Religious Conversion in Prison: Prosocial V. Antisocial Identities

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Abstract

In prison many inmates turn to religion for a novel world-view fostering belonging, identity, and management of life. Dogma associated with religious conversion may reinforce anti-social, radical identity or it may encourage pro-social conformity (Sadri 2006, 2007, 2009). This study focuses on religious conversion in prison and nuanced pathways to two types of identity tendencies indicating the potential for either pro-social outcomes supportive of prisoner rehabilitation and desistance, or the potential for anti-social outcomes indicating continuing radicalization and crime. Given the relative dearth of research on either of the above subjects, this study particularly examines conversion in prison and the potential tendencies for, the inclusivist, or the exclusivist, the incorporationist, or the rejectionist tendencies in relation to conversion as an evolving process.

It is important that sound methodological research be conducted to better understand the above tendencies that appear to relate to religion, conversion and community belonging and which without sound research lead to unsupported claims-making (Maruna et al, 2006; O'Connor and Bogue 2010; Worthington et al, 2010; Norcross and Wampold, 2010; Pew, 2012). While it is important for society to provide security against radical recruitment efforts using religion, it is also equally important and fundamental that religion as a means of pro-social identity be preserved (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2008).   Hence, the specific assumption of this study is that religious dogma has a tendency to lead converts in prison to construct community identities that may (or may not) support such radicalization, and that these tendencies arise in the context of religious conversion and identity (Kimball 2002; Hassner 2003; Juergensmeyer 2003; Gulen 2004; Gerwehr, Scott and Daly 2006; Goddard 2006; Aslan 2006; Armstrong 2009; Cox 2009; Cinoglu 2010). By analyzing interviews conducted with both prison chaplains and prisoners who have experienced religious transformation, this research delivers a better understanding of the process leading to new religious and world-view community identities and a better insight into the way in which each of these identities diverge and are justified. What is called for, and this study proposes, is a testable grounded theory providing an understanding of how these tendencies evolve in relation to religious conversion and the individual's understanding of his identity in relation to others about him in both sectarian and secular contexts.

This pilot study is restricted to incarcerated participants experiencing conversion to one of two world religions: Christianity and Islam (Rigsby 2012). Within the prison environment people are susceptible to a transformative dogma (Agnew 1992). An assumption made is that prison creates a micro population where combinations of factors converge to create unique need for and access to "change". Factors, identified as 1) situational "strain" (stigma, labels, fear of being "broken") create a "turning point" leading to a 2) "need" for change expressed as desire for knowledge of self and community, understanding, responsibility, and accountability. Change is attempted through 3) presence of a "means," one of which is "structured religion" and 4) with guidance from "helpers" converts are motivated and guided in an identity transforming process.

Problematic of our times is crime. Solutions increasing the likelihood of desistance and reduction of recidivism are needed.

Religion is one of several treatment programs that may be integrated with other outcomes based initiatives offering individuals desiring a transformative change to accomplish change. In America, religion in prison has historically been discussed in terms of Christianity. However, in light of 9/11 prisoners converting to Islam have become a point of discussion particularly in regards to potential for prison to serve as a breeding ground for groups wishing to recruit terrorists. Hence, two questions arise. First, "whether religion leads to pro-sociality or anti-sociality?" And, if so, "is there a distinction between Islam and Christianity?" Existing literature on religion in prison tends to focus on religion only as an institutional management tool for internal security rather than the religious conversion experience that may serve to rehabilitate and assist successful reentry to society (O'Connor 2004b; Camp et. al. 2006; Camp et. al. 2008; O'Connor and Duncan 2008; O'Connor and Bogue 2010). A need for additional research exploring the transformative experiences of prison converts is needed. Through lived experiences an intimate and meaningful glimpse of change in identity appears. Particularly relevant to concern about the role of Islam in the world's prison systems is the issue of radicalization and recruitment to terrorist associations. This research informs the participants, criminal justice practitioners, religious leaders, and social science professionals in how religious conversion is a process of subtle distinctions in a systematic transformation where helpers and dogma may radicalize or de-radicalize the convert (Butler 1978; Barringer 1998; Fox 2005; Hamm 2007; Cilluffo et. al. 2007; Hamm 2009).

Before moving forward the use of "inmate" and "prisoner" appear in this article. In preparing for this study I used the word inmate rather than prisoner. The word inmate is considered less prejudicial and discriminatory than the word prisoner. The word prisoner has a negative connotation and is a societal label stigmatizing people (Becker 1963; Goffman 1961, 1963).   However, in speaking with the participants they overwhelmingly told me they preferred to be called "prisoners" and that they "detested the word inmate". One goal of this study is to give voice and empower the prison population. In helping them to clarify their transforming identities and to honor them in this research, I use the word "prisoner" often.

Definitions

Key terms appear herein. These terms are instrumental to the understanding of the research.

Conversion. Conversion is understood as a change of religion or a change of religious orientation within a religion entailing "a turning around" in the direction of life. Converts give up one worldview for another. Central to "a turning" is the concept of commitment or recommitment to group membership interaction. In this process they are likely to return to a religion, or change their religion as a means of seeking new beliefs and bonding relationships that provide alternative directions for identity (Heirich 1977; Downton 1980; Kox et. al. 1991; Nagel 1994; Gardner 2004; Goddard 2006). The assumption is that conversion and recommitment are inseparable to devotion and membership solidarity and are measureable by increased interaction with the community of the faith and members of the group (Butler 1978; Barringer 1998; Fox 2005; Hamm 2007; Cilluffo et. al. 2007; Hamm 2009). This interactive process affects the disengaging of an old identity and engaging a new one. When people give up one worldview for another, they experience the process of conversion.

Exclusivist. A person whose position is that only one religion is the way to the truth. One religion is, therefore, uniquely superior to the exclusion of all others (Sadri 2006).

Inclusivist. A person whose position is that one religion has unique and superior truth, but some form of salvation is accessible to followers of other creeds (Sadri 2006).

Incorporationist. A person whose plan in life is to live among people of varied faiths and persuasions. An incorporationist usually has an inclusivist or a pluralist worldview that recognizes secular goals can be achieved through religion (Sadri 2006; 2009).

Rejectionist. A person whose plan of life is to live apart from the society. Such a person is either radically indifferent to other people or hostile to them (Sadri 2006; 2009).

The Literature: A Need for Deep Understanding of Religion and Prison

For the prisoner, religion is but one means to express identity in an otherwise restricted population. Studies of prisoner life experiences and particularly narrative accounts have been neglected. There is need to better understand how religion provides a means for the prisoner to adjust to, manage, and cope with prisonization.

