may arise from the self, others, or the material world, and while targeted at the identity story, the threats may have significant impacts on the individual themselves (e.g., decreased self-esteem, decreased interest in upward mobility, and decreased professional performance) (Petriglieri, 2011; Steele, 1997; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Davies, et al., 2005). The impacts of identity threats are significant to both the individual and the story they are contemplating. If an identity story is expected to be threatened in the future, an appraisal process occurs to determine the threat's magnitude of impact. Then, if the threat is deemed significant, one of two typical coping responses may be made by the individual: *identity protection*, the protection of an identity story against threats to preserve its current state, or *identity modification*, changing a threatened identity story to protect a self-concept (Petriglieri, 2011). This literature review focuses on identity protection, as this response allows a possible identity to retain its original, unaltered form. By focusing solely on identity protection responses, this study may provide further understanding of how individuals create and *maintain* a divergent possible identity.

Identity story protection approaches may vary based on the individual. Known responses may include *derogation of the sources* of the threat, employing *positive distinctiveness* where the individual focuses on educating potential threateners about the positive aspects of the story, or *concealment* of the identity story from the potentially threatening parties (Petriglieri, 2011; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tajfel, 1978; Creed & Scully 2000; Frable et al., 1997; Ellemers et al., 2002). Unlike in identity modification responses, each of these anticipatory, protection responses is a way to navigate potentially negative social feedback without having to alter their story (Petriglieri, 2011). By *derogating* the sources of threat, the individual attempts to lessen the sting of future threat by "condemning the [possible] condemners" (Sykes & Matza, 1957). *Positive distinctiveness* attaches pride to the identity story, and the individual may incorporate the story into other pieces of their narrative as they distinguish the story's positive attributes to others (Ellemers et al., 2002). The final method of an identity story's protection is *identity concealment*. An example of identity concealment may be homosexual employees preemptively concealing their sexual orientation identity to prevent becoming a target and receiving identity threats from coworkers (Creed & Scully, 2000; Frable et al., 1997). All three of these responses have been investigated with identity stories which have *already* been selected and are being told by the

individual (i.e., individuals preemptively concealing an already integrated homosexual identity) (Creed & Scully, 2000; Frable et al., 1997; Clair et al., 2005). Relatively less is known about the methods or logics used by individuals who are protecting a new, *potential* identity story they are merely considering from potential threats. To have a clear focus for this research, this review will investigate the identity protection response of concealment in particular to provide a greater understanding for proactive protection in stories.

Additional identity threat research proposes that threats may, at times, be beneficial and even *employed* by professionals to author a preferred identity (Brown & Coupland, 2015). In the case of rugby players who face potential threats towards their professional rugby player identities (i.e., potential injuries, age limitations, and performance issues), Brown and Coupland (2015) proposed that such threats may sometimes be used as a *constructive* resource when authoring an identity. They noted that external threats were used by rugby players during identity work as they authored a version of themselves that was more committed *because* of the threats, not despite them (Brown & Coupland, 2015). Individuals using threats as flexible resources when authoring an identity story warrants further investigation in the context of possible, future identities. As individuals who contemplate future identity stories that differ greatly from their existing repertoire will likely face threats towards those stories, better understanding the potential responses an individual may employ when changing the course of their professional identity stories is paramount.

2.4.3 Stigmatized identity stories

An individual may contemplate utilizing identity story protection responses and concealing an identity story if it is stigmatized (Goffman, 1963; Clair et al., 2005; Ragins & Cornwell, 2007; Ragins, 2008; Stutterheim et al., 2011). *Stigmas* are defined as "an attribute that [is] deeply discrediting" to an individual, and a stigmatized identity story is one that may be said to holistically discredit or blemish an individual (Goffman, 1963:13).

Some stigmatized attributes may be easily visible to external audiences, while other stigmatized attributes may remain invisible and not easily perceived by others (Goffman, 1963; Ragins, 2008; Pachankis, 2007; O'Connell, 2016; Clair et al., 2005). Visible stigmas may be

reluctantly accepted by the owner as they recognize their stigmatized trait will always be visible to society (e.g., race, gender, or speech) (Goffman, 1963). However, individuals who possess identities with visible stigmas report often experiencing social rejection, emotional anxiety, or ostracization (Goffman, 1963; Ragins, 2008; Jones et al., 1984). Because of this, individuals with visible stigmas may attempt to "repair" a stigmatized identity by seeking surgeries, psychotherapy, or remedial education to create a fully transformed and unblemished identity (Goffman, 1963). Even after extensive work and repair, social acceptance is often still withheld as individuals are given a secondary classification as someone with a "record of...blemish" (Goffman, 1963: 20). Alternatively, individuals with *invisible* stigmas may face a different challenge, e.g., an individual with a terminal medical condition who is trying to decide whether to share their diagnosis with others. While individuals with visible stigmas face rejection and ostracization regardless of their desire to conceal their stigmatized identity, individuals with invisible stigmas are continually faced with anxiety over the decision to conceal or reveal their identities (Pachankis, 2007; Ragins, 2008). This anxiety inducing decision to reveal or conceal is compounded by the overarching desire for individuals to maintain consistency in the narratives they tell others (Holland et al., 1998). However, as revealing a stigmatized attribute is known to initiate external criticism and judgment, individuals who have invisibly stigmatized identity stories are known to hide these identities which might bring about social rejection or ridicule (e.g., hiding associations of previous work in a job interview).

Although an individual's concealment of a stigmatized identity story is done with the desire to mitigate any negative responses or threats, concealment has the potential to create other negative results for the individual. Nondisclosure of the stigmatized identity story may have *affective* implications, including emotional distress and depression (Ullrich et al., 2003; Link et al., 1991; Kalichman & Nachimson, 1999). Individuals with stigmatized identity stories simultaneously balance desiring to create an authentic relationship with others by revealing core parts of themselves, while also desiring protection against potential social threats and rejection (Goffman, 1963; Holland et al., 1998; Ragins & Cornwell, 2007). The nondisclosure of stigmatized identity stories may also have *behavioral* implications, such as modified actions or mannerisms, decreased eye contact, and increased isolation and distress (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2006; Greene et al., 1985; Hetrick & Martin, 1987). The relationship between invisible stigmas

and their authors is tenuous and often involves uncertainty as the individual continuously wrestles with the decision to disclose their stigma, exposing it to potential threats (Ragins, 2008; Goffman, 1963). While stigmas and threats are researched and relatively well understood with respect to enacted stigmatized identity stories, relatively little is known about how stigmas and threats influence the formation of potential considerations for possible identity stories, including those which diverge substantially from one's existing professional identity story.

2.4.4 Under-institutionalized identity change stories

Change stories may also vary depending on their level of institutionalization and how often an identity story's change path may have been already taken by others (Garsten, 1999). While some identity change stories follow more traditional paths of forward progression (e.g., a junior consultant becoming a managing consultant), individuals telling similar stories to these may not be faced with significant amounts of opposition from those in their professional and social circles (Garsten, 1999; Ibarra, 1999). However, individuals who tell under-institutionalized stories, that do not align with their previous work, often express receiving differing responses from those in their professional circles (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). These stories of change may have higher levels of internal dissonance and ambiguity, as well as be accompanied by higher levels of external criticism from others (Holland et al., 1998; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). In this research, individuals who are contemplating an identity story that follows a path which radically diverges from what other change stories commonly resemble would be classified as an under-institutionalized change story. Therefore, individuals going through radically divergent transitions may experience greater levels of difficulty in telling their professional identity change stories than those telling more familiar, institutionalized change stories.

2.4.5 Modifying an identity story

There are a variety of ways an individual may discuss modifying their identities during the process of finalizing their identity stories. The three main types of story modifications discussed in this review provide insight into how individuals may continue to work on their

identity storylines: *addition and subtraction*, *role adaptation* and *role identity separation*, and *acquisitive* or *protective approaches* to modifying an identity.

In *addition* identity change stories, individuals are known to build upon a current story they are sharing with others about who they say they are (Albert, 1992; Corley & Gioia, 2004). Modifications that are made by adding to a pre-existing story will build upon an identity story that has been foundationally laid out and will layer additional behaviors, ways of thinking, or mannerisms to continue to enrich the current identity story (Albert, 1992; Corley & Gioia, 2004). Conversely, with *subtraction* identity change stories, individuals may take away from this foundational layer and remove from it what they say they already do and think (Albert, 1992; Corley & Gioia, 2004). By doing this, an individual may deconstruct a story that does not suit the current or future needs of their overall identity narrative.

Research has noted similar ways of talking about modifying an identity story. In *role adaptation* an identity story may be further developed from its current iteration, shaping an existing foundation of meaning in a similar way that addition identity change stories are told. However, *role-identity separation* stories may highlight situations where an individual determines the desire to step away from their association with the previous story and may result in a neutral or dis-identification from the former identity story (Wittman, 2019; Dukerich et al., 1998). This may resemble telling stories about casting aside a former connection to an identity to chart a new path forward that does not associate with their former stories.

A third approach to modifying an identity story may be through an *acquisitive* or *protective* approach to telling a new identity story. While the other types of modifications reference adding to or subtracting from a previous identity, these approaches may leave the identity in its current state but modify the ways that they are presented to others. In these ways of approaching a modification, once a possible role is presented to an individual, they may decide to take an acquisitive approach where approval from others is sought during the telling of these stories through display and identity work (Arkin, 1981). Alternatively, individuals may take a protective approach where they instead decide to proactively avoid telling their new stories to others to stave off disapproval and avoid external contact with other people who may disapprove

of their new story (Arkin, 1981). This protective approach is similar in motivation to individuals who may decide to undertake a nondisclosure approach to sharing new identity stories under consideration. Previous research explores this protective concept in relation to actualized identities, while this project explores it within the context of nascent identities.

By employing any of these approaches to modifying an identity story, individuals can navigate change from a current story to a future story. While some of these approaches result in the augmentation of current beliefs of who they say they are, other approaches require a significant overhaul of how an individual thinks and communicates about themselves. Depending on the approach, an individual may experience a greater amount of external pushback and internal doubt in the storyline they are crafting and beginning to tell. This may be a result of external criticism and disagreement with the decision to claim this identity; or it may be because an individual does not believe they can fulfill the role of the identity story they are attempting to tell. Because of this, varying approaches can be used at different moments by individuals, depending on the situation they may find themselves in at that time.

2.5 Criminal Context

The research context for this project investigates identity stories within the profession of organized crime. Organized crime has been defined in a variety of ways, but most scholars would agree upon two central definitions. At the macro level, organized crime is regarded as a singular organization or a group of illegal organizations through which members participate in illegal activities. At the micro level, it may further be defined as the execution of illicit activities by an individual to receive financial gain (Paoli, 2019). In this project focusing on micro-identity stories, an individual who claims to have had income from an organization that aligns with the former definition, or self-identifies with the latter would be deemed a professional criminal. Within this research, organized crime is contextualized as a legitimate profession and its participants are seen as professionals in which professional identity stories can be studied.

Conceptually, organizational structures, employee development, work specialization, and organizational goals exhibit striking similarities when comparing mainstream (non-criminal) and

criminal professions. Take, for example, street gang members and freelance gig-workers, such as Uber or Lyft drivers: both operate within loose organizational structures, are motivated by sporadic profit-making opportunities, and maintain relative autonomy in determining their work schedules. Flat organizational structures may characterize freelance, gig, or consulting opportunities for individuals in both mainstream and criminal work (Paoli, 2019). Alternatively, hierarchical organizational structures also exist in both criminal and mainstream professions. These highly "corporatized" organizations in both areas of professions, which focus on hierarchy, leadership development, and employee relations, exist for individuals wishing to move up and develop into leadership roles within their specific organizations, e.g., government organizations, Fortune 500 companies, the mafia, and gangs (Decker & Curry, 2000: 474). Further, work specialization exists in the criminal profession, just as in mainstream professional work. In the same way that an individual may specialize in tax accounting or bankruptcy finance, professional criminals may specialize their criminal work (e.g., government take-overs in post-Soviet Russia, global shipping, building a narcotic smuggling enterprise from South America to Europe) (McCarthy, 2011). Other professional criminals may be generalist in nature, similar to a human resource generalist professional in mainstream industry and may employ "cafeteria-style offending" with a variety of criminal activities in their day-to-day work, including burglary, grand theft, homicide, and more (Paoli, 2019: 281). Driving forces behind organizational success may also be similar as economic goals and incentives (e.g., increasing revenues, decreasing expenses, expanding markets, and driving profits) motivate both mainstream and criminal organizations (Paoli, 2019; Decker & Curry, 2000; Emmett, 2020). While the two professions carry differing levels of social acceptance, the striking similarities between organizations, work, development, and incentive structures show an unexplored work environment where professional identities can be formed and further investigated. Previous research investigated much of the sociological innerworkings of organized crime, and provided a strong understanding of how these organizations may utilize their members in carrying out organizational activities (Whyte, 2012; Venkatesh, 2008). This research continues to build upon these macro-level sociological findings, and investigates how an individual may associate and identify with the criminal profession at the micro-level.

As divergent and nascent stories are studied through discourse in a criminal context for this project, there are many parallels to pre-existing types of narrative stories in extant research (McAdams, 2006; Presser, 2014; Toubiana, 2020; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). As individuals made a pivot from the familiar to leave a professional life of crime and tell a story of something radically different, this may resemble a storyline of a redemption narrative in many ways. Throughout the project, interviewees talked about their journeys from drug dealing to leading churches or outreach ministries in their communities. While these redemption-like stories were present in many of these interviews, this project focused on the divergent and nascent attributes of the storytelling to provide a wider applicability of the research to stories outside of a criminal context which may not be "redeemed" from a previous profession although they experience significant change.

2.6 Conclusion

This review has provided an overview of relevant literature to establish a foundation for this research project. An overview of identity literature was given as it pertains to the various types of identity stories told by individuals, especially those who say they are crafting identity change stories. While there are a variety of ways to approach the literature around identity stories and identity change stories, existing literature was presented to outline current understandings of how individuals may develop an initial way of describing themselves and eventually discussing provisionally enacting it for others. Known ways of telling identity change stories were also outlined, as well as identifying gaps in extant literature that are further explored in this research project. Throughout this project about identity stories, individuals may leverage the various ways of modifying their identities, and a thorough discussion was given for each in this literature review. To best engage this research, a narrative approach is taken in order to provide interpretations with sufficient nuance and understanding for the stories told by individuals who were undergoing these changes. Major themes in this literature review revolved around the belief of an individual's desire for identity story coherence, protecting identities until they were strong enough to withstand external criticism, and the need to recognize that under-institutionalized identities may experience change trajectories that vary from those which are more standardized and institutionalized within the working world. A sufficient background of both professional

identity literature and criminal identity literature were given to provide an understanding of the context for this research project.

While a significant amount of literature around the concept of identity change has been previously studied, there is a need to better understand how the literature connects in ways that are relevant for new ways of telling stories about working in a changing professional environment. While institutionalized ways of working and progressing in careers are well studied (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000), scholars recognize the organizational changes happening in the working world which may require new ways of developing identity literature (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). This research project helps answer the call to find ways of tying extant identity research to gaps in the literature which have missed furthering understandings of non-traditional and under-institutionalized career changes (Brown & Coupland, 2015). Much opportunity exists to explore these under-institutionalized paths which diverge from the familiar, as well as developing an understanding of how change stories might be told which do not resemble the known and familiar. Deeper understandings of possible identity stories will be developed in this research project, as well as an understanding of how individuals think about new storylines during extended periods of private reflection and play through *nascent identity stories* (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Petriglieri, 2011). Additionally, an overarching connection between extant literature and rising challenges in the working world will be addressed in the exploration of a new type of identity change story, *divergent identity stories.*

This review has laid the foundation of this empirical study which seeks to provide understanding using a narrative approach. It develops a way of discussing subjective stories in which individuals create an identity story that radically differs from what they have known in a previous criminal profession. This research aims to extrapolate findings that are then applicable for any individual exploring a significant identity story change. The next section discusses the methodological approach used in this study.

3.Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter situates this project's research within the various epistemological and methodological views of organizational studies. It also explains reasons why specific methodologies were chosen for the project's research design and analysis. Methodology informs how a project is designed and developed, and it provides the theoretical lens through which to view and understand research (Bryman, 2004). These lenses are used to provide a consistent framework for the researcher to gather and interpret data, as well as to assist readers and other scholars with an understanding of how to interpret and apply the findings.

This project builds an understanding of how individuals subjectively construct and develop a professional identity story through discourse with themselves and others. Through a series of interviews with individuals recounting their identity development process, this project codifies ways of telling professional identity stories that diverge from the known or familiar and may require additional time for development in its early stages. An interpretivist approach was taken for this research, allowing individuals to share their own beliefs about how their stories unfolded. Each individual's interpretations were then methodically organized and examined in a way to provide greater understanding to the process and its outcomes. By investigating ways of telling these stories, this research expands current sociological understandings of how stories of new identities may be told in the early stages of consideration.

This chapter is structured into five parts: an explanation of the chosen research philosophies (3.1), identifying a research philosophy (3.2), outlining the research approach (3.3), reviewing the research design (3.4), highlighting the data collection approach (3.5), and explaining the data analysis (3.6). This project had two central focuses for the research. First was the extension of current understandings in how identity stories are formed, particularly when they diverge from a known and expected path of previous experience. Second was the expansion of extant literature on possible identities, providing a greater understanding of how identities are shaped in their initial stages and considered in private before being showcased to others.

The first aim of this study was to extend current understandings about identity formation, particularly focusing on the concept of identities diverging from a known and familiar identity repertoire. Existing scholarship extensively researches professional identities that follow conventional development paths, but leaves room for further exploration of when unexpected, diverging identities are pursued by the individual (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This study will specifically investigate professional identity stories, focusing on the development of who an individual identifies themselves to be in a workplace, which may significantly diverge from a conventional path or repertoire of past and present identities. Specifically, this research focused on individuals who have shifted from a past professional identity in the criminal sector into the mainstream, non-criminal sector of work. By collecting and analyzing participant stories, several recommendations were made for how an individual can undertake significantly changing the professional identity story they tell themselves and others. These recommendations were compiled as a reference for any individual seeking to make a professional change and were intended to provide broader applicability in creating a divergent professional identity story.

The second aim of this study focused on understanding these early-stage formations of identity stories: nascent identity stories. The concept of nascent identity stories builds upon extant possible and provisional identity literature (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). This concept is explored using the same data set of participant interviews used for the first research focus (on divergent narrative identity). As previously mentioned, this research project engaged a participant group that is unconventional in the field of management: individuals who identified as ex-professional criminals. While other groups could have been the subject of research for nascent identity stories, studying this group yielded novel insights into the early stages of the identity process that may not have otherwise been as apparent. This is likely because while many other participant groups may have had alternative options for careers they could have pursued without significant barriers. These individuals, who held identities of an extreme nature, were likely to provide the greatest insight into the development of a new identity story that an individual did not yet feel ready (for various reasons) to enact. In the past, studies of extreme cases have proven to yield novel insights on identities (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Flyvbjerg,

2006; Pratt, 2000). In this project, the extreme nature arose from an environment where creating a new identity may have been dangerous or impermissible. In traditional identity change literature, an individual may try out a new identity at any time within their various social settings (e.g., professional identities in workplaces) and receive feedback about the fit and appropriateness of their new identity (Ibarra, 1999). However, individuals who claim a crime-related identity may not have the freedom to try out new, alternative professional identities and showcase them to their various social circles. This research found that until a new identity is ready to be fully pursued, showing a fledgling (or nascent) identity that is contrary to the extant criminal lifestyle was often dangerous, and therefore, inhibited. The resulting need to shelter, hide, or protect a new identity was often higher for this ex-criminal group than the corresponding need for individuals in mainstream organizational work who are considering new identities (Ragins, 2008). Because of the hypothesized higher level of need for sheltering new identities, the proposed 'extreme' environment was likely to provide greater insight into the pre-provisional stage of identities. Specifically, any individual who was professionally engaged in criminal or illicit activities may provide compelling insight into the development and management of budding, nascent identities.

3.2 Identifying a research philosophy

As this research project began, it was positioned into a framework of ontological and epistemological understanding. *Ontology* is defined as "claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other" (Blaikie, 2000: 8). Ontology varies in these claims and assumptions, ranging from *objectivism*, where knowable and definitive truth may exist, to *subjectivism*, where a variety of truths and realities may exist for subjects (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Braun & Clarke, 2013). This research project is primarily positioned within subjectivist ontology, as this interpretive study has no definitive 'truth' that is being investigated in the research. By nature, divergent narratives will employ greater amounts of subjectivism as these narratives acknowledge the subjective nature of writing and communicating an individual's story, without the constraints of traditional narrative classifications. Similarly, nascent identity stories are investigated based on an individuals' perceptions and interpretations of how they

recalled interacting with an identity that was in the earliest stages of consideration. For these reasons, a subjective positioning acknowledges the fluidity in which individuals understand and share their stories with others.

Epistemology, or "the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality," addresses knowledge creation and *how* we can know that knowledge exists (Blaikie, 2000: 8). Epistemology asks questions to challenge how a researcher might really know, or believe they know, what counts as knowledge throughout a project (Blaikie, 2000). Especially as this project acknowledges a subjective understanding of truth for participants, it was necessary for the researcher to acknowledge a limited level of "knowing*"* that could be asserted. For this reason, when designing a study of human behavior, it was important to maintain epistemic humility. While several foundational concepts used in this research project are well-established within the field of identities and narratives, the study of human socio-psychological phenomena is necessarily an inexact process, with its findings observed, structured, and filtered by each researcher (Coupland, 2001). Although the proposed concepts and theory extensions from this project build upon knowledge that is widely accepted, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations to its applicability for both existing and future theory. Nevertheless, developing, and refining theories of human behavior continues to be useful in providing frameworks and structures within which we can better understand people and their behaviors, both as individuals alone and as individuals in organizations.

Together, ontology, epistemology, and methodology created the *paradigms of inquiry*, or frameworks for positioning research, in this study (Kuhn, 1962; Bryman, 2008). Four of the most employed paradigms for research include: functionalist, radical structuralist, radical humanist, and interpretivist paradigms (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Burrell and Morgan's paradigm model, **Figure 1**, (1979) is built upon a matrix of two spectrums: ontological objectivism or subjectivism, and the research location of regulation or radical change. The paradigms in this model are framed to be mutually exclusive, as research must be built around one of the four paradigms of understanding (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Based on the reasoning above, this research project will be based within the lower-left quadrant, the *interpretivist paradigm*. This approach is subjective in its science, while still regulated by sociology. Philosophers and

researchers in this paradigm often seek to explain the world as it is and believe that the social world is subjectively experienced and created by those in it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Although other approaches were deliberated over, the interpretivist paradigm was chosen for this project as it allowed understanding of the subjective nature of identity story development through discourse of how an individual sees themselves in the world (Cerulo, 1993; Ibarra, 1999; Gecas, 1982; Brown, 2004).

Figure 1.
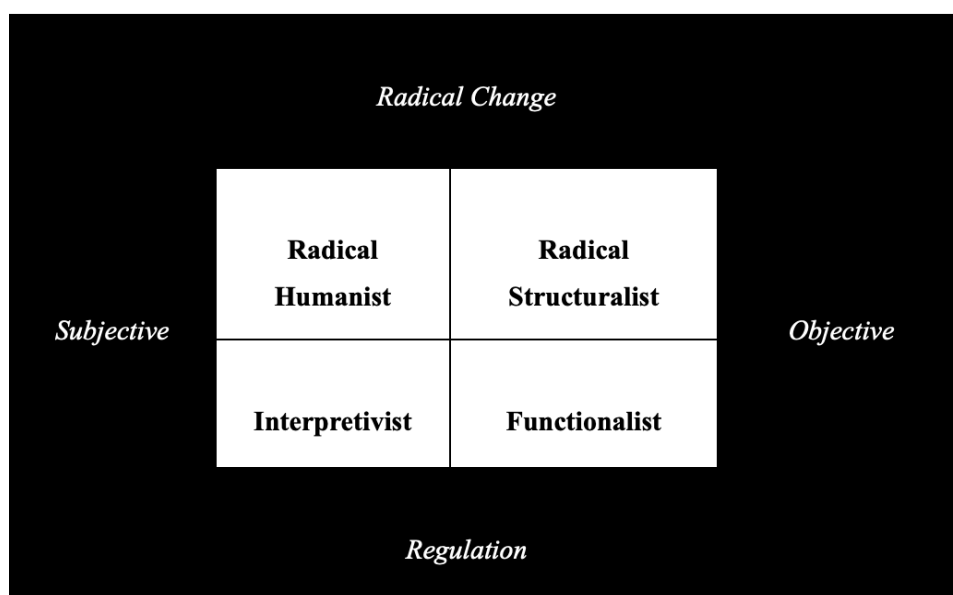
3.3 Research approach and methodology

Qualitative research builds understanding from the experiences and interpretations of participants while allowing for subjective truths and theories to be developed, rather than aiming to codify objective understanding of a phenomenon (Mason, 2002). By focusing on the development and comparison of language within qualitative research data, a deeper understanding can be created that provides multi-layered applicability to a variety of other settings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This provides a richer level of theory that often extends past one dimensional cause-and-effect outcomes. Using qualitative methods for this project was an effective way to capture the nuance necessary to support an extension of narrative theory which moved beyond discrete categorization and acknowledged more varied life stories which diverged

from the known and familiar, as well as those which did not follow commonly studied patterns of early consideration.

3.3.1 Qualitative research interviews

Qualitative interviews were used to extend, discover, and develop these new theories of diverging professional identity stories and nascent identity stories. This qualitative research project served as an empirical study providing valuable insight into the discursive processes an individual uses when nurturing a diverging identity or writing a life story (Bryman, 2004; Bryman et al., 2018). In this project's data collection process, which utilized interviews, it was important to ask questions in the interview setting that allowed for the discovery process alongside participants, as the origins of their new identities were not always understood by the participants themselves. Similarly, as storylines were often unconventional, participants needed to be given the freedom to share in a way that allowed them space to communicate all the twists and turns of their stories (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative insights were compiled and coded from these interviews, both at the individual and collective levels, investigating patterns which revealed commonalities among participants telling stories of their divergent professional identities. Similar approaches were taken when re-analyzing interviews for insight into how individuals navigate a possible identity story that is not yet ready to be shown to others. While some qualitative researchers have found ways to code and *quantify* qualitative data, this research remained explicitly centered on thematic analysis of the qualitative data (McAdams, 2012). Professional identity stories and understandings told by participants built the framework for identity story theory extensions. These stories were analyzed for commonalities and patterns, recognizing that the subjective nature of qualitative work would not produce quantifiable "true or false" answers, but provided valuable insights into the processes of human thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors (Bryman, 2004; Bryman et al., 2018).

3.3.2 Access

To complete this research, participants were identified through existing networks, supplemented by relationship building and snowball sampling, as well as partnerships with global rehabilitation organizations which specialize in helping individuals exit criminal

organizations and lifestyles. It was important to build professional rapport with these individuals and organizations early on, while emphasizing anonymity for participants and assuring their identifying data would not be shared with anyone besides the researcher. This was especially true when introduced to participants via third-party individuals or organizations: in these situations, the researcher never confirmed with the referrer who became a research participant and who did not. In total, 46 interviews were conducted with individuals who claimed to have left a professional, criminal identity who engaged in various types of illegal activities as their primary work identity. Interviews were audio recorded, ranging between twenty minutes and 130 minutes, and conducted over video calls if the participant consented. Four prior interviews which were originally conducted for a previous body of research were included in this study. Those participants have since provided consent for a shift in the research focus that developed into this doctoral body of research and allowed for their interviews to be reanalyzed for this study.

As many of these interviewees were referred through snowball sampling, it was not always apparent how they were thought to be "professional criminals" until interviews had begun. Often, participants would cryptically refer to a friend or acquaintance who had an interesting story to tell that they thought would be helpful for this research. It was often not until speaking with an individual on the phone that their professional background would be fully revealed and their affiliations with criminal activities understood. However, interviewees were willing to share their stories and often insisted that they had undergone a professional identity transition based on the criteria set for interviewing individuals. This criterion, as mentioned in the literature review, required that individuals' professional backgrounds either be formerly affiliated with illicit organizations, or that their primary source of income was from illicit activities. For this reason, there was variation in the level of involvement in professional criminal activities that participants claimed to have had. While some individuals had been involved in their criminal professions for several decades, others may have only been involved for short periods of time before trying to leave the profession. However, as these participants agreed to the criterion of their involvement in illicit organizations or that their primary source of income was illicitly garnered, interviews were conducted and all transcripts were thoroughly analyzed while recognizing the variation that may have existed.

3.3.3 Ethics identification and discussion

The ethical considerations for this study were significant due to participants' backgrounds and the potential for continued involvement in illicit activities. Ethical safeguards were put in place for the safety of both the participants and the researcher. It was important for all records of contact (e.g., emails, phone calls) with participants to be kept strictly anonymous and for no reference to personal identifiable information (e.g., names, contact information, locations) to be found in final interview transcripts. Precautions taken to protect personal identifiable information (PII) were discussed with participants before any interviews began and any questions about the study were answered before participants signed consent forms and began answering interview questions. All measures were taken to honor the "fair processing" portion of the University of Bath's Data Protection Statement, which is built on the principle that individuals know what all interviews are to be used for (i.e., a management study on identity development) prior to interviews (University of Bath GDPR Compliance Statement, 2019). Signed consent forms from interviewees also received additional protection with a strict storage plan, as the forms contained personal identifiable information in signatures and names. An extensive informational sheet with project details and purpose was given to each participant, followed by the necessary consent forms to ensure understanding of the project and all safety measures that were put in place to protect participants.

As a note, interviews focused solely on the discursive identity *processes* an individual underwent when leaving their criminal affiliations, and not on any criminal acts themselves. Thus, the interview template was built in a way that sought to understand participants' identity story development processes and did not specifically ask individuals to reveal any incriminating information from their past criminal histories. Throughout the interviews, the freedom for participants to abstain from sharing any personal or incriminating information was reiterated, especially if sharing created feelings of discomfort. Participants were allowed to redact any non-identity related information told if the participant desired, as discursive processes were the primary focus of the interviews. As sensitive information was told by the participants throughout the interviews, safety for the researcher was also important. The possession of this sensitive information increased safety risks for the researcher, both from the participant who shared the sensitive information, as well as any former associates who may have had a desire to obtain that

information. It was important to share as little of the researcher's own personal identifying information as possible (e.g., city of residence, family information). The decision to withhold personal identifiable information of the researcher safeguarded against retaliatory action being taken. Additionally, to mitigate any close, personal contact risk that may have arisen from physical proximity with participants (or associates) who may have had intentions of compromising researcher safety, interviews were conducted virtually (i.e., phone or video calls). Safety modifications, like virtual-only interviews, were accommodated during the data collection process to ensure that interviews were able to serve as the primary data collection method. This was a major goal for the research project as one-on-one interviews provide a research method with less external influence on the participant's sharing compared to other data collection methods (Bryman, 2004).

Regardless of what information was given during the interviews, it was paramount to maintain strict researcher-participant confidentiality and not share any PII or incriminating evidence of individual participants to any party outside of the researcher and participant. This level of confidentiality safeguarded participants and mitigated any adverse impact from sharing sensitive information in their interviews. Following General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR Compliance Statement) was vital in the management of interview data as the researcher was located in the United Kingdom during data collection and much of the research was conducted while based in Europe. GDPR regulations require participants are informed of the study's purpose, of the ethical considerations protecting them, that extraneous data were not kept if it was not necessary for the research, that all personal data would be recorded accurately, and that data would not be discussed with anyone besides the researcher (GDPR Compliance Statement). As previously mentioned, although data were fully anonymized, data storage and security remained of utmost importance. The Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the University of Bath's Guide to Good Practice was also followed for additional measures, and the research was approved by an extension review process with the Social Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bath for meeting the necessary ethics standards of conducting research at the university. Their approval is included in Appendix 1. Following these guidelines and the safety precautions mentioned above, strict data management, security of data, and

confidentiality were maintained to safeguard the personal information and data of all participants taking part in this research.

3.4 Research design

Design choices were important for the effective and consistent execution of this research (Bryman, 2004). For data to be collected in an effective manner, research design choices for a methodology were made. The participants chosen for this study were individuals who self-identified as a professional criminal in their past. A design was needed to support the exploration of the research questions that guided this study. These questions were as follows:

- Why might an individual tell a new professional identity story that has no connection to previous professional stories they told about themselves?
- How do individuals navigate various internal and external considerations when deciding to undergo an identity change that differs from what they have previously known?
- How does an individual navigate the earliest stages of change when crafting their identity change story?
- How are these early, nascent identity stories constructed and reinforced by the individuals telling them?

Answers were developed from interviews that addressed these questions, creating an opportunity to understand the reflexive experience individuals underwent when developing and communicating a narrative of the process of considering a new identity. These sorts of self-reflexive narratives were collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews where guiding questions were asked and individuals were allowed to freely share their story and experiences (Bryman, 2004; Bryman et al., 2018). By asking unbounded and open-ended questions that allow individuals to tell the full arc of their stories, participants were encouraged to share any information they thought was relevant to their narrative. Follow-up questions were asked to distill particular pieces of the narrative (e.g., divergent professional identities or nascent identities) after hearing the individual's narrative storyline. By choosing individual interviews as

the research method, this study provided a forum for participants to freely express what they were thinking and feeling in response to research questions. Individual interviews were chosen in contrast to other methods which may impose a level of pressure or social influence in providing answers with others present (i.e., a group interview) or limit the development of answers due to a limited response space (e.g., questionnaires, surveys) (Bryman, 2004). From a practical interview design standpoint, the interview guide outline reflected research questions for both divergent professional identity stories and nascent identity stories as both concepts were created and developed from the same data set. Thus, interview questions were built around understanding the narratives of the individual with follow-up questions probing into the earliest, private formation of their new identity.

The research design for the study helped the project address the first two research questions regarding the formation of divergent professional identities. To effectively address the question of new identity formation and cultivation, ideal participants for this research project were individuals who may have previously held identities that would not easily permit the formation of new identities from a past repertoire. The third and fourth research questions were also addressed in this study's design, addressing how an individual may interact with a possible identity they are considering but are not yet ready to showcase to others (Markus & Nurius, 1986). By asking individuals to retroactively share their experiences in this transition period, a richer understanding was gained of how individuals think about pursuing an identity. Participants were first asked a screening question to determine if their criminal affiliation fit the aforementioned criterion, as well as a follow up question to determine if they would classify it a *past* identity (Bloom et al., 2021; Brown, 2019). The objective was to interview individuals who were *formerly* affiliated with crime, increasing the likelihood that participants had since developed a new professional identity outside of their criminally affiliated ones. Although interviewing participants only formerly involved in crime was desirable, it is often difficult for an individual to fully separate from that lifestyle (Garot, 2011). Due to the potential danger of associating with individuals who still maintained criminal affiliations, additional safety measures were taken when conducting interviews via phone or video calls. Further details are provided on these research instruments below.

Again, this study was designed to simultaneously satisfy two research aims: first to create theory (discovering a new type of identity story that professionals may tell which diverge from past experiences), and second to extend theory (nascent identity stories as an extension of possible identity stories). The interview guide was based in existing narrative identity literature – specifically centering around possible, provisional, and enactment narratives – as the first portion of this research project focused on further developing the concept of narrative identities to include divergent identities. Questions were built around the formation of diverging professional identity stories and designed to create theory as opposed to testing it. Thus, the interview guide asked open-ended questions centered around areas in literature where there were opportunities for additional theoretical development, specifically regarding early-stage identity development. These questions addressed the initial stages of new identity formation, gaining insight into the interactions an individual may have with a newly forming, though not yet integrated, identity. Questions were also added to dive into the beginning portions of individuals' identity stories more deeply, in an effort to build out an understanding of the early stages of possible identities that may have been considered but were not yet ready to be enacted (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Interviews employed a semi-structured interview method, discussed further below, and were based in grounded theory methodology to allow the freedom to investigate alternative emerging ideas in the data, acknowledging that each individual may have had a distinct narrative process or identity formation that did not completely align with previously mentioned concepts by other interviewees. As an inductive, grounded theory approach was used within these semi-structured interviews, additional insights continued to be generated by revisiting the literature in an iterative fashion between following interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since new theory creation and novel theory extensions were sought with this study, a grounded theory approach – where literature was also iteratively revisited throughout data collection to provide additional insights – provided the flexibility to gather novel concepts from a few interviews, cross reference it with any extant literature-based explanations, and test emerging hypotheses in subsequent interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this iterative process, it was important to revisit the data and perform varying types of thematic analyses. One of the known disadvantages of grounded theory is the tendency to narrowly focus on a few thematic patterns and miss broader themes that may emerge in the data (Gehman et al., 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Potential under-development was avoided by iteratively returning to the data

throughout the analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Any conceptual discovery was continually refined via the grounded theory approach. A constant revisiting of the literature was made throughout interviews to clarify and distill ideas brought out by participants.

