

That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It...Or Am I?

**Applying a narrative based
framework to criminal desistance
through Circles of Support and
Accountability**

IIRP 15th World Conference

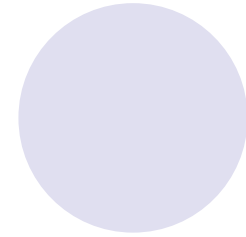
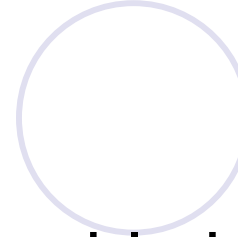
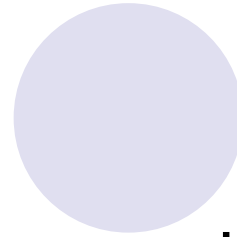
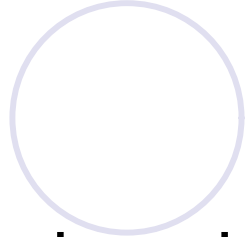
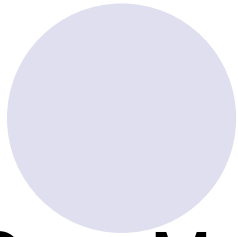
Bethlehem, PA

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Derek Miodownik

Circles of Support & Accountability (CoSA) in Vermont

- A CoSA is a group of 3-5 trained and supervised volunteers who enter into structured, voluntary and mutual relationship with an individual reentering the community after incarceration.
- The ultimate goal of CoSA is no more victims.
- The offender is known as the “Core Member”



- Core Members have done considerable harm (domestic, violent, sexual).
- Core Members are also faced with the prospect of (re)building a community life after a significant period of confinement without a positive social network, as well as with the many challenges (i.e. housing, employment) that are endemic to reentry.
- CoSAs are developed and convene prior to the Core Member's release and meet weekly for at least one year.



- Voluntary basis for all parties leverages informal authority in an otherwise formal control system.
- An intentional microenvironment to support self-efficacy.
- Coordinated in conjunction with Corrections supervision.
- Regularly scheduled Case Conferences include CoSA, Probation Officer, family, service/treatment providers.



Radical Inclusion

The Restorative Reentry Program is committed to a philosophy of *radical inclusion*. The message implicit in this policy is that:

- you are a member of this community with a responsibility to be a contributing, law abiding citizen;
- you don't have the option of removing yourself from this responsibility for yourself and to the community by behaving otherwise; and
- your community will stand by you while you correct your behavior.

The Shadow Cast by Formal Justice

Community is made from conflict as much as from cooperation; the capacity to solve conflict is what gives social relations their sinew.

Professionalizing justice steals the conflicts, robbing the community of its ability to face trouble and restore peace. Communities lose their confidence, their capacity, and, finally, their inclination to preserve their own order. They instead become consumers of police and court services with the consequence that they largely cease to be communities.

Nils Christie (1977). Conflicts as Property. *British Journal of Criminology*.



"Well, I, for one, am grateful for the beefed-up police presence."



The Shadow Cont.

The first thing to understand is that the public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves. No amount of police can enforce Civilization where the normal causal enforcement of it has broken down.

The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jane Jacobs
(1961)



"Gee, Tommy, I'd be lost without your constant peer pressure."