Equally as important is the need to gain understanding of how those desiring change in self and community identity do so through religion.

Rationales

Two rationales drive this research. Both are social in nature and arise from academy and the political climate of our post 9/11 times. Each call seeks to ensure the safety of our society through pro-social controls. Distinctively however, the academic call substantiates the use of religion as a tool for pro-social change in the individual, while the political rationale relates to calls to regulate freedom of religion. The academic rationale calls for understanding how religious transformation may assist pro-sociality, reentry and desistance. The political rationale calls for caution when regulating a particular religion as a public safety initiative. The general position here is if there are distinctions between Islam and Christianity and pro-sociality, facts not claims must regulate free practice of religion.

Academic Call. This research explores how transformation toward a pro-social identity and desistance arises in relation to prison treatment programs. Researchers from several disciplines studying religion, crime, and treatment programs for the incarcerated are calling for better understanding of the role of religion in prison treatment and reentry programs (O'Connor 2004a, 2004b; Maruna et. al. 2006; O'Connor and Duncan 2008; O'Connor and Bogue 2010; Worthington et al, 2010; Norcross and Wampold, 2010; Pew, 2012). We need to understand "deep meaning" associated with transformation (Maruna et.al. 2006). Self -narratives help the participant and researcher to explore identity and how it transforms. Perhaps Maruna et. al. (2006) summarize this process the best, "deep meaning through narrative helps prisoners explore their social community and identity by giving them a participatory role providing a means of expression and an enabling power to take control of their futures." Narrative provides the researcher vital data while simultaneously providing the participant a therapeutic venue through "voice" (O'Connor 2004a, 2004b; Maruna et. al. 2006; O'Connor and Duncan 2008; O'Connor and Bogue 2010; Worthington et al, 2010; Norcross and Wampold 2010). What the literature calls for is sound, verifiable academic research using narrative to uncover themes, concepts and terms to emerge and lead to a testable theory on how religion may assist in creating an outcomes-evidence based measure of change toward a pro-social individual that is best equipped to reenter society. It is this verifiable methodology which may be replicated, tested and quantitative measures developed (O'Connor 2004b; Maruna et al, 2006; O'Connor and Duncan 2008; O'Connor and Bogue 2010; Worthington et al, 2010; Norcross and Wampold, 2010; Pew, 2012; Rigsby 2012). The academic community plays a vital role as it exercises its duty to effectively foster "change promoting roles" in prisoner transformation (O'Connor and Bogue 2010).

Political Call. While many seek to better understand and employ narrative and religious experiences to enhance outcomes in prisoner transformation and assist in understanding of self, belonging, and pro-sociality, others voice a prevalent concern that Islam is being used anti-socially; assisting terrorist networking. Since 9/11, fear of terrorism has led to heightened scrutiny of the role of Islam as a tool for active and wide spread recruitment to terrorism (Pistole, 2003; Lieberman 2006a, 2006b; Newman, 2010; King, 2011). While a legitimate concern, our constitution requires that "safety to the public" be balanced against "infringement of religion" (US Commission on Civil Rights 2008; Greene 2011; Richardson, 2011). A report from the US Commission on Civil Rights stated "researchers must employ an interdisciplinary approach to this phenomenon that is both balanced between security and civil rights." Singling out one religion for study requires care in both procedure and claims making. This research attempts to respond to this need by comparing Christianity and Islam in prison.

Conversion in Prison Studies. A number of studies make the claim that terrorist ideologies may use religion as a gathering point within prisons (Hamm 2007; Cilluffo 2007; Cilluffo et al. 2007; Fighel 2007; Hamm 2009). Two studies are particularly relevant to radicalization and religion in prisoner populations. Mark Hamm's study recruited prisoner participants and interviewed them seeking their understandings of how conversion to religion may affect whether or not they become more pro-social or anti-social or whether they may or may not be receptive to terrorist recruitment (Hamm 2007, 2009). In late 2011, the Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a fifty state survey of prison chaplains (Pew 2012). While this study provides great insight into religion in prison it still fails to include the prisoner him/herself as a participant. Moreover, it fails to provide the deep and thick meaning that is required in order to generate a solid testable theory on conversion and its tendencies toward inclusivity, exclusivity, incorporationist and rejectionist identities.

As noted by Pew (2012), inmate participant studies are hard to accomplish due to prisoners being a protected population for research purposes. The Hamm study and Pew research are noteworthy, however they fail in two fundamental ways. Hamm does not compare Christian and Islamic converts in prison and Pew, failing to gain access to prisoner narratives, relies on Chaplain interpretations about conversion. While they offer confirmation of several conclusions I have drawn, it is this research that responds to the gap in the literature (Rigsby 2012).

Although not researching prisoner conversion specifically, one 1965 study on conversion is particularly relevant (Lofland and Stark 1965). In their article, Lofland and Stark outline five progressive steps for religious conversion. Lofland and Stark alone fail to explain prisoner conversion and transformation. But, by integrating their theory with existing criminological and sociological theories religion's role in transformation of prisoners is greatly enlightened. It is this theory of conversion, modified by sociological and criminological theory, which serves as a foundation for the theory generated from this study.

Methodology, Population and Participants

Qualitative methodology was employed in order to arrive at a grounded theory that extends and refines Lofland and Starks theory of conversion (1965). Patton (2008), and Marshall and Rossman (2006), define qualitative research as uncovering or focusing upon the "individual lived experience." It seeks to interpret complex social interaction (Denzin 1989; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Becker 1998; Patton 2008; Marshall and Rossman 2006). This approach depends on natural settings where participants interact in their own language, on their own terms (Krefting 1991). Qualitative methods are sometimes criticized for lack of generalizability, validity, reliability and susceptibility to bias. However, the aim of qualitative method is solid methodical design seeking a trustworthy portrayal of data and deep understanding leading to knowledge supporting a testable grounded theory (Guba 1981; Krefting 1991; Becker 1998; Marshall and Rossman 2006). Qualitative techniques offer theory construction, extension, and refinement and leads to quantitative research (Snow 2003).

Self narrative accounts provided valuable insight into the decisions participants made for religious conversion and offered first hand deep meaning explaining how the individual perceived his change in identity. The interviews, sometimes lasting 2 hours each, were holistic in seeking to flexibly explore and examine phenomena while assuring systematic reflection on my part.