To not impose personal views of the researcher, participants were repeatedly asked how they interpreted their own stories. During interviews, it was paramount to clarify beliefs and understandings for each participant to build a framework for what their professional transition meant to them, e.g., telling a story that drastically differed from what they claimed before, while understanding how it possibly conflicted with who they currently claimed to be (McLean & Syed, 2016; Knox & McCurrie, 1996; Gang Enforcement, 2021). As each participant had a different way of thinking about their former professional career, a similar approach of clarification was taken when reviewing and analyzing the data holistically. A range of interpretations of these stories existed. For example, some participants thought their criminal associations were not positive experiences and explained why they wanted to move distinctly away from that work. While others looked back fondly and acknowledged their former lifestyle was enjoyable in some ways, and acknowledged that such a professional career was unsustainable in the long-term. Ensuring interviewees did not feel pressured to provide assumed responses based on cultural stereotypes was of great importance (e.g., saying their participation in drug dealing was "bad" and anything after that lifestyle has been "good"). Similarly, care was taken to assure interviewees felt freedom and encouragement to share how they were feeling without the researcher imposing a presupposition that a criminal past might be negative or undesirable (Wiersma, 1988). Therefore, it was vital to approach questions from an exploratory framework that did not imply a presupposed moral judgment about a participant's past actions (Wiersma, 1988). As interviews are co-created between interviewers and participants, an exploratory approach helped mitigate as much subconscious influence as possible (Presser, 2014; Coupland, 2001). Interview questions were therefore developed and presented in a way that focused on *general* professional identity storylines and *general* early development of identities. By creating this type of interview environment, the participants provided self-definitions of subjective identities when outlining their narrative journeys.

3.5 Data collection

This research project employed semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting data. While there is no perfect instrument for collecting qualitative data, interviews provide an opportunity for individuals to share their own interpretations of reality (Cunliffe, 2008). By using a semi-structured interview format, the researcher and participants were able to co-investigate various pieces of interviewees' stories as relevant pieces of information arose (Bryman, 2004).

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

In an interpretivist approach to conducting and analyzing research, interviews provide a freedom of exploration and interpretation on the part of the interviewee (Bryman, 2004; Bryman et al., 2018). While the interviewees may have given a range of insights through their stories, an interpretivist approach encouraged the interviewee to make their own conclusions and deductions of what their stories meant (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Practically, this allowed for the interviewee to state their preferred meaning with less misinterpretation of third parties later analyzing their stories. An intentional interview format provided this level of reflection and interpretation on behalf of the interviewee, with a reduced potential of the interviewer making inferences and assumptions of participant meanings (Bryman, 2004; Alvesson et al., 2008). A semi-structured interview approach particularly lends itself to exploration of the interviewee and interviewer throughout the research process (Bryman, 2004). As referenced in 3.4, this approach allowed participants to construct their interpretation of knowledge about their stories, rather than an interviewer trying to extract a particular finding from it (Mason, 2002). As research questions for this project were exploratory in nature, a semi-structured approach best aligned with the objectives of exploring individuals' interpretations of reality.

It is important to note that despite the best of intentions, responses in an individual's interview are still inevitably externally influenced by the interviewer and may even be said by some to be co-created with the interviewer. However, the semi-structured interview approach provides less influence than methods that require the presence and involvement of others besides the researcher (i.e., group interviewees) (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cunliffe, 2008). From a practical interview design standpoint, the interview guide reflected research questions for both divergent

identity stories and nascent identity stories, as both concepts were created and developed from the same data set. Thus, interview questions were first built around understanding a divergent narrative of the individual, with follow up questions probing into the early, private formation of their new identity. The interview schedule is included in Appendix 2.

3.5.2 Research instruments

Electronic recording devices and non-cloud-based storage devices were the primary instruments used during this research, with interviews ranging between twenty minutes and 130 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and then professionally transcribed. Participants were given the option to choose to be interviewed via audio or video call and were given the option to either have the interview recorded in the interview platform or on a separate recording device. All transcriptions and audio recordings were stored on a computer hard drive and additionally backed up on a storage device that remained locked and securely stored. Ensuring this content was securely safeguarded and protected to guarantee participant anonymity was highly important because of participant criminal histories and affiliations. Any previously conducted interviews used for this study were also converted to this storage format. Notes were taken (either by hand or on a word processing platform) and transcribed immediately following the interview no more than 48 hours later. All participants consented to be audio recorded. Additionally, interviews were anonymized and numerically coded to provide additional protection for participants. Interviews were professionally transcribed with all personal identifying information redacted, and the transcription organization was chosen with the highest level of caution and concern after several discussions with organizations and reviewing their ethics policies. Transcriptions that contained personal identifying information, locations, and names were redacted as a safety measure for protecting the sensitive data shared during interviews. Participants, including previous research participants, received consent forms that outlined the intentions of the study and the storage security of their information. Prior to interviews, safeguarding procedures were explained to participants, who were subsequently given the opportunity to step away from the interviews at any time. They were also given the opportunity to retract their interviews for up to two weeks after the interview took place; after this time, interviews were anonymized and were no longer able to be identified and removed. None of the interviewees requested for their interviews to be retracted. Interviews were not

conducted unless consent forms were agreed to and given approval by participants. Anonymity was guaranteed for participants, alongside continued levels of confidentiality via anonymized quotations used in research and future publications.

3.5.3 Research population and sample

Sample selection began with outreach calls and emails sent to organizations asking for individuals who might be interested in participating. After gaining initial interest from these organizations, additional avenues of snowball sampling were pursued to expand the breadth of individuals in this study. While direct contact and outreach was made for referrals, all individuals self-selected into and out of interviews. All interviews were conducted virtually. A total of forty-six participants volunteered for this study. Participants were not paid but told their stories voluntarily to assist with this research. In this participant group, eleven individuals identified as females while thirty-five identified as males. A goal of this study was to provide representation of the female perspective in research on professional identities, as the global level of female representation in the workplace has remained above 50% in the past three decades (*Female Labor Force Participation - World Bank Gender Data Portal*, 2022). Forty-one participants were based in the United States, four were based in Europe, and one was based in Latin America. While future research could continue to explore the divergent and nascent storytelling processes in other geographies of the world, it was important to have at least some representation from outside of the United States in this research to allow further diversity of thought and insight.

After conducting the first few interviews, constructive feedback was given by participants on how the interview questions and outreach communication might be improved to best communicate with candidates. This included recommendations about removing phrases mentioning criminal lifestyles, previous incarceration, or a life of crime. Careful word choices were developed throughout this process from participant feedback to ensure individuals did not feel judgment from the researcher when asking screening questions about their previous association with criminal work. Several interviewees gave feedback during and after their interviews to help ensure questions were thoughtfully crafted and individuals were shown dignity and respect in the interview setting.

There were a range of differences in participants' definitions of involvement in criminal professions and activities; it is helpful to provide the range of work that was studied in this research project. Reported criminal professions ranged from fraudulent check writing, international drug smuggling, cartel affiliations, gang leaders, robberies, drug dealing, assassination, to gambling on illegal street racing. Divergent professions that were eventually pursued included non-profit leadership, hospitality industry management, podcast creation, writing and authorship, clergy, politics, firefighting, and political activism.

3.6 Data analysis

When analyzing the transcripts to begin building the data set, a combination of Microsoft Word and Excel were used to code interviews for emergent patterns and themes. The data were examined in relation to the two research topics: the formation of divergent professional identity stories and nascent identity stories. All forty-six interviews were conducted over a twenty-three-month period. As previously mentioned, four interviews were part of a previous body of research from a Master's program research project. A total of 822 pages of data were generated during interviews, and 364,577 words were analyzed. Interviews were 50 minutes on average, and provided a total of 2,303 minutes of interview data that was reviewed during the analysis process.

The data were first analyzed to build greater understanding around stories individuals told that involved a significant divergence from the professional identity they claimed to have previously held. Following the grounded theory method, initial interviews were coded for emerging patterns, literature was revisited, and additional interviews were subsequently shaped around first-level codes and concepts that emerged in prior interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews continued in this fashion until theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Braun & Clarke, 2006). When no new themes emerged from the data and the research continued to confirm previously discovered themes, interviews ceased and first-level codes were grouped into either major or minor themes, generating nuanced understandings of identity story divergence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the data analysis of divergent identity stories included a narrative bracketing approach (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

Here, one dimension of the data is first examined: *what* was said by the participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). After analyzing the discursive language and studying the contents of the transcript, narrative bracketing is then used to analyze a secondary dimension: *how* the participants told their stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). This secondary analysis provides additional insight when seeking to understand the subthemes within the major narrative themes that arise (McAdams, 2001). All these themes served as the basis for proposing extensions to existing theories on narrative storytelling for professionals (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Pratt, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; McAdams, 2013). Additionally, this focused approach of narrative bracketing provides greater insight into the discursive resources used by participants when telling their stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

In a second, separate review of the data, an analysis was conducted for content relating to the telling of nascent identity stories. This portion of the study was conducted in a similar, grounded theory approach to assess participant interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout this iterative process of cross examining the literature and data collection, known literature was revisited that related to possible and provisional identity stories and refined insights discovered during analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ibarra, 1999; Brown, 2017; Markus & Nurius, 1986). After analyzing the data and collating all first-level codes into minor and major themes, the data were then holistically revisited to develop an overarching theory about the drivers and methods of the private stages of possible identity consideration (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This new, overarching theory addressed the creation, development, and nurturing of nascent identity stories that were not yet ready to be shared with others because of their fragile nature.

Although interview questions were primarily focused on gaining an understanding of the narrative journeys of individuals leaving an identity of one nature and creating an identity of another, specific follow up questions during interviews about the earliest stages of novel identity formation provided additional insight for analysis. As this data set sought to address two different research goals, by strategically planning the interview structure, sufficient data were gathered to answer and expand upon both diverging professional identity stories and nascent identity stories.

3.6.1 Reflexivity

When conducting this research project, it was important to maintain a state of constant reflexivity. This required the researcher to recognize the impact they were having on the research throughout the process, as well as the impact the research process was having on the researcher (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Because of the inherent impact a researcher has on their research, it was important to remain watchful of any assumptions made during the data collection and analysis process and remain vigilant about any pre-supposed beliefs or ideas going into the study (Hassard, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984). This was especially important in this research project as many participants told stories about their involvement in criminal activities and their decision to move in and out of this line of work. The researcher needed to remain neutral in presupposing desires to switch as participants had a variety of reasons they were drawn either towards or away from their work. By maintaining a careful posture of neutrality in asking about decisions to change professions and not assuming beliefs about what led to these decisions, each participant stated their own interpretivist view of why it was important for them to change professional roles. This helped the researcher steer away from claims to authority that may have been skewed by personal interpretation and viewpoints (Burrell, 1993). It was important for the researcher to challenge their own viewpoint throughout this process, as it helped prevent assumptions and limited incorrect interpretations of the data (Douglas, 1986). By challenging the formation of assumptions throughout the process, the research developed a new way of understanding and thinking about criminal professional identity stories.

Reflexivity is an essential part of the interpretivist paradigm, as the researcher continually challenges their own presupposed beliefs and understandings to not influence participants telling stories (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Monitoring language, intentionally phrasing questions to be open-ended, and asking for explicit clarification (as opposed to assuming meanings) were all important components of maintaining a posture of non-assumptive investigation. By fostering only ephemeral relationships with the participants (except for one participant who was a familial relation), and not meeting with them in person to conduct interviews that would potentially develop a sense of rapport or camaraderie, the interviewer maintained "critical distance" and prevent becoming too interconnected with subjects and skew the data (Karra & Phillips, 2008). As the interviewer had little direct personal experience with criminal activities, foundational

knowledge of professional criminal activities were researched before interviews began (Paoli, 2019; Decker & Curry, 2000; McCarthy, 2011). This, at times, made it difficult to reign in presuppositions about the direction that interviews "should" take. This was because of empirical data that stated how individuals usually viewed and told their professional criminal identity stories. It was important to resist the impulse to lead individuals towards a narrative that aligned with pre-existing research or suggest language that helped build and shape theory for this project (Hayens, 2012). Acknowledgements must be made, however, that as interviews are conducted between two individuals and are often "co-created" between the interviewer and participants, even with rigorous preparation and utmost awareness, preconceived assumptions and beliefs are certain to have at least some influence on the direction of questions and subsequent research that was unearthed (Coupland, 2001).

As the biases of any researcher are difficult to fully remove, it was important for the data to speak for itself in reviewing the interpreted meanings of concepts told by *participants*, rather than any perceived meanings of the researcher (Douglas, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Withholding preconceptions of how the data "should" develop based on extant literature was actively worked against throughout this process (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). For example, understanding how a possible or provisional identity may be constructed brought up various questions during this research as individuals repeatedly reported methods of interacting with a possible identity that did not align with current understandings of the literature (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Rather than asserting an accepted view from the literature, this research took an open stance towards exploring novel concepts that may have countered pre-existing understandings. In this way, nascent identity stories were discovered and proved to be an important extension of how an individual may interact with an untold possible identity story.

A final important area of reflexivity was guarding against any personal stance of morality or belief in a correct way of diverging away from a former criminal professional path. The singular participant who was related to the researcher had previously shared their life experience of changing professional identities from their former criminal path. It was important to separate previous tellings of this story, and any pre-supposed morals that had accompanied it, from future

interviews. As the interviewer heard the story of changing from "Bad Billy" to a decorated military veteran during her childhood and moral upbringing, negating biases was required through intentional questioning and open-minded investigation (Hayens, 2012; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Bourdieu, 1984).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has placed this research project within specific epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies, and designs, and has outlined the reasoning as to why each was adopted. An interpretivist approach was chosen for its acknowledgement of the subjective nature of constructing reality for, and by, participants in a study (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This interpretivist nature allows the researcher and the participants to build a constructed version of what they feel to be their reality. As the subjective nature of a research project based on the telling and interpretation of life stories is not an objective truth to be measured, it was important for this research to be built with epistemic humility in recognizing the incompleteness that qualitative research may bring (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman et al., 2018). However, by utilizing a semi-structured interview approach when collecting the data, subjective misinterpretations were minimized as the interviewer was able to ask for clarification and expansion of participants' intended meanings. This project intended to develop a better understanding of how stories might be told by individuals who are attempting to tell a professional identity story that significantly differs from what they have previously told. Compiling data from a series of stories told by individuals is likely to miss elements that may not be universally applicable. However, by iteratively moving between the data and extant literature until theoretical saturation was achieved, risk of missing vital pieces of information were minimized (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the nature of this research dealt with extreme cases of professional identity story change, it was important to remain open minded and unassuming when analyzing the data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). As with all research projects, regular and robust reflexivity was critical throughout the process.

4. Data Presentation

4.1 Part 1: Divergent identity narratives: the possible and the enacted

4.1.1 Introduction: A look into the possible

In this data presentation chapter, Part 1 of the three parts discusses divergent identity exploration at its earliest stages. In interviewee stories, individuals explored both the *possibility* of a new path in their overarching narrative, as well as the liminal space between the possible and the enacted. Part 1 has two sections where individuals echo a fundamental question: "How do I diverge from what I know and tell about myself?" This question is answered through two major themes, divided into a series of minor themes, with some minor themes referencing sub themes of content. Section 4.2.2 lays the groundwork for a possible shift in the identity narrative one might think about undertaking. Section 4.2.3 addresses the liminal, in-between space within a narrative of someone who is beginning to tell new stories while former ways of thinking and acting are still present. Questions Section 4.2.3 addresses: "How might individuals feel within this liminal space between two differing identities?" and "How do individuals reconcile the presence of two radically different identities being present in their stories?"

This introduction section proposes an argument that some identity stories may need significant periods of consideration prior to individuals beginning to undertake or publicly share their new stories. Many individuals told stories with thematic patterns centered around a possible or potential identity they were considering as part of their identities. While foundational literature around telling stories about *possible* selves and identities does not outline processes for individuals to take on new identities, this research investigates a potential expansion of the *provisional* self literature which set out to develop a process whereby individuals undertake a new identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). This chapter also proposes an additional lens to understand liminality for individuals telling stories about professional identity transitions,

as individuals recalled feelings of suspension between an old and new identity – not due to a *lack* of identities, but due to the presence of *both* in their overarching life narrative. This research explores stories of divergent narrative identities that individuals told as they began to form new stories about themselves and their professional lives. Throughout this chapter and subsequent data analysis chapters, interviewees shared their self-narratives and views of the impact that various experiences have had on crafting their professional identity stories. This research captured feelings as they were explicitly stated by interviewees, in an effort to not interpret feelings or emotions on behalf of interviewees in the recounting of these stories.

This study provides a unique window into what they said was both the possibility *and* their eventual enactment of these radically diverging professional identity stories within a broader narrative. In Parts 4.2 and 4.3 of this data presentation chapter, interviewees explained how they began to enact new professional identities and what made them eventually become a significant part of their stories of professional identity.

4.1.2 Revisiting definitions: A mere possibility

As individuals told their stories, there were different kinds of identities that surfaced and appeared in their narratives. In this first major theme, several individuals recounted stories about an identity that was under consideration for an extended period and often said they felt like a mere *possibility* of who they might want to become. As stated by Markus and Nurius (1986), a possible identity represents the "idea(s) of what [an individual] might become, what [an individual] would like to become…" These particular stories highlighted a further kind of possible identity that radically differed from what the individual had known before. In this research project, this type of identity story came to be known as a *divergent possible identity*. This is an identity which diverges substantially from what is known or expected in a storyline based on past and present experiences.

Individuals may tell a range of stories related to various possible identities they may be contemplating, such as a possible familial identity, a possible spiritual identity, etc. To develop a deep understanding of stories of divergence in possible identities, it is helpful to select a type of

identity that is not often diverged from once begun. For this reason, stories about divergent possible *professional* identities will be explored. As professional identities tend to be linear and based upon the successive growth of past experiences (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986), there is an opportunity to explore professional identity shifts which must be deemed as merely *possible* and futuristic, since they are so radical that individuals said they feel almost *impossible* to undertake. Section 4.1.2 of Part 1, therefore, centers around patterns from stories which were told referencing the possibility and imaginings of divergent professional identities.

In this section of Part 1, several minor themes emerged from individuals' narratives. Each of these themes contributed to the overall narrative overview. In this section, each theme proposes why undertaking a new professional identity may necessitate extended periods of consideration. The first theme, *lack of exposure*, outlines how individuals communicated a lack of basic understanding about possible identities to begin thinking about. This was a crucial theme that set the stage for divergent identity stories. Individuals who were beginning to ponder a new identity said they had not had exposure, and therefore had no opportunity to spend any previous amount of time pondering a new identity before their transition. For this reason, interviewees said how it felt like an entirely new identity was being entertained for the first time. The second theme addresses *uncertainty*. This theme outlines a significant concern stated by individuals which surfaced with their consideration of taking on a new identity: leaving behind what was known. This theme particularly addresses the fear of a professional identity vacuum, as interviewees recalled feeling their professional identity had become such a significant part of their identity, that they feared a complete loss of themselves if they lost their identity. The third and final theme for Section 4.1.2 addresses a significant attribute of divergent possible selves: the need to shelter and protect the identity that is in question. Two main theoretical proposals from the themes in Section 4.1.2 were developed from stories told by interviewees. First, they discussed the need for an extended period of consideration for new, possible identities, as there may have been a lack of exposure to alternatives available. Second, interviewees referenced a need for privately sheltering possible identities while they are provisionally enacted so they are not quashed by others.

4.1.2.a Lack of exposure

The minor theme of *lack of exposure* provides insight into how interviewees said they felt divergent professional identities might exist in the possible stage for an extended period as their new identities are contemplated. Interviewees said that when a new, divergent professional identity was brought forward for their consideration, it was so new and unexplored they felt they needed significant time to think about it. In this context, interviewees proposed that their lack of exposure was often from being a member of a highly insular environment, or *total institution*, which spanned across their personal and professional identities (Goffman, 1961). Interviewees recalled this lack of exposure in a few different ways, with stories highlighting a lack of knowing what other opportunities existed. Some individuals, like Interviewee 2's story below, referenced a lack of exposure to knowing other ways to live their lives, and as a result he recalled feeling stuck on his professional trajectory. Because of this, he recalled feelings of resigned hopelessness, accepting his professional path as the only option he sensed existed for him:

"We get a lot of people who come into our places and you hear a lot, like they didn't know there was even an option to live a different way, and you hear that a lot. So there's definitely some kind of hopelessness and if you think about it, right back to the whole [gang name] thing and the whole gangster thing, right, it's like when your whole life is invested in something, almost like a cult, when your community is all getting high and it's all you know and everything you have is in it and you have a track record and you don't have an education, like you've set yourself on this trajectory that there's no other, like there's just no vision for anything else, it just seems hopeless." – Interviewee 2

Other interviewees stated similar thoughts but said in their stories that they *did* have aspirations to become something different. While they didn't know what this "different" might entail, they recalled wanting to do something else with their lives (Interviewee 10). Interviewee 10's story echoed sentiments of wanting to pursue something different with her professional career: "I always had dreams and aspirations of becoming someone different. I didn't know exactly what that was," and continued that she was "sick and tired" of the situations that she found herself in.

Changing an individual's environment may provide exposure to alternative opportunities and result in the ability to pursue an alternative (Fernández-Aráoz, 2018). Interviewee 20 was enrolled in college prior to incarceration, yet lamented the lack of exposure he had during this period to mainstream professional working opportunities. Instead, he mentioned feeling that his only viable professional opportunities available during college were illegally "hustling full time," which was counter to the "good dude" he said felt he was after being "raised with morals and respect."

"I graduated college, had a business degree but I was always the guy who was like book smart and street smart so I would work a job, you know, and hustle on the side right, but then that hustling became full time at like 20 years old. So I hustled full time from 20-25 years old until I actually indicted. Went to prison at 28, came home when I was about 38; so my only source of income for the last five years I was on the streets [inaudible 13:11]. Pre-indictment was like totally from the streets like – but I had this degree like, why are you doing – you know but at the end of the day, like what you feed you just wanna grow, and so I fed the street stuff. I fed the fast money and that whole lifestyle more, so that's what happened; but, when I came home – while I was away, that's when it started right? I got back to the essence of who I was, like I was really this good dude; I was good kid. You know I was a alright guy. I was somebody that you could bring home to your parents and I would respect – I would take my hat at the table and I was really raised with morals and respect but I just kinda lost myself. Lost my identity in the money – in fast money...." – Interviewee 20

Here, a story with a dual identity is present for the protagonist: a "book smart" identity and a "street smart" identity. Interviewee 20 said he had gone to college and felt that he had 'book smarts' available to him, but also said the "street" felt like the option where he would have the most successful professional fit. As he continued in the interview, Interviewee 20 acknowledged that part of the reason he "fed the street stuff" was due to a lack of understanding in what mainstream professional career options existed and how he might have been able to be successful in that world:

"I didn't know that those options existed until I went to prison. I didn't start seeing and learning about different things I could have done you know, like I could have learned the stock market, right. I was a stock market whizz while I was incarcerated, and I learned so much about derivative and investment banking all these big high finance type of things right? But I was in college; I was in the atmosphere that could have been that and could have been a [inaudible 46:20] had those kind of careers. I didn't meet those people until I went to prison, they were all felons, you know, I mean they stole hundreds and millions of dollars, but that's when I began."
– Interviewee 20

Additional interviewees expressed sentiments that pointed towards a "pervasive emptiness" and sense of purposelessness that lingered as they knew they were not being professionally fulfilled, but they continued their current paths because of a lack of knowing what other optionality existed. Interviewee 1 said: "I'd be by myself, and I would understand that there is a pervasive emptiness that dwelled inside of my soul and that none of the things that I was doing could fill it, and I was frustrated, and I kept searching to have that emptiness filled." Similar memories were told by Interviewee 5 as they recalled "What kept me there for so long was that I had no purpose. I had nothing to do with my life, so I didn't know what I was going to leave *to*."

As individuals' stories highlighted feelings of an unfulfilled professional identity, they also referenced a longing and a desire to do something different. They said that they felt a burgeoning potential in their minds for wanting to do something new, but with no idea of what else could tangibly exist as a next step.

4.1.2.b Uncertainty

This second minor theme addresses elements of *uncertainty* in individuals' stories as they began to set their sights on a potential identity they were contemplating pursuing. Here the shadowy image of what they said they wanted to become started to get a bit clearer. However, with this clarity of the new came a sense of alarm in losing the old. This theme captures a significant concern that arose as individuals said they began to think through fears that their new identity might not fulfill their desires for a professional self. Interviewee 20 shared this concern

as he again referenced his two professional identity paths: street and book smarts. While he entertained the idea of giving up his "street" professional identity, he said he had a fear of losing his overall professional identity if the 'book'-based professional identity was not successful (e.g., "having to overcompensate" – Interviewee 20):

"I understand the streets and stuff, I understand books, I can be professional right? I don't want to be that guy that loses his identity, this new identity trying to be something that I'm not because I feel like I have to overcompensate in this new professional world." – Interviewee 20

This theme particularly addresses a fear of a professional identity vacuum, as interviewees' fear of failure in the new identity was coupled in tandem with a recognition of loss of the old. Interviewees acknowledged this concern as they discussed leaving their old professional identity behind. While some shared common fears associated with exiting a professional criminal identity, such as being physically harmed by former colleagues, the thought of radically diverging from the known and familiar into an unknown and unfamiliar professional identity was said to be equally disconcerting:

"I've heard a lot of them who are in it, they want to be out. They'll say that one-on-one, because they trust you. But there's also a fear, even with the people who are established enough in their gang when it attacked them, they have a fear of like, 'Who am I gonna become? I've built my whole identity around this. Who am I, if I'm a such-and-such?'...Violence, fear for themselves, fear for their family, scared of not knowing we they would be, scared of not knowing the world outside of it. It's like, hey, you have to pay the bills and everything else, and if everything you learned was selling dope or doing some kind of criminal activities, well, how do I function?" – Interviewee 17

This uncertainty and fear of not knowing what might come next was what some individuals said held them back from pursuing anything new and provisionally beginning to experiment with new identities. While elements of this theme aligned with the previously mentioned lack of exposure – i.e., a feeling of paralysis in pursuing new identities – this theme largely focused on the acknowledgement of what else might exist and how individuals interacted

with that possible self that they said was beginning to form. While the theme of *lack of exposure* acknowledges a desire to leave the old professional identity behind, the theme of *uncertainty* builds upon this by acknowledging a fear of failure in the newly forming options for future professional identities.

4.1.2.c Sheltering

The third minor theme of this section revolves around the need for *sheltering* and protecting a burgeoning possible professional identity when it is divergent. As the first two minor themes of this section addressed a self that was merely a possibility under consideration, this minor theme begins to address stories' psychological turning points when interviewees said they felt a possible identity began to move into a provisionally enacted identity.

When a possible identity is initially experimented with, a provisional identity begins to form (Ibarra, 1999). While literature points to the need to *publicly* try out possible identities and provisionally assess the fit of an identity (Ibarra, 1999), interviewees' stories repeatedly referenced the dangers of prematurely showing these identities to others. A key characteristic of divergent identity stories in these early stages is that they have the potential to be subjected to significant threats, particularly from external audiences. Interviewees discussed strategies used to pre-empt these potential identity threats.

Here, Interviewee 15 recalled he felt a level of emotion that accompanied the contemplation of this new professional identity. He noted a "fear" of others' thoughts and the "expectations" that would accompany any change in his identity. Sheltering a new identity in his cell at night was the only time he would acknowledge this new "humanity" mentioned below (i.e., the potential, future identity they were deciding about):

"There was emotion there, but I was hiding it so much based out of fear and expectations that the only time I would acknowledge that humanity in me was at night – by myself – and, even then, you live with somebody..." – Interviewee 15

Social influences may impact the way identities are formed and shaped in the lives of individuals (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). As such, individuals recognize the importance of having spaces to protect and shelter their new identities. Here, Interviewee 2 outlined one of the ways that he thought he was able to combat the "hopelessness" he previously mentioned, as he sought to find places to shelter this new identity and not expose it to the elements, like external influences which might quash new seedlings of growth:

"We talk about atmosphere, a greenhouse garden. If you have a greenhouse garden you have a degree of control of the atmosphere and so you can ensure that the temperature is just right for this seed to grow to its fullest before you take it out and plant it somewhere, and you can ensure that these seeds will not grow because these seeds needed to be 68 degrees Fahrenheit but you're going to maintain it at 78 degrees Fahrenheit because you don't want these over here growing, you want these over there growing. That's what our houses are like, we try to maintain just an atmosphere where the things we're sowing can grow and the things that have been sown can die." – Interviewee 2

Additional interviewees told their stories of a divergent *possible* professional identity and the need for sheltering the new, divergent identities they were *provisionally* considering:

"I kept [university] specifically close to the chest, but I did on a few occasions tell people that what I intended on doing was going to college when I got home and if it wasn't me sharing that I was going to college it probably be me just saying like, I'm going to be successful in our area and I don't currently know at the moment but I'm going to be successful in some area, a professional area in life and a few times I got laughed at. People told me, you're going to be a convicted felon and you have a violent crime, you think somebody going to accept you into their workplace and I used to have to just kind of like rebuke that, those words and those thoughts and I think that maybe even led me to keep it a little bit closer to home because who wants to receive that? Who wants to receive the negativity and if you're not strong enough you might actually begin to believe it and I think that's what played a role in me winding up incarcerated in the first place because things were said to me like, do you want to wind up in prison?" – Interviewee 21

To thwart negativity and the potentially harmful impact on the new identity he was deliberating about, Interviewee 21 kept the specifics of his potentially new identity "close to the chest." While his story did recall occasionally sharing some aspects of a future identity that might include attending college, he never mentioned the particular university that he thought defined this new professional identity he wanted to undertake. Interviewee 40 discussed similar feelings of acknowledging the negative impact that an unsupportive community could have had on a fledgling identity she was exploring to be part of her future story:

"No, not at all, that's a preposterous assertion, there is no fucking way, are you kidding? I already was way leftfield for everyone they're like, 'Who is this white girl and why does she talk like she thinks she's smart?' No, I had a terrible time, definitely would not have been talking to people about any kind of life revelations I was having…" – Interviewee 40

Interviewee 27 also emphasized the importance of this private stage of protection. While he warned against sharing the "wrong information to the wrong individual," the warning from this interviewee extended beyond the health of a *possible* identity and largely centered on the *current* well-being and acceptance of him if his community knew that he was deliberating leaving.

"If you give the wrong information to the wrong individual that would be…to your detriment so you don't do it. Yes, generally they don't give information unless they see they're gonna get something from it. That's the code of the street…Everything you just said goes literally one word: harm. Whether it's physical, mental or emotional, right it's [inaudible 18:09] what you have and what you don't have, who you need, who you don't need, you can forward and you can backwards or you're staying in place it all comes down to that on the street, right. Trying to live or trying to do this, trying to live, trying to drive, and trying to stay alive. Anything that goes against that is a harm towards that and yes, so it all comes down to that one word. We do it to eliminate possible harm." – Interviewee 27

While individuals' stories showed they may eventually share their new professional identity with others, the initial stages of consideration for divergent identities were largely

private to the outside world. This hallmark characteristic of sheltering divergent possible identities is important to underline as a defining attribute for these stories.

4.1.3 Liminality between the possible and the real

The second major theme of this study reveals a common feeling of *liminality* in transitional professional identity stories told by interviewees (Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988). While participants underwent a season of being "betwixt and between" identities, they recalled a range of emotions as their possible identities became actualized (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). The first minor theme of liminality from these stories centers around sharing feelings of being *exposed and naked* as interviewees began to take on their new identity and leave their former identity behind. The second minor theme is defined by a *faking it* sentiment, as divergent identities in liminality require a significant level of identity work to convince oneself and others of the new identity. The third and final minor theme is rich in insights as individuals said they felt *torn* between two identities and experienced a variety of emotions that accompanied this experience. While individuals claimed they were trying to leave a former identity behind and tell a narrative built upon new professional stories, many said that it often felt as if their old identity continued to linger and interfere with their new identity (Wittman, 2019). This section paints a common, overarching storyline of an internal struggle told by individuals who stated feeling caught in liminality between a possible and an enacted identity narrative.

4.1.3.a Exposed and naked

In Section 4.1.2, Interviewee 2's story mentioned the importance of creating a "greenhouse" with a "controlled atmosphere" to protect a burgeoning identity for others. He said this was largely influenced by his own divergent identity transition where a controlled, protective environment was *not* present. In this portion of his interview, Interviewee 2 narrated feeling an extreme amount of exposure and nakedness when he began to change his professional identity as a drug dealer. His story referenced feelings of "nakedness" as his new identity had not yet been fully normalized and incorporated into ways of talking about his profession. Other scholars have discussed feelings of discomfort individuals might share when telling stories of being caught in periods of identity liminality (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Markus & Nurius, 1986); this case of

extreme identity transition may place a magnifying glass on emotions interviewees recalled feeling in this transitional season (Pratt, 2000).

"So the same story, the drugs become like an identity, they're clothing, wrapped yourself in your own stuff, right? So it's literally like, there's no other word I have but 'nakedness' when the drugs leave and like being in a rehab with a bunch of other people like that, you don't notice it, but I'll never forget, I was amazed at how bright the lights were in Walmart. I mean it was so bright and I was so nervous, and I was like, I could feel the cold air, you know? Like it was so airy and the ground was so hard, and I was having like a whole, I was tripping out man, and I thought everybody was watching me and it was the most, I'll never forget that experience." – Interviewee 2

Other interviewees' claimed to feel a similar level of exposure and nakedness when they stopped their former professional identities, without having yet incorporated new professional story into their identity narrative. Some explained that exposure and nakedness was likened to feeling "ashamed" and "embarrassed" without a professional identity to claim for their own.

"What I began to realize was, I no longer had an identity. And so I literally felt like I was physically naked. Like I just felt, like ashamed. I felt embarrassed. I didn't, it wasn't like this go-lucky-feeling." – Interviewee 4

One interviewee gave their thoughts of why many of their former associates stayed in his profession (e.g., as a drug dealer and an addict). Although people expressed a desire to cease their former professional identity, he said they likely possessed an underlying fear that a new professional identity they were contemplating would not provide an equitable level of security and comfort as their previous identity. In moments of concern, individuals said they thought that liminal narratives are vulnerable and may be pushed back into former identities during these moments of transition.

"That's why it's harder. And that's why people become addicts, because they want to be, that they want to have what they have on drugs. Yeah. All the time. So, they're so scared to come back to

the reality where they'll never have that, that they just stay there forever, because they'd rather

live in the dream, than to face the reality." – Interviewee 5

4.1.3.b Faking it

Throughout the interviews showcased above, interviewee stories repeatedly described a series of actions they often took to incorporate a new professional identity. Commonly referred to as *identity work*, individuals said they undertook a series of dramaturgical, discursive, and symbolic actions to convince themselves, and others, of the validity of the new professional stories they were beginning to tell to others (Brown, 2017). They recalled they told stories about enacting these identities, even when they said it did not feel it was yet incorporated into who they were. They recalled that this enactment assisted with substantiating the identity claims they began to make in this transitional phase. Interviewees said that taking such actions provided them with the confidence they needed to begin telling their new professional identity stories to others. Interviewee 20, who previously mentioned frustration with his limited exposure in college to potential professional identities, acknowledged the difficulty of beginning to act upon professional interests after being incarcerated. Although it was a professional identity they said they felt they could *tell*, it was not yet a professional identity story they said they felt *belonged* in their narrative. While identity stories are known to employ identity work when shown to others (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), divergent professional identity stories may require a significant amount of additional identity work to develop the confidence to move from the *possible* to the *real*:

"I had to tell myself that I belonged in a role. You know if I had to fake it until I made it you

know, just kind of like to give myself that boost of confidence and so now that I'm totally in a

professional world." – Interviewee 20

Others referenced similar sentiments in their own stories of learning to *fake it* until the new identity was fully incorporated. They discussed feelings of confidence in the success of this dramaturgical identity work's impact on their own stories, and often mentioned this as a recommendation for individuals who were beginning to ponder a divergent professional identity transition of their own:

"I tell people 'Come to class and fake it, right, I don't care what you come here for, just sit up here and fake it.' But sooner or later, there's an old saying if you keep coming to the barber shop you'll end up getting a haircut." – Interviewee 12

Others mentioned a combination of discursive and dramaturgical identity work that was necessary for them to first *act* the new identity story, and then begin to *believe* the new identity story. As discussed later in Part 4.3, *programming*, or repetitive actions done to begin to reinforce the new identity desired, is one type of dramaturgical identity work done by individuals. The "repetition, repetition, repetition" mentioned below was repeated by several others as they used a series of actions to reinforce who they wanted to become:

"Saying positive affirmations, but out loud, in the mirror and people would be like 'Who are you talking to bro' and I'm like 'Leave me alone, doing my positive affirmations right now.' So I basically would tell myself I'd say this three to five times every morning, clean up the same, brush my teeth and go. 'No-one's going to tell me what I can and can't do,' that's all I would say because I let those circles from the past win…that was just every day and it's one of those things you know building those habits right where I just told myself and all the books I'm reading and schoolwork I'm doing it's like if you want to be successful you have to build those habits right. So, it was just repetition, repetition, repetition." – Interviewee 13

Others employed an interesting method of dramaturgical identity work that involved imagining oneself acting in a way that would align with their desired professional identity story. After visualizing the behavior likely necessary to take on the identity, individuals said they began to feel confident enough to start enacting that behavior as well. Interviewee 41 outlined this process in his story, as he began mental visualization during that transitional phase of who he needed to become: "that journey from leaving camp, the mindset was already there, I knew I was probably going to have a job there, I visualized it, I could see myself working there." He shared that by imagining who he wanted to become, it provided him confidence to continue onward even when "the pathway to get there was a little bit difficult."