The study population consisted of prisoners and chaplains in the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). The prisoner sample was recruited from male prisoners incarcerated at the DOC and who self-declared conversion. All twenty-two DOC chaplains were asked to participate in a short demographic style questionnaire. Fifteen chaplains participated in this questionnaire. From these, four chaplains were selected for interviews to understand administrative policies, groups attending religious meetings or programs, and gain insight in interpreting participant narratives. Chaplains cited prisoner motivations for joining a faith group, relationships of prisoners, prisoner experiences, their understanding of commitment building, and their thoughts about why some prisoners may become inclusivist or exclusivist.

More than twenty-two prisoners requested to participate, however the decision was made to stop interviews at twenty-two due to DOC time constraints proximate to the Christmas holiday, and because narratives had reached saturation. I used semi-structured interview questions seeking open-ended, self-narrative aimed at exploring deep meaning in religious experiences in relation to issues that may touch on the tendencies of identity. The small sample size was maintained for two reasons. First this is a pilot study designed to establish a baseline for replication and because it uses qualitative methodology seeking deep meaning to inmate religious experiences in the form of self-narrative. The second reason for the relatively small sample size is related to the time necessary to conduct narrative data analysis and the limitations of money and personnel to assist in analysis.

Assumptions and Research Questions

Unlike quantitative methodology that is traditionally positivist in design, and which begins with hypotheses that are then tested using association between variables, qualitative methodology seeks to interpret complex social interaction (Becker 1998; Marshall and Rossman 2006). In developing this study three assumptions came from the literature review. These three assumptions complement the general questions: "whether religion leads to pro-sociality or anti-sociality" and if so; "is there a distinction between Islam and Christianity?" Three research questions were developed from these assumptions.

Three Assumptions. The first assumption is that religious belief has a tendency to construct community identities that may (or may not) support radicalization, and these tendencies arise in the context of religious conversion and identity. This is followed by the assumption that prison creates a micro population where a combination of factors such as structured religion, cultural strain (stigma, labels, fear of being "broken"), and a need for community identity (responsibility, accountability, knowledge of self,) make people susceptible to a transformative dogma as delivered and controlled by "helpers". Last, conversion and recommitment are inseparable to devotion and membership solidarity and are measureable by increased interaction with the community of the faith and members of the group.

Research Questions. The questions arise in relation to the fact that the literature reflects that all religions have the potential to lead to pro-social as well as anti-social exchanges. Therefore, these research questions particularly address the concern as to whether there are distinctions in Christianity as compared to Islam that relate to pro-social or anti-social identity as measured by the sectarian religious community identity and secular worldview community identity.

1. What are the social and personal reasons given for inmate conversion?
2. How are inclusivist or exclusivist religious community identities formed and justified by the participants?
3. How are incorporationist or rejectionist worldviews formed and justified by the participants?

Findings

Coding and analysis consisted of three phases and lasted six months. The first phase of coding included detailed transcription of audio files noting voice inflection. Concepts that emerged led to themes relating to reasons for, and meaning of conversion as experienced by each participant. Each participant's account developed concepts related to conversion and their understanding of self and that this understanding related to associations with others within the context of their religion as well as general society. It became apparent that self-identity interacted with religious community as well as secular community. Not all religiously inclusive participants were pro-social and incorporational toward broader society. Likewise not all exclusive participants were rejecting or anti-social toward secular society. Figure 1, portrays four initial general concepts that emerged during transcription. In this portrayal, "self" is an individual's identity. Much like Cooley's (1902) "looking glass", self is a reflection of the internal understanding. Moreover, self is reflective of others about us. Understanding of self as pro-social or anti-social arises from tensions in group belonging. It is within this reflexive process that the secular worldview identity and the religious community identity are shaped by both real and perceived tensions.   As in a drama we play expected roles within each identity (Cooley 1902). The self is a composite of others understanding of us, as well as our understanding of the other. This "reality" is tested in daily exchanges with others and constantly adjusted. In context to the themes of identity participants discussed their decisions to turn to religion. Overwhelmingly, participant accounts related feelings of unsurmountable strain and experiencing inability to deal with stigma and labels of prison which led them to a critical "turning point" in life. Desire for change became a motivator leading to religious conversion as one alternative means to transform identity. Conversion as a means of change explains how "self" interacts with secular and sectarian group affiliations and defines the individual's transforming identity. In discussing his continual transformation participant Psi reasoned:

"[*It's*] a day by day process I still don't fully understand. I just accept. Knowledge and understanding comes with relationship. Growing up I wasn't taught what a relationship was. Transformation takes time. Loneliness comes from the inside not outside. You take a stand on what you believe or get away from it. That wall still is being torn down little by little. It goes back to relationship doesn't it? Knowing He is in control and not me and allowing Him to lead me instead of rushing out and doing what I want to do. Transformation is one step at a time, faith, wisdom; it never ends."

Figure 1. Initial Concepts and Themes Coded
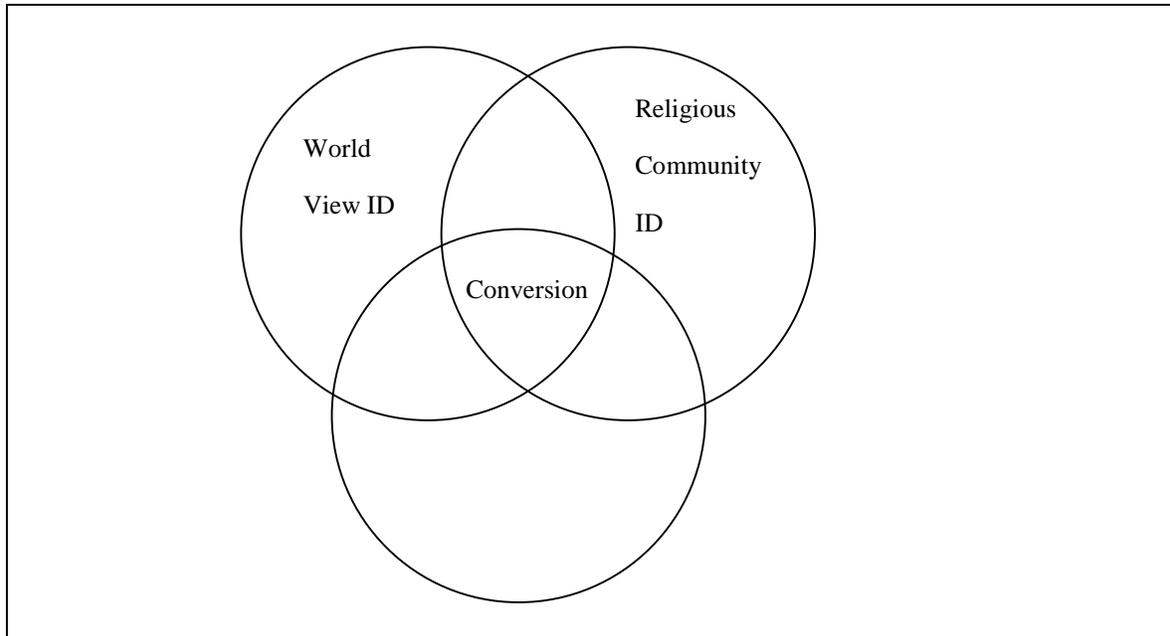
During phase two axial coding provided a means to codify particular descriptive words and phrases used by the participants. These words and phrases, like spokes on a bicycle wheel leading inward to an axle, came to group about particular concepts offering insight in how to operationalize the terms described. Table 1 portrays a subset of key words used by the participants when discussing each of the four conceptual themes.