The liminality phase between a possible and an enacted divergent identity may be full of magnified feelings of inauthenticity and a fear of not belonging. Interviewees' stories echoed this concern repeatedly, as they referenced a need to convince not only themselves but also others of who they wanted to become. By "faking it" until they "made it" (Interviewee 20) into this new identity through various forms of identity work, individuals were able to overcome these feelings of inadequacy in their new roles.

4.1.3.c Torn

After *faking it* into their new professional identity, interviewees recounted stories of an unforeseen complexity: surfacing remnants of their former professional identities and feeling *torn* between the two. This minor theme was manifested in three subthemes that surfaced in conversations with interviewees. In this liminal transition, individuals told stories of a new, divergent, and oftentimes competing, identity which they shared feeling occurred simultaneously with their original professional identity. The first subtheme addresses portions of the old identity continuing to emerge in new professional environments, chiefly in the form of *habits and mindsets*. The second subtheme addresses the psychological *difficulty in reconciliation of having both identities present* in the mind of the individual. Again, as these divergent professional identities sometimes involved competing ideals, interviewees recalled a deep wrestling with who they said they felt they *really* were. The third subtheme addresses a unique psychological state where interviewees said they felt the ability to maintain mental and emotional stability while both the former and new identities were simultaneously present in their self-concept, referred to as *complex narratives*.

4.1.3.c.a Old habits and mindsets linger

Scholars have previously discussed the presence of former identities lingering behind after an individual takes on a new identity (Wittman, 2019). This subtheme builds upon lingering identities literature and discusses some of the elements of these lingering identities that stay behind – chiefly, *lingering habits and mindsets*. Interviewee 15, whose story mentioned a fear of sharing their divergent possible identity beyond with themselves in their cell at night, said that despite the decision to move forward with their new identity after all, interests in certain aspects of their old identity still lingered. Here, they specifically mentioned the enjoyment they

experienced through revisiting and reliving their old lives, which they could only get through watching prison movies. Interestingly, Interviewee 15 mentioned the *intentional* pursuit of content that would provoke a former psychological state and mindset: "We never leave it behind…I still watch monster movies – I still watch prison movies…I still get that feeling of that rush – that adrenaline."

Other interviewees mentioned a similar connection to their former ways of thinking in their previous identities. However, instead of having things that they said they missed and needed to actively pursue through watching prison movies, these individuals talked about an unintentional flaring up of their old identity's mindsets when they experienced things like "being challenged" by others. Here, Interviewee 11 observed a "holding onto" with part of his previous identity that he was not aware of unless in certain challenging situations:

"I came from an element of the streets where yeah, I robbed people. And in that environment everybody is shifting from victim to prey. And then being in prison and that mentality, still prevalent in there, but it's not really in my environment every day, like I don't embrace that part of myself. But not realizing that I still held onto that part of my identity a little bit when I was challenged, when I felt like I was challenged, to a certain degree." – Interviewee 11

Others told of a similar "firing out," or getting rid of, the "old stuff" (e.g., language and behavior) that continued to surface during their divergent professional identity transition. Interviewee 13 reported a decrease in these behaviors and mindsets the closer they got to their new professional environment (i.e., freedom from prison) while also sharing that former behaviors never completely subsided.

Similar stories were told by others who claimed that the lingering of these behaviors and habits were bred out of necessity and survival. While Interviewee 16 attempted to take on a divergent professional identity, he said he felt caught in a liminality between his new identity (a reformed international smuggler) who was still in his former environment (in prison and surrounded by non-reformed criminals). Simply put, this interviewee's story outlined the need to find ways to financially support his new identity while still in his old environment. This was said to be the impetus behind illegally running a poker table, illegally having a candy store in prison,

etc., to give the new professional identity story a chance to survive long enough to be integrated into their long-term identity narrative:

"...if I wasn't in prison, I would probably have gotten killed because I was doing illegal activities with my dad. So, I was conspiring with him. So, I was like, you know what, this is a sign. Maybe I'm getting a second chance in life. But at the same time, I'm in this medium facility that I need to find a way to survive. So, I still ended up doing illegal things while I was in prison. I ran a poker table, I sold... we had a candy store. I was finding a way to have extra money where my family wouldn't have to send me money." – Interviewee 16

Interviewees referenced a variety of ways that old habits lingered in their new identities. Whether self-perpetuated or a necessity for survival, individuals experienced a lingering of behaviors, habits, and mindsets from their previous professional identities, even into the telling of their new, divergent professional identity stories.

4.1.3.c.b Difficulty in reconciliation

The second subtheme within this minor theme of being torn between original and divergent identities echoes the difficulties individuals faced as they could not *reconcile the presence of competing identities*. Here, the story of Interviewee 2 referenced the psychological turmoil he said to have undergone as he began to weigh his divergent identity with himself and others. While no longer physically in his former professional identity, he said he had not yet made the radical psychological jump necessary to feel that his new professional identity story fit into his broader narrative:

"It was absolute identity crisis upon identity crisis. You know, it was like as soon as I started figuring out, as I started thinking, you know, I got sober, I started a little prayer life, fell in love with a local girl up in Appalachian State and then I met Jesus, and then I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Meeting Jesus was really cool, you know, realizing he was my God, that was awesome, the baptism of the Holy Ghost was not cool and like the gifts that started happening, like I'm a very prophetic person, but I didn't know that then. So I started like having these prophetic things happen and now where I'm at I've worked through all this but let me tell you, it

was years, I mean it was tormenting, a lot of cussing God in the secret place, really like just like

a lot of nasty stuff, a lot of processing, a lot of crying, a lot of whining to God, it was very

tumultuous. I mean I'm like a crackhead and nine months later I'm healing signs and wonders,

do you know what I'm saying? Like what the what? Like what is happening? I didn't even

believe in Jesus a couple of months ago. It was like a rollercoaster, and I don't ever want to go

back to that, ever, I really don't. I don't miss it." – Interviewee 2

Interviewee 10, who referenced having aspirations to do something different even if she did not know what that might entail, continued to recount that her early stages of identity transition felt chaotic and were often filled with things "pulling you back to your old life":

"It feels like chaos. I mean it's something that drags you down and I think that's what our

students…their primary [sigh]…their primary struggle is because when you're trying to do right

it just seems like all of this other stuff is pulling you back to your old ways, is pulling you back to

your old life or you know, becoming another obstacle and another roadblock and you know the

best advice I can give the students is that you know, don't make the same mistake twice. You

know make sure that you're…we're all gonna make mistakes, we're all gonna have hiccups in

life but don't make the same mistake twice. You know learn from your mistakes, push forward

and realize that there is an end goal this time. You know a lot of times we're, like I said, we're

just kind of keeping our head above water, we're surviving but we're not really living our life's

and this is the opportunity to be able to live your life. This is an opportunity to be able to have a

strong foundation for yourself so that you can actually start hitting the goals that you have and

attaining your dreams. And I think that is scary sometimes to dream when you don't have any

prospect of how to get there. You know and you're barely able to figure our where you're gonna

lay your head at night, how do you dream? You know so I always push them to remember the

dreams that they have told me." – Interviewee 10

Some individuals' stories openly said that their new professional identities provided some way to pay penance for the previous identity they held. As they moved into their divergent professional identities, individuals acknowledged a sense of regret and remorse for their former identities. Individuals highlighted a level of difficulty in reconciling even the existence of their former identities. While these interviewees did not claim a lingering of habits and mindsets, a

sense of regret created a constant presence of their former identities in their new stories. To overcome this constant presence of their former identity, interviewees attempted to channel it into a sense of purpose, worth, and hopefulness to continue in their new, divergent professional identity stories. Interviewee 13 said:

"I don't care how good I do it, I took a life. I can never repay that. I can never repay all the other stupid stuff I did in my life that I didn't go to prison for right. So all I can do now is hope that each day that I try to help someone else be better, try and help someone else stay out of trouble…" – Interviewee 13

Interviewee 35 also recalled a similar feeling of purpose and worth in his new identity story being told:

"So, I found a sense of purpose and worth. While being incarcerated there is this thought that you intake, I'm a felon, I'm incarcerated, I'm a public nuisance, all these kind of things. The fire camp program provided me an opportunity to showcase my skills and prove that I was not what the state or the world thought of me. I found a sense of worth." – Interviewee 35

Interviewees 13 and 35 referenced feelings of deep regret and disappointment that they needed to push past to attempt to reconcile the presence of their former professional identities. While they began to find this "sense of worth" (*Interviewee 35*) in their new profession, the motivation for high performance in their new role was often directly linked to their former professional identity in the background of their minds, and the desire to "prove that I was not what the state or the world thought of me" (*Interviewee 35*).

4.1.3.c.c Coexistence of Competing Sides

In this final subtheme of investigating the suspension between two identity stories within a narrative, some individuals claimed to have found a unique psychological state where they maintained mental and emotional stability despite the simultaneous presence of their original and divergent identity stories in their narrative. This is referred to as *complex narratives*. In these stories about their complex identity journeys, individuals shared their experience of pursuing a divergent professional identity and reaching a sense of peace despite the dual presence of their

two identities. This was found through the purposeful *use* of individuals' former professional identities. Unlike with interviewees 13 and 25 above, these interviews echoed a sense of reconciliation in acknowledging their past identities and their constant presence in their narrative:

"There's a 15-year span that I completely try to leave behind, but I use it now instead of boasting and trying to feed my ego and my self-image. What I do is I try to help people, so I use it as a reference rather than a 'Go-to.' It's very important to me…" – Interviewee 15

Other interviewees echoed similar sentiments of leveraging the skills and expertise they learned in their former professional identities and bringing them into their future work. These stories were often juxtaposed with stories of lingering habits and behaviors that other individuals referenced in their divergent identity stories. This reconciliation was possible due to a reframing of the skills and experience that could somehow *benefit* their divergent professional identity:

"I actually learned that all these skills that I've acquired along the way in these not so positive environments had a place in this new direction I was going. It was just - I was just gonna have to tweak them a little bit and use them in different ways, right. So that hustle that I had on the street, it was just resourcefulness, right. You know that tenacity used to be my drive to do all these other things, right. So, it was really just a mind shift of okay, hold on a second, you know I'm not gonna be ashamed anymore of all the mistakes that I've made. I'm gonna acknowledge it, I'm gonna receive it, but I'm gonna move forward from it." – Interviewee 43

Others referenced similar sentiments about the benefits that holding onto a piece of their former identities had in their narrative. By holding onto their former identity as "the street guy, the thug" they were able to be a more effective peacemaker who could intervene in volatile environments and have the credibility to influence the situation:

"I was still holding on to a part of myself because I was in that environment, a volatile environment, and I was still holding onto a little piece… That piece was the street guy, the thug that I was, and I think I held onto it because I embraced a lot of who I was, because I was the guy that was stopping fights and stopping people from getting you know I was stopping a lot of

things, I was the peacemaker, so I embraced a lot of it. But I think there was still that aspect of

that idea of masculinity." – Interviewee 11

This same steadied, yet complex, narrative was heard from others who acknowledged some "bad flipside[s]" to their past, but largely capitalized on the positive "good flipside[s]" that their previous professional identity brought to the table in their new professional identity stories. Interviewee 1 described significant benefits of having this former identity readily available in his narrative, as he displayed the ability to "spot a bad guy a mile away" and was able to "train people to defend themselves." Without the complex presence of their previous professional identity story within their narrative, these types of benefits may not have presented themselves to individuals:

"My past has made me really good at thwarting danger, I still carry street smarts about me to

the point where I have been asked if I am interested in the future at taking a particular position

that requires being able to stop villainous acts and being able to train people to defend

themselves...I don't know how else to say it, like I can literally right now spot a bad guy a mile

away, I can smell it, you know, and all this obviously is in the gracious hand of the Lord, so this

has had a good flipside to it but the bad flipside is that I still struggle with anger."

– Interviewee 1

Other interviewees stated they reached a place of emotional acceptance with their complex narratives in different ways. In these narratives, individuals did not seek to find resolution by capitalizing on the benefits of their past identity stories within their new ones. Instead, individuals discussed an acceptance of a non-linear professional identity path. By telling themselves, and others, of the normalcy in a non-sequitur narrative, individuals were able to reconcile having divergent and sometimes conflicting identities co-exist: "Yes, I'm still a good person who made some seriously wrong choices, and paid the penalty for that, and that doesn't negate that I'm still a good person.'…it's entirely possible to both be someone that maybe killed someone and still be a good person." (Interviewee 14). These stories acknowledged conflicting identities present in their lives but spoke to a belief that individuals did not need to have fully reconciled, linear identities to maintain forward progress:

"When I work with people, I tell them that your progression is not linear, it's fluid. There is ups and downs. In my life I say yes, I took 20 steps forward but three months from now I might go 10 steps backwards. But the only way that will affect me is my personal view of it. It's my view that will give me the discouragement. If I just look at it and reframe it and be like, oh as I say, shite happens, that's the way it is, you know? And I say, that's life. But where the issue lies is, and I know you've spoke to a lot of people, what the terrifying part for us is normalcy, see because everything prior to normalcy is chaos and we thrive on chaos. We understand chaos, we can function in chaos. If we look at addiction, mental health, you know, build relationships, marriages, whatever it is, is chaos. So, when you get out the first initial thing is chaos, because you're running, rebuilding a life, you know, re-establishing credit, re-establishing relationships. It's still chaos. And then once everything starts to settle and there's that normalcy, then it's like uh-oh. Uh-oh, what is this? That's where I tell people do not feel the normalcy. I will help you in the normalcy. I'll help you in the chaos. That's where it is and that's why I tell people yes, you're going to get ahead and also you're going to step back, that's the way it is. Are you going to have failed relationships? Absolutely. It's how you deal with that. Are you going to change employment? Are you necessarily not going to get that raise you thought about, maybe you're not going to get that promotion, and your mind will automatically go, the only reason I never got that raise or that promotion is cause I'm a bloody ex-con. No, not because of that. Don't give power to that situation. Ask that person, what can I do differently in the future and what can I change so that I can look towards that position? What was it that I may have been lacking? Because automatically we're going to get into that mindset, I'm not worthy, I didn't deserve it anyhow. No." – Interviewee 32

Interviewees shared various ways they reconciled the complex presence of two radically different identities in their stories. While some individuals leveraged past identities as a positive benefit for future identities, others created a new trajectory outline of how their narrative stories may be told. By employing one of these methods of reconciliation, individuals told stories where they were able to navigate the complexity of liminal suspension between a former identity that lingered and a new identity that diverged from the known and familiar.

4.1.4 Conclusion

This research study provides insights into a range of *divergent identity stories* that an individual can tell. While Section 4.1.2 addresses the *possibility* of a divergent professional identity being considered by individuals, Section 4.1.3 explores the *liminality* of a divergent professional identity in the early stages of being told and incorporated into a broader narrative.

Section 4.1.2 addresses themes revolving around the possibility of taking on a divergent possible identity: acknowledging the impact that a lack of exposure might have on a radical identity change, the uncertainty that may come with it, as well as recognizing the need for sheltering and protecting a new identity while in its early stages of consideration.

Section 4.1.3 addresses a period of liminality, torn between the *possible* and the *real* within a divergent professional identity story. These themes from their stories address feelings of exposure and nakedness, the need to enact an identity even if it does not yet "fit," and feeling torn between the presence of two simultaneously occurring identities. This section addresses a type of liminality where individuals said they felt "betwixt and between" identities, and from a place of suspension as pulled *between* identities (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). While stories did not express feeling identity-*less* because of a transitional vacuum in between identities, interviewees shared feelings of not fully mastering the storytelling of either, because of the presence of the other, in their narrative.

4.2 Part 2: Motivations and Approaches

4.2.1 Introduction

As individuals continued to share their stories about their divergent professional identities, additional themes emerged. In this portion of interviewees' stories, two major themes emerged as they referenced how their divergent identities began. This chapter addresses two questions that were addressed by interviewees in their stories: "What led me to pursue this divergent and radically differing identity?" and "How did I go about beginning to pursue this

identity?" Section 4.2.2 addresses a major theme of divergent identities, as interviewees said what they felt were their *motivations* that led them to tell this new identity story. Section 4.2.3 next outlines two different *approaches* taken by interviewees to begin incorporating their new stories into their narratives. This chapter showcases themes and subthemes within interviewees stories that address *why* and *how* individuals pursue their divergent professional identities.

4.2.2 Motivators

Interviewees highlighted the importance of having a motivation in place to begin creating their new identity stories. These motivators were another major pattern emerging from interviewees stories. In their stories, individuals recalled that these initiating motivators, or *initiators*, were vital to continue to move past the difficulties and deterrents that came in the early days of their new identity. Interviewees also stated the need for longer-term *sustainer* motivations that would continue to keep them moving forward. These initiating motivators were often an internal reckoning that sometimes occurred because of external events, like hitting rock bottom from being in prison, while sustaining motivators were often externally inspired and driven, like becoming a role model for others seeking to make the transition. However, several interviewees told stories where they experienced relapse because of a lack of accompanying internal motivations to continue with their new identities. Stories from interviewees continually highlighted the importance of internal and external motivations being present to begin and maintain their journey towards their new identity.

4.2.2.a Motivators

Within interviewees' broader narratives, they recalled that divergent identity stories required a radical and initiating force to divert their path so abruptly. This minor theme focuses on these initiating motivations that interviewees recounted in their stories. Interviewees often likened this level of redirecting impact as "hitting a wall" or "hitting rock bottom." They said that this moment within their stories often led to an inflection point of self-evaluation, where interviewees recalled realizations of a need to change themselves to change their stories.

In Part 4.1, Interviewee 10 stated a desire to do something different, even if she did not know what that entailed. Later in her interview, she recounted motivators that she said she thought had led her to the point of making a change in her professional identity story. Here, Interviewee 10 communicated the moment (becoming incarcerated) when she recognized the impact that her professional identity was having on her life trajectory. In this moment, she referenced recognizing an "insanity" cycle that she said she felt she was caught in, where she did "the same things over and over again and expect results" that differed from the inputs that she had put in:

"I think that's why I ended up been in trouble was because I was so lost and you know and I didn't really know what I needed or what I wanted and then I kind of got thrown into going into college and then I was just alone…When you're incarcerated obviously you don't have anything more than time so it's hard not to reflect on certain things especially when you're dealing with a case that is you know reflecting on actions that you made positive or negative…unfortunately it took being incarcerated to stop me from…to realize that I need to get away from the situations… I always tell [others], you know insanity is when we do the same things over and over again and expect [different] results. I realized that I was in my own insanity. That I kept doing something similar, maybe I wasn't selling cocaine, I was selling weed or maybe I wasn't selling weed, I was selling this, but it was still illegal. And so, the outcomes were still the same. I'm getting all this money; it's running through my hands like water because I'm not really supposed to have it and I'm not being responsible with it and I also have this notion that I can get it again so it's not like a big deal to me 'cause I'm actually working for it. And you know at the end of the day, I mean I'm still having the same outcomes…So in my lifetime I've been shot at, I've been stabbed, I've been hog-tied and robbed at gun point, I have used a gun and you know had other people at gun point and in none of those situations which are impacting my life did I ever say like "enough is enough."? Like I need to stop doing this, you know this is risking my life. But it took for me to have my freedom taken away from me, for me to say okay enough is enough here…"
– Interviewee 10

Interviewee 9 also highlighted this feeling of "insanity" which he conveyed feeling caught in, and he described an epiphany when he recognized his desire to change his professional

identity. While taking action was an important step in the process, many individuals recounted the importance of first experiencing a mental reset in their ways of thinking about themselves and their identities:

"So, it's like I can't keep repeating the same thing. What's the definition of insanity? Repeating the same thing, expecting a different result. I just realized that I could no longer be the herd thinker, think inside the herd. I had to break away from the herd and whatever that came with the consequences or whatever I had to be comfortable living with that. I did not want to continue to live that life of worrying about what others think about me anymore" – Interviewee 9

Exhaustion with her old life was one of the ways that Interviewee 25 acknowledged her inflection point came about. She highlighted that this level of emotional exhaustion was the impetus for pushing her to determine what she wanted next in her professional career:

"I knew that when I was released, I had two choices. I could either come back to my life as a soccer mom and just put prison behind me and no-one would ever think about it again, or I could be a part of creating change in a system that I knew was wrong, and that's when I said, 'Okay, this is my career.' But I never would have picked this for myself. So I do what I do because of all of the things that I've seen, all of the things that I've heard, and I never lose sight of all of the women that I left behind and all of the women and young girls that are coming in after me. That's what motivates me to do it. That's the work that I've done… we also know that people will hit the wall, like, 'I can't do this anymore,' and sometimes you have to hit that wall, and that wall doesn't necessarily come when you're 60, 65, 70; it could come at 30, it could come at 25. Whenever it comes, it's when you say, 'I can't do this anymore. I need to do something different,' and in that moment, you've created the seed of possibility and hope within yourself, to be able to say, 'I'm gonna do this..because the wall could be different, and the wall is different, for everybody. Sometimes you just get to the point where, 'I'm just tired of the same cycle. I cannot do this anymore. I'm just tired.' 'This lifestyle is not suiting me anymore. I cannot continue to do this.' 'I can't stand the look of disappointment in my mother's face because I keep doing this.' 'I don't want to have to explain this to my children, who are young right now. I'm a parent; I've been away from my child three years. How do I come back and explain?' So the wall is all of

those things, and every single person, when something gets bad enough in your life or hard enough in your life, or it causes you stress and anxiety, you'll hit that wall, and whatever that wall is for you is what can impel you to do something different…And some people refer to it as 'hitting rock-bottom'. Once you hit rock bottom, you can only go up. Well, that's true, and for people that say, 'I hit rock-bottom and the only place I could go was up,' that's great, but 'up' is not quantifiable enough for me…I don't know that I ever really hit that big wall until recently, and my wall was not so much I want to do things differently; it's I've been pivoting a lot with my work, and my work has been great and I love my work, I love what I do, I love the impact that I have, but I'm at a stage in my life where I don't want to keep pivoting. I want to take myself, my work, my life to the next level." – Interviewee 25

Similar tones of exhaustion were present in Interviewee 32's story of divergence as he recounted telling the Correctional Center in his prison that he felt a total divergence was necessary, or that his only other alternative was taking his own life:

"And I went in there and I said I really want to get to ERP [rehabilitation program], I want to get into intensive treatment, I want to go to the Drug Use Correctional Center, and they were like well why would we do that? I said because I only see two options. They're like, well what's that? I said the only two options I see is either you let me get into that program and understand who I am and go out and not be stuck in this revolving door, or you let me out without that program and I am not going back to my life. I cannot do it anymore. So, the option that I see, and I will take is I will go get a gun – I remember saying it to them – and I will blow my fucking brains out, cause I'm not going to do that anymore." – Interviewee 32

Additional stories referenced the importance of having these inflection points to push them to try something "differently" than they would have before. This inflection point began to open a world of possibilities they would not have originally entertained:

"I had to find who I was by losing myself. I said I will never stop selling drugs at one point, I'll never forget that time. I said 'I'll never stop selling drugs'. It was too easy, you know. I had to get caught, otherwise I wouldn't have" – Interviewee 20

Interviewee 20's reflections on his inflection point revealed an understanding that if he had not gotten caught, he likely would have continued with his profession of selling drugs.

Some inflection points came from a source of internal reflection. Interviewees, like Interviewee 12, recounted his experience in changing his professional trajectory after evaluating the outcomes of all his previous professional identity decisions:

"I continued doing the things that I was doing that landed me into prison and after several years I was like I'm tired something's got to change and I knew at that point that if I kept doing the same thing I was going to the same result, so I had to start doing something different…I looked back at the things that I was doing that got me there in the first place. I already knew that if you continue to put two apples together with two other apples you'll have four apples, no matter how you arrange that if you keep putting those numbers together you'll going to arrive at four, so you have to do something. So I already knew you had to do something different in order to get a different result. So I was willing to try things differently" – Interviewee 12

Interviewee 16's story of divergence also highlighted an internal reflection that pushed him to beginning a new professional path:

"Because I knew if I would have stayed in Milwaukee, I was already starting to sell low-level drugs, cocaine here and there. I was, like, you know what, I'm either going to end up in jail or in prison… I'm going to end up dead or in prison, one of the two…" – Interviewee 16

While some of these inflection moments resulted from a series of *internal* reflections, some were *externally* motivated by experiences an individual went through. Interviewee 27 recalled the "instant I said I would never allow myself to be a party to harming anybody else ever again":

"But in the intervening 18 years, that's when the change took place. I personally noticed it when I was in the court room and I was at a plea bargain hearing or something like that, and I

happened to look back in the gallery and I happened to see one of the tellers who was one of my victims and I mouthed the words, I'm sorry. At the same time that she reacted, the lady who was sitting next to her reacted. That just happened to be my wife and at the time…at the time I said wow, I had an epiphany that the bank teller wasn't my only victim. That my wife was a victim as well and it's that bleeding outward. Everybody that had to deal with me in my knucklehead mindset from the time I was 14 to the time I was 46, were part of my victim train and that was…and that had a profound impact on me. That instant I said I would never allow myself to be a party to harming anybody else ever again." – Interviewee 27

Interviewee 38 also referenced an externally-based motivator as he realized his kids would grow up without a father if he did not change his professional trajectory:

"I had a potential that I was gonna spend the next 23 years of my life in prison, and I'm absolutely sick. I have kids now that are gonna grow up without their father, just like I grew up without mine, and I'm distraught, I'm angry, I'm fighting everybody in jail." – Interviewee 38

Interviewee 37 echoed a similar motivator about his story's inflection point as he acknowledged the impact that he felt having kids had on his ability to change his professional trajectory:

"Then we had our second kid and that was one of the turning points like 'oh this is really… people depend on me.'… Then we had a third child and by then I had already cut all my gang ties. I don't know if it was by choice or just by repetition that I just took on the father role…I don't know if I would have been motivated. Just the way my life turned out, I don't know what it would have been if I didn't have kids." – Interviewee 37

Another interviewee made the recognition of not being who they wanted to, and conveyed the impact of 39 years of not living the life of "the person I wanna be." When repeated actions perpetually led to the same outcomes, this interviewee stated the realization that "this ain't working" and the desire to begin changing her story. Interviewee 14's story of her newly

diverging professional identities largely centered around an internal dialogue of recognizing the impact her own actions had on her life:

"I was 39 years old before I went to prison and had been in trouble, so I had a very full life of, 'This isn't working,' and I just really had to look at myself and be like, 'Something has to change, and it has to be me – there's clearly something within myself that isn't working, and I have to be the one to change that.'...I really had to recognize that, clearly, this ain't working – 'What I've been doing is not working, and now I have some time to really look at that.'" – Interviewee 14

Similar stories of inflection were communicated as interviewees explained what led them to pursue an identity that radically differed from what they knew and had professional experience of. In Interviewee 4's story, he emphasized the impact that his environment would have on his life if he did not change and soon tell a different professional story within his narrative:

"You know you're 40 you started off at 13, now you're 40, and then you're 60 you're still stuck in this junk. And you've been locked up 20 times. I mean, there's all type of like those things that you would see be like yeah, I don't want that to be me, but I really don't know how it's not going to be me if I'm doing the exact same things they're still doing…. So I would just say, just the consequences of the life would be enough to be like, 'Yeah, this isn't the way.'… like, well, 'If I get out, I'm still gonna do the same stuff. I'm probably going to come back to die.' Yeah, so that was a big thing to kind of always like, 'Oh, maybe I should stop.'" – Interviewee 4

For some, these moments of inflection came through conversations with others and seeing a flaw in their loop of repeatedly returning to their profession of drug dealing. They expressed that seeing this "insanity" cycle reflected in others highlighted the importance of change in their own lives:

"I had a leadership role inside the prison, as you know, in my group, my social circles, and the guy asked me for permission to bring in some meth, and he would give me $500 if I gave him permission, as in my only role was to give him permission. So I ended up talking to him for about

an hour just about how stupid it was, because he's been in prison four times, each time for drugs, and I was like, 'What happens every time you come to prison?' and he's like, 'Every time I come to prison, I have to start all over. I have to start from scratch,' so I was talking to him about how stupid that was. And $500 in prison is like $50,000 out here. On the high end, you're making $50 a month if you're working a full-time job. So we ended up talking like that, but it was really a wake-up for me because I was like, 'Man, we need to change how we influence each other in here.' That's when I started coming up with ideas for changing the cultures inside of prison." – Interviewee 17

Interviewees communicated a variety of emotions they felt contributed to these inflection points in their stories. Interviewee 2, from Part 4.1, recounted memories of feeling extreme fear and vulnerability as he reached a pinnacle in his drug dealing career: "Oh yeah, oh man I was terrified. Every time I pumped gas, I hated pumping gas…gas pumping is not good, you know, you're vulnerable" (Interviewee 2).

This immense fear Interviewee 2 shared was one that others echoed as well. Interviewees recalled receiving advice for how and when to begin to expect this inflection point. Interviewee 13 recalled a veteran inmate during his sentence sharing a timeline of when he could expect to hit the wall that would make him reconsider his life trajectory. This timeline of between five and seven years was so common amongst inmates that a heuristic was developed for when these inflection points could almost be predicted amongst inmates:

"I'll never forget one of my old cell mates and he was younger than me but he had been in longer and this was before I went to the dorm living he had told me there is two numbers you need to know and it's ironic crazy like cos we talk he's in the [country name] he got deported there, we just talked the other day like he doesn't even remember telling me this but he said "These are two numbers these are five and seven" and I was like "What's five and seven?", he goes "Someone told me this a while back," he goes, "Five years you're going to feel like you just showed up, all that stress everything's going to hit you yeah" and I was like "Really?" cause I was almost at five years when he told me this, and then he goes "And seven years you're going to make a decision what you really want to do, and that's going to be it" and I was like wow.

And ironically right after that is when my murder conviction got overturned and when I came back it was right around my five-year mark and I was stressed out and then at seven years is when I ended up in dorm living and when I changed everything. So he was spot on with the five and seven." – Interviewee 13

While some referenced a consistency in what they heard from others about a timeline of when they might expect to proverbially "hit the wall," other interviewees emphasized the importance of each individual's story and unique journey to this moment of inflection:

"It all boils down to the individual. Each person has their own dropping point. It takes some people just the thought about going to jail would straighten them out. Some people have to go to jail or a couple of days to realize you know what I need to do something different. Some people had to actually go to prison and spend some time. Everybody has their own threshold and so when a person gets to that point, has to get to that point, that he or she really wants to change then it becomes easy." – Interviewee 12

Regardless of how individuals talked about their initiating motivation to make a change in their professional identity, interviewees repeatedly communicated the importance of this inflection point to begin their journey.

4.2.2.b Sustainers

As discussed in Section 4.1.3, stories about the early stages of interviewees' new identity journeys were often said to be riddled with liminality and feeling torn "betwixt and between" (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). One way that individuals said they managed this initial transition period was by focusing on a motivator to sustain them past initial hurdles threatening to push them back to their previous identities. This minor theme focused on the motivations that interviewees said kept them going in their journey of creating this new identity. The *sustainer* motivations commonly mentioned were external influences, like faith and setting an example for others, which interviewees conveyed had provided a source of meaning for them as they continued with their new professional identities despite significant difficulties:

"My identity was no longer on what my dad did, what environment I grew up in, what mistakes I made. It was now in finding a purpose, trusting in someone greater than myself, believing that there is a God." – Interviewee 18

Interviewee 37 said he used a series of actions to motivate himself to continue onward in his identity change. By having his tattoos removed over an extended period, he expressed feeling a continual reminder of the intentional change he was making: "So being able to take off my tattoos and feeling the pain of taking it off was the reminder of why I'm making these changes and in the long run what's going to come out of it, or what I wanted to come out of it. So, you have to change from the inside out" (Interviewee 37). Interviewees said that choosing a focal point outside of themselves provided a source of forward motion to continue to push themselves to author their new stories:

"I completed the training and then begged my way in there. So, it took a lot of will power to even get up to that point. People were offering me drugs to sell. I could have done whatever I needed to do to survive up until that point right? But again, I have thousands and thousands and thousands of black brothers that are [laughing] to join, who are depending on one of us to get out there and blaze a trail and make a way for them when they get out ten years later or fifteen years later and that is what helped to push me." – Interviewee 19

As Interviewee 19 highlighted, having a long-term motivator of sustaining the new behavior and identity was helpful when creating new identities. Interviewees 26 and 28 mentioned similar motivators that kept their new identities going: "I wasn't supposed to get out until 2025 and so there's a part of it that's like 'the governor signed off on this, would he be disappointed if I did this [slight laugh] and not this?'" (Interviewee 26):

"I'm still looking at doing all that time and sadly I carry the guilt, remorse and shame of what I had done for the next 25 years. You know I thought it was my penance to try to give back and help keep other people from going down the path I had been down… And so I determined that I'm gonna turn this thing around so that everybody that comes in, you know they're treated like somebody's brother, best friend or father is coming to the program." – Interviewee 28

To maintain this pursuit of a new identity, some interviewees recounted exercises of reminders to help them push through the doubt of why they were continuing on this new path.

"You know one of the things that I would do sometimes when I was in prison is I would write down all the reasons why I need to continue on this path to redemption. Like list them because it was always a reminder that it's way bigger then freedom, it's way bigger than whatever the case may have been. So once I found my why, I found my voice, I found my self-identity that I am truly proud of. You know that's really where it stands with me the reason why I'm not a back and forth person. I'm 100 percent into what I do on this path of redemption, giving back and empowering others because it's part of who I am today. " – Interviewee 9

By having a sustainer in place, individuals were able to maintain the momentum of their initiating motivators and continue down the trajectory of the new professional identity they were pursuing. Some of these sustaining motivators were said to be things outside of themselves (i.e., God or a community of others relying on their success).

4.2.2.b.a Relapse

As strong external motivators were commonly mentioned as sustaining contributors for the long-term viability of a new identity, having an internal motivator was also highlighted as an important factor for a divergent identity. Interviewees conveyed the impact that not having an intrinsic motivator could have on their ability to sustain their new identity story they were trying to create over the long term: *relapse*. Without the presence of an internal motivator to come alongside a potentially weakening external motivators, interviewees' stories recalled moments of relapse and a "back and forth" motion between their former and desired identities. Interviewees said that relapse was often able to be avoided when strong internal motivators were present in their lives.