Table 1 Terms and Phrases Legend: Terms used in narratives in, near, and adjacent to context of four initial conceptual themes identified.

Self ID	Religious Community ID	World View Tensions	Conversion
-desire for knowledge, -Understanding spirit -Self-worth, value -Need to be respected -Love self before others -Turning, change -Survival -Selfishness -To be accountable, -Responsible -Nowhere to turn.. (kicked, lost, angry, mad, hate -Searching self -Trying (many things to find self) -Bottomed out -Be real -Escape box	-Community/ family -Relationships (divine, self, others, brothers) -Religion (box, free, constrained) -Testing real watched -God, The God, Allah -Support -Accountability of.. reinforces responsible to.., duty to.. -being Real	-Free-world.. (religion, practices, traditions, excluded, labeled, never felt part of, watched, skeptical, acceptance, parents teach, no father, cultural thing, separate, not religious, not spiritual, no respect, abuse) -Media.. (distorts, uses, manipulates) -Religion.. (used, distorted, tied to politics, social issues, lack of knowledge and understanding, not staying with the text) -Politics.. (race, oppression, religion abused to justify, agendas, terror, history, distorts love, responsibility, flag and religion, religion as nation) -Being a hypocrite no knowledge, understanding, communication	-To be committed to.. -To be responsible to.. -God/The God -Helpers (cellies, brothers on the tier, volunteers, family, chaplains, media) -Free-world structures -Time -Transformation change -Problems resolved, created in transforming -Spiritual relationship vs. membership "religion" -Personal decision

Each concept is portrayed in association with the conceptual terms related to actual words used by participants in the narratives. For example, the node conversion is clustered by the sub-concepts of responsibility, helpers, commitment, and other terms. Only stronger correlations of $r = .90$ or greater are reflected by connecting lines. Terms moderately strong to strong correlations, $r = .70$, but less than $r = .90$ are not designated by lines. It should be noted that in presenting the correlations in the figures below I treated Pearson's r as a descriptive statistic. That is, I was not trying to generalize beyond the sample to the prison convert population. I only describe the sample itself. This allowed a visualization of words and concepts that clustered about the axis of "conversion." Using these words, concepts were coded concerning conversion, commitment, responsibility, helpers, problems and solutions, and transformation.

Using this procedure I was able to visualize how coded concepts began to relate about a central axis and eventually to central themes. I concluded that particular words used to describe the coded concept of process of conversion were related to the other concepts and the linked words could be used to describe them. Other conceptualized terms portrayed such as inclusive, plural, God-Allah, and time also showed moderately strong, $r = .70$, to strong correlations, $r = .80$. Logically, one might believe that concepts of inclusive and plural would correlate with process of conversion at the same level of strength as exclusive. However, in considering this, the weaker association may be in regards to particular words used to distinguish these concepts. Nonetheless inclusive, plural and process of conversion had a strong correlation, $r = .80$. Figure 2 reflects findings showing strong relationships between concepts of responsibility, commitment, problems-solutions, helpers, conversion and the discussion of reasons for conversion.

Figure 2. Patterns of Concepts Clustered by Strength of Correlation to Process of Conversion
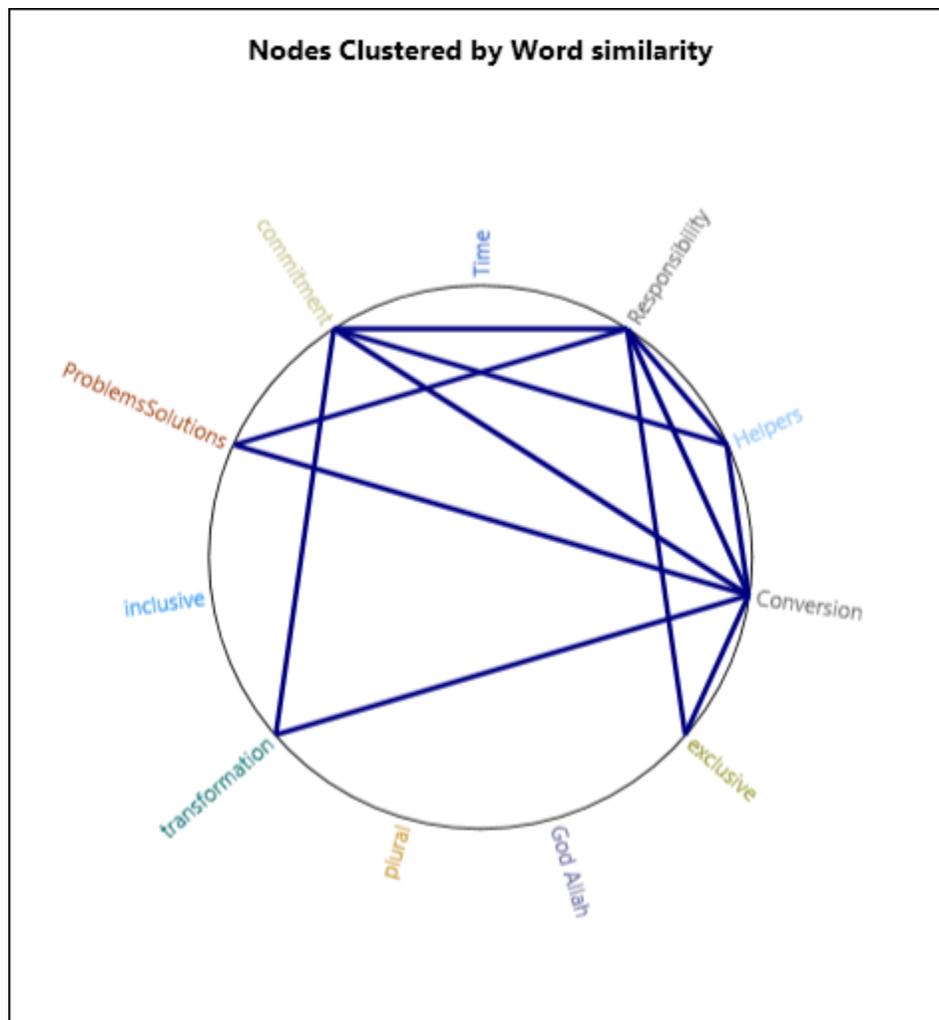
Figure 3 portrays the words used by prisoners to describe the coded concept of "desire in turning" to express and describe needs for survival in prison, understanding of self, and daily practices that strongly correlated, $r = .90$. Other conceptualized terms portrayed such as knowledge, self-identity, spirit, self-worth, change, and selfishness also showed moderately strong, $r = .70$, to strong correlations, $r = .80$.