Relapse could occur in a variety of ways. Interviewee 15 recalled that throughout the authorship of his divergent professional identity story he experienced this "back and forth" motion between his two identities. When reflecting on why he thought this oscillation between

the two identities existed, Interviewee 15 recalled feeling uncertain whether or not he would be released from prison and this impacted his motivation to fully change his identity. These feelings of uncertainty made it difficult for him to fully release his former professional identity:

"I was going back and forth with my life out here with my wife, and I asked myself why I couldn't let it go, and I was still going back and forth with it… was because I still did not see myself getting out of prison, even with less than two years left." – Interviewee 15

Relapse was said to occur once the change process was initiated, but weak external motivations were present to sustain the change. While interviewee 37 explained in the previous section how having children was *his* initiating motivator for an identity transition, he simultaneously stated feeling torn in having "one foot in the door, one foot out the door" with his former and new professional identity and breaking away from mindsets like "making money the way you know how to make money" (Interviewee 37). Making easy money through drug dealing, in comparison to minimum wage at a thrift store in his new job, weakened his resolve to fully stick with his divergent identity. Additional interviewees recounted what happened when those sustaining internal motivations were either not present, or not strong enough to help them overcome the desire (or perceived need) to go back to their former identities:

"…Same idea of why abusive partners and abusive relationships remain that the 'Devil you know is better than the one you don't.' We all know people that have stayed in relationships like that, so people are comfortable – they know what to expect with you in your old way, and they count on that in a way – right?...When you get knocked down when you're trying to do the right thing, what do you do? – you go back to what you know – whether it's selling guns, whether it's doing drugs – you go back to what you know. So, what I knew was, 'Well, I know how to forge payroll checks, and I can get the money I need to pay my rent.'" – Interviewee 14

Familiarity and comfort with the old identity were also highlighted as a reason that interviewees said they felt drawn back to their former lifestyle at times. Even though "the intention was there, at times I did still slip back into my old ways because it's something I was familiar with" because "I knew that I could make the money that I needed to make in order to

survive" (Interviewee 10). She said that "sometimes lack of resources kind of pushed me there. Just that comfort of what you already know or people you already know" (Interviewee 10). Interviewee 25 echoed similar sentiments of people defaulting to what she knew and felt comfortable with when put in difficult situations:

"It goes to the internal fortitude. I want better for myself, I want better for my children, I want to be able to live as authentic and transparent of a life as I can, and you can't do that…You can be authentic and transparent if you go back to the people and places that know you, but then your situation hasn't changed, and so now you're not being authentic to yourself of, 'I want to do different.' And it is tough. It is hard, and people will do just that – they will default to what they know, what they're comfortable with, where they're already accepted, because we're social animals and we need people around us. "
– Interviewee 25

However, some stories outlined a solution for avoiding relapse. Interviewee 20 explained what he felt was the need for a deeper, intrinsic motivation to do something different with his life. In his storytelling, this internal motivation – a contrite heart –provided a "deeper" impact on his long-term identity story shift than any external influences he had experienced through prison. In his reasoning, Interviewee 20 said that as external motivators may cease to be motivating, i.e. consequences of jail "aren't scary anymore," a deep, internal motivation, i.e. a "moral obligation," may provide a more solid and "concrete" commitment to the new identity:

"...like you have to have a contrite heart, like something has to change internally. I mean outside of just, if I do X, Y, Z I'm going to go to jail for an extended amount of time, you know. That was just my take on it and I think the people that I see and witness first hand while incarcerated that made those drastic [inaudible 09:33] changes, it was deeper than the consequences but while they can only change with the consequences... It's like the consequences aren't scary anymore. You're done with the consequences, you're almost home now, right? So it's like, okay, I could take another shot at this and you know, I've got through this time, I've done it, you know. I can do it again but this time I'll be smarter about it, but when you have a moral obligation, whether

it's just your faith in God or just like you just want to do something different and I think it's that change of identity is more a concrete thing." – Interviewee 20

Other interviewees continued to reference the impact they felt internal motivations had on their ability to prevent a relapse to a former professional identity. When Interviewee 8 discussed his divergent identity story, he referenced concepts like psychological "surrender" to God and "work in [his] heart" to change his behaviors helped create a new identity of becoming a person of faith, motivating his ability to change his overall story. Interviewee 28 insisted that for him to finally move past his relapses, something bigger and more powerful than himself [God] was the reason he was finally able to sustain a new identity story and no longer struggle with relapses in his identity:

"I mean it was living a hypocritical lifestyle. You know I was still trying to bless and help my family. I was blessed that they did have minimum wage jobs back when I was in prison so I got into some really good you know, jobs that helped me support my family and stuff like that but you know I was gonna sell drugs or do something that was against my morals and character and so for a while there I was using the card table to you know help put my son through college and get braces on his teeth when the minimum wage jobs went away. So you know...'cause I tried, cried, prayed and promised my whole life to try to change or fix things in my life that were broken or that you know I knew being raised the right way would not honor my parents or the best version of me and I couldn't do it. No matter how hard I tried. And so to never drink again I thought I was a hope to die alcoholic, you know to never curse again you know I thought that was just part of who I was. And so I don't take any credit for those changes. That was definitely you know God making a complete 180 in my life about who I was." – Interviewee 28

While sustaining motivators were told as being able to be either internal or external, interviewees interestingly only mentioned periods of relapse when they did not have internal sustaining motivators in place.

4.2.3 Approaches

The next major theme revolved around *approaches* recalled by interviewees who told stories of creating their divergent narratives. When individuals told stories of their divergent identities, they primarily used two types of narrative storylines to recount their development: cold turkey and gradual. They recounted an immediate, cold turkey approach of divergence in their storyline, or a more gradual shift in taking steps to become who they communicated they felt they wanted to be. These approaches embody a series of actions individuals recalled taking when creating their new identities. Interviewee 15 gave his perspective on these two approaches he said he thought people could use to leave their former stories behind:

"Two ways people get out is there is a 'Sea-change' and a 'Seed-change,'…and so, a 'Sea-change' is when everything comes crashing down. Well, like there's a traumatic event – a death in the family – something that happened where we have to change, and this goes for getting in and getting out, and then you have the 'Seed,' where there's a seed planted and it's slowly but surely growing and so, when you're asking questions like, 'Was it a 'Sea -change,' or a 'Seed-change?' and I don't know how many people could answer that, but a lot of times it's a 'Seed.' It's been planted, but then it could also be a combination of both where you had the idea, but then some things are so traumatic and so life-changing that you change." – Interviewee 15

Additional stories told by interviewees reinforced these two differing approaches that individuals can take when starting to change their identities. In some instances, both types of change were said to be employed to create a new identity. Interviewee 27 described the presence of both approaches in his story where a switch was flipped instantly to make the decision to change, but the actual change process was a much more gradual series of events:

"The switch was flipped instantaneously but the change took time. Yes there's – anybody that ever tells you from one second to the next that they changed from a piece of crap to a perfect person, telling you a lie 'cause it doesn't happen like that. It doesn't happen instantaneously you know. Because there's so much garbage and rubbish that people carry from whatever their life is or what has been and that doesn't go anywhere. That doesn't magically disappear, you know those things still have to be dealt with you know." – Interviewee 27

This dual approach was rare, but it highlights the importance that each of these approaches may play when rewriting a professional identity story.

4.2.3.a Cold turkey

This section discusses the first minor theme of approaches to making an identity change and revolves around patterns from interviewee stories that employed a fast-paced, *cold turkey* approach. In this approach, individuals recounted their stories about a drastic, quick change in their identities. This was attributed to the rapid actions they took to enable their identity change. Some individuals claimed this type of change story was possible because of innate traits and personalities which enabled them to "cold turkey" their old ways of thinking and acting. Meanwhile, they sensed if others did not have this "way of being" then it was likely due to a personality difference that may be unchangeable (Coupland, 2015). Several individuals said that they took a "clean cut" approach with their former professional identities as they began to radically out former habits, mindsets, and associations with their old professional identities:

"So it was like, it was a pretty clean cut with the drug scene, just knowing like if I can't, we're not buddies, I'm not going to sit on the couch while you shoot heroin, I'm not into that anymore." – Interviewee 2

Many individuals told their stories with radical identity changes when they made mental commitments to the new identity they wanted, and said they firmly stuck with it regardless of their environment: "I think once I made the decision it just stuck" (Interviewee 16). He went on to frame the decision to tell his new story as merely "it was just a matter of how I was going to do it" (Interviewee 16). Similar levels of quick commitment were made by others as they discussed their decisions to diverge into their new identities:

"I made a vow to never get in trouble again, and I never got in trouble after that, so I went from getting 44 major incidents to nothing. But my change wasn't normal for the prison system."
– Interviewee 17

When Interviewee 4 began to approach taking on his new professional identity, he conveyed the impact of an "extremist" mindset he said he used to approach this diverging identity. As he communicated the future identity he hoped to develop, he referenced the need to physically remove associations with music and former ways of speaking to reinforce this new identity. He recalled that the "outward stuff" was the things he said he felt could be approached in this black-and-white way, while the "heart issues" took a bit longer to create change:

"I'm an extremist, I'm either going to be all in whatever I'm doing. I'm not like gray I'm either black or white. And so, if I was doing all these crazy things. So I jumped. I'm like okay well I think from my reading and seeing other people live out this faith, to some degree, this is the thing to do. So in prison my motto was I'm going to be the model inmate. Yeah. Because model inmates obviously are frowned upon, are not in the best position there. And so I'm like, well, and the only thing I would think, is 'If Jesus was wearing these blues,' because we wore blues. In the Illinois prison, I will do 'If Jesus had worn these blues, what would he do? Would he do this? No. Okay. I can't do that anymore.' Yeah and that that was like my standard was "would Jesus do this?" And then I like, and it could be the most, pettiest thing. But if it was rule, okay, I'm going to do it. And so I really um, got really, like structured and yeah obviously, mind. Obviously, the Word renews your mind, you're transformed. So, I mean, everything: the way I spoke the way I thought. I got rid of all my, you know, gangsta hip-hop, rap tapes. I, you know, got rid of things that I had no business doing anymore. I mean, just everything I mean everything I did it just changed. I stopped cursing, I, yeah. I just stopped. It was a lot of it was just like, Poof! I'm done, I know I don't need to do it. I know what's right and what's wrong, I'm just gonna to do it.Yeah, so I would say it's more the the, the outward stuff that it was, that I could drop right away. It was more of the heart issues. Those things, obviously. Yeah. Those things were progressions in my life." – Interviewee 4

Some interviewees were dogmatic about the importance of taking actionable steps to remove things from their life that would lead them back to their old identity stories as professional criminals:

"You've got to be careful creeping back into the stuff so it doesn't grab a hold, so I'm going to be very clear on that, but I want to say that I pretty much cut everything off…At that point you're keeping certain strands attached that can be used to pull you back in and that strand can turn into a noose around your neck." – Interviewee 1

Interviewee 8 communicated the toll he felt from his inability to initially make a clean cut from his old life. He recounted the impact that an oscillation had not only on himself, but also on others in his life. To "get clean," he stated feeling as though he needed to experience a full separation from his former environment. He said that this cold turkey approach allowed him to move forward for himself and for others in his life and recalled thinking "If I was going to get clean, I had to separate myself from all these people…" (Interviewee 8).

Others talked about taking similar actions, such as blocking communications where *"you have to burn every single bridge, every single relationship, every single contact. Delete your number, delete every single number of your phone*" to begin enacting their new identity (Interviewee 5).

Interviewee 5's story displayed additional actions he took to reinforce the new identity he was beginning to shape. By having processes in place to course-correct from his former identity, he said he felt that he was able to stay on the new course he was wanting to chart. Other interviewees echoed these similar processes of clean separation they said was necessary to maintain their new, divergent identities. In the next chapter, these disciplines will be further explored as a method of identity maintenance.

"No I slayed it…I slayed my addiction while I was in prison. Did not do it again. I did not want to be the guy who struggles with marijuana and alcohol privately inside of prison, and eventually gonna show out publicly right. So I just immediately just made a decision to develop discipline and say you know what, I can't do none of that anymore because another reason is, because I remember my crime was committed, I was intoxicated when I committed my crime, right"
– Interviewee 9

Although interviewees recounted a complicated process to disentangle their new lives from their former ones, Interviewee 11 conveyed what he said was still the importance of respectfully ending associations with his former relationships. While it did not change his feelings for needing a "bill of divorcement," Interviewee 11 emphasized the need to keep "love in the relationship[s]" with others who may one day want assistance with his own divergent story changes:

"That's why I tell guys when you sign that bill of divorcement from those friends you can't do it disrespectfully, you can't do it in a negative way because sometimes you're the only example that they have of somebody transforming their life and if you dissolve the relationship on a bad note when they want to transform their life they know they can't come to you because you've destroyed the relationship, but if you do it the correct way and let them know that there's love still in the relationship but you just want to go in a different direction because you want to be an example to your children and to your family" – Interviewee 11

When beginning to shape his new professional identity, Interviewee 28 recalled a push from the community around him that seemed to test and see if he was committed to his new identity: "[I] never got so many temptations and offers. I never even smoked weed, here you want this or you wanna try this, just like people trying to almost test or see if that was really real with me, you know." His response remained "No I'm not interested. That doesn't have any attraction to me anymore so thank you though, but no." When asked why he thought they might have been 'testing' him, he simply stated "There's a saying, misery loves company…" By completely ending his drug use and illicit activities, he shared that he felt able to maintain his path forward despite any temptations from others.

Many interviewees referenced ups and downs within their radically diverging identity stories. While they acknowledged the tumultuous journey they said they were on, they said they felt that a "cold turkey" approach from their former ways of business was the only way they could successfully move forward in their new identity, as they had limited temptation and exposure to their former ways of life:

"The journey of leaving, I think it's a journey, has been difficult, but I cold turkied. So I switched off all my business phones. I switched off all contact with people whom were, who were part of that life, and a part of that world. I just cold turkied. Yeah." – Interviewee 6

Interviewee 5 echoed a journey of repeated attempts to make a gradual change in professional identity. However, until he was determined to make a complete break from his former world he said he felt he was not able to "start all over again." He recounted that "it happened over a series of multiple attempts, like I would try and do it [leave]," but "Then I'll do it again and leave one number." He shared the feeling that these connections kept him tied to his former life, "until eventually I just had to do it. I just had to start all over again."

Interviewee 12 acknowledged challenges with these types of radical, divergent identity changes. He recalled the extreme difficulty of making this shift, but he also shared a sense of hopefulness about their transition and the lessening of his emotional load over time. Despite the difficulties he faced, he said that "I started developing the mindset and the skillset to overcome those challenges each time I was met with those challenges. It got easier over the course of time" (Interviewee 12).

By utilizing a cold turkey approach, interviewees said they were able to cleanly move forward without the pull of their former identities close behind them.

4.2.3.b Gradual

While some individuals told stories with an immediate change in their professional identities, others told stories with themes of a slower, *gradual* transition from one professional identity to the next. This change in an identity was often discussed in stories as a change in behaviors and mindset shifts in ways of thinking. Some changes were gradual over time in different areas of life, e.g., behaviors, ways of talking, etc., while other gradual change was a result of a "back and forth" motion individuals experienced trying to move forward on their journey. In regard to the former type of gradual change, Interviewee 15 told his story of how he diverged in his professional identity. By slowly backing away from his former work and showing less interest in his profession, Interviewee 15 said he felt that he was able to remove himself

from his work environment in a way that allowed him to move forward in the new identity he wanted to pursue:

"I had no issues with walking away from my stuff. In prison, walking away and saying, 'Hey, I want a different life' – they made me show them. It wasn't like, 'Oh, hey, we're gonna let you out – you're done' – it was more… I just started keeping busy with stuff I wanted to do, and I would dibble and dabble a little less than I had before and just show less interest – I didn't have the heart for it…. I was weak, as they called it – I wasn't as strong-hearted as I was – you know, 'The lion going into battle' – it was 'Meh,' which is different – so, I was getting useless and unreliable." – Interviewee 15

While individuals recalled thinking they were able to immediately change some behaviors in their stories, they said they felt other behaviors took significantly more time to change. Interviewee 11 recollected the parts of his story he said he felt he was able to change quickly, "some things changed immediately, like I stopped cursing immediately, I stopped smoking immediately," while he highlighted "then certain things didn't change immediately like the anger, the frustration, you know the baggage. 'Cause I didn't know anything about it" and it required a more gradual approach for change (Interviewee 11).

Similarly, Interviewee 5 proposed that "in some ways it's both [gradual and immediate changes]". He recalled "in some ways, it may happen in the moment," while in others it "took a while for it to manifest." Interviewees highlighted ways that they worked within this gradual process, sharing how they tried to change by beginning to systematically eliminate portions of their former identity connections. By taking on this shift in a gradual way, they recalled they felt the overall process of their identity story change got easier with time:

"I started eliminating things almost like one by one, I wouldn't hang out with certain groups of guys, I wouldn't participate in certain behaviors like going to the gambling room smoking any weed, I stopped doing those subtle things like that and before I knew it, life became much easier." – Interviewee 12

Interviewee 17 echoed this sentiment and recounted that the most successful breaks from his professional past usually occurred when he chose to focus on breaking ties in a few areas of his life ("do[ing] my thing") while continuing to keep other areas of his professional life the same:

"Very, very, very rarely does somebody give everything up. It's usually a gradual thing. They have people coming at them from different angles and they're better off if they can be not necessarily isolated, but if they could be surrounded by like-minded people, then it's easier for that stuff to get ingrained in them long-term… The most successful I've seen is the guys who say they're gonna maintain social ties with them, but I'm gonna go and do my thing. I've seen more success out of that than somebody saying, 'I'm gonna break ranks completely. I'm not gonna talk to you guys,' and then there's gonna be that…" – Interviewee 17

Others recalled a process of visualization and picturing who they wanted to be in this future state, slowly focusing on attributes and characteristics of who they wanted to become. This "changing [of] the chorus and the visualization techniques for me were very, very powerful" as it "reminded me of my greatness" (Interviewee 11). He would do this by "writ[ing] these quotes down, I would write these bible verses down, and then I would commit those things to memory."

This slow, gradual process of behavior and habit change was seen in others' stories as well. Interviewee 18 conveyed that these micro-habit changes led to "fruit" that eventually began to show a new identity. By changing his thinking, patterns, and behaviors over a period, Interviewee 18 communicated how he felt he was beginning to create the new professional identity he wanted to have. Interestingly, by having a new focus around a spiritual faith to pattern these behaviors and mindsets, his new professional identity had scaffolding to begin modeling after:

"I think it was a slow, gradual process, because when you're so used to having bad habits, bad thinking patterns, just doing things a certain way for so long… I always tell people this: change doesn't happen overnight. There may be something that happens that could be powerful and it

could happen overnight, but the growth process, the changing of the mind, the patterns had to break… it was a slow, gradual process, probably a few years before the fruit started to show from the process I was going through. I began to realize that I was given another chance. I was given a fresh start, and so, am I gonna stay thinking and living the same way I've lived? I needed to renew my mind, I needed to start thinking different, my patterns had to change, my behavior had to change, I had to become disciplined, and as I started to follow other people, place myself in a different environment, now I have a faith that tells me otherwise than what culture and society was telling me, that started to shape my identity into something totally opposite of what I assumed. And so my identity became a part of my faith, and who God says I am, and who He has made me to be, the purposes that He created me for, and so I went from being selfish to being selfless." – Interviewee 18

However, the latter type of gradual identity change occurred as individuals experienced a back-and-forth motion between their former and new identities. Interviewees said that they felt a "constant battle" (Interviewee 19) of needing to choose to keep a stake in the ground for their new identity so that their former identity would not resurface. While they said they felt they were largely able to claim their new professional identity, they simultaneously stated a fear they may one day be in a position that tempted them to go back to their former line of work. Interviewee 19 said he was not yet wealthy enough to safeguard himself against financial strain, and he worried a significant financial concern might push him back into his former employment:

"I'm still in recovery always because things always happen and you'll find yourself in positions right…it's a constant battle because I'm not a millionaire so I still worry and am concerned about money and my own bills and my future too, so it's not like just one day – I'll never go back. No, it is in our mind like that if it comes down to right, four of my children starve or something like that, to the extreme, but I'll always preach but that's the extreme right, because I assure you if you hang in there you won't hit the extreme, something will break for you before then. So to answer your question, there's no flip of a switch, it's an ongoing process just like a recovering addict or recovering alcoholic." – Interviewee 19

While storylines often exhibited themes of either cold turkey or gradual changes, there were some instances where interviewees told stories of feeling some combination of both instant and gradual change to their narrative. Interviewee 4 explained his divergence story as a series of gradual behavioral and mindset changes, followed by what he said was an instantaneous final shift into his new identity: "It was gradual, and then "Boof!" (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 29 depicted similar imagery of quickly hitting rock bottom, while then lingering in the liminal space between the two identities before making a change: "They say you get to the bottom when you stop digging, but like I'm a firm believer that you can drag yourself along the bottom for a really long time, a really long time, with no skin left on your body" (Interviewee 29).

These gradual changes were exhibited in many ways, as some individuals referenced an intentionally piecemeal change approach to different areas of their lives, while others recalled their gradual process as a change that involved a series of forward and backward motions.

4.2.3.c Community during change

As interviewees communicated their identity divergence stories, they recalled what they said was one of the key parts of the initial change process: a *supportive community*. Interestingly, community in these initial phases was said to be important for individuals who underwent some period of a gradual approach to taking on their new identities. Alternatively, individuals who said they had the ability to change their identity cold turkey did *not* emphasize the importance of community in their stories about change. While Part 4.3 outlines a major theme around the importance of a community in the long-term sustainment of the new identity in professional stories, this section emphasizes a minor theme around the importance of a community in the initial stages of identity change. Interviewee 10 gave her thoughts about the impact of having a community which accepted her new identity story and did not define her by her previous story. While Interviewee 10 was able to have a radical change as soon as her environment would allow it, she recalled often seeing that the gradual change approach was most effective when surrounded by a community:

"So it's really – I guess it's two fold. It's, you know, surrounding yourself with positive people who are not truly don't care about your background, not just saying that they don't care about it and are gonna help you move forward in your life and are gonna understand that you know, no pathway in life is a direct projection of moving forward. You go forward, you take some steps back, you know you go forward again but it's about that push but it's more so about being receptive in your heart and understanding that you do deserve that second chance. That you do deserve to live a life that's not hectic, that you don't have to keep you know looking over your shoulder and living that type of life." – Interviewee 10

Interviewee 1 recalled the impact he felt that community had on his ability to begin changing into his new identity as well. Interviewee 1 was able to continue forward on his new professional identity path by having others lean into different roadblocks that were potentially keeping him from his new professional identity (going to university for a bachelor's degree):

"God literally opened up the hearts and the purses of people to completely support me in crazy ways, girl, I could tell you crazy stuff where I'm praying to God asking him for help. I remember I graduated with my Associates degree, but I was not going to go and get my Bachelor's degree until I had eye surgery because my eyes were so bad I had a hard time focusing and I was literally going to delay getting my Bachelor's degree so I could work to pay for eye surgery. I prayed to God and four days later a blind man called me and wanted to pay for me to have laser eye surgery done so I could go and finish my degree like that, so there would be no stoppage. Now I can't tell you the number of times that things just like that happened, literally God just, he made everybody support me." – Interviewee 1

Interviewee 13's story also discussed the impact that community had on his identity. As he discussed the importance of a "divorcement" from former associations, he also talked about the impact a new community could have on his professional identity journey. By surrounding himself with others on a similar professional storyline trajectory (former professional criminals who were rewriting their work narratives), he said he thought that his circle of friends helped reinforce the new identity story he was telling others:

"Look at my circle of friends now they're literally convicted murderers gang bangers and all this other stuff because they figured it out and they're all out doing good now and those are the people I hold near and dear because we've been through the same struggle" – Interviewee 13

Interviewee 7 told about his identity change, recalling that he "tried a long time" and several times "wanted to leave that style of life" and his former professional identity behind. However, he "didn't have support" and was not able to take those initial steps towards his divergent identity until he found a supportive community.

Interviewee 9 recalled a moment that he said was important in defining who he was going to be in his future professional career. He said that having others reinforce his new professional identity (i.e., his father publicly sharing it with others) helped him solidify who he felt he was in the initial stages of his identity:

"So I remember going up for parole and I got a chance to speak. My father attended my parole hearing with me and I had a chance to speak and I had an attorney with me as well but I remember speaking on my behalf and speaking to the parole board about why I deserve parole and I remember my dad looking at me for the first time and didn't believe…he was like is that my son because I was again this – god I used a lot of lingo and terms and uneducated, wasn't able to really hold a conversation with anyone like that right. So when he saw that in me that was when he was like man, my son is different and I remember my sisters – he told my sisters like your brother has really, really…even though we carried on visits, this guy is different you know what I'm saying and I remember he telling a lot of people he was like my son, he spoke as though he was an attorney and that was the first time my father really saw my IQ, saw my presentation, heard my presentation and saw me in a form where most of the men in prison saw me teaching and talking to a prison administrator." – Interviewee 9

Interviewee 13 acknowledged he felt the person he became was possible once he started spending time with different individuals than he had before. He said that currently "people ask

me, like, you know, 'How did you change into a different person in prison' I was like 'I didn't. I just started hanging around better people.'" He said he thought that this community was a significant part of the process of his gradually becoming a new person, and that "it goes back to the old saying you know: you want to be a lawyer, go hang around lawyers" (Interviewee 13). Interviewee 28's story also stressed the importance of having these "like-minded people" around him to continue in the journey of changing his professional identity story:

"So put positive like-minded people that can help you when you are having those down moments, when you are figuring does this matter? Does it make a difference? To help you know continue to push you on, to carry you on, you know to encourage you on." – Interviewee 28

Interviewee 18 conveyed the impact he felt a similarly identifying community could have on the initial discovery of a new identity. He also said that he sensed his new, long-term identity was reinforced by this community. Stating "a strong support system is crucial to be consistent on a path of transformation," and that he felt "to discover your identity and to live in that new identity, you need to be surrounded with people that share that same identity, people that are walking in that same lifestyle, people that have been transformed as well." His reasons for this largely centered on continued motivation during the gradual change "so that when you're down, when you're getting tempted or when you're feeling like, 'Man, I don't know if I can keep doing this,' or, 'I'm tempted to go back to this old way,' they're there to hold you accountable."

While identity divergence occurred in a variety of ways throughout stories told by individuals, those who said they underwent a gradual divergence process often referenced the impact that an external support community had on the long-term viability of their new identity. Although others said they were intrinsically motivated and possessed the ability to cold-turkey their former identity, they were not as likely to mention the need for community to continue to reinforce this new professional identity.

4.2.4 Conclusion

When individuals shared their stories about divergent identities, there were often inflection moments that signaled significant identity change beginning to occur. This part of the data presentation chapter focused on highlighting the motivators that pushed individuals into pursuing a divergent professional identity. Additionally, it explored the two approaches individuals said they took to begin pursuing their new identities once they found their initial motivations.

When interviewees communicated their stories in Section 4.2.2, almost all highlighted a motivator of some kind that led them to push past the initial hurdles of undertaking their identity changes. In this theme of motivators, interviewees recalled *initiating* motivations that began their pursuit of a divergent identity. This often resembled an external motivation, like "hitting a wall," which then directed the individual to pursue a different path. Many interviewees then referenced the importance of a *sustaining* motivator in their decision, helping maintain the forward trajectory of the new identity. Without an internal sustaining motivation in place, especially in the presence of weak external motivators, interviewees recalled resulting *relapse* episodes that could potentially lead the interviewee to return to their former professional identity.

In Section 4.2.3, minor themes emerged around the approaches that interviewees recalled taking when beginning to tell their changed identity stories. Interviewees communicated two main approaches when they told their identity change stories: a *cold turkey* approach and a *gradual* approach. With the immediate, drastic change in the cold-turkey approach, some individuals attributed their ability for this change to an intrinsic personality or "way of being" (Coupland, 2015). Others who highlighted their gradual approach in their stories to change in their identities emphasized the non-sequitur journey that individuals are on when trying to take on a new and divergent identity. For those who took the gradual approach, community was often vital to the new identity's long-term sustainability.

4.3 Part 3: Sustainment

4.3.1 Introduction

In this part of the data presentation chapter, three major themes are explored from interviewees' stories. The first theme outlines the importance of *role modeling* when trying to tell stories of creating a divergent professional identity. With the assistance of role models and mentors, interviewees discussed that they felt able to construct and begin to pursue a desired professional identity. The second theme highlights the importance of a *community supporting* new identity stories. This community was repeatedly noted by interviewees in their stories as highly important in reinforcing their new professional identity during their transition. The third theme revolved around the long-term *reinforcement* of their new professional identities. Within this theme were three minor themes that contributed to the perpetuation of the new identity stories: *the power of the pause moment, excavation of old identities, and programming and identity scaffolding.* This part showcases themes that interviewees highlighted in their stories as integral to the long-term sustainment of their new professional identities.

4.3.2 Role modeling: Beginning development

As Ibarra (1999) states, *role models* and mentors have a significant influence on people in transition. Interviewees often referenced the importance of a role model to *begin* to shape their new identity. Interviewee 15's story referenced the impact a role model had early in his career when he first became a gang member:

"The whole reason I became a gang member – I grew up in a project area and I used to get picked on by my own home boys. What happened was, I was getting molested by my stepdad at the time and I didn't say nothing, but one of the guys found out, so the funny thing about being a gang member and adopting a life – or a lifestyle – what happened was, in my moment, that this guy went and beat my stepdad almost to death for me. At that moment, I asked him… his name was 'Tiny,' and I asked him – I said, 'Hey, what's your favorite color – what's your favorite

football team – how do you dress – what's your favorite type of shoe – what's your favorite

brand?' – everything – and everything that man told me and everything I learned from him –

even today... those are still some of my favorites... So, when we adopt that, we don't adopt the

lifestyle, we adopt usually a person that we look up to that's more of a father figure than

anybody else was, and same thing in prison, and my stepdad is a high-ranking... not my stepdad,

but my... I was involved in a riot in LA County Jail, and I adopt this guy up, and I didn't know

him – he was a complete stranger – and, even since then, he's been my adoptive dad – my prison

dad – and so, come to find out he's actually high-ranking – he's involved in a lot of prison

organizations, and that's when I started adopting – it was at that moment that I sat there and

said, 'Well, I'm going to prison – I might as well learn from the best,' and so I started asking

him those same questions." – Interviewee 15

Some interviewees recalled the impact that *not* having role models had when beginning their identity transitions. Without a guide to model her life after, Interviewee 26 said how she had to rely on extensive introspection to decide how to create her identity:

"*There's not a lot of role models inside. Especially when you're fresh in because you don't know*

who to talk to or who to see. A lot of the initial part was asking myself with every decision that I

made, obviously not "what do I eat today," but bigger decisions. It was like 'does this feel good

for me? Does this actually...' We all have some sort of moral compass, 'does this feel like I'm

going to be taking from someone to do this?'" – Interviewee 26

When Interviewee 9 told his story and recounted the initial stages of shaping his new professional identity, he noted that mentors who had already undergone a similar identity change seemed to feel highly influential in his change process. Interviewee 9 recalled moments when he was not able to find examples to shape his new identity, and referenced a different set of tactics he took in piecemealing role models through books, movies, and TV icons like Oprah Winfrey:

"*I had mentors that had already did 20 years and they was comfortable. So I saw I had an*

example and I think this is important. I saw people who were known as this particular bad

person and they transformed their lives but they gave me an example of what that looks like and

then that gave me the courage to just step out, and I was cool with that. Even when I was working on myself privately I still had examples, you know and I think that's important that you have – people sometimes have to see it, you know how other people are navigating it so that that will help them create their own pathway, path to redemption map somewhat you know… So just thinking about that, so when a person doesn't have a physical, I found it through books and movies that connected, that helped me. Oprah Winfrey was one of my mentors through her show. Basically her show was giving me some tips on how to live my life differently even though she wasn't physically with me when I would turn on her show in the evenings in prison and watch it for 45 minutes. It was something about personal development, about dealing with trauma, dealing with abuse. That was my mentor." – Interviewee 9

Interviewee 38 mentioned the impact he felt mentors had on his identity change as well. He proposed that these mentors, who were fellow prisoners who expressed desire for their own identity change but were unable to leave their maximum-security sentences, had actively pursued him and trained him in this new identity. As these mentors said they were unable to fully live out their new identities because of their 1,000 year sentences, Interviewee 38 recalled how it felt when they instead turned their attention to helping him develop his story about his new professional identity:

"Who I became a student of was the men that are in those maximum-security United States federal penitentiaries who aren't ever coming home. The judge gave them a thousand years. I don't even know how you can even begin doing a thousand years, but Jennifer, the minute that I hit the yard, or get inside prison, those guys, for whatever reason, snatched me up out of the garbage that's on the yard and they put me up underneath their wings and they walked with me my entire rip. They trained me, they mentored me, they taught me, they took me to school – it was like they were living their life out through me, because they knew I had an out-date." –
Interviewee 38

Interviewees said that role models often demonstrated different ways in which their future identity stories could be crafted. While some role models had an impact by exposing interviewees to the possibility of the new identity, several remembered the most impactful role models were ones who had lived out a similar identity transition to those they were attempting to

tell: "I knew that my mom was in that world, and she had gone out…she would speak to me from her experience of what she had been through so I did kind of have someone there who could kind of guide me through it" (Interviewee 5). This guidance was said by many to be invaluable. One interviewee recalled an apparent epiphany moment when he finally found someone who was telling the story he was trying to craft for himself: "I said, whoa, wait, what? Like how did you get into Rutgers? He was like, 'Yes'" (Interviewee 21). This interviewee recounted a pivotal moment of learning how someone began their new identity journey as "[I] put the mop down and started talking to him and he was telling me like, yes, I was in 'such and such' prison where this professor at Rutgers was tutoring" (Interviewee 21). Some of these role models were not only guides showing possible paths to pursue, but also served as mentors to encourage them along their path: "He told me he saw potential in me and that he wanted to help me get into college if I was interested" (Interviewee 21). Other interviewees recalled similar encounters with role models who began to encourage them in how to craft their new identities.

"From the time I got the Bible to the top of my conversion, five cellmates, each of them were all ex-gang members they became men of God. All, I didn't, didn't realize is, though, until like later on down the line, like after I was a believer. I got out of prison. I like I started looking back at my life and I'm like "Oh, man. This guy was in this gang. He was a Christian." Every one of them were trying to talk to me about God and some respect, obviously, every one of them, the level of faith, it was, different in some respects." – Interviewee 4

"I had reached out to a pastor, a friend of ours gave us a phone number to a pastor and when I reached out to that pastor he told me, 'Come to my church tonight' so I went to his church and he told me his testimony and he wanted to be with the lord, he has passed away but he had told me that he was one of the original Latin Kings from Chicago…He had sold drugs and he had did drugs. I didn't grow up in church so to me people that went to church were perfect people. But then when I heard his story I saw myself in him…So I started going to church there and after a couple of months going to church I decided to make that move to go to that Men's Ministry out in Central Florida from Miami. When I got settled, it was a one-year program but they just fed you

The Bible you know, [inaudible 00:19:36] [connection dropped]. They just fed you The Bible in the morning, and lunch, at dinner, and I stayed with them for four years." – Interviewee 23

Role models were often individuals "who [I] learned a tremendous amount from" and they "challenged [me] to start thinking about the whole different process" as new identities were being developed by interviewees (Interviewee 42). Others said similarly about their role models:

"Then that's when my life changed. I met a lady who changed my life forever. She was a big part of that in the whole program that I talked to you about. A political prisoner, her name was XXX. She was one of the people that helped free Puerto Rico…When I first went to prison I ended up on Unit 15 in [inaudible 00:25:17] which was like super max, so at that point they had death row and there was a few women on death row. So one side of the wing was death row and on the other side that's where they have like people doing long time and lifers and they put me. I was gang affiliated and I was out fighting all the time in the county when I was in the Cook County Jail, so they had me down as somebody that's high risk that they need to pay attention to, so they stuck me on super max with all of these people. At first I was like, I don't belong here with all these murderers, labelling people, not knowing their stories, and just going by what I was told. Like you're sticking me right here on death row, really. I don't belong right here. It was one of the most best things they could have ever done. I ran into like I said, XXX and what intrigued me about her when I got on the unit, she was like this little Puerto Rican lady, not bigger than me, just kind of fit. Every time she went somewhere there was like four or five officers that had to escort her…But no she was like the most humble, the most sweetest lady in the world. She befriended me, gave me a care package when I came, first got there. Encouraged me to go to school. She had people from all walks of life visiting her, from stars to celebrities, to politicians, to just her family. She was always very encouraging, always taught me that knowledge is power, and nobody could take that from you. It was because of her encouragement that I went to school, and I got my JD, then I got my associates degree and horticulture one and two and then I went over…It was there that my transformation began. After I went to that program school and I learned about the unhealed trauma and I learned about how trauma affected the brain and all the pain my mum went through, it created the life that we lived…I'm going to line myself up with a great team, great mentors, people that are going to push me, people that are going to elevate me, people that are going to challenge me and teach me how to

be a better me and a greater me and just keep iron sharp and just keep on going to webinars and

seminars and lining yourself up with the people whose lifestyles and lives that you want to live

like. It's about finding those people that are already living your dream and learning from them,

right." – Interviewee 39

While interviewees said it was helpful to have role models who had experienced identity change themselves, they also said they remembered how it was helpful to have role models who were telling similar stories to the *new* identity the interviewee was debating. The presence (or lack) of these role models was thought to have significant impacts on an individual's potential to craft a new identity story. Interviewee 14 succinctly stated that if someone never sees a new identity modeled, then it is difficult to know what to do when it comes to crafting a new identity story. She recalled the thinking work she did on her own as "Okay, I've done all of this internal work – I've done all of the brain work, now I need to start putting action behind what I'm doing," but she recognized the significant importance of seeing examples of the new identity being enacted as when "we never see it modeled, we don't know what to do" (Interviewee 14).

By seeing others model the identities that interviewees claimed wanting to have one day, interviewees recalled a feeling of empowerment to be able to craft this new story in their narrative. By seeing someone else develop a new identity, interviewees referenced an understanding of agency in their lives they said they had not felt before:

"What research I could do which was reading books and also what I saw in people that I wanted

to be like even though we were all in prison I was like man this dude has a degree already and

you know he did that while he's been behind bars you know and this guy you know he's got these

things going on where he has the best job, like everyone wants the job, how did he get that

because he's doing all these positive things and so the guards at the Free Staff they afford him

those luxuries. ... So, it was like what are the things I can do to benefit myself and yeah it was

just I want to model off people that are doing those things… And I was like wow he's where I

want to be you know I'm like I'm on parole but he's already got the car and the apartment you

know he's where I want to be and so I was like you know what man let me go recycle these golf

clubs and then it made me want to learn more about what Goodwill does and it made me start

looking at all the people that I despise that I worked with and I use it to this day I tell people I go now when I look at people I imagine that there's a TV over their head and I wonder what's that back story look like, like what's really going on with that individual…like I want to be around this is one person cos they're doing everything I want to do." – Interviewee 13

"Seeing a transformation in my wife really also opened my eyes to the fact that change exists, because I didn't know that change exists. I didn't see change. Everyone that was an addict in my family was continuing to be an addict, an alcoholic. " – Interviewee 18

After seeing new identity transitions modeled for them, it "opened my eyes to the fact that change exists, because I didn't know that change exists. I didn't see change…Whatever patterns I saw, I didn't see people recover and get better, they just got worse, so I thought change was not possible for me until I saw her [my wife] change her life." (Interviewee 18). Interviewees began to tell these new stories for themselves and recalled feeling a level of empowerment in the authorship of their new identity stories. Several interviewees recalled a desire to share that same sense of empowerment with others, providing the ability to role model for others since "I've been in their shoes. I grew up from poverty. I often tell people, I mean, I don't even know how to run a business, I'm learning as I go. I was like, so I think that's what keeps me going and that's why I would never think twice about it because there's a lot of people that… they just need hope" (Interviewee 16).