Figure 3. Patterns of Concepts Clustered by Strength of Correlation to Desire in Turning.
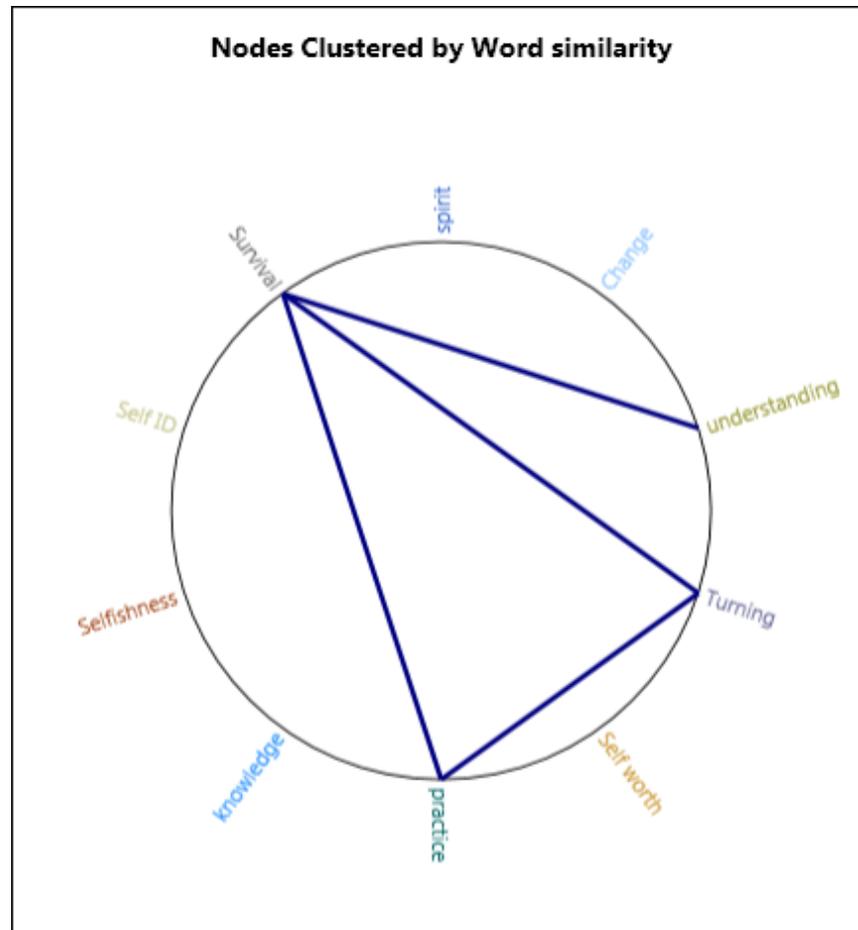
Research question two addresses how converts develop an inclusivist or exclusivist tendency in religious community and how they justify these tendencies. Analysis turns on the individual's understanding of self in relation to the teachings and expectations of the religious community toward other religious groups.

Inclusive or exclusive tendency relate to type of change desired, affiliation with "helpers" that motivate and oversee development of "strong social bonds" with the religious membership, and the building of "commitment." Three related concepts "religious belief", "religious relationships" and "esteem" emerged as important to developing a tendency. Religious belief emerged in their discussion of "spirituality" and "religiosity." Spirituality often appeared early on in the development of the decision to convert. Several, speaking of their faith in terms of spirituality voiced equivocation that the religion they professed was the only way to salvation.

Often, participants spoke of the role of relationships in helping them gain knowledge, understanding, accountability, and responsibility both in terms of themselves and of others in the membership. Although most participants described their membership as being open to visitors and learners, almost twice as many indicated that limits were imposed on those that strayed too far from the group's belief structure. Participants spoke of exclusive groups defining them in two ways. They may be open to visitors and learners as long as the group leader feels comfortable "a rotten apple" is not distorting that membership's beliefs and practices. Alternatively, they may be fully closed, whether hostile or indifferent, to visitors. They may limit the amount of time a potential convert has in which to make a decision to convert.

Likewise, they may accept members from particular faith groups or denominations while rejecting others. Dogma, race, status as an offender, and politics were listed as primary reasons for exclusivity in the free world. However participants agree that inclusivity was encouraged in prison in part due to being "highly visible", "being in a box", "being tested" and "continually watched" by everyone including other prisoners, gangs and security. Nonetheless, exclusivist undertones were detected in the majority of narratives. Comments made by participants in their narratives were used to code the participant as inclusivist or exclusivist. Table 2 presents a numerical distribution of participants coded as inclusive or exclusive by faith. It is remarkable that overall the number coded exclusivists is twice that of inclusivists. Also interesting is that followers of Islam coded Inclusivist over two times that of Christians.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Religious Community Identity by Religion

Religion	Religious Community Identity		Total
	Exclusive	Inclusive	
Muslim	6 (27%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)
Christian	9 (41%)	2 (09%)	11 (50%)
Total	15 (68%)	7 (32%)	22 (100%)

Numerous references were made concerning how "free world" religion as opposed to prison religion is a box of beliefs, traditions, and old laws that no longer apply. Many participants stated that prison religion as distinguished from free-world religion had accepted them and enabled them to have a relationship with others who were seeking to transform, become accountable, and gain self-respect. Whereas Christians tended to speak of their membership in terms of "family", those of the Islamic faith spoke in terms of "community". Even so, in prison religion remains susceptible to certain stigma where labels exclude membership. Virtually all accounts related to sex offenders and in some instances gays. Sex offenders were usually described as despised and rejected by both the prisoner population and religious members. Identification as gay, as well as racial characteristics and ethnicity were prominent identifiers for exclusion in some religious groups, but not in others. Christian groups were described as mostly white and Muslim groups were mostly described as open to all races and ethnicity, however, Mexican-Hispanics were usually referred to by all as being Catholic.