Interviewee stories recounted the impact that seeing a new identity modeled had on their ability to begin crafting their new identity. Interviewee 17 shared the importance of the next theme of *community support* in tandem with role modeling. In addition to seeing a new identity modeled, some interviewees mentioned a need to have a community to reinforce their new identity.

"…but the stuff that he tried to influence me always resonated, but I really didn't have somebody to walk me through it, so to speak…a support group; mentorship and also showing them examples of other people who have been in similar positions as them and showing them that it's

possible. I've seen that that's been the biggest motivator for them to maintain that course."

– Interviewee 17

4.3.3 Community support to continue to reinforce new identities

Interviewees' stories of identity change also featured a major theme around the impact of having a *community to support the reinforcement of their new identity stories* in a transitional phase.

Interviewee 32 said he wanted to make a change in his identity, but he knew he needed others in his former life to help him begin to shape his new professional identity: "I let my guys know. I said 'Listen man, I've got this bed date [for rehab] and I'm done. I can't keep doing this and I need your help.'" While many interviewees stated the impact a *new* community which matched their *new* identity had on the sustainment of this new identity, Interviewee 32 did not have a new community around him to reinforce it. Instead, he sought assistance from his former community to help him reinforce what he sought: "They were like, 'Well what do you need, Z?' I went to a lot of the shot-callers and gang affiliations, I said 'Man, help me out here.' I needed that" (Interviewee 32). Similarly, by having a friend in her environment to support her identity transition, Interviewee 40 said she felt that her journey was easier when beginning to craft her new professional identity:

"I firmly believe I wouldn't have been able, I couldn't have survived that experience without her, just having a friend. I felt everyone in the prison was out to get me, I really was someone that people did not like. I was like, 'Dude, I'm so nice, I'm so quiet, [inaudible 00:24:00], what do you guys all have against me?'...I was just trying to survive...I felt I was losing my mind a little bit, especially because I didn't have communication with the outside world, I didn't have visits or anything so for me I knew that if I was going to these spaces or I hoped that if I was going to those spaces those people in those spaces also were trying to be better people." – Interviewee 40

Interviewee 42 recounted what he thought the impact was of having help along the way when pursuing his new identity. He explained feeling that this community of 50 people, who had been similarly incarcerated and built new identities, was a boon to building his new identity:

"I went to a weekend in Chicago where I was surprised to sit in a room with 50 other people, all who had been incarcerated, and the concept behind that organization is… they raise a tremendous amount of money, but what they do is educate leaders – people who have been incarcerated be better leaders – and then they send them back into the community. That was real impactful for me" – Interviewee 42

Seeing others who made Interviewee 41 feel that he was not an anomaly in his new identity was what he said helped him feel more secure in his new identity:

"What was so monumental for me, I will probably never forget, is that the person that was, he was from CAL FIRE, he was a black firefighter, in Tuolumne County of all places. If you're familiar with or heard of Yosemite National Forest? Yeah, it's up in those woods and it just so happened to be him, he was the one there, and I'm kind of getting familiar with California a little bit more and I'm like, there's not going to be no African-American blacks in this general area, so it's me and the other firefighter and this guy and we're doing CPR on this guy, and it's just us black dudes." – Interviewee 41

By having a positive, like-minded community in place, Interviewee 28's story emphasized the impact that those individuals had on his ability to "push [him] on" in creating his new identity. By teaching him to look past the fact that "I'm looking at this crazy amount of time" left in prison, "they [the community] really modeled for me that you know, you can still make a difference. You know you can still have a life and you know and be an agent of change and an influencer" on the inside by not waiting to start shaping your new identity (Interviewee 28). By putting "positive like-minded people that can help you when you are having those down moments, when you are figuring 'Does this matter? Does it make a difference?' To help you know continue to push you on, to carry you on" (Interviewee 28), it helped this interviewee continue to develop his new identity story despite its difficulties.

Interviewee 34 told what he felt was the impact of having supportive people around him to reinforce his new identity. "Really putting yourself out there, vulnerably to the point of 'I feel stupid asking these questions because I should probably know this,' but being brave enough to ask" he recalled being at a vulnerable time in his identity change as he admitted "I really don't know how to do that" to others around him. However, the support of the community seemed to be readily offered as Interviewee 34 recalled classmates saying, "'Yes, yes absolutely, let me show you how,' right. And then they would show me how" (Interviewee 34). Additional interviewees stated the impact of being surrounded by others who had gone through similar changes in their identities – by having a community of similarly transitioning individuals, they said they felt their new identity was reinforced.

While a new community was helpful to reinforce a new identity, individuals shared the sentiment that former communities could sometimes bring back a former identity. Interviewee 29 also referenced the importance of removing herself from her former community. To maintain the forward trajectory of her new identity story, she surrounded herself "with people who were like me but that weren't living the way that we had lived." This was important for her as "I knew if I talked to one person from my [former] lifestyle, the chances of me being loaded were exponentially greater," so she recalled taking matters into her own hands as she crafted her new identity and "literally abandoned every person that I knew in my life, my mother included, to make this trip to try to get sober" (Interviewee 29).

Other interviewees' stories echoed similar sentiments on the importance of having someone outside of their old life to help reinforce their new professional identities. Interviewee 8 recalled the impact that he said his wife had on creating his new professional identity by saying "I feel like if she hadn't have come into my life then maybe I wouldn't have learned to be constant and consistent, because she was a woman with two kids, two little kids that loved and adored me for some crazy reason, and I'm just this guy just getting his life together in rehab" (Interviewee 8). Interviewee 2 framed the importance of community as a linchpin in a new identity sticking, as "I can't tell you how many people go to rehab, get clean, I mean go to prison, have encounters with Jesus and as soon as they get out it's over," repeating "that's why

community is so important" (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 28 echoed similar remarks in his story when asked about how he maintained the new identity he was trying to craft, stating "I don't take a lot of credit for that. I'm really grateful for the people that did look out for me and kept me on a right path 'cause it could have easily went the other way" (Interviewee 28).

After not having a supportive community during his *own* identity transition, Interviewee 36 said what he felt was so important about having a community of support for *others* who were wanting to craft a new identity:

"So, to lose control, to have someone push the dimmer switch down for me rather than me doing it myself was very difficult but then the joy is to have other folks then also step in to lift me back up and say, 'You're doing great. Trust the process. Check in with yourself. Take care of yourself. Lean on us. We're here for you.' Those are things and blessings that I really didn't have a lot of before I started this journey, and so those are also things that were helpful to keep that identity work going, even in the midst of someone else stepping in and saying, 'Nope, you're done here.'" – Interviewee 36

In summary, many interviewees' stories highlighted the importance of having a community in place during an identity's change. They claimed that community was vital for supporting the individual as they faced a variety of challenges when beginning to live out their new, radically different identity.

4.3.4 Reinforcement

As previously stated in Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3, when telling a story about the early transition of their new professional identity which diverged from the known and familiar, interviewees discussed the impact of listening to a role model who told similar stories of their own new identities, as well as having a community in place to help *reinforce* their new identity. These are important steps to initiate a period of change. However, this research outlines an additional major theme for how individuals might reinforce a new, divergent identity story in the long term. Three minor themes emerged from the data: *(i) the power of the pause moments, (ii)*

excavating old identities, and (iii) "programming" and identity scaffolding. These three minor themes create one of the key findings of this research: long-term reinforcement of divergent professional identities.

4.3.4.a Power of the pause

When interviewees narrated radical changes in their identity, they often expressed what was noted in Part 4.2.2 as "hitting a wall" or "hitting rock bottom." In these moments, individuals told stories about reaching a place of mental and/or emotional exhaustion that left them wanting to begin creating a new identity. This research further explored these moments of "hitting rock bottom," and discovered the impact of lingering in this state. In these moments of *pause*, individuals discussed recognizing a sense of agency in having the choice to be "unconscious" or "conscious" in their choices for how their identity story may develop (Interviewee 20). One interviewee recalled this as a period where they consciously used this time to redirect themselves, rather than unconsciously let these pauses become a "normal part of daily operation":

"I think you can get too far gone and get vices, situations whatever it may be, depression, [inaudible 36:40] outside external situations can make you lose who you are and you can get so far gone that you never make it back. I was gone, I didn't like – had I not gone to prison like I wouldn't definitely be doing the things I'm doing now, I'd probably live like a mediocre life maybe unless something had happened, but all things stay [inaudible 37:05] and not went to prison and all that like, yeah it would have been like, I would be still kind of like a little shady, whatever right?...For most people, they're not conscious about their time away. I've met people that's not as conscious like they just – this is a normal part of daily operations for them. They go in and out of prisons, like maybe they sit down for a little bit and think about it but walls are the world once they get out its like it captivates them and their back to carrying on doing what they normally do. So I call them standard [sl. operation 38:58] procedure. But when a man is conscious or a woman and they get behind that fence and they really, they flag then. Don't act the [inaudible 39:13] you know what I mean, right, that's really gonna take it to a whole other level, you know, at least for myself. Oh no, that statement is very, very true. I had to lose myself to find myself." – Interviewee 20

Interviewee 25 gave her thoughts on how important leveraging her moment of pause was when beginning to develop her new, divergent professional identity. She also noted the impact that these pause moments might have for professional identity transitions outside of the context of her own story of a professional *criminal* identity transition:

"That [Covid-19 pandemic] gave people a lot of momentary pause to reflect on that frailty and say, 'What do I really want to do?' Again, it was another wall that Covid imposed that people could hit. A lot of people have, and a lot of people are looking at things differently, and honestly, if I think about what the good from Covid was, there were a couple of good things, but creating these walls for people to be reflective and to look inside, to figure out what they're grateful for and what they want to do, what mark do they want to leave in the world, what mark do they want to leave with their children? What's their legacy? People have been thinking about that a lot, and I think that that's also gone to the Great Resignations and people going, 'This doesn't work for me anymore.'...Covid has created the opportunity for people to do that, to get in touch with self and say, 'What are my values? What is my mission statement?' And I think that Covid has also created a deeper understanding of the frailty of the body and of life. 'Do I want to be a banker for the next 25' – not that I want to denigrate bankers – 'years? Yeah, I could make a good living, but am I fulfilled, am I happy? What I really want to be is a… British's next best baker. Why the hell not try it?' Honestly, my motto for 2022 is 'why not?' If I want to do something, why not? And prison does the same thing." – Interviewee 25

Many interviewees likened their pause moments to intensive periods of study and schooling. Rather than telling stories about seeing their pause as a professional setback, they told stories about deciding to intentionally use that time to repurpose their experiences into a springboard for their future professional identity:

"I remember pulling up in front of that big, gigantic gate and the bus was chugging and the big gates opened up, and there was a seal on the wall that said, 'United States Federal Penitentiary, Allenwood.' But in my mind, on the bus, before I even got off that bus, I looked at the sign and I changed the words on there, and it said, 'United States Federal Learning Institution', 'United

States Federal Bible College', United States anything else other than prison, and Jennifer, I went
in there and I went to school…something that one of the lifers said to me – he said to me that if
you were to study one subject, just one hour every day over the course of the five-year period,
you will have become an expert in that subject. And I was like, 'Oh, my goodness!' and that
changed my life…and keep in mind, I'm in a maximum-security United States federal
penitentiary, where people are getting murdered, and gangs and this and that, but he says, 'One
hour every day over the course of a five-year period, you will become an expert in this subject.'
And he looked at me, Jennifer, and said, '[Interviewee 38], what do you wanna become an expert
in?' Oh, my gosh! [Laughs]. And from there, I went to school. I just went on this study, and the
number one thing that I had to become an expert in? I had to get to know the real me…."
– Interviewee 38

Interviewee 11 recalled a similar experience as he decided to view his time in prison
"more like college as opposed to like gladiator school." This nearly 13 years of 'schooling' was
one of the driving forces he attributed to the long-term sustainment of his identity:

"…because if you can go in to prison, if you have to do that time and you have a plan developed
and you understand that your life has meaning and that it has purpose then you utilize that time
more like college as opposed to like gladiator school…Yeah you know for me that's how I looked
at the institution you know for that 12 years and 9 months I used prison as a university to
transform my mind and I had a lot of mentors but for me I think the epiphany came from me
sitting in the county jail…I remember sitting in my cell on the side of the bed and it hit me there
has to be more to life than this and I wasn't just thinking about prison I was thinking about there
had to be more to life than getting high selling dope robbing people, you know the mediocre
street life there had to be more than that for me." – Interviewee 11

Interviewee 32 also viewed his "incarceration as [my] PhD." He stood by the belief that
"it's about reframing that negative into the epitome of the positive and how we can make a
difference," and by doing so, shared the feeling that "you know, no longer am I part of the
problem. What I am today is part of the solution" (Interviewee 32).

Interviewee 10 echoed that "jail saves you in a lot of ways" by giving "you that time to really focus on what you need to focus on." With that uninterrupted time, interviewees said they had the ability to focus on who they would like to become and develop a way to become that new person. That period of pause provided space where "you can definitely start formulating those plans." (Interviewee 10).

Without something to distract him, Interviewee 43 said that he was able to dig into who he wanted to become and "get clear headed." By letting himself sit in the discomfort of the space of the pause, he recalled the impact of "[having] to deal with the person that was in front of me":

"And in that moment of stillness, right that I used to have when I was incarcerated, when I didn't have to worry about putting bread on the table, but I don't have to worry about paying for rent, that peace that I used to experience within myself, right regardless of my environment, it could have been in there, too. It's rare now, right because there's so many different things to worry about. Yes, I think that was one of the major ones for me. It was really learning about my relationship with God, and honestly, just seeing him move so much in my life…. I was kind of relieved when I got locked up, because for me, every time I got locked up, I got cleaned and I got clear headed, right. I mean, there's opportunities to get high in there too, but I was pretty clear headed you know. I was myself, like my naked self when I was incarcerated. You know I had to deal with the person that was in front of me you know. And so I just saw it as an opportunity to rebuild, right. I already knew - like all the stuff I didn't wanna do, I was already doing when I was out there, right so I didn't need to revisit that. I didn't need to pour through that because there was nothing - I mean, there was a lot of lessons that I learned of things I didn't wanna do or ways I didn't wanna feel but like I said, I had to lean into the discomfort of the unknown in order to grow." – Interviewee 43

With nowhere else to go, and nothing to distract him, Interviewee 42 discussed his view of the impact these moments of pause had on his ability to move forward:

"I had nothing for 30 days on my own, and so I had a chance to think. I can almost say it's like God saying to me, 'Mr. [Interviewee 42], I've been trying to get your attention for 50 years, and

we've got some time now, and so let's talk because there's no place to go.' So, I was forced to look at things that – in my life – I wasn't excited about, and I couldn't numb it. I couldn't drink, I couldn't use drugs, or I couldn't talk to somebody else – I had to face those things – and I think, if you think about it, the world out there is very fearful of going to the things that they are afraid of or that that they don't want to address, and they'll do anything to stay away from those things. So, I was forced to do that and, when you're forced to do that, then you come up with some insight and, what you find is that, 'Oh, that wasn't that scary after all.'" – Interviewee 42

Others echoed sentiments of not "feel[ing] pressure" when they were in these pause moments. Interviewee 40 gave her thoughts of how a lack of external presence and pressure provided her with an opportunity to develop a new identity story:

"While I was incarcerated I think what speaks to this idea of 'having time' is I didn't have any phone calls, any visitors, any letters…when I was in prison I couldn't use people or things as an excuse for why I couldn't get better, or why I couldn't take the time to work on myself. I didn't feel pressure… I didn't have the good parts of having communication, or the bad parts, I didn't feel the guilt and shame that comes from your family members being really pissed at you for what you did and being incarcerated." – Interviewee 40

Interviewee 14 referenced what she considered a "spiritual retreat" where "you don't have to take care of your kids or your parents" and "you've got nothing but time" to think about intentionally crafting your new identity:

"...If you can look at it as a spiritual retreat, all of a sudden, you've got some great time to devote to yourself. You don't have to take care of your kids or your parents – you don't have to worry about paying rent – all of a sudden, you've got nothing but time and, if you use that wisely, instead of playing the games in prison and doing whatever, you – all of a sudden – have a space. It's not always quiet in prison but, if you can quiet your mind, and really work on… again, we all have the core issue…if you can figure out what that core issue is that drove you – in my case – to steal half-a-million Dollars… you know, in the rest of our lives – we don't have time if we're worrying about paying bills, and worrying about what we're not doing with our

fam… whatever – we're worried about whatever we're worried about – we don't have the time to
devote to, 'I really need to work on myself' – Interviewee 14

Interviewees stated needing different levels of space and solitude to find this pause. Some said they felt they needed solitary time away from even their prison community. Others still, like Interviewees 24 and 5, said they felt their drug rehabilitation programs served as their pause moments to stop and think about their future identities. Interviewee 5 said "that [time away] helped me kind of be out of it for a good period of time being clean and sober and restart."

"But it ended up being a really great prison that offered a ton of rehabilitative programs and classes, including RDAP which stands for Residential Drug Abuse Program. So that is an intense 9-month cognitive behavioral therapy program. You actually live in a separate unit, you're still in the prison but all the people on the program are housed separately from the rest of the prison. We just focus on our drug therapy and learning new skill sets. That was a really great program, I was very fortunate to have that program, although it was terribly hard. When you have to recreate new habits and patterns and try to unlearn the only way you've ever known how to live and think. It's not easy. But it's necessary."
– Interviewee 24

After the initial shock that prison was a "rude awakening" (Interviewee 33), interviewees then recalled feeling acutely "aware of the emptiness" in the space they were in (Interviewee 1). This emptiness in their experience in prison provided them the time to reflect and begin shaping their new professional identity stories:

"When I would go to prison, I would always do really well in there. Yeah, and you have space and time to think but it's not – you're so far removed from reality, from the reality of your life that for me it was always, first it was a rude awakening. How did we end up here again? My answer was always heroin. Once I got through that, it did offer you time to reflect." –
Interviewee 33

Interviewee 9 described how his time in prison was helpful for beginning his pivot into his new identity. However, he highlighted an interesting component of his pause moment which the following minor theme will continue to investigate: excavation. Interviewee 9 said that his moment of pause and merely looking *forward* to a new identity was not enough to sustain a divergent identity. It required he also look *backward* to excavate his past behaviors and motivators that led him to his previous professional identity:

"So in that prison it allowed me that time to dig deep into myself to figure out and I always tell people that I had to go back and heal the 16-year-old boy. I had to go back and heal him and that's where – that's how I landed there through reading various books about…books around the wounded boy and I remember this book and it was speaking about this man who was an adult and he was very abusive to his spouse and his children and he was an alcoholic but he never really understood where that came from until he went back and started looking at his childhood experience and realized that everything he was to his wife and children his father was to him. And in order for that transformation to happen to be the father and the husband he needed to become, he had to heal the boy." – Interviewee 9

4.3.4.b Excavating old identities

Another significant minor theme that repeatedly appeared in stories of interviewees was the importance of *excavating* and digging into what led them to pursue their previous professional identities. Interestingly, the data in their stories began to show a connection between pause moments and the identity excavation that is further explored in this section. Interviewees talked about what they felt was the impact of unearthing their previous motivations and behavioral drivers on their ability to move forward in crafting their new identity stories. By strategically using their moments of pause to do this period of excavation, they talked about feeling they were able to develop and shape a radically new and different identity.

Interviewee 10, who previously mentioned how jail can "save a lot of people," referenced the impact that using her time away had on her ability to excavate and determine the new identity she wanted and said she felt she deserved:

"You know one of the big things about getting a second chance is you have to forgive yourself first and you have to give yourself that second chance first, and that's a harder thing…Then you have to understand that you know, part of this is reflecting on yourself and seeing yourself for what you are, you know or what you were at that time and forgiving yourself for it. I mean I had to come to terms with the fact that I have very bad anger problems and I had to address those problems, and you know while I was incarcerated I did some programming but I was forced to do that programming at the time and it was like useless because I was forced to do it…But if you really want this and you really are sick and tired of being sick and tired and you want some different options for yourself, you need to make all of the necessary changes. Not just getting that education but making the necessary changes that go along with it. A lot of times that's hard. It's walking away from the streets. It's doing something completely different. It's trusting that you know, you do have the skills and the skillset to be able to do this. It's trusting that people are gonna forgive you for what you've done in the past. It's trusting that you know, God has a higher purpose for you and that you know - because I know for me I could say that I felt like I was not deserving of being blessed you know 'cause of all of the things I did but it was like that a mental hiccup that I was having. And so I had to really work on myself to get to the point where I could say I am accepting and I am able, I'm gifted and blessed enough to receive what's coming my way. I deserve these things." – Interviewee 10

Interviewee 33 recalled her period of excavation during her professional identity change. She referenced two questions she asked herself during this period of pause when she completed deep internal work. First, "How did I get here?", and second, "How do I get *there*?"

"I think to have it on a deep level you really need to do that internal work and yeah that takes a lot. It takes a lot of thought and commitment and so forth. Then I ended up writing my book and I think that was really cathartic for me. It just got it all out…I think for most people, it's dealing with that internal stuff that got you there in first place. How did I get here is the first thing and then how do I get there is the second thing? How do I get from where I'm at now to where I want to be but what landed me here so I'm in prison? In jail. In this mess. How do I not get back there and how do I get from where I'm at now to where I want to go right?" – Interviewee 33

Interviewee 2's story referenced that he experienced excavation and developing an understanding of what led him to his previous identity had on his future agency. Excavating and sorting through past motivations, experiences, and events made a way for his new identity to start taking meaningful root:

"All the 12 steps are, is essentially, they just deal with unforgiveness and resentment, they deal with trauma in a very non-evasive, it's a very simple way, but it's very practical, you know, and you write stuff out on paper and you just look at your life. So through that process you kind of see, oh God, I messed up, like oh man, I'm selfish, you know, it helps you forgive others when you realize how you actually caused most of the problems, it's what they do essentially…So I was able to start forgiving and really taking ownership and seeing how messed up I was and in that, I think in that forgiveness it must have opened up the door for God to really come because he came in this form of peace." – Interviewee 2

Interviewee 28 recalled how important it was for him to understand the root causes of what led him to his previous identity and prison. He remembered pondering and trying to "understand some of the root causes that sent me to prison, you know, like lack of a father in the home or, you know, abusive households" (Interviewee 28). After working on excavating her former identity, Interviewee 26 said she was able to think about what she wanted her future identity story to sound like, and she was able to begin doing things to further her future professional identity (i.e., becoming financially independent):

"I ended up spending almost 17 years in prison. A lot of that time was like what does it look like, do I want to be like… what does success look like for me, is it individual success and then coming to that realization that I came… So you could only make $55 a month there and then working at a better job, so I worked for Correctional Industries after I graduated from computer-aided drafting, which wasn't that much more money but it was like 'okay I can maybe not have to ask her [my mom] for money for clothes or something, I can buy my own.' I was like 'okay that feels better, something about that feels better' and then I kept getting jobs that paid a little bit more, so I became more self-sufficient. So I stopped asking her for money. There was a point

that came I was like 'the only thing she has to pay for literally is our phone calls.' That was for me that was central. It was really important for me." – Interviewee 26

Interviewee 24 shared a similar thought pattern she had when deciding to excavate her previous identity. She said she recognized the importance of digging into an understanding of her former ways of thinking, as she felt that thinking would not change on its own. Interviewee 39's story addressed a similar need in wanting to understand her previous identity to begin moving towards a new identity: by going "through hell and back so many times," therapy was a "part of my healing, this was a part of my closure, and that's what people don't understand. I might not have a PhD on a piece of paper but believe me I have a PhD I can tell you how my brain works" (Interviewee 39):

"I didn't need to work, I needed to work on my addiction. So I applied behind her [correctional officer] back...I said, 'Listen, I need help, I literally need help I didn't tell her I had used drugs and was bringing [inaudible 00:15:54] into the halfway house, but I said, 'I can't do this on my own, my addiction is stronger than I am, I am powerless to my addiction and I've got to do something.' When I said it to her in that way I think she was like, 'Oh okay I didn't think about it from that perspective.' Then she went ahead and agreed to allow me to go into this program. That's really when I started my spiritual journey of healing and exercised the demons that were within me. There really was demons, I was really possessed. Everything in life is spiritual, everything. I had allowed demons inside of me, addiction is a demon, probably a plethora of demons [slight laugh]. But now I had to figure out how to make these demons leave…I think that unresolved trauma is the worst thing that you can do, you've got to talk about things, you've got to deal with these issues. They don't just go away." – Interviewee 24

Interviewees emphasized the importance of addressing their initial motivators for their previous identities, and understanding what led them to be incarcerated:

"The frustrating thing is that the people who come in my door every day think the old way is gonna work, and 'I'm gonna get back and do this,' and 'Homey's got me a spot – I'm gonna go here and here' and, if you follow that road and you don't try to address the core issues that put

you incarcerated, you're headed right back there, and so that's just proven out time and time
again. The people who are the strongest supporters of my program are the people who we've
worked with a little bit who made the wrong choice and are back incarcerated. So, it's almost
easier for me to say to somebody – as frankly as they'll receive it is… and you're sitting across
from me – I'll say, 'I'm gonna help you there but, if you go this direction, then I'll be here next
time you get back out – okay? – and then, call me, and I'll come back and pick you up again, and
then maybe you'll get it, but you're gonna make a mistake' People don't wanna hear that – you
know, you try to say it in the nicest way you can, but that's what's gonna happen."
– Interviewee 42

Interviewee 30 noted after his transition that while many things contributed to his new identity's long-term sustainability, excavation through therapy was the key to moving forward and helping him disentangle his former identity. He said that while therapy on its own was helpful, it made the greatest difference to his new professional identity's long-term sustainability when it was coupled with space without distractions. In essence, using the combination of *both* a pause moment and intentional excavation contributed to his new identity's endurance:

"Throughout that entire process I was connected to a lot of therapy which was incredibly helpful
and also I was able to finish my four year degree and then also discovered social justice work
and so all these things came together…I think it was many factors, not the least of which is that
there is a huge amount of therapy involved. I think there was two. I mean there is a lot. There
was one of the kind of moral reconciliation therapy twice a week. Cognitive self-change changed
– no, I'm sorry. Moral reconciliation once a week. Cognitive self-change once a week. I met with
the psychotherapist once a week. Trauma therapy once a week and then you have to go to all
these [s.l 12 0:06:46.4] to meet it. So it's kind of hard to disentangle but a big focus of a lot of
these things was like, how to orientate yourself to living like a life where you're consistent with
your values that you want to hold and what you're thinking about yourself in the context of lots
of people…I think I'd been asked them before, but I was able to engage in a different way and
part of it was probably about space, in the sense that I didn't have anything else I could do with
my time." – Interviewee 30

Without excavating through former motivations and behaviors, interviewees stated concerns that former behaviors and ways of acting might continue to resurface. One interviewee said that "you can be the same inside, you could still have the same thought process and everything that's got you in trouble to begin with," and without true excavation, on the outside "you look good, but you're still you" on the inside (Interviewee 37):

"So for me I had to make amends to my mother and my father because of their break up so I was angry with them because they you know broke up decided to separate, they haven't legally got a divorce but just legally separated, and so I had to make amends to that and ask for their forgiveness for that and so that kind of relieved the pressure that I was putting on myself and relieve the pressure for them blaming themselves for where their son was at. So they had to take some healing to do that. I still like to say there's people going through the process of self-development trying to clean some old hurts and wounds that has to be addressed and taken care and just putting a band aid on... people can move forward without them addressing it but guess what they're going to come back up again." – Interviewee 12

Interviewee stories showed that excavation could result in a variety of insights. For some, digging into behaviors and mindsets were the excavation needed to understand their lifestyle of anger and physical aggression in their line of work as a drug dealer. By undertaking therapy, Interviewee 6 said that he was able to un-condition himself from that lifestyle:

"It's only my late 20s during a basic counseling course, for me, was just touching on the surface to psychology that I realized, anger and aggression went to this. Imagine, for the whole, I don't know 25 years of my life or so 27 years, if I got angry, it would result in me being physically aggressive. Yeah, yeah. That's how conditioned I was for that lifestyle…I mean I've had, like, I don't know how many hours, maybe hundreds of hours of therapy." – Interviewee 6

Interviewees reinforced the importance of excavating their past identities so they could move forward, as several expressed the belief that former identities are changed gradually and do not instantaneously shift. Here, Interviewee 38 recognized that he could not just study the new

identity he wanted in business and attain it. Instead, he said he needed to dig through his past by studying psychology and understand what led him to his former identity:

"Then the other thing that… I spent a lot of my time not only studying business, but in an effort to understand why [Interviewee 38] did all those things that I did in life. I wanted to understand why do people do what people do, and I cracked open the psychology of that and opened up this can of worms that literally changed my life, and it got so good to me – and I say this very humbly – I became so well-learned at it, that this passion to turn right back around and share what it was I learned with other people." – Interviewee 38

While he acknowledged the importance of the external environment, Interviewee 36 said he needed to benchmark how close he was to acting out his new identity story for others. He acknowledged the internal work he had done that made the difference in his new identity being maintained:

"I would say it was 90% internal. I mean the external work was really the triggers. The feedback from others. That was the external stuff and the only reason it's not 100% was because getting that feedback, having those external stimuli, whatever you want to call it, I had to have those otherwise I didn't have a way of measuring the 90% growth inside because I was able to view that feedback and those external stimuli through a different lens than I would have before I started this journey. So, I needed both, but the majority of the work was internal."
– Interviewee 36

While Interviewee 41 did other things like sports and school, he said that excavation therapy had the greatest impact on changing his professional identity:

"From there I went to county jail, did that for about a year, fighting my case, and things of that nature, was sentenced to 12 years in state prison for second degree robbery with a gun allegation. From there, truly that's where the journey started changing, in a sense. So while being in there I was mostly focused on sports and was trying to get my way into school but you know the system inside had rules and barriers and age limits and gaps and it's funny, I met the

guidelines for one school and I could get in for free because I was 21 or 22, but they said you've got to have less than five years and I had like 10 years still to do, so it was like, okay. So I couldn't get into that but I was still able to play sports and trying to read a book here and there, but really the thing that transformed my life was therapy. So, I did get therapy while I was still incarcerated and that helped a great deal for me." – Interviewee 41

Some interviewees recalled a distinct moment when they started to see changes in their way of thinking. They remembered recognizing the importance of excavating in starting to see these changes in their mindset shifts and eventual behavior changes:

"I remember going into the courtroom and trying to plead with this judge to put me in a drug rehab program and looking back on that I can see how delusional I was to the magnitude of my behavior. That I thought I could rob and ask for rehab. But I think it speaks to this idea that I knew that if I corrected that behavior, then my life would probably get better. I didn't necessarily feel absolutely tied to that series of behaviors or that part of my identity. It was like an attachment…[later when describing an instance when they saw an unexpected behavior change in themselves] There was an internal voice that was like 'well that's not what you would have done, that's so weird!' Rather than just thinking about how things transpired, it was more like I really thought 'that is not what I would have done.' So, that's where I felt there were two, there was a before-[Interviewee 40] and an after-[Interviewee 40]. But I will say that while I was incarcerated, I absolutely started to notice a change in my thinking. Maybe not my actual behavior but just the way that I perceived everything that was occurring around me. I remember specifically this incident where first of all in prison people are so mean [slight laugh]. People are really mean and everyone is super-crass and you have to tiptoe around every situation because they're afraid of how people are going to perceive your behavior, they're going to perceive the way you talk. You cannot be secure in anything. Even in my thinking I'm like, I'm like 'am I thinking the right thing?' It's just very disorientating and exhausting."
– Interviewee 40

As these stories continued to be told, patterns of internal work to excavate combined with connection and community with others helped them, they said, believe change was possible:

"So I had done significant internal work and connection and community, things in my legal life, to really change the trajectory. I had an opportunity to just trust in folks because I didn't know what to do and one of the beautiful gifts of deep grief is that vulnerability is mandatory, where I couldn't put on a game face if I wanted to. So that combination of things allowed for this alchemy to happen for transition or change for me, internally." – Interviewee 29

However, excavation did not always resemble therapy as a way to dig in and understand oneself. After hitting his wall, Interviewee 1 mentioned a pause moment in jail and decided to take advantage of that time to understand who he was within the context of religion. Similarly, Interviewee 8 followed a similar pattern of using an existing framework (the 12-step program) to excavate and understand his former identity:

"I could see that even though that a lot of those people were sober, they still wouldn't change. They wouldn't renew their hearts. You have old, perverted men talking about the women coming in, their trying to get help and still use them and manipulating them and you know, using their positions of power and it was like 'Might as well be getting high, you're still doing the same stuff.' That wasn't the fruit that I wanted. I didn't know much, but I knew I wanted more than that. For like just for the self-help programs, they didn't work for me in particular. I've seen them work for people for – you know for a lot of amounts of time but until you have that spiritual awakening – step 12 says having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we carry this message to the alcoholic that still suffers." – Interviewee 8

Interviewee 9 emphasized the importance of using a tool to help him process his former identity. While he wanted to excavate, he recalled wanting to do so privately. For this reason, he chose to journal rather than to enroll in counseling with others:

"And I remember after that show was over, that day I went to the prison canteen, I brought like ten notebooks and that's where I began privately started expressing who I was and what I was feeling and the different things that I was going through inside of the prison environment that would allow me to have that moment of freedom or redemption to one day speak publicly about my transformation. But initially I was more so journal writing about all of my pain but also

helping me shape that mindset through journals of gratitude and then I had a journal about my

childhood experience and my thoughts and beliefs and affirmation, letters that I wrote to people

apologizing for the wrongs. So I had various different levels of journaling which allowed me to

do this privately, that allowed me to grow from those experiences"— Interviewee 9

4.3.4.c Programming and identity scaffolding

Once the decision had been made to start making an identity change, interviewees referenced another minor theme that led to the long-term sustainment of their new identities: *programming*. Individuals said they felt they were able to maintain their new identities by putting support structures in place to repeatedly reinforce the new habits of the new identity. Brown (2017) references this type of dramaturgical identity work, where individuals may work out their new identity by acting a certain way, modifying their behavior or language, etc. Interviewees spoke about programs they would develop in their identity change process as structural supports. Programming is a colloquial phrase commonly used in prisons to refer to individuals who attend organized classes or other structured programs. to grow and develop (Delgado, 2020). Interviewees discussed creating their own programming to work on their identity development (i.e., strict workout schedules, reading plans, etc.). These programs were especially important during the liminal phase as individuals attempted to take on their new identity while still in an old environment. Other studies have shown similar patterns for individuals in prisons as a coping mechanism in their current states, as well as a way to begin visualizing who they might want to become (Brown & Toyoki, 2013). Interviewees in this study discussed how these programs assisted in maintaining some sense of agency over their present and future lives:

"You know when you're locked up, you learn how to program right and so you kind of get really

good at disconnecting yourself from the rest of the world…And when you're doing years, you

know when you're doing a stretch that's multiple years, you get even better at programming and

just totally just cutting yourself off from everything outside because it has the tendency to kind of

wear you down and preoccupy your brain with things you have no control over, right…You learn

how to program, you learn how to do time in the sense that you develop a program for yourself

to follow, like a regimented schedule, right. So you know I'll get up at certain time, I walk to

Chow or they bring me Chow depending if I'm in an administrative segregation unit or what time. At this time, this happens then I read for a little bit, and then we exercise, and then after that, I take a shower and then after that, I draw for this long or I read for this long, or I fish on the tier for so long. And then at this time, by this time Chow is here and then after Chow, then we wait for mail. And then after mail, you know I have a coffee with my bunkee. And so you have a program that you follow, because if you don't, then you drive yourself crazy worrying about things outside that you have no control of…Yes. It's to keep yourself sane and to just show you how to just, I don't know, keep you consistent with whatever it is that you wanna do. A lot of people - I was really into my fitness back then, right. So it was like, I'd go jog I don't know, five miles today, right and then every week it'd be like, I'm gonna add another mile to that, right because I can. And so it's that programming, right. Where I'm going to keep myself distracted focusing on these other things or studying for the state exam that I was taking, which I got 100% in my math state exam." – Interviewee 43

Interviewee 13 described the level of programming he had in place to assist him in developing his new professional identity:

"If you're doing it in a positive way which is what I was doing, I mean my days were booked. Like if I had Outlook in prison my calendar would have looked ridiculous, I mean it was getting up for early chow getting my stuff ready I would go into the bathroom and people looked at me crazy but I did it and it worked for me which was saying positive affirmations." - Interviewee 13

By combining a variety of programs and activities, Interviewee 40 discussed the benefits of how "you feel like a human, you're interacting with other people." By having a structure in place, interviewees talked about being able to feel a sense of humanity which was not possible in their current identity:

"I did 30 programs, back-to-back, I did groups every night, it was like a segue I guess, I went to community college while I was incarcerated, I did college in the mail like there's two different main prisons in California for women, one of them is a maximum security prison and the other is a minimum security prison, so once you get to the minimum security prison you have a lot more

freedom to participate in programming, which is amazing, because you feel like a human, you're interacting with other people. So I did the various drug programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, I did a restorative justice program, I did a criminal thinking program, I learnt how to train dogs for kids with autism…" – Interviewee 40

Interviewee 5 recalled how having a routine and structure in place to scaffold the behaviors of the desired divergent identity was important for its future sustainability, while simultaneously preventing the likelihood of his former identity to resurface:

"What helps people get out and sustainably stay out is having, having boundaries, having like safety measures like safety measures of boundaries…what got me was having a routine. So starting to study again having work on the weekends, having anything that would stop me from going out would help" – Interviewee 5

These programs and scaffolding supports continued to reinforce identities that were being sought out by individuals. For a divergent identity particularly, interviewee stories showed that scaffolds seemed to be highly important in reinforcing a new identity which the individual had no experience in and potentially little community support in place.