The third research question explores incorporationist (cooperative) and rejectionist transformation and reasons for developing. Three themes emerged in discussion of the individual's religious outlook when describing their role in the world and interaction with society. These statements were in the first person. These were coded as "social responsibility," "cultural responsibility," and "political responsibility." Based upon the individual's descriptive statements individuals were coded as incorporationist or rejectionist. Most participants had something to say about religion's role and involvement in the world and how people or governments may use (or as most often stated "abuse") religion to accomplish social, cultural and political goals. These observations were usually about other people and organizations and were offered usually in the third person, and therefore were not used in coding the individual participant as incorporationist or rejectionist.

Views on the social responsibility of religion toward society and the secular world emerged in the context of "showing the true religion," "showing God/Allah," "way of life or walk of life," "valuing others," "the golden rule," and statements like: "religious texts are road maps to life." It was in context of religion's role in the world, rather than membership within a religion, that the terms "dogma," "pundits," "agendas" and "nationalism" were often cited in creating opposition to associations between people, groups, nations, and societies in daily life exchanges.

Participants noted that dogmatic beliefs and ways of practice within a religion, in moderation, have value and assist in building commitment and identity that bond the group. Yet those identified as inclusive spoke of excessive dogma leading to exclusion and intolerance within the religious community.

In the context of social-cultural responsibility of religion, concepts clustered around race, ethnicity, crime, humanity, and social responsibility. Concerns about labels and stigma were cited as reasons for religion to be active in the world. Politics and nationalism were seen as "abusers" of religion. Those who were coded incorporationist often cited the value that true religion brings to society and how through its teaching of acceptance, responsibility and the golden rule, religion can assist social, cultural and political needs of society. Conversely those coded rejectionist often mentioned that religion is an individual responsibility, that society is evil and should be distanced or segments of society "controlled", and religion should be isolated from secular society. Most participants, both Muslim and Christian, overwhelmingly coded incorporationist (19) while only a few (3) were coded rejectionist.

After analyzing the numerical portrayals of individual self-identities three cross tabulations portraying findings and relationships emerged between these identities. Table 3 presents a cross tabulation of the Inclusive/Exclusive Religious Community Identity by Incorporationist/Rejectionist Worldview Identity.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Religious Community Identity and Worldview Community Identity by Religion

Community Identity

Self-Identity	Religious Community Identity				Total
	Muslim		Christian		
	Inclusive	Exclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive	
Incorporationist	4 (18%)	5 (23%)	1 (4.5%)	8 (36%)	18 (82%)
Rejectionist	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	4 (18%)
Total	5 (22.5)	6 (27.5%)	2 (9%)	9 (40.5%)	22 (100%)*

Surprisingly of the 22 participants only four coded rejectionist toward secular society. These participants used words and phrases related to concepts that disassociated, neutralized and sanctified their anti-social behavior even in light of their profession of religion and spirituality whether exclusive or inclusive. These responses tended to argue that one's religion or spirituality was an individual responsibility and had no bearing on society. The commonality that emerged from these statements is that when social, cultural and political issues overshadow or use religion hate, intolerance, labels, stigma and abuse of groups and individuals occur. When discussing social issues rejection of society arose in context of hate, segregation, or ignorance. "I'm not anti-social, I hate people. I have no tolerance for stupidity." stated participant Kappa. And, on how individuals infiltrate groups and spread hate, participant Iota responded, "They [*another religious group*] have one that is radical. He is very racist, very extremist, 'death to the infidels.' I know he comes in here regularly. I saw him one time." One enlightening observation was by participant Rho who explained how he could do something evil to another and accept it.

"If I want to kill someone, I can have every intention to kill someone. I can shoot them 100 times. If God doesn't want that person to die, that person is not going to die. If I have every intention to save someone and I can do everything possible to save them, if God wants that person to go, that person is going to go and there is nothing to prevent that…" [Rho]

Several narratives described the use of religion to overcome political oppression (both passively and actively) and that the use of religion as a justifier of political violence hurts the public view of religion and the members of the religion. An example comes from participant Gamma who coded both exclusive and rejecting.

"They wanted to argue that we are not really in the last times yet and God hasn't poured out his spirit. I have visions and dreams. All scripture is the inspired word of God. I've done a lot of writing of my own and there are times when I feel that I'm genuinely inspired. I consider myself a POW. Our nation has declared a war on drugs so to speak. People are going to think I have based on burning down the American legion alone are going to think that I have something against veterans and I don't at all. I really have a strong sense that somewhere somehow someday that a real movement can come and will come from that particular environment around me. I mean I might be egotistical and arrogant or prideful but I don't know. I think first and foremost not so much for America but just for my own hometown. Jesus said in Judea or Jerusalem and the uttermost parts of the world so I need to start in my own community. It also says that a prophet is not received in his own nation… many are called but few are chosen." [Gamma]

Interestingly exclusivist religious outlook did not necessarily lead to a rejectionist worldview in a way that would be conducive to radicalization or terrorism. Most religious exclusivists found a way to be "in" the world but not "of" the world or chose to keep to their own beliefs and communities and remain isolated. Only rarely were tendencies of the kind that would alert security agencies of radicalization processes evinced as a result of religious conversion. Surprisingly, exclusivist undertones were detected in the majority of narratives. Contrary to media reports and concern for prison Islam serving a role in radical recruitment, is that more Muslims coded inclusive/incorporationist than Christians.

The Theory of Transforming Identities in Prison

Lofland and Stark's 1965 theory of conversion refined by other theory explains prisoner conversion and extends it to explain developing tendencies in identity. The integration of Lofland and Stark with several existing theories is portrayed in Table 4. The left column portrays the steps of conversion summarized in Lofland and Stark's original theory, the right column portrays the integrated theories that provide steps of conversion and how identity tendencies develop in the unique prison environment. Each step proposed creates a subtle distinction or nuances for developing tendencies. These multiple nuances may lead to either an inclusive or exclusive religious identity and either a rejecting or incorporating worldview identity.

Table 4. An Integrative Theory of Lofland and Stark (1965) Theory of Conversion with Criminological and Sociological Theories to Explain Transforming Identities in Prison.