4.3.5 Conclusion

When individuals told their stories about diverging from the known and familiar, they used a variety of methods to reinforce their new identities. Utilizing role models as an example to construct their new identities was a way to begin the identity change and was later supported by a community of individuals who had previously undergone similar identity changes. These two themes highlighted ways individuals may *begin* to form their new identities. This research also highlights an additional theme around the sustainment of divergent identities: by intentionally leveraging pause moments and excavating motivations that led them to former identities, interviewees shared the belief they were better able to maintain their new identities in the future. Interviewees also saw successful maintenance of a divergent identity in the long term by putting identity scaffolding through programming. This section outlined a variety of themes

that interviewees said they felt contributed to the longevity of their divergent professional identities. As stories of radically diverging identities often highlight work needed to *begin* their identity change, these stories underscore the importance of having the right processes in place to *sustain* that work into enactment and full incorporation of the divergent identity.

4.4 Part 4: Summary

These three parts of the data presentation chapter outline patterns from interviewee stories about how divergent identities may begin, the approaches individuals may take towards crafting them, and ways to sustain them in the long term. Section 4.1, *Divergent Identity Narratives: The possible and the enacted*, highlighted several key aspects of beginning a new, possible self that an individual might consider, as well as the liminal period they may undergo during the early stages of committing to that identity. Part 4.2, *Motivations and Approaches*, outlined common types of motivators that began and sustained the identity change process, as well as the patterns of approaching identity change in one's story. Part 4.3, *Sustainment*, highlighted the most salient ways interviewees said they sustained their identities into the latter stages of identity development and incorporation.

In the following chapter, these major, minor, and subthemes are discussed in relation to existing literature and the implications these findings may have on future research. This data is then brought forward to discuss two topics that arose from these themes 1) two main forms of telling divergent identity stories and 2) aspects of new, nascent identities that form in a divergent identity story.

5. Discussion:

Divergent professional identity stories

5.1 Introduction

The first part of this discussion chapter, part 5.2, focuses on two main types of narratives that emerged from the data: *cold turkey* and *gradual* change narratives. Within each of these types of narratives, varying patterns arose. Based on the stories told by interviewees, these patterns have been codified as some of the ways in which individuals – who say they tried to create a radically new and differing identity – tell their stories of identity divergence. These new sociological patterns have provided a basis for novel ways of expressing oneself when undergoing a divergent identity change. Understanding ways of telling these divergent professional identity stories is highly important and relevant in today's professional world as many individuals find themselves searching for storyline structures to make sense of their changing environments. As individuals are continuing to experience increasing dissatisfaction in their work (Collins, 2022), and new generations have more career opportunities available than ever before (Lauria, 2021), it is helpful to provide narrative guides for how an individual might go about telling stories that diverge from the known and familiar.

Scholars have outlined various approaches that an individual might take when telling their identity change stories (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Previous research has been conducted to investigate *why* an individual or an organization might say that they are wanting to change (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Gioia et al., 2000), but less research has been conducted to understand *how* an individual or organization might say that change occurs. While this research's breadth of identity change and development stories is not exhaustive, it does provide insight into established patterns of how individuals might go about telling a divergent identity story. Interviewees from this research recounted experiences through stories of how they believed their changed identities were created and sustained in the long term. Patterns from these stories were then organized to give structure to the ways individuals said they felt they pursued and maintained a new identity that drastically differed from what they had known before (Bryman, 2004).

Three main parts of this chapter are discussed and connected back to existing identity literature: *5.2 Telling stories of identity divergence, 5.3 Beginning the process, and 5.4 Maintaining momentum*. In *Telling stories of identity divergence,* two main types of narratives are outlined as ways individuals told their stories of identity divergence: *cold turkey* or *gradual*. Of these two types of narratives, different patterns and variations arose within each. In *Beginning the process*, three components of divergent identity creation are explored. Finally, in *Maintaining momentum*, motivation and reinforcement are highlighted patterns that were referenced by individuals as important to increasing the long-term sustainment of their divergent identities.

5.2 Telling stories of identity divergence

Individuals may share a variety of stories in their lives (McAdams, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Identity change can be one of these stories. Scholars have found that, regardless of the speed of the steps individuals say they have taken in crafting identity change, the structure of identity change stories follow a basic plotline: identity coherence and clarity, loss of this clarity and navigating through the resulting confusion, and ultimately returning to a state of clarity in the form of a new identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Lewin, 1951). In this research project, individuals told stories of acting on new, divergent identities through two main narrative patterns. These types of narratives can be referred to as quickly going *cold turkey* or experiencing a *gradual change* over time. Identity scholars have previously reported these two types of change stories told at the macro level, as organizations told their identity change stories. These stories of change may span significant periods of time while also saying they felt only incremental evidence of the new identity emerging (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Or, some organizations share stories of identity change occurring rapidly, such as a merger and acquisition or bankruptcy (Corley & Gioia, 2004). At the micro level, scholars widely agree that individuals' stories may reflect a gradual approach to work on a new identity over time (Ibarra, 1999; Brown, 2017; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). In previous research like those mentioned above, stories of rapid identity changes were often told when an individual said they underwent a *forced* identity transition, i.e., unexpected job loss through a company restructuring, layoff, etc. (Maitlis, 2022;

Becker, 1997; Ezzy, 1998; Gabriel et al., 2010). At both the macro and micro levels, individuals telling stories of rapid identity change express feelings of high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, and a sense of loss (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Kinicki et al., 2000). When identity ambiguity is present, individuals and organizations alike are forced to question known ways of describing who they are, as who they shared being previously may no longer be reconciled in the context of their new environment. When alignment is unclear between an identity story and an environment, the need for identity change and resolution becomes salient (Corley & Gioia, 2004).

This research highlights an important differentiation: individuals who tell stories of *voluntarily* undergoing radical identity changes do not express these same levels of anxiety and sense of loss as those who tell stories of *involuntarily* undergoing radical identity changes. While interviewees of voluntary change did still express ambiguity and uncertainty in not knowing their next steps, they did not often express a crippling sense of loss and emotional anxiety. It also highlights a potential connection in the stories between personality and the ability to undergo a quick, cold turkey identity change when creating a divergent identity.

5.2.1 Cold turkey

Interviewees who described the process of their identity change as *cold turkey* recalled it being an instantaneous change. Nine interviewees in this research project told stories of a complete and instant change, while fourteen more discussed patterns of cold turkey elements in their stories where they were able to quickly commit to changing portions of their identity. In cold turkey approach stories, individuals said they were highly intrinsically motivated as they sought quick psychological reconciliation between their current status in life and who they wanted to become. While other interviewees who recalled undergoing gradual changes emphasized a back-and-forth movement between their former and desired identities, as well as a need for external approval, these cold turkey stories outlined deciding to change without any continued connections to former identities nor approval from outside sources.

Although this type of voluntary, rapid identity change story is not commonly researched, some scholars have noted instances where individuals may tell stories of involuntarily undergoing a

total identity loss, where they share feelings of fully losing their professional identity (Gabriel et al., 2010). As these losses are discussed as emotionally devastating and crippling, individuals share seeking understanding to try and make sense of their loss (Kinicki et al., 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In these instances, individuals who said they were able to cope with a total identity loss attributed it to recognizing that their life was more than just their profession (Gabriel et al., 2010). After reaching this stage of acceptance, they said they felt ready to move to a new stage of identity exploration and experimentation, much like Erikson's *identity moratorium*, which serves as a "socially acceptable limbo-land of free experimentation with different post-career options" (Gabriel et al., 2010: 1703: Erikson, 1959). This type of story outlines a forced professional identity loss and feelings of eventual understanding. It then leads individuals to see positive or neutral outcomes of their loss, rather than viewing the loss as a complete identity failure (Gabriel et al., 2010). In this current research project, individuals who told stories where they claimed to have voluntarily left their former professions said they felt they bypassed anxiety and loss, and recalled immediately moving to a state of acceptance and experimentation. This proposes that agency in the decision to enter identity moratorium may alleviate the mental and emotional anxiety that usually accompanies a total identity loss an individual may claim to be undergoing.

As "moratorium narratives seem[ed] to offer a partial but psychologically effective closure whereby their authors recognized that they had entered a new chapter in their lives, one that called for radically different and more flexible responses…", individuals who tell stories of identity moratorium may be able to have effective closure that can lead to a new and radically different future identity (Gabriel et al., 2010: 1704). Interviewees who stopped defining themselves solely by their former careers and opened their identities to include other things (i.e., family, work, spiritual community, etc.) partook in a *bricolage* approach (Levi-Strauss, 1966) where they told a broader story that expanded past a singular focus on their professional identities.

Some interviewees made claims that their personalities were a part of what made them confident enough to make a decision and stick with their new identity, despite any internal anxieties or external pressures that threatened their decision. Interviewees who said they wanted to change

their identities, yet did not want to change their circumstances, social circles, etc. and thought they could continue to live a life that contained elements of their former and future identities, often mentioned a phenomenon similar to Gabriel et al.'s *temporary derailment* (2010). In stories of temporary derailment of an identity, individuals refused full closure on a former identity to keep that option available. Whereas in stories where interviewees embraced a full identity moratorium, they said they would completely close off a former identity in the pursuit of a new one. These interviewees often insisted this ability had to do with who they were as a person, and they recalled the belief that not everyone who made a divergent change has a similar ability to take a cold turkey approach. The Five Factor Model, also known as the "Big Five," focuses on a few key personality traits that suggest a baseline of behavioral and psychological factors individuals can be typified by (McCrae & Costa, 1987). In subsequent research about this model, the relationship between personality traits and psychosis are investigated to understand the impact that personality may have on an individual's attachment to stories of their current understanding of reality (Shi et al., 2018). Openness and neuroticism are two traits of particular interest for future potential research as it relates to cold turkey approach stories in creating a divergent professional identity. Individuals who exhibit high levels of openness are more likely to be open to creativity in their stories and have a cognitive disposition towards flexibility in their future states (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Individuals high in neuroticism may be more susceptible to experiencing strong emotions like anxiety, depression, and anger, and may recall instances when they did not respond well to stressors like ambiguity, loss, etc. (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Individuals whose stories mirrored an identity derailment did not express an openness to experimenting in the future and recalled often feeling overcome by anxieties of their present situation (e.g., financial resources, physical safety, etc.). Meanwhile, those whose stories mirrored an identity moratorium were open to experimentation with the future as they had low levels of concern about their past and current circumstances. Future research might examine a link between individuals who have high levels of openness and low levels of neuroticism and determine if personality traits may have an impact on the ability to tell stories of exploration rather than disappointment in total identity loss.

5.2.2 Gradual

When individuals told stories of creating a divergent professional identity, not all expressed the sense that they were able to immediately make a shift in their mindsets and ways of "being." *Gradual* identity change approach stories, unlike cold turkey, are grounded in extrinsic development and approval. When individuals attempt a change over a period, they are likely to turn to an outside community for continual approval and reinforcement of the micro changes they are making in their identity stories (Ibarra, 1999). Much like in macro-organizational stories about image and identities, the image of the individual, or the projected hope of who an individual would like to become, serves as the basis for initiating change (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). This concept of an image closely parallels the role that possible identities play on the micro scale of identity change (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). As will later be discussed in *Part 5.3*, this possible stage of an identity is told as one of exploration and wonder. This stage may be elongated during gradual identity change, as individuals spend extended time considering all the possibilities their professional identities might take on. Eventually, these possible identities become a provisional identity which is tried on for others for approval and insight on how to further develop it.

For those who share stories of gradually becoming their divergent identity, another extended process within provisional identities is undertaken via community approval and reinforcement (Ibarra, 1999). Albert (1992) provides two methods in which individuals might say they go through this approval process. Albert referred to these methods of storytelling change as the *addition* and *subtraction* of identities. In addition identity change theory, individuals add and build upon what they already share about who they say they are (Albert, 1992; Corley & Gioia, 2004). This addition builds upon a foundation that was previously present and may resemble individuals layering in additional behaviors on top of what they say they already do and think in their current identities. In this research project, this sometimes surfaced as an individual who said they had a strong business foundation from their previous experience in international drug dealing would share how they applied those skills to opening a legitimate business. Conversely, with subtraction identity change, individuals remove from what they say they already do and think (Corley & Gioia, 2004). This sometimes resembled individuals who communicated removing known behaviors (e.g., profanity, fighting, etc.) during the provisional

stage that they were trying on for members of their new support group. Individuals in this research project often referred to these kinds of subtraction as they worked to strike profanity from their everyday language, tried to stop fighting with fellow inmates, and spent several years getting their tattoos removed from their bodies.

This gradual change was a process by which individuals repeatedly tried to reconcile dissonance between who they were and who they wanted to become. While dissonance remained between who the individual said they wanted to become and who they said they felt they were, the change process was not completed and would be continually revisited (Corley & Gioia, 2004). By having an external community in place to approve and reinforce gradual changes, interviewees shared a steadier sense of becoming who they wanted to be. As many interviewees often quoted periods of relapse and falling back into former ways of acting and being, they recalled their communities helping guide and encourage them back to the path of sustaining their divergent identity in the long term.

5.3 Beginning the process

In stories about divergent professional identities, many interviewees referenced what they felt was a distinct beginning to their stories. In this *beginning process* of developing a new identity, three main phenomena were often present in stories told by interviewees: *hitting rock bottom, undergoing a period of pause,* and *excavating prior motivations and understandings*. While all three were not necessarily recounted within every story, there were often combinations of two and three phenomena that would surface within a divergent identity story.

5.3.1 Rock bottom

In stories, there are many ways the individuals can narrate the peaks and valleys of identity exploration during a season of change. The theme of *hitting rock bottom* was highly emphasized, appearing in 19 of the interviewees' stories. Scholars refer to hitting an identity's "rock bottom" when "negativity is brought to a climax by the formation of links among the negative features of one's current life situation and a belief that the future is likely to 'contain much of the same'" (Shepherd & Williams, 2018: 29; Bauer et al., 2005: 1182). In this research

project, individuals recounted hitting their versions of rock bottom when feeling a lack of identity. These moments of rock bottom were not often recalled as being self-induced, but rather resulting from involuntary external circumstances (e.g., being arrested, being sent to solitary confinement, etc.). In previous research, stories with this sudden loss of identity resulted in reports of grief for individuals where a liminal stage of identity insecurity threatened an individual's sense of self-understanding (Ashforth, 2001; Conroy & O'Leary Kelly, 2014). Reaching such a lack of self-understanding can, and may, result in disappointment and despondency. At this point individuals may become reclusive and limit exposure to others to "protect the self against the demoralizing effects of further failures" (Baumeister, 1997:165). Interviewees echoed this desire at times to withdraw from others around them. Shepherd and William (2018) refer to this process as "cognitive deconstruction," where they propose that this approach to navigating identity loss may not always result in the eventual creation of a new identity. Instead, by later discussing their engagement in identity play after hitting rock bottom (see *Part 5.4* for more on identity play), individuals said they were better able to make progress toward developing a new identity (Shepherd & Williams, 2018).

While often recounted as precarious situations, stories of hitting rock bottom were also often framed as valuable occurrences that provided positive identity outcomes which might not have otherwise been possible. In other stories of hitting rock bottom, scholars found that experimental identity play may become a mechanism that individuals will take advantage of (Baumeister, 1990). It is by arriving in this place, albeit not always of their own volition, that individuals said they could find a way forward in a new identity. When not forced to reckon with an "end-of-the-line" mentality, individuals describe a struggle to find direction (Shepherd & Williams, 2018). Interviewees in this research project corroborated these previous scholarly findings as they acknowledged that their previous attempts at creating a new identity, without having hit rock bottom, were not successful as they lacked direction and focus. Once forced to reckon with their identity loss in a period of hitting rock bottom (often in prison, solitary confinement, or rehab), these individuals recalled a sharper sense of purpose and focus when developing their identities. To further extend current research, this need for rock bottom appeared in nearly half of participant stories who said they made a cold turkey or gradual change. This finding shows how, particularly in the sense of a divergent identity change,

interviewees said they experienced a greater need to reach a point of reckoning when beginning to create a radically new identity.

As individuals recalled a greater sense of focus coming into place for their future identities while at rock bottom, they stated being able to then aim their efforts on their *identity growth*. Erikson (1959, 1968) described stories of identity growth as developing a sense of "one's own values, norms, and commitments" (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). While movement from identity confusion to identity clarity was not explicit in Erikson's early research, Marcia (1966) expanded this initial research and proposed that exploration and commitment were the two necessary components to developing stories around a stable sense of self. At rock bottom, individuals recalled having both distance and time to freely explore and commit to a new identity (further expanded upon in the *pause moments* section).

While identity change research has often centered on stories with incremental changes made to create new identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), these stories focus on the complete overhaul of an identity and the reconstruction of a professional identity from the bottom-up. This is highly relevant for individuals even outside of the professional *criminal* space, as individuals who lose their jobs may often report a complete sense of professional identity loss (Shepherd & Williams, 2018). As hitting rock bottom is a crucial step for individuals who share hopes of reconstructing an identity that has been lost, it is not a far cry to see the importance of hitting rock bottom when creating a divergent professional identity. Divergent identities also require rebuilding from an identity's foundation. Interviewees who said they were able to dig into the foundations of their professional identities often recalled their time at rock bottom as being the pivotal moment that helped them begin to rebuild a professional identity for the future. Again, while this concept of hitting rock bottom may have reported negative impacts on an individual in the short term (i.e., loss of self-concept, grief, identity insecurity, etc.), the long-term impacts of achieving this state of total identity loss may have significant positive impacts on the individual (Shepherd & Williams, 2018).

5.3.2 Pause moment to process

When interviewees described other impactful themes that helped them build their new identities, they often highlighted moments of suspension and a *pause* in time where they were not expected to fulfill their former roles and identities. During this suspension, interviewees said they were able to explore and contemplate new identities. There were two components to this phenomenon: a mental state and a physical space. Within identity research, they are referred to as liminality and *identity workspaces* (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010).

5.3.2.a Liminality

In a professional identities sense, *liminality* refers to stories which are "'in between' as people start to shed an old role without yet having clarity about the new" (Ibarra & Oboardu, 2016: 35). In this state, individuals say they feel as if they are "neither one thing nor another" (Turner, 1967: 96). Within this research project, individuals who recounted stories of creating drastically new identities often referred to this period as a pause moment between their identities. Often while they were in prison, solitary confinement, or rehab, interviewees highlighted a freeing feeling resulting from people in their previous lives who were no longer present to expect them to maintain their former identities. This provided an opportunity to focus on the exploration of a new identity through identity play where they were able to experiment with thoughts of a new identity without having yet fully committed (March, 1976; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). While these identities are eventually worked on once selected (Brown, 2015; 2017), this initial state of discussing their play and exploration is important for individuals who are aiming to drastically diverge from a previously known identity repertoire.

Under-institutionalized liminality experiences, or those identity experiences which do not follow a traditional trajectory of identity change and progression, often provide a greater opportunity for identity growth than those that are *institutionalized* (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Individuals who said they were in this form of liminality often share feeling a greater sense of agency in their choices, have access to a range of exposure to varying ideas, and have a greater level of freedom with their identity crafting (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). While there are certain amounts of risk that may come with an identity change that is

unstructured and under-institutionalized, there is also significant opportunity that can come from someone undergoing an under-institutionalized season of liminality (Garsten, 1999). This research project focused on the divergent transition individuals claimed to experience from professional criminal identities to an identity in a non-criminal profession. This journey included a variety of transition points talked about by individuals, some of which included periods of time in prison or jail, rehabilitation centers, community support groups, solitary confinement, or a combination of them all. These spaces were said to influence different psychological states for individuals and provide varying levels of support for those who said they were trying to craft new identities.

Stories of identity change from criminal to non-criminal professional identities are under-institutionalized and not a traditional professional identity change path, much like scholars deem stories of contemporary careers (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). These liminal paths, which are not well-trodden, require a significant amount of sense-making to navigate the new identity's creation (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). By utilizing this pause from previous role expectations, individuals said they were able to leverage and capitalize on the benefits of identity freedom within this liminal season, resulting in a more creative and intentional divergent identity.

5.3.2.b Identity workspaces

The second component of the pause moment theme was the physical and psychological space provided to individuals in which they could craft their new identities. Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010:2) refer to this concept as *identity workspaces*, or "institutions that provide a holding environment for individuals' identity work." While stories of liminality claimed it provided individuals the opportunity to discuss their engagement in identity *play* (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), stories referencing identity workspaces claimed those workspaces provided structured environments for individuals to engage in identity *work* (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). In other words, once an identity has been decided upon, individuals can develop their new identity in an ordered environment. Stories about these identities in workspaces may be stories of refinement with an existing identity or the creation of an entirely new one (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). In this research, individuals often referred to their divergent identities as an entirely new identity they were developing.

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) propose that identity workspaces are necessary, as identity work cannot be conducted in isolation and is often brought on by identity destabilization and uncertainty (Kreiner et al., 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). In this research project, some interviewees discussed needing to begin creating their identities on their own, as they said they were afraid of negative repercussions from their former communities or those around them in prison. While they said these initial development stages were in isolation, there was an eventual showcasing and refinement of the identity once they said they felt there were safe individuals to continue shaping this identity alongside. However, interviewees stated they experienced periods of identity destabilization and uncertainty when beginning to craft their new identities. For these two reasons, the environments individuals recalled being in (e.g., prisons, rehabilitation facilities, support groups, etc.) were often noted as 'identity workspaces' where they could support their divergent identity development in spaces that were safe from external criticism and harm.

Psychologically safe and supportive environments that provide space for an individual in transition, referred to as *holding environments*, may provide the ability to find meaning through mental and emotional turmoil during identity change (Winnicott, 1975; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Erikson (1980: 120) stated "the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" during a period called *psychosocial moratorium*. These holding environments are identity workspaces that can provide emotional and psychological support while an individual is crafting their new identity. Several interviewees referenced community groups, affinity support networks, or informal groups in their stories that provided an environment that would assist them in developing the identity they wished to pursue.

By finding safe physical and psychological environments to engage in, individuals were able to create their new identities in a way that supported and stabilized their identity transition (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Interviewees used a combination of physical spaces (e.g., prison, Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, rehabilitation centers, etc.) and psychological spaces (e.g., informal meetings with like-minded individuals, community support groups, etc.) during their periods of pause to craft their divergent identities.

5.3.3 Excavation

The third theme in stories of beginning to create divergent identity change is that of *excavation*. During excavation, individuals recalled spending significant time psychologically processing prior motivations and understandings of their previous behaviors and actions to inform their future, divergent identity. This theme of excavation is hallmarked by a period of extreme reflection and introspection. Previous scholars have acknowledged this reflection response in stories of individuals during certain professional transitions (e.g., a forced identity transition) and outlined the process that individuals say they lean upon as they excavate their "personal, relational, and other resources to explain their initial career choice, the transition process, and their subsequent career direction" (Maitlis, 2022: 2; Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Hoyer & Steyart, 2015; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). This study expands this finding and investigates a similar mechanism of introspection that individuals say they employ when also *voluntarily* changing their professional identities.

In this period of introspection, individuals often reflect on their previous identities and the motivations that led to initially pursuing them. Wittman (2019) discusses a similar occurrence in her research where individuals share stories of processing how to move past lingering identities. In her research, Wittman discusses that her interviewees told stories where they either decided to undertake *role adaptation*, where their identity was developed further from its current state, or *role-identity separation*, where the individual resulted in either a neutral identification or disidentification (2019). In role adaptation, individuals determine the best course of action for their new identity is the development and restructuring of components of their current identity to meet the needs of their future environment (Ibarra, 1999). However, if individuals "see their past role as incongruent with their new self-definition [they] may disidentify with…that past" (Wittman, 2019: 728; Dukerich et al., 1998). In these instances, if individuals do not see a future that can align with their former identity, they may claim to dis-identify with their previous identity entirely in order to move forward. During this excavation period, interviewees in this research project often referred to the need for counseling and psychotherapy to help them identify future goals and determine how they might achieve those goals. If these individuals determined they were unable to reconcile a past identity with a future desired identity, they said they would take the steps necessary to retire their former identity (e.g.,

cutting off ties with former associates, tattoo removal, etc.). Sometimes these individuals would tell stories where they would create "ex" identities and act in a diametrically opposed manner to portray an identity which contradicts their former way of living (Ebaugh, 1988). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) referred to this occurrence as the conflict between "who one is and who one was" (Wittman, 2019: 728).

As individuals spend time reflecting on their past identity to inform their future identity, scholars agree there are varying levels of willingness to explore and commit to new identities. As previously mentioned, Marcia (1966) proposed two processes individuals may share in their identity development: exploration and commitment. *Identity diffusion*, or no identity exploration or commitment to a new identity, *identity moratorium*, or exploration without any commitment, *identity foreclosure*, or commitment without any exploration, and *identity achievement*, or commitment to a new identity after a period of exploration, are the four combinations of committing to a new identity (Marcia, 1966). If individuals say they are deciding to take on an entirely new identity and dis-identify from their previous role, they may then share experiencing either an identity moratorium or identity foreclosure, where they tell stories of undertaking *either* exploration *or* commitment. The chief difference being an individual's willingness to explore new identities before completely committing to a new one.

As excavating a previous identity and understanding former motivations and beliefs can help an individual make sense of their former way of being, it can help determine the degree of alignment of who individuals say they *were* and with who they say they *want to be* in the future. Moving forward in stories of a new identity may only involve trace amounts of repurposing a former identity, as with role adaptation, while other divergent identity stories may involve a complete separation from former ways of being. Until excavating the past, it is difficult for individuals to fully understand the level of exploration needed to select and craft a new identity.

5.4 Maintaining momentum

The next theme in telling stories of divergent identities explores understanding the *motivators* and *reinforcers* individuals said helped them continue forward in shaping their divergent professional identities. Many interviewees discussed having initial thoughts about professional identity change at several points during their careers. However, in some instances they recalled they were not able to maintain their trajectory for their new divergent identity. Interviewees highlighted an important theme needed to move past the initial stages of considering a divergent identity: the work to *maintain momentum*. This was told in one way as having an initial *motivator* to take early steps towards change, which was said to be difficult for individuals who were undertaking something radical and unknown. It was at other times described as having *reinforcing* mechanisms in place that could continue to drive their identity change, as interviewees said they felt many barriers to entry continued to arise for them through critical external parties, situational constraints, or internal doubts and concerns.

In this discussion, a motivator refers to the psychological reasoning an individual may have to act or perform identity work in a certain way (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.). Reinforcers refer to a stimulus or circumstance that produces a repeated response (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.). As previously stated, a divergent identity requires radical change from the familiar and therefore may follow a non-traditional path of identity progression. These non-traditional paths may leave exacerbated voids in an individual's identity narrative while they craft a new identity story they may not have familiarity with. While many scholars have charted the paths individuals take in an identity change journey (Ibarra, 1999), few have openly acknowledged gaps in academic literature about the impact of identity voids that can occur with professional transitions, as well as the importance of *identity recovery* in a story to regain a professional identity of some kind (Miscenko & Day, 2016). As interviewees repeatedly discussed in their interviews, they feel driven to reconcile identity voids through finding initial motivators, working to make coherent who they are and who they would like to become, or by finding reinforcers, which propels them to continue on the path of their new identity and maintain identity coherence. Many interviewees recalled leveraging both concepts in an effort to maintain the forward momentum of the new identity they were hoping to create.

While individuals recalled undertaking foundational steps in beginning the process of their identity change, the outcomes of their new identity's long-term viability in their story were highly related to the amount of motivation and reinforcement the individual had when making this change. Put another way, in stories where interviewees hit rock bottom, took time to process within pause moments, and understood previous identities through excavation as ways of *beginning* the process of a divergent identity change, the new identity was likely to be *sustained* in the long term when motivation and reinforcement were present. Scholars have found various motivators and reinforcers in other stories that have led individuals to change their professional identities (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978; Bandura, 1977). Many of these known reasons for professional identity change revolve around the individual's expressed desire to fit the needs of the new professional identity they are in (Schein, 1978; Nicholson, 1984), and fit perceived social pressures of role expectations (Ibarra, 1999). After spending time in their new role, individuals say they are better able to understand the new identity's needs and can change their behaviors to meet these needs (Bandura, 1977). These motivations are externally driven and are largely shaped by what it seems their new professions require. This research project expands this understanding of what may be needed to motivate and reinforce someone to continue on a path of divergent identity change, which may be significantly more difficult to maintain than an identity change of a less drastic nature (Ibarra, 1999).

In recent years, research has begun to point toward the need for work done to both initiate *and* sustain identity change (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Argyris, 1997). Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) discuss how stories of identity work during identity change based on two determinants: externally-based pressures of what the new identity is supposed to look like, and internally-based desires for individuals to have a coherent story of who they are and want to be. Within the broader concepts of the motivating and reinforcing factors mentioned above, these internal and external components are further explored below.

5.4.1 Motivation

During this research project, twenty-nine interviewees recalled an initial reason that led them to decide to create a new identity. While stories of some of these reasons may have

corresponded with the experience of hitting rock bottom, there were often psychological components that were said to push them to change their behavior. For instance, while some individuals recalled a time in solitary confinement they referred to as their rock bottom experience, their claimed motivation to change their professional identity was instead to become a more supportive and present father for their children. Importantly, these *motivations* were said to be internally developed and made as a decision to pursue this new identity for themselves, not because of external pressures coercing them to make a change.

Interviewees said they employed identity play and identity work when establishing their motivation for creating a new identity to solve internal identity coherence. This play and work were said to be internally motivated by a desire to find psychological continuity between their identities. Interviewees began to craft a narrative for themselves that established coherence between the person they *were* and the person they wanted to *become* (Holland et al., 1998). Extending the example from above, as one interviewee determined that taking on a new professional identity would allow them to become a more present and supportive father for their children, they recalled beginning to work on crafting an internal narrative that could reconcile their former and future professional identities. This identity story at times resembled an individual who reasoned their former role as a gang member was to be a provider and defender for their community, but they now viewed themselves as a provider of their family in a traditional professional role as a local businessman. Finding this sense of consistency with a purpose as a provider, regardless of their professional role, helped them reconcile their differing identities.

Individuals also said they began aligning themselves with who they wanted to become through externally-driven motivators. This could be done in a variety of ways but was often begun through identity play and the exploration of possible selves (Ibarra & Petrieglieri, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). As identity play is a complementary concept to identity work, individuals said they would first engage in play to experiment with possible ideas of who they wanted to become before making a final decision and beginning to work on solidifying that identity for themselves (Ibarra & Petrieglieri, 2010). This play was said to come in the forms of investigative reading, talking to others about possible identity options for the future, and even

watching television shows that inspired them with possibilities of who they could become. Interviewees recalled a sense of wonder when initially thinking about the possibilities of who they could become in their new identities. These beginning stages of identity play are intended for discovery, to enjoy learning about available possibilities for an individual to pursue and were said to be highly important in motivating individuals on the journey of creating a radically new, divergent identity. In contrast, identity work tends to be more goal oriented and focused on objectives to meet, and can therefore be most important once the individual has determined what identity they would like to create and begins to author it, *see* Reinforcement *below* (March, 1976).

In this chapter on their stories of finding and establishing motivation to begin shaping their divergent professional identity, it was said that *role models* were also highly important. Twenty-one interviewees recalled the motivational impact that meeting someone, who had gone through a similar divergent change, had on their ability to think about new, possible identities (Ibarra, 1999). These role models provided a repertoire of possible selves for consideration in the future and provided additional initial inputs of who these individuals might become. Within stories, role models are often cited as important for any type of identity change (Ibarra, 1999), but they appeared to be vital for individuals undergoing a divergent professional identity change as they searched for evidence that a change of such drastic nature could be possible.

5.4.2 Reinforcement

Returning to the example above, after discovering the best way to meet their new identity goal (i.e., becoming a supportive father for their children), sixteen interviewees said they began *reinforcing* that identity through work to align themselves with their possible identity and provisionally acting upon it. Interviewees said they often felt these new identities came with social expectations of what that identity looked like, which were helpful guidelines for determining how to go about constructing and reinforcing their new professional identity. Similarly, by leveraging role models to find motivation for a future identity, guidance became available for individuals in support communities to begin provisionally testing out their new identities (Ibarra, 1999). These individuals who said they wanted to undergo a change expressed having a good idea of who they wanted to become, as well as how to work towards that goal.

Internal identity work was said to be vital to reinforce a divergent professional identity. Socio-cognitive identity work is known to be done at this stage as individuals may work to create coherence in their internal storylines (Brown, 2017; Holland et al., 1998). Individuals said they employed *sensemaking* in this initial identity work to create understanding of their current circumstances for themselves (Maclean et al., 2012; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Weick, 1995). Interviewees acknowledged an intensive period of sensemaking in early stages as they reconciled their current identity as a liminal space between a former and future self. As they moved into a more decided state of the future identity they hoped to pursue, sensemaking remained a necessity as individuals said they continued to reconcile the new identity they were beginning to enact with a former way of thinking and being (Maclean et al., 2012). In stories of change, this internal socio-cognitive identity work is highly important to reinforce the new, divergent identity interviewees are developing. By maintaining a continual mindset of sensemaking, individuals said they were able to reconcile the sometimes-conflicting narratives they recalled continuing to experience well into enacting their new identities.

Dramaturgical and discursive identity work were also described and said to be important forms of externally facing identity work that were performed by interviewees for audiences. As individuals tried to align themselves with the perceived social expectations for their new roles, they recalled employing various forms of trialing out their provisional identities with others (Ibarra, 1999). This came in the form of dramaturgical identity work, where they said they enacted the behaviors of the new identity (e.g., forms of dress, mannerisms, etc.) or in the form of discursive identity work (e.g., new speech, phrases, withheld previous types of language, etc.) (Brown, 2017). By provisionally beginning to try out these new behaviors in front of others, interviewees said their divergent identity continued to be reinforced. Some recalled a feeling of accountability to their new communities they were trying to become a part of, as well as a sense of reinforcing support as others gave them feedback on ways to continue shaping themselves into their new identity. These external audiences (i.e., support groups in this research project) are said to be highly important for individuals as they continue to sort through who they are and reinforce who they want to become (Goffman, 1959; Markus & Nurius, 1986). In a similar way that role models are important for individuals in the early, motivational periods of determining their new

identities, communities were discussed as important ways to reinforce the identity of *who* an individual is wanting to become.

Pratt (2000) discussed various behavioral and cognitive approaches that individuals might take when learning to become part of a new community. He referenced a similar, continuous *dream building* cycle where individuals told stories where they would begin to align who they said they were and who they said they wanted to become and expressed feeling in a constant state of validation with their new communities for their new identity to be accepted. Connecting to the previous concept of motivation, Pratt refers to the beginning stages of developing a new identity as *seekership*, where individuals shared seeking to find a future identity solution for the discontent they said they felt in their current identity (2000; Lofland & Stark, 1965). At this early stage of motivation, *sensebreaking*, or the "breaking down of meaning" in one's identity, was a useful tool individuals said that communities employed to help the individual begin to see the benefits of leaving a former identity behind (Pratt, 2000). Later during the reinforcement period, communities have been known to accompany individuals in their sensemaking and socio-cognitive identity work to continue to provide guidance of who they might become (Pratt, 2000; Maclean, 2012). These various behavioral and cognitive approaches can be taken in many ways but are chiefly to help individuals continue to "maintain and affirm identities" they are attempting to pursue (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010: 12).

5.5 Conclusion

This research project brings together a variety of theoretical concepts to outline two main approaches to telling a divergent identity story: cold turkey and gradual approaches. In this process, individuals can create a drastically new and different identity than what they said to have previously known. Better understanding this process is important as individuals are making greater professional pivots than ever before and may find themselves in a position where they attempt to create an identity that diverges from their past experience (Lauria, 2021). As human nature seeks to reconcile dissonance within who one *is* and who one wishes to *become*, making a change of this significant nature is no small feat for individuals. Creating a new identity from a repertoire of possibilities, provisionally trying them on and testing for others, and eventually

enacting, after extensive identity work to solidify a final identity, can be an extensive process for individuals. In stories of well-trodden traditional or institutionalized identity trajectories in the professional world, identity change is an already extensive and emotionally taxing process (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). For non-traditional and under-institutionalized identity trajectory stories, this process of change can be even more overwhelming and anxiety-inducing because of the ambiguity and lack of direction (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Ashforth, 2001). Like other ways of seeking to understand identity change, these narrative approaches and the patterns within them seek to give clarity for individuals who have identities that may be uncertain in their current state (Petriglieri, 2011; Shepherd & Williams, 2018; Wittman, 2019).

While these narrative approaches are not exhaustive, the two main types of narrative storylines – cold turkey and gradual – contain a variety of patterns and themes to capture common ways of approaching a divergent identity journey. These new sociological patterns of expressing oneself provide a way for individuals to think about their identity change stories. In the beginning stages of their change, interviewees said that individuals may experience any of three key themes: hitting rock bottom, utilizing pause moments to process, and excavating past motivations to understand what led them to previous identities. Throughout these three themes, individuals laid a foundation for moving forward in a manner that they said felt was sustainable and likely to support a future identity. Without going through some combination of these three concepts, interviewees recalled moments of relapse where their attempt to change fell flat and they found themselves returning to their former identities. Similarly important in telling new stories of divergence, individuals recalled two concepts that helped them maintain forward momentum in the new identities they had begun. Here, interviewees discussed the importance of the initial motivation and the continual reinforcement of their new identities. By having one or both themes in their stories, interviewees often said they were able to continue on the trajectory of their new identities. Although these two types of narratives have different features, they ultimately solve the same goal: identity resolution for individuals seeking a radically new identity. This body of work can be helpful in future research as professional identity paths are becoming less traditional and institutionalized, and it aims to guide individuals seeking to make an identity change that may be outside of the realm of the comfortable and familiar.

6. Discussion: Nascent identity stories

6.1 Introduction

Identity stories are told by individuals in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2016; McAdams, 2001). Some identity stories are told by individuals who are discussing who they are yet to be, while other stories discuss who they feel they have already become (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; McAdams, 2001; McAdams, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). In this research project, identity stories arose which fell in-between these two categories. In these stories, individuals spoke about who they were deciding on becoming and wondered how to first engage this consideration in a private way, all while acknowledging they were not yet prepared to share it with others through public enactment.

While this juncture in stories between inception and enactment has been previously researched, this project highlights an even finer examination of stories which discuss *possibilities* being pondered. This discussion chapter addresses a particular type of story that was told about an individual's decision to make a professional role change: nascent identity stories. This chapter outlines some of the characteristics mentioned as themes of these types of stories and organizes them into three main sections of understanding: First, when are they told? Second, why are they told? And third, what are the attributes of these stories? This research project brought a heightened awareness to stories discussing the earliest periods of profession change, particularly in stories when an individual said they were not able to craft their new professional role through the traditional routes of identity change, i.e., traditional considerations of change, exploration of future possibilities, and provisional enactment (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999).

The stories from this research propose that before individuals determine whether a profession under consideration is suitable for public display or eventual self-incorporation, it may exist in an earlier, fledgling and budding state—what this paper refers to as "nascent identity stories." Nascent identity stories seek to fill a theoretical gap and extend our understanding of stories told about possible identities that are being contemplated (Markus &

Nurius, 1986). They occurred in narratives during the germinal stages of consideration, post-conception and pre-enactment, where an individual engaged in the private determination of the future profession's fit and their interest in pursuing it. As discussed below, several distinctive characteristics of nascent identity stories arose in interviews and are reconciled with existing literature. First, nascent identity stories tend to highlight extended periods of consideration, as individuals said they may not have had the prior exposure to build a sufficient repertoire of alternatives and may have been unsure of how to craft a new identity story. Characteristically, nascent identity stories reference feelings of vulnerability while in their newly-formed states. As a result, nascent identity stories often referenced a need to shelter the profession they were pondering until they were more confident in their future profession's potential to receive positive external feedback and maintain internal congruence once enacted. Individuals telling nascent identity stories often shared feelings of discomfort as they recalled being in a state of liminality, betwixt and between identities: neither having yet adopted, nor rejected, the idea of who they wanted to become. These and other characteristics are further discussed in this chapter.

6.2 When are they told?

As individuals look to tell new stories about themselves, they often look for narratives that mirror the type of change they hope to model themselves after (Ibarra, 1999). Nascent identity stories were often told as individuals recalled entertaining the idea of a professional role that greatly differed from what they had formerly known. Previous scholars have discovered that themes within stories of under-institutionalized and non-traditional paths of profession change may drastically differ in approaches and outcomes from what is told in stories of change within a well-trodden path (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). However, as most stories of identity change largely seek to tell a tale of congruence and coherence, nascent identity stories may still provide insights that are universally relevant for any story of profession change (Holland et al., 1998). This section of the discussion addresses the context of when nascent identity stories are told by an individual, with hopes that parallels and insights may still be drawn for others hoping to tell their stories of identity change.

Nascent identity stories are an extension of current understandings of possible identity stories, providing additional insight into possible identity stories which were not yet ready to progress into the next stages of consideration. These nascent identity stories referenced a period between determining what was a *possibility* to explore and what was deemed safe to *provisionally* try out in front of others, often highlighting the difficulties that may have prevented them in moving from a possible story to a provisional story (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). These difficulties were themes and indicators of what might lead someone to tell a nascent identity story, particularly when they were contemplating a possible identity. The first indicator revolved around the discrepancy of who an individual said they wanted to become and who they said they felt they could become. In research, possible identity stories depict representations of who the individuals would *like* to become, alongside any possibilities of who they feel they might be *able* to actually become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). While an individual may tell stories of an aspirational self they may hope for and desire to one day be (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), they may also tell stories about hoping to become something which they feel is impossible to pursue despite their interest in it (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2015). Interviewees in this project described this discrepancy, often mentioning an impact on their level of motivation when they were debating something that was significantly different from their previous experience. While one interviewee said they wanted to go into corporate finance, they recalled being discouraged when they recognized their previous background in check forgery would likely prevent them from obtaining a new role in that field.

A second indicator that often emerged when these types of stories were told revolved around an increased level of difficulty in identity creation when the possible profession strayed from the familiar. In the literature, possible identity stories are told because of both an individual's internal motivations and their external social influences (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Because of this, individuals may often resort to following a pattern of known and familiar trajectories, such as a junior consultant who becomes a managing consultant, as their internal motivations may be for forward progression and external influences may encourage them to progress within their current organization (Ibarra, 1999). Previous research outlines this likelihood of events where external pressures push forward a narrative of a traditional, familiar identity trajectory. In stories of Amway sales representatives, individuals told stories where their

workplace communities strongly encouraged their professional development within the set path of Amway (Pratt, 2000). External influences are often said to be highly intertwined in stories about the decision-making process of individuals creating an identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). If an individual does not tell a story which follows a traditional path, research records stories that highlight feelings of inauthenticity and incoherence both for the individual *and* their communities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Baumeister, 1998; Ibarra, 2003). Many interviewees in this research echoed this finding, as individuals' stories of leaving gangs were filled with confusion and ambiguity within themselves of who they wanted to become, as well as frustration from their gang communities who they said did not understand their motivation or need for change. Parts II and III further elaborate on the impact that this need for internal and external congruence may have as individuals recalled having to first spend extended time internally overcoming feelings of self-doubt while bracing for external evaluation (Holland et al., 1998). A story of this kind was often said to require this additional, dedicated time to think about their new identity in private, long before exposing it to the outside world and potential external criticisms.

A third indicator of when nascent identity stories may be told are when stories describe extended periods of play and consideration of an identity. Nascent identity stories are possible identity stories which often referenced staying in a period of extended exploration that often came with greater amounts of identity play. As identity play is said to occur in the "threshold between current realities and future possibilities," an individual who tells stories about a possible version of themselves that they are strongly pondering may play with it in order to understand how it may fit within their current narrative and any future stories they may tell about themselves (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Especially as nascent identity stories were common in situations of extreme identity change, this play was especially crucial for interviewees who discussed needing to reconcile their diametrically opposed identity stories of previous criminal work and their desire for mainstream professional work in the future. Holland et al. (1998) refer to this as establishing identity coherence in a narrative story about oneself. It is especially important for individuals who need to bridge a wider chasm between a former and future self to have dedicated time to do so. While previous scholars have outlined patterns that individuals tell in their stories when managing multiple and sometimes conflicting identities (Ashforth et al., 2000; Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Elsbach & Battacharya, 2001; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), extended time in

exploration and consideration is an additional way of reconciling a story with conflicting ideas of who a person says they are. During this extended time, identity play can help an individual internally make sense of the future, as it is "a way of believing in a possibility and behaving as if it exists" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010: 11). Stories of this play are told as a way to test out a possible self while in private and provide a sense of provisionally trying the identity out to see how it 'fits' for themselves (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petrigilieri, 2010). While traditional stories of identity play reference an early showcase and are provisionally explored in front of others to receive input, approval, feedback, or rejection (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010), nascent identity stories have an element of fragility about them that may not be able to withstand external feedback. This is further discussed in 6.4. Whether from an effort to protect a desired identity that has not yet been securely anchored, or from a fear of feedback that may push the individual into an identity they are not yet ready to pursue, nascent identity stories were told as possibilities which were played with in an extended period of private self-reflection. Themes from the research surfaced in *excavation* and *motivators,* as extended internal play gave time for greater refinement of the identity*,* as well in *sustainment,* as this extended time was said to allow space for developing a sense of purpose in creating a new identity.

Another indicator of when nascent identity stories are told is when the individual does not wish to show their potential identity to others from a place of fear and concern. Identity stories which describe a provisional state of enactment are said to be tried on in front of others for their feedback and approval (Ibarra, 1999). As previously mentioned and further discussed in Part 6.4, interviewees described feeling that their vision of their future self was highly susceptible to external feedback. While this feedback may be either positive or negative (Ibarra, 1999), in the case of a new and fragile identity, negative feedback was often said by interviewees to be the most impactful. There are a variety of reasons why negative external feedback and rejection may occur. Stories describing instances of external rejection were said to occur because of apparent incoherence in an individual's story of their lives, or because it was thought that their new identity was stigmatized by their former community (Ragins, 2008). Individuals have also discussed thinking that rejection may have occurred because of their lack of appropriate behaviors, mannerisms, and knowledge of identity work display rules that demonstrated meeting the "display rules" of the new identity (Ibarra, 1999: 764; Sutton, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein,

1979). If an individual has not yet met these display rules for the new identity, external audiences may respond with negative feedback. In this research project, many interviewees recalled feeling they had a lack of information and resources for how to meet these display rules and said they were unsure how to begin to act in a new way that differed from their previous behaviors. Many interviewees said they had to seek creative ways of piecing together these display rules through role models and aspirational figures as they recalled a lack of individuals in their prison and rehabilitation environments who could demonstrate new ways of being. Some interviewees in this research project told these stories from a place of uncertainty, as they said they were sometimes unsure of who they wanted to become and doubted if the new profession they were exploring was something they would eventually pursue. As they said they were unsure of their long-term interest in the new professional role, they said they did not yet feel ready to expose it to others and have themselves held accountable.

Nascent identity stories were often told as extensions of possible identity stories, both when those possible identity stories required extended periods of consideration before showing them to others, as well as when the stories highlighted tales of difficulty in unfamiliar identity creation. At other times, nascent identity stories were told when an individual expressed fear and concern of showing a possible identity to others, largely connected to a fear of rejection for both themselves and who they might wish to become. This kept them from provisionally sharing the thought with others. Nascent identity stories help provide a sense of understanding as to why some possible identity stories progress, and why others do not progress, into stories of action where a provisional identity is tried out in front of others.

6.3 Why are they told?

When individuals told possible identity stories, several interviewees stated hesitation in knowing how to move forward. 6.2 outlined an argument for *when* these feelings of hesitation were indicative of a nascent identity story being told. In 6.3, a further expansion helps understand *why* nascent identities are associated with prolonged seasons of private consideration and subsequent periods of delayed enactment. Two themes recurred in interviewees' stories that

shed light on heightened ambiguity and concern told by interviewees in this period: *lack of exposure* and *uncertainty*.

6.3.1 Lack of exposure

In the theme *lack of exposure*, individuals' stories recounted the early period between their initial desire to take a new profession path and the time when they identified a possible path to experiment with. In this period between initial thoughts and potential consideration, twenty-four interviewees recalled knowing they wanted a change, but stated feeling a lack of understanding what options existed for them. As several of these individuals said they had only ever been in their current line of work, e.g., being in a gang, drug dealing, international smuggling, etc., they said they felt uninformed of how to create alternative options for themselves. In the literature, these available alternatives might be known as a story's identity repertoire (Ibarra, 1999). A repertoire provides a range of possible identity options from which an individual might select and begin to tell new stories about themselves. After reviewing a range of possible options, individuals said they often select an identity to provisionally experiment with and pursue in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Bloom et al., 2021; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In this research project of extreme identity change stories, individuals said they felt they did not have sufficient exposure to alternatives in order to develop repertoires and tell a new story. These repertoires may sometimes be referred to as toolkits, where the "habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action" help an individual begin constructing stories about the person they might like to become (Swidler, 1986: 273). Swidler refers to these toolkits as compositions of stories and rituals that may form a foundation on which an identity can be developed (1986). Many interviewees said they were quite limited in their exposure to others outside of their social and professional circles (which often were said to be closely intertwined), and so had a limited range of available stories and rituals to build from. These future possibilities were sometimes difficult to craft on their own without external guidance as individuals said they often felt their only guide was knowing who they would *not* like to become, based on their past experiences, rather than who they would *like* to become.

These stories also cataloged a variety of instances when interviewees said they felt any change in their profession was too difficult to undertake, as their familial and social identities were often closely tied to their professional identities and had afforded them exposure to professions outside their immediate circles. This created an increasingly difficult and complicated shift when trying to make a change (Goffman, 1961; Gofen, 2009; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). While this extreme interconnectedness and resulting lack of exposure is common in stories of total institutions like the military, organized crime, and cults, it can also be common in stories among those in mainstream professions and high-commitment organizations (Toubiana, 2020; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Stories that describe the highly connected nature of an individual's personal and work life often highlight the importance of having time to ponder a new, fledgling identity while also untangling the connectedness to their other identities to gain exposure in new areas of life (Delahunty & O'Shea, 2021). This often appeared in the data under the theme of *excavation* and provided an additional insight as to why these nascent identity stories may be told as an extension of a possible identity story. Excavation will be further discussed in the next section.

In this research, nascent identity stories were often told by individuals who experienced low levels of exposure to alternative, possible options and said they needed extensive dedicated time to explore new identities for themselves. These stories were also told by individuals who said this lack of exposure was related to an extremely interconnected professional identity with their prior major identities (e.g., familial and social) and said additional time was needed to disentangle themselves from their past personal and work life to pursue something new (Toubiana, 2020).

6.3.2 Uncertainty

As interviewees continued to tell their stories of identity development, another theme emerged that contributed to understanding why nascent identity stories might be told: *uncertainty*. This uncertainty was closely linked and often complementary to the lack of exposure that individuals referenced when telling stories of beginning to make an identity change. As individuals said they had a lack of exposure in knowing what a future profession could look like, they then recalled realizing that without this vision they lacked the puzzle pieces

to begin constructing any new, future profession; this led to uncertainty in how to move forward. Some stories referenced feelings of hopelessness in this ambiguity, as they recalled knowing they wanted to change, but said they had no idea where to begin and what steps to take. In the literature, this means that without a possible identity story to set a vision on, they have no way of knowing how to undertake the identity play and eventual identity work necessary to begin shaping a new provisional identity story (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Petrieglieri, 2011; Brown, 2017; Ibarra, 1999). As previously stated in the first discussion chapter, individuals who are in the stage of considering possible identities will often play with the potential of an idea and experiment with who they might want to become (Petrieglieri, 2011). This play helps individuals determine what alignment they may or may not have with a future, desired version of themselves before publicly trying it on in front of others. Extended time in this 'possible' period was said to provide additional opportunities to think about former professions and what led them to their previous professional path. Themes of *pause* and *excavation* were said to be helpful in these instances, helping determine previous motivations and eventually chart a path towards their new identity. As possible identity stories are known as the "theoretical link between motivation and self-concept [and] the workings of the individual," individuals may tell stories of developing a better sense of certainty in who they want to become and their motivations behind the decision, which can result in increased confidence to refine and recall eventual experimentation with their identity in front of others (Erikson, 2019:28).

After determining what kind of identity they would like to become and playing with these nascent possibilities in private, individuals then said they were able to take steps towards acting on their new identities (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Brown, 2017; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Interviewees recalled this provisional enactment as a time when they began to experiment in front of others with what they said was a new professional identity. As lengthy exploration of the self had already been made, significant amounts of uncertainty were said to be reduced as they moved forward. As a step of taking action in a forward direction, they sought out the tools from their toolkit to begin their identity work and publically work on their identity (Swidler, 1986; Brown, 2017). These various types of identity work described were often dramaturgical, discursive, and symbolic, and could sometimes be a combination of the three (Brown, 2017). As individuals tried out these identities in front of others, they embraced what Gecas (1986:140)

referred to as "the *experience* of agency." This feeling of agency in a new identity was said to be novel for many of the individuals interviewed, and it was said to be a new area of uncertainty in its own right; seven interviewees discussed fear that came with too much freedom to make choices for themselves.

Interviewee stories of nascent identities were told as a result of uncertainty in a variety of domains. Without knowing the future identity they were aspiring towards, they were uncertain of the building blocks needed to begin construction with. Additional experiences of uncertainty were referenced when interviewees recalled high levels of agency that were new to them and gave fear with this new found freedom. However, the extended period in private – a hallmark of nascent identities – allowed them to set intentions about the kind of person they wanted to become and push through uncertainty.

6.4 Nascent identity story attributes

There were a few key attributes about nascent identity stories that commonly appeared in interviews and were built from several themes that repeatedly surfaced in stories. These core attributes included: *extended consideration and development, increased susceptibility to threats, and sheltering*. Each of these are discussed in detail below and outline connections to current literature as well as the significance they play in understanding how individuals may tell a nascent identity story.

6.4.1 Extended consideration and development

The first nascent identity story attribute is the extended period of consideration and development that individuals say they undergo. As this extended development was previously discussed as insight for *when* a nascent identity story might be told and *why* the consideration might happen within this period, it is important to understand more about what this specific attribute entails. Individuals gave several reasons in their stories as to why they needed an extended time of consideration and development. Chief among these contemplations was the ambiguity between who they currently were and who they wanted to be in the future. While scholars repeatedly reference the importance of coherence and clarity in identities, individuals

who do not follow traditional paths may not have had the luxury of role clarity throughout their change process (Holland et al., 1998; Delahunty & O'Shea, 2021; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Toubiana, 2020). In 6.3, uncertainty referenced the initial stages of consideration in a story as individuals recalled not knowing how to move forward in crafting a provisional profession without a repertoire of possible ones to choose from. This part of the chapter expands the understanding of *uncertainty* to include a period of identity decision paralysis that leads to extended consideration and development. Eight individuals specifically referenced an identity vacuum and feelings of a void in who they might currently *be*, as they were unsure of who they could *become*.

Identity literature notes that stories with this type of "betwixt and between" liminality often have heightened levels of anxiety for many of the individuals who tell these stories of identity change (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988). When in a period of uncertainty about steps forward, the decision to leave a former "way of being" behind can be quite daunting for individuals. While some scholars refer to the retention of a former identity as a *lingering* identity story (Toubiana, 2020), nascent identity stories have the potential to extend our understanding of *why* individuals may hold onto a previous way of being: concern in the liminal space between who they are and who they will become. Because of the lack of exposure referenced in 6.3, individuals in organized crime may say it takes them longer to develop a new identity than someone in a traditional career progression (e.g., a junior consultant becoming a manager), as they share that their identity story repertoires might be quite limited with options to choose from when crafting their new stories (Ibarra, 1999). This reportedly lengthened the period of needing to find possible identities to work on crafting, which created a void between a potential and enacted identity. This void was said to create fear and anxiety for many individuals. Oftentimes interviewees said this period made them nervous in knowing how, or *if*, to move forward.

Nascent identity stories may also talk about extended times of contemplation to mitigate impending internal and external barriers that individuals said they felt were often looming. As discussed in the next section, nascent identity stories often have a high susceptibility to threats and are subject to extreme pressure in their early stages. This was framed in many ways, but in

this research interviewees often said this when recognizing the potential downfalls of making an identity shift away from what they had previously done for work that increased their susceptibility to threats and pressures. Other scholars noted a similar difficulty in individuals' stories of moving through other extreme identity transitions (Toubiana, 2020). In her research, Toubiana discussed stories that told about the difficulty of identity change due to internal paralysis and a failure to de-identify with previous associations of work (2020). Interviewee stories in this research project highlight similar difficulties of disidentifying with former associations, habits, and mindsets, as well as external pressures that would not let them easily leave their organizations (Brown, 2017; Pratt, 2000). Individuals said that having intentional time to think helped them begin to disentangle themselves from their past and do the work necessary internally to prepare for their future, regardless of how much additional time these deep, internal debates took. This period was also said to help them build up a reserve of stamina to maintain the course with their new identity as external pressures arose. In the next section, these external pressures and threats prevalent in nascent identity stories are further discussed.

6.4.2 Increased susceptibility to threats

While internal doubts were often said to be a danger in a nascent identity story that an individual told, perhaps one of the most significant attributes of a nascent identity story is its increased susceptibility to external threats. These threats are known to come in a variety of forms in stories but are best known as an experience that indicates "potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment" within an identity story (Petriglieri, 2011). Threats often come from external parties, who seek to harm and negatively impact the chances of an identity story's sustainment. These threats are said to elicit a variety of responses from individuals, who may describe themselves in stories as having low self-esteem, decreased desire to advance their professional career, and decreased overall performance (Steele, 1997; Davies, et al., 2005; Taylor & Brown 1988). These threats may have already occurred for the individual in their stories of self *or* are a perceived threat yet to come (Petriglieri, 2011). In this research project, individuals said they were sometimes afraid to share potential thoughts about a profession they were contemplating to protect themselves from many of these negative outcomes, as well as protect their aspirations about a potential profession from scrutiny and reduce its potential for eventual enactment. Interviewee stories were peppered with concerns that premature discussions

might leave them exposed and result in rejection of this future possibility. Several methods of this type of protection are discussed further in the *sheltered* section.

Heightened susceptibility to threats surfaced in nascent identity stories for twofold reasons: individuals were stigmatized because of who they wanted to become, and individuals were under extreme scrutiny because of their unconventional transition. First, interviewees told stories of leaving their high-commitment criminal professions for roles and lifestyles that were said to be mundane by their previous social and professional circles. Their new roles were stigmatized, and therefore carried a significant amount of skepticism and criticism (Ragins, 2008; Ashforth et al., 2017; Ragins et al., 2007). Second, individuals who leave identities of an unconventional nature may also struggle to exit and claim a profession that greatly differs, or is sometimes counter, to what they had previously been (Ebaugh, 1988; Toubiana, 2020). While stories discuss internal barriers of doubt and insecurity when creating a role in a new professional space, the external barriers were those that interviewees said caused them to feel threatened.

As previously mentioned nascent identity stories often described a series of challenges individuals said they faced when trying to explore a new profession for the future. Some of the most acute challenges described could often be likened to literature's threats within identity stories that were mentioned above (Petriglieri, 2011). To determine whether an identity being discussed is under threat or merely in a difficult state of change, there must be a primary and secondary appraisal by the individual of potential responses to the new identity from external parties (Petriglieri, 2011). In the primary stage, individuals determine what significance the experience will or will not have on their wellbeing when their desired future profession is revealed. In this research this resembled interviewees considering the outcomes on their wellbeing when sharing with others about the future profession they are pondering. In the secondary stage, the individual then deliberates what their response will be and how they will interact with the feedback if it is deemed a threat. This resembled interviewees sharing contemplations of conversations about their new profession with friends and family going poorly, and trying to determine what next steps might entail. In this project, twelve interviewees viewed any negative feedback, pressure, or response that might be given to them as a threat to

the future profession they were contemplating. As stories were told about shaping their ideas for a future profession, individuals said it often required vulnerability to begin considering and pursuing, and shared that any response which was not positive felt dangerous to their determination to continue moving forward. Stryker and Serpe (1994) would propose that this is likely because the profession they were exploring was one that they highly valued, and one that they hoped could have significance for them long term. This high-value possibility for a future profession was therefore likely extremely valuable for individuals and would lead to the desire to protect these possibilities from future threats.

After determining if their situations were threats against the identity they were exploring, individuals outlined steps they recalled taking to protect this future potential. In many instances, concealment was said to be one of the safest options for protection and is further discussed below.

6.4.3 Sheltering

In her review of identity threats, Petriglieri proposed that in order "to maintain a sense of continuity over time and yet adapt to shifting personal and social conditions, individuals need to balance their need to preserve identity stability with their need to sustain identity dynamism" (2011: 642). In a nascent identity story, this balance of identity stability and identity dynamism was often said to be achieved through concealment from potential external criticism. This concealment, or sheltering, was referenced by nineteen interviewees and is a major contribution of this research into understanding how individuals tell stories about possible ideas of identities they are thinking about. While some research cautions against concealment because of potential negative impacts that concealment may have on the psyche of an individual (Pachankis, 2007), interviewees in this research said that identity concealment often felt it was the only option that provided a chance of long-term survival.

In nascent identity stories, interviewees said they were most likely to shelter or conceal a profession they were contemplating when it seemed too fragile to expose to others. After spending time in extended consideration to determine their level of interest in pursuing the role, as well as to bolster their confidence, individuals said they were then ready to begin sharing the

possible identity they were exploring privately with others around them. Much like sheltering a fledgling plant that is not yet ready to be exposed to the elements, individuals told stories where they sheltered ideas of their potential profession until they were firmly rooted in their internal grounding to withstand external storms. Interviewees said that when deciding on such a significant profession change, it was helpful to have at least one of the "voices," either internal or external, quieter. This was important as individuals said their own internal criticism and doubt was already so great that they assumed little possibility of forward progress if it was met with any external criticism. This is a potential extension of Arkin's (1981) work on the mechanisms that individuals use in their stories in an effort for roles under considerations to survive against external threats. Arkin states that once a possible role is presented to individuals, an individual may take an "acquisitive" approach where they seek approval from others during enactment of the new role through display and identity work. Alternatively, they may take a "protective" approach where they proactively avoid enactment opportunities for fear of contact with others who may disapprove (Arkin, 1981; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). This research proposes an extension of these mechanisms that may be utilized prior to enactment, as individuals in this research told stories where they used a "protective" approach when first determining their own interest in an identity and made efforts to avoid contact with individuals who may have negatively impacted the possibility of them trying out a future role. It is important to note that this type of sheltering and concealment differs from other known concealment strategies used in literature, as these potential roles are concealed in the hope of eventual enactment in the future. In other literature, identity stories may discuss roles that are concealed indefinitely to create a separate, hidden role that can perpetually hide behind other prominent identities in their life story (Arkin, 1981; Ragins, 2008). Instead, the type of concealment discussed in nascent identity stories provides an opportunity to safeguard future possibilities: protecting identities long enough to bolster their potential, giving them a greater chance of long-term viability when eventually publicly showcased.

While stories of possible identities told by individuals are played with, tried on, and discussed with others (Markus & Nurius, 1986), future research would benefit from investigating this additional way of protecting possible identity stories: sheltering. Additionally, further investigations could be made to explore the novel concept that sheltering an identity may propel

it forward, as opposed to the current conceptualization of identity concealment as a form of long-term protection (Arkin, 1981; Ragins, 2008).

6.5 Conclusion

Nascent identity stories surfaced within the research in stories told by individuals who were undergoing significant professional transitions. While this research context of extreme cases in professional identity changes may have put nascent identity stories under a microscope and surfaced attributes about it, it is a type of identity story that may still be applicable in a variety of situations as individuals contemplate possible identity stories that they may not yet be ready to expose to others. This discussion chapter highlights three main themes to better understand nascent identity stories, relating each back to findings from this research and extant literature: when stories of nascent identities are told, why they are told, and attributes of these stories. These stories were often told in the early stages of consideration – after the conception of possible ideas, but prior to any enactment. Nascent identity stories are an extension of possible identity stories and describe the earliest thinking when thinking about a new, potential role or opportunity. This thinking occurred before fully knowing what a possibility may be and during an extended period of consideration before enacting anything in front of others. Nascent identity stories were often said to come about due to a lack of exposure and increased amounts of uncertainty with how to move forward, resulting in an extended period of consideration and reflection. The extended time, during which individuals work through lack of exposure and uncertainty, was a hallmark of nascent identity stories, alongside themes of increased susceptibility to threats and perceived need to shelter possibilities from others. Sheltering of nascent identities is a particularly important contribution of this research in providing understanding for additional ways that possible identity stories may be told as a means of long-term sustainability for future public enactment, as current stories tend to focus on sheltered identities as a means for perpetual hiding. This research also surfaces a distinct possibility that a possible identity story which does not follow a traditional or institutionalized path in professional progression may likely be a nascent identity story that requires additional time for contemplation and sheltering before enacting it in front of others. This is an opportunity for future research that would expand scholarly understanding of possible identity stories and identity change stories.

The next chapter of the discussion provides a summary of these findings, as well as outlines potential limitations, areas of future research, and concluding thoughts.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter provides a final showcase of the themes and findings discovered in this research. In this portion of the thesis, an outline of summaries from each chapter is provided, along with contributions to knowledge and recommendations for future research. Limitations for this study are also discussed, alongside final thoughts and reflections from this project.

7.2 Summary of findings

The literature review for this project examines current scholarly literature in the context of relevant identity research. It provides foundational definitions for identities and narrative storytelling approaches that are foundational for this thesis, as well as outlines current understandings for concepts like professional identities, identity work, possible selves, provisional selves, identity threats, and stigmas (Schein, 1978; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2019; Brown, 2017; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999; Petriglieri, 2011; Ragins, 2008). While this literature review provided a foundational understanding of the concepts necessary to build upon for this research project, it also provided insights into areas for future investigative research that were built upon throughout this project. A short review of literature was also given to provide a context for professional criminal organizations and why their members may become, and stay, part of their ranks (Paoli, 2019; McCarthy, 2011; Decker & Curry, 2000).

The chapter on methodology reviews the ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigms of inquiry and situated this research within the interpretivist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This allowed the researcher to seek to understand interviewee stories as they were told, recognizing that their expressed understandings of the world are subjectively created and experienced (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This enabled the researcher to capture stories

of identities as they were told by interviewees, and build an understanding based on the subjective nature of how the identities might be viewed by the individual and how they see themselves in the world (Cerulo, 1993; Ibarra, 1999; Gecas, 1982). From a design perspective, reasons for selecting an interview method approach were outlined and largely centered around providing the opportunity for interviewees to freely express their perspectives on their identities and their experiences in them (Bryman, 2004).

The chapter on this study's context provides insight into the world of professional organized crime and gave a greater sense of understanding to the types of professional transitions that were experienced by the individuals in this research project (Paoli, 2019; McCarthy, 2011; Decker & Curry, 2000). This chapter gave historical, sociological, and relational context to the highly connected professional environments these individuals were in, as well as provided relevant research to explain the universal relevance and importance of studying these identity transitions (Paoli, 2019).

The data presentation chapter contains three main parts: *divergent identity narratives, the possible and the enacted; motivations and approaches;* and *sustainment*. These parts were developed from the major and minor themes that arose in individuals' stories.

In Chapter 4, Part 1, *divergent identity narratives: the possible and the enacted*, interviewee stories begin to explore questions about how to diverge from an identity which might be known and familiar to them. The first portion of 4.1 outlines how an individual might begin to explore an identity that radically differs to what is previously known, and how individuals expressed feeling in this early stage of thinking about future possible identities (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The second portion of 4.1 addresses the feelings of liminality an individual might have while in between these two identities, as well as how they may eventually reconcile the simultaneous presence of two radically different identities in their stories (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

In Part 4.2, *motivation and approaches*, interviewees begin to explain their rationale behind pursuing their future identity. Two types of motivators appeared in the data, those which

initially motivated change in the individual, and those which sustained the change process over a significant period. One of the main types of *initiating* motivators was described by interviewees as hitting a wall or hitting rock bottom. Current literature validates this phenomenon and provides an understanding for how rock bottom may occur and be initially navigated (Shepherd & Williams, 2018). This research project continues to extend current understandings of how rock bottom may be utilized as a useful tool in propelling the self forward in identity change. The subsection showcasing data on *sustaining* motivators addresses concerns that interviewees raised about liminal periods between identities, as well as the counter measures they put in place to motivate themselves forward through these periods of ambiguity and uncertainty (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Two different approaches were taken by individuals who told stories of crafting and implementing their new identity. These *cold turkey* and *gradual* approaches were made by individuals who expressed either an innate "way of being" which enabled them to make a quick change in their story, or a more gradual change which involved a back-and-forth motion between identities before settling on one (Coupland, 2015).

In part 4.3, the third and final part of the data presentation chapter, *sustainment* was the primary theme of interviewee stories. While many interviewees discussed difficulty in their journey of initiating and beginning to create their new identity, they subsequently highlighted concepts which they said they thought helped continue to reinforce and sustain their identity in the long term. In the beginning stages of identity development, *role modeling* was deemed as highly important by interviewees who wanted to begin shaping a possible identity and eventually experiment with it in enactment (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Throughout the transition period, *community support* was said to be a significant part of what continued to sustain interviewees through periods of internal doubt and external criticisms. The final minor theme that arose in this theme of sustainment refers to the *reinforcement* of these new identities. This reinforcement was said to be enabled by leveraging pause moments for intentional reflection and intention setting for a new identity. This was coupled with the importance of excavating past identities to understand what led them to a previously held identity. After utilizing moments of pause to look both forwards and backwards, interviewees referred to the impact of programming, a type of scaffolding used to reinforce the new identity (Brown & Toyoki, 2013).

In the next portion of the thesis, two discussion chapters were presented which were built from themes in the data and connected to extant scholarly literature. The first discussion chapter, chapter 5, presented two ways that an identity story of divergence may be told: as a story of a quick, cold-turkey nature, or as a story of a gradual change over time. This chapter highlighted themes from the data presentation to show how individuals told stories about beginning their divergent identity change process, as well as how they continued to sustain it over time. This extends our understanding of *how* individuals might begin to undertake the identity change they claim to desire (Gioia et al., 2000; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996).

The second discussion chapter, chapter 6, provided an extension to scholars' current understanding of possible identities (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This chapter outlines the concept of *nascent identities*, and provides an understanding for when and why these stories might be told. Additionally, it highlights attributes that describe nascent identities, providing context for why extended periods of consideration might be necessary for these kinds of possible identities, as well as what makes them more susceptible to identity threats. This chapter also highlighted a particular characteristic unique to this kind of possible identity and gave reasons why sheltering and concealing was said by many to be the safest way to keep a possible identity viable for the future.

7.3 Contribution to knowledge and recommendations for future research

This portion of the conclusion chapter addresses two main areas of contribution to knowledge, as well as areas of additional research for these areas.

The first major contribution lies around the narratives of divergent professional identities. These two new ways of telling a narrative, in a cold turkey or gradual manner, provide new sociological ways of expressing oneself in narrative identity storytelling. This is especially useful when telling stories of identity change. While many scholars have outlined the ways that identities may change and be worked on over time (Ibarra, 1999; Brown, 2017; Ibarra &

Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006), few scholars have addressed rapid identity change (Maitlis, 2022; Shepherd & Williams, 2018). This research extends current research for this limited understanding of rapid identity change and provides new ways of discussing and thinking about a change that is quickly made of one's *own* volition. This extends current research of stories about rapid identity change that are primarily told in the context of involuntary losses of identity, i.e., job loss, medical accidents, etc. and may give guidance for how a quick identity change may be proactively managed by individuals (Shepherd & Williams, 2018; Maitlis, 2022; Becker, 1997; Ezzy, 1998; Gabriel et al., 2010).