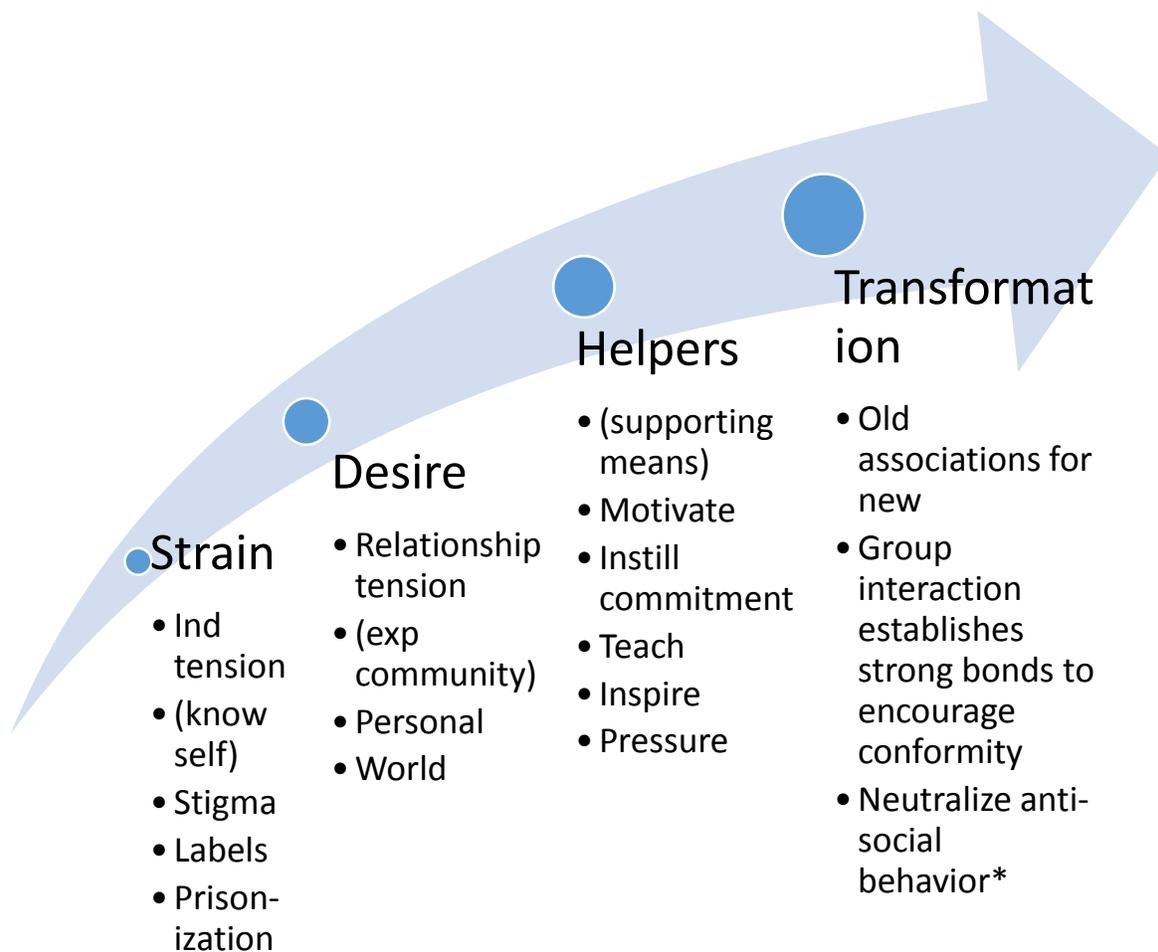|	
Experiences of acute tension	Strain of prison (General Strain Theory, [Agnew 1992, 2006] associated with Labeling and Stigma [Goffman 1959, 1961, 1963; Becker 1963])
Divine Precepts "turning point"	Turning point
Religion as a problem-solver	Desire to seek change through religion
Becoming a religious seeker	
Formation of affective bond(s)	Helper(s) create controls that obligate conformity to group values and norms (Social Bonds/ Control Theory [Hirschi 1969])
Extra-cult attachments	(Neutralization [Sykes and Matza 1957])
Convert becomes a deployable agent through intensive interaction	

Secular-Sectarian System Theory of Identity and Sociality in Prison

The theory explains how through religion and group memberships individuals evaluate and transform their identity as part of a system of existence within the prison system. The process is part of a system where developing identity of self, religious community and worldview interact within the unique prison environment to assist the convert in transforming their life. Dependent upon a number of associations along the pathway the individual may adapt subtle distinctions that transform them pro-socially or anti-socially.

By integrating concepts from sociological theories of strain (Agnew 1992) with stigma and labeling (Goffman 1963, Becker 1963) and criminological theories of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957) with social bonding (Hirschi 1969) Lofland and Stark's theory of conversion extends to evidence reasons for conversion in prison and the way in which religious and worldview communities arise and are justified and transform the individual's identity.

Figure 4 visualizes the process of prison conversion and transformation. It is in this environment that strain and desire aided by labels and stigma lead to a resolution or goal to change. The desired change may emerge as desire to change self and relationships or simply a desire to change and manage the prison environment. It is here that dogma of untrained and non-traditional helpers may create alternative pathways to access and use religion as one of several means of transformation and change. Again helpers may be pure in teaching the religion or seek to distort it for personal agendas. They may be educated in the religion and its traditions or they may not. As transformation begins, helpers hold converts accountable through new developing associations, responsibilities and practices. The convert through the "box" of religion is constantly held accountable and tested for his "real" identity. Throughout this learning process controls assure conformity to group values and norms while neutralization provides a pathway to explain continued need to adhere to beliefs and practices, correct for drift, and promote acceptance of change and transformation in behavior.

Figure 4. Religious Conversion and Transformation Model: a System Theory of Secular-Sectarian Identity Transformation and Sociality in Prison.

Strain
- Ind tension
- (know self)
- Stigma
- Labels
- Prison-ization

Desire
- Relationship tension
- (exp community)
- Personal
- World

Helpers
- (supporting means)
- Motivate
- Instill commitment
- Teach
- Inspire
- Pressure

Transformation
- Old associations for new
- Group interaction establishes strong bonds to encourage conformity
- Neutralize anti-social behavior*

Within the unique system of prison several pathways offer subtle distinctions or nuances in how tendencies of identity develop. The narratives explain how the individual transforms and develops a new understanding of self and community belonging and how tendencies toward a pro-social or anti-social identity arise. Several steps create exchanges for the tendencies to develop and transform the individual.