Future research may benefit from and expand this contribution to the research by thoroughly investigating each of these types of narratives and determining if other cold turkey and gradual changes within stories of a less extreme context may also yield similar benefits of sustained change through the assistance of hitting rock bottom, leveraging pause moments, and excavating past motivations and understandings. As well as determining if similar methods used to maintain change momentum may be useful in other contexts. An additional area of future research to potentially explore from this portion of the project revolved around personality and the impact that it may have on an individual's ability to craft a new identity, as well as the speed at which they may implement it. This concept surfaced in a variety of interviews, as some individuals claimed they simply had the ability to change in their "way of being" while stating that others simply did not (Coupland, 2015). Future research would benefit from a study investigating the role that personality may play in identity change stories. Additionally, concepts like "hitting rock bottom," which have been previously researched by scholars, may have greater areas of future exploration (Shepherd & Williams, 2018). This research project found instances where hitting rock bottom may have been utilized as a useful tool in moving forward, as opposed to previous research where rock bottom was sometimes viewed as a negative ending point for an identity (Shepherd & Williams, 2018).

An additional area of contribution centers around the proposal of nascent identities, an extension of current understandings of possible identities. This provides a greater understanding into the earliest periods of consideration, before an identity is ready for discussion or experimentation with others (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Another area of knowledge

contribution around the concept of nascent identities is the ability to use temporary sheltering and concealment as a way to eventually propel an identity forward, rather than traditional concealment literature where concealment is primarily used as a method of protection (Ragins, 2008).

Areas where future research may benefit nascent identities is studying this concept outside of extreme cases. While the use of an extreme case helped provide initial insight into the existence and attributes of a nascent identity, it would be useful to see if a wider range of possible identity stories may contain traces of prolonged consideration and had similar attributes of needing to be sheltered and being highly susceptible to threats. If this were true it would be of interest to learn if similar antecedents of lack of exposure and uncertainty were also contributing factors that led to these kinds of stories being told, or if there might be other factors that could drive individuals to have a nascent identity.

7.4 Limitations of the study

Throughout this research, many themes and subsequent findings became apparent. While it is believed that these findings may be widely applicable to a variety of contexts, it is important to note any apparent and hidden limitations that may hinder the applicability of this data's findings.

First, while the population sample size of 46 is similar in size to other studies of identity change (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000), a larger population sample may yield even greater insights and provide additional nuance to some of the findings of divergent professional identity stories and nascent identities. Additionally, the individuals interviewed for this project were largely individuals who would describe their identity change stories as having achieved the change they had set out to accomplish. While a few did reference continued inclinations towards previous ways of thinking and acting, they did largely claim to be enacting the new identity they had sought to make. One way that these findings could be enriched would be by incorporating stories of individuals who were still in periods of transition or had stated that they had *not* been able to claim the new identity they had been aiming towards. As these were largely identity stories that

had been sustained over time, more nuanced results might surface if additional interviewees were included in this project who had not been able to sustain their new identity over time.

Additionally, as with any stories of extreme cases (Toubiana, 2020, Ebaugh, 1988; Pratt, 2000), it is important to recognize that not all identity change stories of an extreme nature may be directly transferable to less significant identity change. While they often do magnify human behavior and provide a window into the micro-sociological tendencies that may be harder to capture in less significant change (Pratt, 2000), not every tendency and phenomena may be universally applicable. In this research project, data may not be entirely transferable between stories of criminal professions and mainstream professions as there are additional layers of sociological complexity and societal norms (Paoli, 2019; Decker & Curry, 2000). While some individuals leaving a professional career in a gang may be worried for their and their family's well-being from a sense of apparent physical danger and harm, individuals leaving a job in corporate finance may also experience concern for their and their family's well-being, but from a sense of financial instability. And while social pressure for a tenured individual in corporate finance hoping to pursue a career as a pastry chef may incite ridicule, the social pressure being applied to a long-standing mafia member wanting to now run a flower shop may be more greatly elevated. This may be due to the understanding that many individuals in illicit professional work are in total institutions, or high-commitment organizations, and the nodes of connection to their places of employment may exceed merely that of financial obligation to remain employed (Toubiana, 2020; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). This would increase the difficulty to remove themselves from their work, because of the increased connectivity of their professional, financial, familial, and social identities (Ebaugh, 1988).

While this study sought significant diversity in interviewee race and gender profiles (see appendices), it is also important to highlight the impact that nationality and culture may have played in the stories of divergence and nascent identities. Out of 46 interviewees, only five were from outside of the United States. Throughout stories told in this research project, religion was noted as a significant part of individuals' stories of divergence. These religious themes, which were further analyzed for additional themes within the stories, were highly prevalent in stories of American participants. Recent reports state that 53% of the United States population ranks

religion as "highly important in their lives," a figure which places it at the global 50th percentile for importance, and over double that of its peer countries of the UK, Germany, Italy, South Korea, Australia, etc. (*Americans Are in the Middle of the Pack Globally When It Comes to Importance of Religion*, 2015). Because of this, US narratives may in general have a higher proportion of faith and religion that surfaces throughout life stories, particularly when those stories contain elements of hardship and perseverance.

Methodologically, while snowball sampling is a valid and effective way of garnering participant interest, it may also provide a repeating set of perspectives as individuals may refer others who think and act similar to themselves (Kuhn, 1962; Bryman, 2008). In this research project, individuals who said they had completed their own divergent identity change recommended other individuals whose stories they said they thought mirrored theirs, as many interviewees said these were the only people they continued to associate with from their former lives. For this reason, individuals' stories of identity change may have had an outsized similarity in patterns and should be considered when reviewing this data.

Despite limitations that may exist in the study, ways of telling divergent professional identity stories and nascent identities are concepts that continue to expand our understanding of current scholarly research on identity change. While further research would continue to support these findings and phenomenon, this study provides a strong baseline understanding for how individuals may navigate radical identity change and interact with possible identities that may require extended thought and reflection.

7.5 Concluding thoughts

This chapter outlines and summarizes the entirety of this project and the work done to design, collect, and report this research about identity changes experienced by former professional criminals. It summarizes the research and findings from this project, as well as synthesizing them with a direct application of their importance. This chapter also seeks to place this research within a broader host of identity literature. An outline of additional areas of

consideration were made for this research, as well as providing recommendations for future research that could be built upon these findings.

While this research project was begun two and a half years ago as an extension of previous research done in a Master's program, it is founded on a much longer fascination between the similarities of illicit and mainstream organizations. With a background in human resources and organizational behavior, the sociological similarities of how these organizations are run and sustained were always intriguing at a macro level and piqued my interest in understanding how similarities at the micro level might exist for these professionals. After having initial conversations with my grandfather*, who was one of my favorite interviewees for this project, I realized that a deep connection to understanding and learning from individuals who had walked these paths of increased difficult identity change had always lingered in my mind. In the past decade of professional work, I have sat across from countless men and women who have expressed wanting to change their careers but were overwhelmed with knowing where and how to begin. It was an honor to speak to the men and women of this study who bravely made this journey to change their identities in radical, and sometimes dangerous, ways. Their stories showed me that regardless of how daunting an identity change may feel, radical and divergent change *is* possible with the right support and understanding in place.

This interviewee was the sole research participant of personal connection; consent was provided for reference to be made to their identity in this context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethics review and project overview

SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Application form for full submission for research ethics approval

Staff		PhD **X**		Masters		UG		Other (e.g., MRes)	

ESRC funded project or studentship		Knowledge Transfer Partnership		Consultancy	
Other funded or unfunded research project	X	Service evaluation/Audit		Other (Umbrella etc. please specify)	

Project Title	**An Investigation of Complex Narratives and the Formation of Divergent Possible Selves**
Name of applicant/s	Jennifer Mizzell
Email for applicant/s	Jpm94@bath.ac.uk
Name & contact email for supervisor (for UG / Masters / PhD students)	Andrew Brown, adb20@bath.ac.uk Otilia Obodaru, oo397@bath.ac.uk
Department	Management, Strategy and Organisation Division
Proposed dates of study	**November 2021-July 2022**

Secondary data analysis
Does this proposal involve secondary data analysis? This is when you are analysing data that has already been collected by somebody else, i.e., you will have no part in collecting the original data. YES ☐   NO ☒

N.B. Please attach evidence of ethical approval for the original study. The Project Description should detail what you intend to do with the data, not how the data were originally collected. It is important to note whether the data you are using have already been anonymised.

Are there ethical implications concerned with the following general issues? *If yes, please provide details below*	
1. **Funding source**	No, there are no issues for this research due to funding provisions. No funding is being provided for this study, therefore there is nothing inhibiting objective research of a critical nature.
2. **Freedom to publish the results**	Yes, the results can be published, and will be shared with any partnership organizations that may request copies of the final research project.
3. **Future use of findings**	No, there are no ethical issues with how the findings might be used in the future.
4. **Conflicts of Interest**	No, there is no involvement that may result in a conflict of interest with this research.

Information Classification Scheme
Confirm that you have completed the information security awareness module (available here: https://moodle.bath.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=56524)   ☒   What category of data will you be collecting? (If you are unsure, please look at the guidance available on the SSREC wiki.)   **Internal Use**   ☐   **Restricted**   ☒   **Highly Restricted**   ☐

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

1 Research Title	An Investigation of Complex Narratives and the Formation of Divergent Possible Selves
2 Background and aims of the research (no more than 300 words)	This project aims to develop an understanding of complex narratives that are told by individuals throughout their identity narration process. It additionally seeks to develop an understanding of diverging possible selves, and how new identities, which differ from past and present identities, are formed. The main research methods will be qualitative interviews, anchored in grounded theory. The background for this research will be based in identity literature, and will attempt to broaden foundational understandings of literature like Marius & Nurius' (1987) concept of possible selves, and McAdams, (1999) telling the identity of oneself through narrative stories. This research will be built on background material from identity literature, and will extend existing literature in the identity realm.

3 Outline the study design and list the methods including any questionnaires/interview schedules (please attach). How much time (roughly) will each method take and how long in total will participants be expected to take part in the study (maximum 300 words)	Participants will be recruited for a singular, one-hour interview, but will be granted more time if they choose to share additional information past one hour. The study design will be built solely around semi-structured interviews, and the methods will be interviews based in grounded theory. For the safety of the researcher, all interviews will be conducted virtually over a phone call or a virtual interviewing platform (Zoom) without video recording. The virtual platform to interview participants will be via Zoom, as it is more accessible to individuals who are joining virtual meetings. While Microsoft Teams is an option for online interviewing, this requires an extensive registration process with a Microsoft account that may present a barrier to many participants wanting to partake in interviews. Meanwhile, Zoom is a more user-friendly platform for individuals who would like to log in for a single use, and do not need a registration of personal information to the third-party platform. Videos will be turned off for the interviews to ensure anonymity, and recordings will be kept on a separate device. I expect to generated 50 1-hour interviews; these will be stored as MP3s and will be transcribed into Word documents (.docx). The Word documents will be saved as Rich Text Files (.rtf) for long-term preservation. In total I expect to generate <200GB of data. This method of data collection should take approximately ~50 hours. Therefore, it will be expected that each participant will spend approximately one hour in interviews. Interview questions are attached.
4 Who will be recruited to participate in the research?	Individuals who were previously professionally involved in organized crime will be recruited to participate in the research. This may include individuals who were formerly involved in a gang or member of a criminal group, or individuals who conducted criminal activities as their primary profession. To classify what constitutes as "formerly" involved in crime: these individuals previously received their primary source of income from this professional identity, but no longer are employed by this work and no longer are financially benefitting from a criminal association.
5 How many participants will be recruited? Why is this number necessary?	Fifty participants will be recruited for the research. This number is necessary for my qualitative research to achieve theoretical saturation in the data collection process.
6 How will participants be recruited?	Participants will be recruited through snowball sampling and partnerships with rehabilitation programs. Partnerships with rehabilitation programs will serve as gatekeepers to participants. These organizations may range from organizations like ▮▮, ▮▮, ▮▮, ▮▮, etc. These organizations specialize in rehabilitation from criminal lifestyles. Several of these organizations have been approached and shown initial interest in the project. I will create an informational outline of the study for these organizations, with my contact details if individuals are interested in

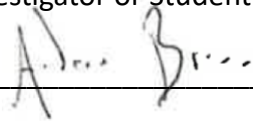|	partaking in the study. The individuals may then reach out to me if they are interested and willing to partake in the study. This will assist with any power dynamic issues that may arise, where participants are hesitant to share information or get involved lest it get back to their gatekeeper organization. In order to further mitigate any concerns that participants may have about their information getting back to their organizations, I will assure participants of their anonymity and thoroughly cover in my review of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) that no one will ever see the participant list and contact information except for me.
7 Are there any potential participants who will be excluded? If so, what are the exclusion criteria? Is there any specific inclusion criteria?	As only individuals who were *formerly professional criminals* will be interviewed, if any individuals are continuing their illegal activities they will not be eligible for interviews. Also, if individuals would not classify themselves as professional criminals (i.e., relying on criminal activities as their primary source of employment and income), then they will be excluded from the research.
8 Where will the research take place?	The research will be conducted completely virtually, as individuals will only be interviewed via phone calls or the Zoom interviewing platform with the participant video turned off.
9 How will informed consent be obtained from all participants or their parents/guardians prior to individuals entering the study?	Participants will be provided with a study information sheet prior to their interviews. Before beginning the interview, I will provide an opportunity for prospective participants to ask any questions they may have about the study. A consent form will then be signed by participants. Copies of each of these forms are attached.
10 If the study aims to actively deceive the participants, please justify and briefly outline how this will be carried out	No, this study does not involve any aims to deceive participants.

11 Will participants be made aware they can drop out of the research study at any time without having to give a reason for doing so? **Is it clear at what point participants can withdraw their data (e.g., before anonymization)?**	Yes, on the provided information sheet individuals will see that they may drop out of the research study at any point during the interview, as well as up to two weeks after the interview (as after two weeks the data will be anonymized and I will be unable to identify which interview belongs to the participant). The PIS will state that if the participant drops out then their data will be destroyed. Additionally, prior to the start of the interview, I will tell participants that they may withdraw as well as having their information destroyed as soon as the interview is terminated.
12 Describe any potential risks to participants (physical, psychological, legal, social) arising from the study. *Explain how you will seek to resolve these.*	While the interviews are not intended to cause psychological distress, the nature of highly introspective questions concerning identity changes in the individual may lead to participants experiencing psychological outbursts or emotional breakdowns. If these occur during the interviews, I will let the participants know that we can pause or discontinue the interview, giving them the option to finish on a different date. If the participant begins to express serious concerns and appears to need immediate psychological care, I will encourage them to contact their rehabilitation programs. If they do not feel comfortable speaking to their programs, but appear to require immediate care, I will refer them to assistance programs, i.e., Samaritans.
13 Describe any potential benefits of the study for the participants	While participants will not be compensated and directly benefit from the interviews, they may still indirectly benefit from the research being conducted in this study. This study aims to develop a framework for helping individuals reconcile having conflicting professional identities from a past and present life. It is the hope that this published research will help not only the participants as they navigate the presence of their former criminal identities, but also wider society as research will address how individuals (and society) can interface with individuals who have conflicting identities.
14 Describe potential risks to researcher/s and *how these will be managed*.	This research will discuss sensitive information from potentially dangerous populations. A plan has been created by myself with my advisors to mitigate any dangers that might arise. All interviews will be conducted virtually, with no identifying information besides my name and email address being shared with participants. Additionally, if I become upset by information shared by participants, I will reach out to mental health counselling services provided by the University of Bath. I will also mitigate any concerns about being radicalized during this research by attending weekly meetings with moral and values-centered groups, as well as bi-weekly check ins with my supervisors so they may continue to check in on my mental well-being.

15 How will participants be debriefed? (i.e., feedback of results) **What aftercare will you provide?**	A copy of the transcript will be provided for participants if they wish to have a record of their interviews. Additionally, I will stress to participants that they are welcome to withdraw their data up to two weeks after the interview (as after two weeks it will be anonymized). I will also ensure there is directing and sign-posting of resources for any aftercare needed, i.e., if I was connected via a gatekeeper, then referring them to go to their host organizations (the gatekeepers and my connection to the participants), or if they were found via snowball sampling and not via a gatekeeper, then I would connect them to third party groups like Samaritans, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Red Cross, etc. for aftercare may be needed that may be beyond my assistance.
16 How will confidentiality and security of personal data relating to your participants be maintained?	(*Please outline your data management plan here* based on the UoB Data Management Plan: https://library.bath.ac.uk/research-data/data-management-plans/university-dmp-templates) I will keep anonymised transcripts of all interviews, and will immediately destroy the original audio recordings after transcriptions in order to remove the risk of accidental disclosure. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to my anonymized transcripts during the project, but after the project the anonymized transcripts will be available if necessary for publications. Only I, the researcher, will have access to personal data that may be provided to be by the participants. I will provide my contact information and a brief description of the project for gatekeepers, and ask them to share it with their membership. If anyone is interested in participating in the project, they will then contact me directly. I will then set up interviews, share the participant information sheet (PIS), and ask them to sign the consent forms. The gatekeepers solely assist me in helping me gain access the participants, but will not be selecting anyone from their membership and providing details for me. In this way, the gatekeeper will not have any knowledge of who is actually participating in the interviews and the project. As previously stated, I will be using Zoom to conduct interviews as it is user-friendly, ubiquitous for individuals to join a Zoom meeting, does not require a personal registration of information or account to join a meeting, and allows individuals to join meetings without having to download software to their devices. All transcripts and information regarding this project will be stored on the University's X drive, in a folder created for me by my supervisors.
17 Will the participants be photographed, audio-taped or video-taped? If so, please justify	It is the desire of this study for the participants to be audio recorded for the interview. Participants will have the option to be recorded in their consent form, and will give their consent (or not) prior to the interviews. After the recordings are transcribed into anonymized interview transcripts, the original audio files will be destroyed.

18 Is any reimbursement of expenses or other payment to be made to participants? Please explain.	There are no reimbursements expenses or payments made to participants.
19 Any other relevant information?	This research project will be interviewing former members of organized crime. It is the aim of this study to only ask questions regarding their professional identity journeys as they were exiting a life of crime and creating new professional identities. If information arises in interviews that may be incriminating for individuals, they will have an opportunity to redact any portion of their interviews. Additionally, all interviews will be completely anonymized, with any identifying information (i.e., locations, associates, or gangs mentioned) being redacted from the interviews so that no identifying information may be extracted from transcripts.

Additionally, introductions to rehabilitation programs/groups will need to be made in order to acquire access to participant groups for interviews. The ethical considerations that will need to be made involve maintaining anonymity of the group members, not receiving personal information from the gatekeepers (i.e., partnership organizations) in order to retain anonymity of which members will be interviewed. |
| **20 How long will you store *personal* data (including informed consent)? If you are retaining personal data longer than the end of the study, please justify** | I will keep anonymized transcripts of all interviews, but will destroy the original audio recordings in order to remove the risk of accidental disclosure. I will destroy personal data at the end of the analysis (with the exception of the informed consent form) that I will store for at least 10 years after the study ends in case there is a question from a participant. |

Attach the following (where relevant) <u>including version number and date</u>:			
		Version	Date
1	Participant information sheets	1	
2	Consent forms	1	
3	Health history questionnaire		
4	Poster/promotional material		
5	Debrief	1	
6	Copy of questionnaire/ proposed data collection tool (questionnaire; interview schedule/ observation chart/ data record sheet/ participant record sheet)	1	
7	Data management plan	1	

Signed by: Principal Investigator or Student Supervisor

_____   Date: 19 October 2021

By signing and submitting the form, you are agreeing with the following statement:

'I am familiar with the guidelines for ethical practices in research and I have discussed the ethical aspects of the proposed project with my supervisor(s) and/or the other researchers involved in the project. **I am also aware of and will comply with the university policies for storage and processing of human participant data.**'

Signed by: Student

_____   Date: 19-10-21

By signing you are agree████████████████ibility for the application and conduct of the research.

<p style="text-align:center">**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**</p>

An Investigation of Complex Narratives and the Formation of Divergent Possible Selves

Name of Researcher: Jennifer Mizzell
Contact details of Researcher: ████████████████

This information sheet forms part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask one of the researchers named above if you are not clear about any details of the project.

1. **What is the purpose of the project:**

This project aims to develop an understanding of complex narratives that are told by individuals throughout their identity narration process. It additionally seeks to develop an understanding of diverging possible selves, and how new identities, which differ from past and present identities, are formed. Individuals who are former members of organized crime will be interviewed to understand their processes of possessing complex stories, as well as learning how a new identity was created that is drastically different from the previous identity in crime. The main research methods will be qualitative interviews, anchored in grounded theory. The aim is to interview individuals who have created a new identity not based in crime. This study will learn from individuals' stories, and seek to build a new framework for understanding stories which have large amounts of complexity, or have required a radically new identity to be created.

2. **Who can be a participant?**

This study is designed to learn from individuals who have changed from a professional identity based on criminal activities of some kind, to a professional identity that is not primarily driven by criminal activities. Individuals who will be ideal participants are individuals who have experienced this kind of identity transition.

3. **Do I have to take part?**
It is entirely up to you to decide if you would like to participate. Before you decide to take part, I will describe the project and go through this information sheet with you. If you agree to take part, I will then ask you to sign the consent form. However, if at any time during the interview you decide you no longer wish to take part in the project, you are free to withdraw, without giving reason. You have two weeks from the date of the

interview to withdraw from the study; after this time, all data will be anonymized and it will not be possible to identify interviews to be deleted.

4.   What will I be asked to do?
As a participant, you will be asked to share your life story. Interviews will last between 45 minutes and one hour, asking for the general storyline of your life as well as follow up questions about the transition periods when changing your identity. These questions will be asked via a telephone or virtual call. The purpose of this study is to better understand the stories that individuals tell about their lives, when their life stories and identities are complex.

5.   Are there reasons why I should not take part?
While there are no specific reasons why a participant should not take part, this study is designed to learn from individuals who have changed from an identity based in criminal activities of some kind, to an identity that is not primarily centered around criminal activities. For individuals who have not had a past identity centered around criminal activities, their insights may not be able to provide the particular kind of insight needed for this study. However, if you do not feel that the safety precautions outlined below are enough to meet your satisfaction, you are welcome to withdraw from the project.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?
While participants will not be compensated and directly benefit from the interviews, they may still indirectly benefit from the research being conducted in this study. This study aims to develop a framework for helping individuals reconcile having conflicting professional identities from a past and present life. It is the hope that this published research will help not only the participants as they navigate the presence of their former criminal identities, but also wider society as research will address how individuals (and society) can interface with individuals who have conflicting identities.

7.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
 Although the information that will be asked in your interview revolves around your personal identity development and not the specifics of any former criminal activity, you may still divulge information that may be highly sensitive. If there is any question you would not like to answer for any reason, you may choose not to answer. Alternatively, you may request a copy of the written transcript and redact any portions (within two weeks after the interview and prior to anonymization) that you do not feel comfortable having shared.

While the interviews are not intended to cause psychological distress, the nature of highly introspective questions concerning identity changes may lead to participants experiencing psychological outbursts or emotional breakdowns. If these occur during the interviews, I will let you, the participant, know that we can pause or discontinue the interview, giving them the option to finish on a different date. If you, the participant,

begins to express serious concerns and appears to need immediate psychological care, I will encourage you to contact your host rehabilitation programs. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to your host program, but appear to require immediate care, I will refer you to assistance programs, i.e., Samaritans.

8. Will my participation involve any discomfort or embarrassment?
It is not expected or intended that you would feel any discomfort or embarrassment if you take part in the project. If, however, you do feel uncomfortable or appear upset at any time, I, the researcher will stop the interview immediately and may direct you to an appropriate support service.

9. Who will have access to the information that I provide?
Only I, the researcher, will have access to personal data information that you provide to set up our initial interview. I will keep anonymized transcripts of all interviews, and will immediately destroy the original audio recordings after transcriptions in order to remove the risk of accidental disclosure. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to my anonymized transcripts during the project, but after the project the anonymized transcripts will be available if necessary for publications.

As the nature of this research is to study the identity transitions of individuals who have changed their identity from being a former professional criminal to that of another professional identity, no questions will be asked that would require you to divulge specific information about the nature of any crimes you may have committed. Therefore, the chances of disclosure of this type of information should be rare. However, in the event that a participant shares information that is sensitive in nature, it will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If it is a reference to a past, previously-litigated action, there is no legal obligation for myself to report this to any authorities. However, if the individual reveals that they are currently committing or planning to commit one of the following offenses, then I am obligated to report this to my supervisors and ask for their guidance on next steps: the abuse of children, the abuse of vulnerable adults, engaging in acts of terrorism.

10. What will happen to the data collected and results of the project?
 All data collected during the project including personal, identifiable data will be treated as confidential and stored in a secure data management platform. This storage of data will be done in accordance with GDPR. Recorded data will be immediately disposed of after writing and anonymizing transcripts. Your name or other identifying information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication of the research.

After the project has finished, I can also provide participants with a summary of the project results. This summary will not include any identifiable information but will show the overall findings of the project.

11. Who has reviewed the project?
All projects undertaken by researchers will have to be given a favorable opinion by the University of Bath, Social Science Research Ethics Committee (SSREC) before data can be published. Researcher's supervisors have provided provisional support for data gathering.

12. How can I withdraw from the project?
 If you wish to stop participating before completing all parts of the project, you can contact the above identified researcher (Jennifer Mizzell) by email, telephone, or in person. You can withdraw from the project at any point during the interview without providing reasons for doing so and without consequence for yourself.

If for any reason you wish to withdraw your data, please contact an identified researcher within two weeks of your participation. After this date, it may not be possible to withdraw your data as some results may have already been published. Your individual results, however, will not be identifiable in any way in any presentation or publication.

13.   University of Bath privacy notice

The University of Bath privacy notice can be found here:
https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/university-of-bath-privacy-notice-for-research-participants/.

14. What happens if there is a problem?
If you have concerns about any aspect of the project, you should ask to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer any questions. If they are unable to resolve your concern, or you wish to make a complaint regarding the project, please contact the Chair of SSREC at ssrec@bath.ac.uk.

15.   If I require further information who should I contact and how?
Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this project. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you would like some more information.

Name of Researcher: Jennifer Mizzell
Contact details of Researcher: jpm94@bath.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM

An Investigation of Complex Narratives and the Formation of Divergent Possible Selves

Jennifer Mizzell
Jpm94@bath.ac.uk

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

1. I have been provided with information explaining what participation in this project involves.

2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this project.

3. I have received satisfactory answers to all questions I have asked.

4. I have received enough information about the project to make a decision about my participation.

5. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent to participate in the project at any time without having to give a reason for withdrawing.

6. I understand that I am free to withdraw my data within two weeks of my participation.

7. I understand the nature and purpose of the procedures involved in this project. These have been communicated to me on the information sheet accompanying this form.

8. I understand and acknowledge that this interview and research project is designed to promote scientific knowledge and that the University of Bath will use the data I provide only for the purpose(s) set out in the information sheet.

9. I understand the data I provide will be treated as confidential, barring any information that might be shared in which I am planning to harm a minor or vulnerable adult, or commit an act of terrorism, which will need to be discussed with the supervisors of the researchers. I understand that on completion of the project my name or other identifying information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication of the research.

10. I agree to the University of Bath keeping and processing the data that I provide during the course of this study and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

11. I agree that my anonymized transcript and interview data may be used in future studies.

12. I hereby fully and freely consent to my participation in this project.

Participant's signature: _____   Date: _____

PARTICIPANT'S PRINTED ███

Researcher's signature: ██

RESEARCHER'S PRINTED ██

████████████████████████

If you have any concerns or complaints related to your participation in this project please feel free to reach out to the Departmental Research Ethics Officer, Tahiru Liedong, tl723@bath.ac.uk.

Debriefing Information

Thank you for taking part in this project which aims to develop an understanding of complex narratives that are told by individuals through their life stories, and seeks to develop an understanding of diverging possible selves (how new identities that are different from past and present identities) are formed. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Although this project is not focused on the rehabilitation of individuals who are leaving a professional life in organized crime, I am aware that some of the people who take part in this project may find information and about exiting criminal environments useful. Below is a list of organisations and websites that may contain information useful to you.

YDI's useful starting points for how to begin leaving a gang, or membership in organized crime. https://www.ydinm.org/2020/05/20/how-to-leave-a-gang/

Your Life Counts' additional starting points for how to begin your transition out of gang or criminal membership groups. https://yourlifecounts.org/learning-center/gangs/what-if-i-want-to-get-out-of-one/#

If you are having concerns about your mental well-being and need to speak with someone, Samaritans offer helpful counselling services and have worked with many individuals in and out of prison. https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/

If you would like to join a peer accountability group to stay out of a life of crime, charities like St. Giles Trust have a variety of resources available for you. https://www.stgilestrust.org.uk There are also a variety of mentorship programs that are available to you, through programs like http://www.gangsline.com

Additionally, there are search tools that can assist you with more specific resources of help you might need to maintain a life outside of crime. https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/find-local-services

Thank you again for participating. If you would like to speak to me about the project please get in touch.

Researcher name: Jennifer Mizzell
Email: jpm94@bath.ac.uk

The University address overseeing this research is: Department of Management University of

Bath, Claverton Down Bath, BA2 7AY

Signed………………………………………………………………………………………………

Date………………………………………………

Researcher's signature…………………

Date………………………………………………

If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research study, please contact the Chair of SSREC at ssrec@bath.ac.uk.

Data Management Plan

1 Overview

2 Project title
An Investigation of Complex Narratives and the Formation of Divergent Possible Selves

3 Student name and department
Jennifer Mizzell Strategy & Organization Division, Department of Management

4 Supervisor(s)
Note: the main University of Bath supervisor is the Data Steward for the project.
*Andrew Brown, University of Bath Otilia Obodaru, University of Bath

5 Project description
This project aims to develop an understanding of complex narratives that are told by individuals throughout their identity narration process. It additionally seeks to develop an understanding of diverging possible selves, and how new identities, which differ from past and present identities, are formed. The main research methods will be qualitative interviews, anchored in grounded theory.

6 Compliance

When you submit your DMP you are confirming that you have read and understood all of the legislative, policy and contractual requirements that apply to your project.

Information on additional University of Bath policies and UK/EU legislation that may apply to research can be found in our Data Management Plan Compliance Wiki page (this will require you to sign in with your University of Bath user account).

7 University policy requirements
Data underpinning publications must be kept for at least ten years. My data must be, at all times, stored securely and backed up. Informed consent must be obtained from participants for data to be retained, shared, and used for new purposes.
University policy or guidance
University of Bath Research Data Policy
University of Bath Code of Good Practice in Research Integrity
University of Bath Electronic Information Systems Security Policy
University of Bath Intellectual Property Policy
University of Bath Code of Ethics

8 Legal requirements
There are no legislative requirements relating to my project.

9	Contractual requirements

Provide a brief summary of any contractual requirements regarding the management of your research data or enter 'Not Applicable' in this section. If your funder has a data policy you should include the URL to the policy in this section. You can find out whether your funder has a data policy from our guidance on funder data policies.

Name of funder	Data policy URL
N/A	N/A

10   Gathering data

There is guidance and example wording for this section on the Data Management Plan Guidance Wiki page.

11	Description of the data

3.1.1 Types of data
I will be using data taken from the published literature. I will be generating qualitative data from interviews with participants.
3.1.2 Format and scale of the data
I expect to generated 50 1-hour interviews; these will be stored as MP3s and will be transcribed into Word documents (.docx). The Word documents will be saved as Rich Text Files (.rtf) for long-term preservation. In total I expect to generate <200GB of data.

12	Data collection methods
I will interview my participants via Zoom (as it is user-friendly, ubiquitous, does not require registration of personal information with a third-party group, and does not require a pre-existing user account to log into the interview, while Microsoft Teams requires pre-registration of participant information, having a pre-existing account, downloaded applications, and is not often used outside of the University setting), and I will record interviews with my participants using a digital audio recorder. I will then transcribe these interviews into written text (and afterwards delete the audio files). I will combine existing data from sources such as previous interviews from an earlier project, and re-analyse them to derive new conclusions.
13   Development of original software
I will not develop any original software.

14   Working with data

There is guidance and example wording for this section on the Data Management Plan Guidance Wiki page.

15	Short- and medium-term data storage arrangements
As previously stated, I will be using Zoom to conduct interviews as it is user-friendly, ubiquitous for individuals to join a Zoom meeting, does not require a personal registration of information or account to join a meeting, and allows individuals to join meetings without having to download software to

their devices. All transcripts and information regarding this project will be stored on the University's X drive, in a folder created for me by my supervisors.

I will keep anonymised transcripts of all interviews, but will destroy the original audio recordings in order to remove the risk of accidental disclosure. I will destroy personal data at the end of the analysis (with the exception of the informed consent form) that I will store for at least 10 years after the study ends in case there is a question from a participant.

16	Control of access to data and sharing with collaborators
Only myself and my supervisor will have access to my data during the project. Furthermore, only I will have access to participant's personal data (i.e., name, phone numbers, email address that they have shared when contacting me). All anonymized transcripts and analysis will be kept on the University's X drive.	

17	File organisation and version control
I use a folder for each project phase, and within this sub-folder lies the study protocol, data, documentation, literature, and publications. I use folder names to organise the data, and then the equipment / model automatically numbers all files created within that folder. Each file name starts with the data on which the data were collected in YYYY-MM-DD format.	

18	Documentation that will accompany the data
I keep additional notes about interviews in a Word document about the audio recordings and transcripts.	

19   Archiving data

There is guidance and example wording for this section on the Data Management Plan Guidance Wiki page.

20	Selection of data to be retained and deleted at the end of the project
I will keep anonymised transcripts of all interviews, but will destroy the original audio recordings in order to remove the risk of accidental disclosure. However, I will destroy personal data at the end of the analysis (with the exception of the informed consent form) that I will store for at least 10 years after the study ends in case there is a question or concern from a participant.	

21	Data preservation strategy and retention period
I will submit data underpinning publications and any other data that would be of value to future research to the University of Bath's Research Data Archive (or replace with the name of an alternative archive or repository), where it will be kept for at least 10 years.	

22	Maintenance of original software
Not applicable.	

23   Sharing data

There is guidance and example wording for this section on the Data Management Plan Guidance Wiki page.

24   Justification for any restrictions on data sharing
All of my anonymized data may be shared openly at the end of the project when my research findings are published.

25   Arrangements for data sharing
My data will be shared openly via the University of Bath Research Data Archive. I will include the DOI to my dataset in data access statements provided in publications from my project.

26   Implementation

There is guidance and example wording for this section on the Data Management Plan Guidance Wiki page.

27   Review of the Data Management Plan
Your Data Management Plan is a living document that should be kept up to date during your project. Provide information about who will keep the plan up to date, and how regularly it will be reviewed (provide dates of review if you can).

28   Special resources required for the project
No special resources required.

29   Further training needs
No further training needs required.

Appendix 2. Interview schedule

How long have you been with (insert name of rehabilitation organization or ask how long been out of organized crime)? Have you enjoyed your time? Where are you from originally?
How do you explain to others the change from being in a gang to a (insert current profession)?
Is it ever difficult for *you* to believe that you have fully left being in a gang?
Is it ever difficult for *other people* to believe that you have fully left being in a gang?
Can you tell me about your journey to joining a gang?
When you were in your gang, what did you like and dislike? What were the pros and cons?
Tell me about the decision to change from a gang lifestyle. Was it sudden? Or something you had thought about for a while? How was it different from before?
When you left that lifestyle, what were the new expectations from people around you?
What behaviors, beliefs, etc. changed when you left?
Did you (or do you) ever see anybody else from the gang now after you left? What do your old friends/former gang members say if they see you in your new life?
How do you handle knowing there would be (insert response from previous question) that others would feel towards you?
In research, there are two different kinds of stories - one that is "dark to light" and one that is "light to dark." Can you describe your life using these terms? Is it something you still feel torn between, or does one feel like it fits you better?
How did you think about this decision, in the time before you decided to change? Did you talk to others about it or just think about it privately?
When you thought about this new life, what was it that appealed to you? Was there anything that didn't appeal to you?
How would this new identity impact other areas of your life? Would it impact your relationships with friends who were also in gangs? Family? Financially? Socially?
Tell me about this thought of who you wanted to become. What did they look like? How did they act? Why did that appeal to you? Did you think about it often?
Do you ever watch movies or TV shows about gangs? Do you like them? Any character ever inspired you?
Did you ever try to change and then fail? What did that look like?
What made the change "stick"? How did you end up successfully changing?
Are there any things you miss about your old life and your old self? Where would you be now if you hadn't made this change?

Appendix 3: Research participants

Interviewee No.	Sex	Location
1	M	North America
2	M	North America
3	M	Europe
4	M	Europe
5	M	Europe
6	M	Europe
7	M	Latin America
8	M	North America
9	M	North America
10	F	North America
11	M	North America
12	M	North America
13	M	North America
14	F	North America
15	M	North America
16	M	North America
17	M	North America
18	M	North America
19	M	North America
20	M	North America
21	M	North America
22	F	North America
23	M	North America
24	F	North America
25	F	North America
26	F	North America
27	M	North America
28	M	North America
29	F	North America
30	M	North America

31	M	North America
32	M	North America
33	F	North America
34	M	North America
35	M	North America
36	M	North America
37	F	North America
38	M	North America
39	F	North America
40	F	North America
41	M	North America
42	M	North America
43	M	North America
44	M	North America
45	M	North America
46	M	North America