In prison Strain Theory applies particularly well (Agnew 1992, 2006). During prisonization frustration, rejection, anger, fear, and desire creates "need for change". The individual begins to seek out alternatives to adapt or seek alternatives. Initially the individual may seek to change their environment and seek protective associations or they may seek to change their inner being. Strain is intensified by labels and stigma and creates a spoiled identity to which the individual must react (Goffman 1959, 1961, 1963, Becker 1963). Even in prison labels attach and have consequences which stigmatize the population. As described by Becker, (1963, 1998) de-labeling is a difficult if not impossible process because social stigma is reinforced institutionally throughout society and no institutionalized de-labeling processes are systematically employed. This became particularly apparent in the narratives. Prison as a total institution, maximizes the potential for tension and strain. Within prison inmates suffer an intensified degree of labeling from society, media, other prisoners and personnel. As identified in most of the narratives, religion and chaplaincy provide prisoners a means to cope with labeling and stigma, as they seek to understand themselves, belonging, safety and provides a way out. As the individual connects with "helpers" and others a new community of belonging develops.

This new community brings with it new attachments, duties and responsibilities both to self and to others. It is here that Social Bonds or Control Theory assists in strengthening attachments, commitments, and beliefs consistent with dominant norms of the group with which they are affiliated. Involvement in activities and practices support behavior and norms. Dependent on the group affiliates and "helpers" the group will reinforce change in the individual toward sub-cultural, counter-cultural or dominant norms and values. The bonds of the group serve to support behavior and values of the religious community and that may in turn support or oppose norms of the dominant society (Anderson 2006; Connor 1972, 1993). As participants noted often, it is the "helper" and the associations developed within the religious group referred to as "family" by Christian converts and as "community" by Islamic converts which regulate behavior. Hirschi (1969), in his discussion of controls noted that strong bonds keep socialized human beings from deviating and keep us from being anti-social. Participants voiced that in prison religion offers one means of somewhat controlling one's life and destiny (place) while creating strong social bonds. In short, strong bonds enforce the individual's connectivity with group identity. The dogma that helpers teach has the potential to authorize or excuse anti-social attitudes and behavior consistent with the process of neutralization used by deviants and offenders (Sykes and Matza 1957).

When prisons suffer a shortage of trained and educated personnel and volunteers in chaplaincy, prisoners must turn to unqualified helpers. When untaught and inexperienced helpers, or those with political, social or cultural agenda use religion for personal objectives religion may become an exclusivist religious means for constructing social bonds and creating a learning atmosphere that supports anti-social outcomes such as rejecting society or segments thereof, as well as crime and terrorism (Sadri 2007, 2009). As prisoners convert they are continually observed, "watched", and "tested" in an effort by others to determine whether they are "real". Guards, administrators, prisoners continually "test" to determine whether the individual is a "real" convert or not. As narratives explained, the test of reality translates to the individual being truly who they say they are. It goes to the essence of self-identity and group affiliation. Even those who are "real" may undergo a period of "drift" between old and transforming identity, or they may swiftly and fully transform to a new identity and community. Religion strengthens the individual in passing the test. Religion serves as a "box" within which practices, rules, and dogmas hold people accountable. "Sacred" practices help balance against secular "profane" practices. As noted overwhelmingly in the accounts the individual's "helper" and members of the group reinforce interpretations of the religion in justifying behavior in respect to particular causes. Neutralization answers the question "how could such a good person do such a bad thing" as individual members learn dogma that allows them to "disassociate" their behaviors and place blame on others (Sykes and Matza 1957). The transformative steps of bonding and neutralization are highly interactional between the convert, other individuals, and institutional structure. Interaction within the group and with "helpers" lead to strong bonds through relationships (attachments), teachings (commitment), practices (involvement) and dogma (belief). This reinforces the duty to transform consistent with the new group's norms and values.

Conclusions

Prisoner transformation through religious conversion is a varied pathway where the reasons for seeking change, for selecting religion as a means of change, the selection of a helper, the religious group affiliated with and the effect of social, cultural and political factors create subtle distinctions in how one experiences conversion or not and if so, how transformation develops and proceeds toward anti- or pro-social outcomes.

Does this tell us anything that we may later quantify and statistically base predictions upon? In responding to this question there are seven points worthy of consideration.

First, religious conversion and transformation in identity is a "much nuanced pathway".

Second, what is found in both religions is that there are many "forks in the road" during the conversion process and transforming identities. Forks were evidenced in both the inclusivist and exclusivist religious community identity and in the incorporationist and rejectionist worldview identity.

Third, the narratives evidenced that religion is just one alternative for gaining knowledge of self. Other alternatives are education, counseling, and gangs.

Fourth, in comparing Christian and Islamic participants it emerged that not all of either faith who experience religious conversion and become inclusivist or exclusivist and in both types there are both incorporationists and rejectionists. Of the 22 participants 2 coding exclusive and 2 coding inclusive were rejecting of society. Moreover of those coding both exclusive and rejecting one was Christian and one was Islamic. Most participants were cooperative toward larger society whether inclusive or exclusive in religious identity.

Fifth, in each religion no definitive process of radicalization emerged although one participant professing Islam and that coded exclusive/rejecting spoke of hate of white people and racism. And, in another case a professing Christian that coded exclusive/rejecting spoke of leading people in violent opposition to government.

Sixth, the four participants coded rejectionist used particular words related to specific concepts that disassociated and sanctified their anti-social behavior even in light of their profession of religion and spirituality.

Seventh, descriptive words and phrases may be operationalized in relation to concepts and scales created to quantify findings in future studies.

Policy Implications for Corrections and Directions for Research

This research establishes a model study for giving prisoners a voice in their transformation, it offers guidelines for study of religious conversion in prison, provides assistance to the correctional system and supports the professional and volunteer chaplaincy as part of an overall prison treatment program designed to help individuals seeking to change their lives pro-socially to do so, to desist from crime and thereby reduce their chances of returning to prison. Findings support a conclusion that isolating one religion as a radicalizing source unduly burdens free practice of religion and fails to recognize other religions have similar tendencies. As noted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2008) restrictions on any non-Christian religion must not result in having their "free exercise" rights to practice religion unduly burdened by the state without a compelling interest.

Prison administrators, chaplains, psychologists, counselors are better equipped to understand how including religion or spirituality into correctional treatment assists desistance (stopping crime) and thereby helps prisoners help themselves not return to prison. It promotes a better understanding of how involving the felon in an active role will promote possible transformation to a pro-social member of society (Norcross & Wampold, 2010; Worthington, Hook, Davis, & McDaniel, 2010).

Importantly, the findings support the need for an interdisciplinary approach where treatment professionals and institutional administrators work holistically with religious services as part of an overall treatment program. Simultaneously it speaks to the need for trained volunteers for all religious faiths served by the prison chaplaincy programs. It therefore provides support and direction for prison chaplaincy and volunteer programs and enhances chaplaincy as a correctional profession.

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