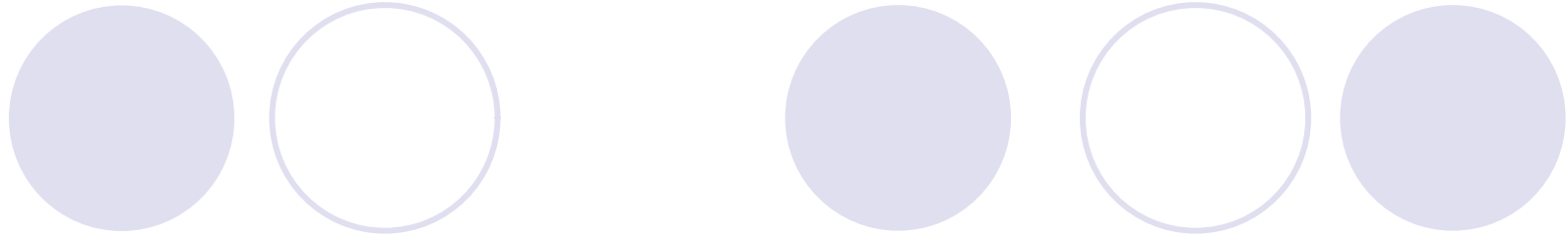
Circles of Support & Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario

Robin J. Wilson, Janice E. Picheca & Michelle Prinzo, 2005

- To examine the impact of the project, two studies were conducted.
- The first study examined the experiences of the various members of COSA: Core Members (the offenders); Circle Volunteers, and Professionals and Agencies affiliated with the project.
- In addition, members of the community-at-large were surveyed to determine their views regarding COSA, and its existence in their community.




- The results from that first study show that the COSA initiative has had a profound effect on all stakeholders: offenders, community volunteers, affiliated professionals, and the community-at-large.
- Core Members generally reported that while they initially felt mixed emotions about COSA, over time, they felt thankful for having its help.



- 90% of Core Members reported that in the absence of COSA, they would have had difficulties adjusting to the community.
- Two-thirds felt they likely would have returned to crime without the help from COSA.



- Study 2 consisted of an examination of the impact of COSA on recidivism.
- A group of 60 high risk sexual offenders involved in COSA after having been released at the end of their sentence were matched to a group of 60 high risk sexual offenders who had been released at the end of their sentence, but who did not become involved in COSA.
- Offenders were matched on risk; length of time in the community; and prior involvement in sexual offender specific treatment.

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- Results show that the offenders who participated in COSA had significantly lower rates of any type of reoffending than did the offenders who did not participate in COSA.
 - Specifically, offenders who participated in COSA had a **70%** reduction in sexual recidivism in contrast to the matched comparison group (5% vs. 16.7%);
 - A **57%** reduction in all types of violent recidivism (including sexual – 15% vs. 35%).
 - An overall reduction of **35%** in all types of recidivism (including violent and sexual - 28.3% vs. 43.4%).



WELCOME BACK
RECIDIVISTS!

m. waken



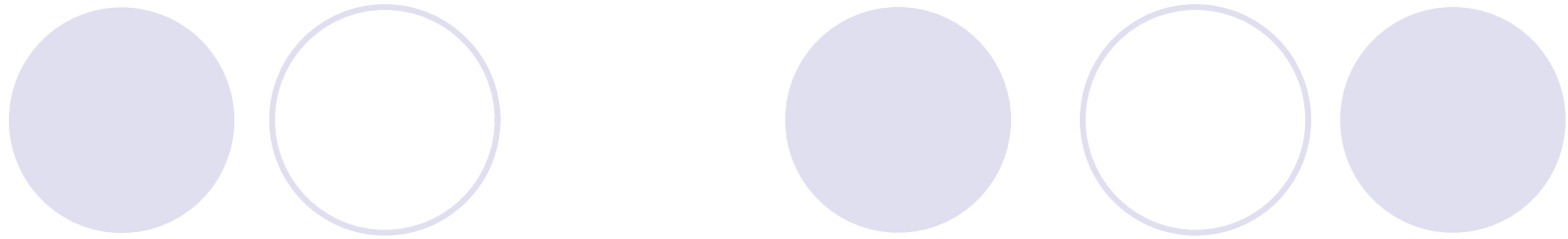
Beyond “What works?”: “Why and How?”

- Although [this] evaluation-based research is very useful in answering the question, “Does this type of program work (on average, overall)?,” it tells us little about *how* rehabilitation works, *why* it works with some clients, or *why* it fails with others.

(Maruna citing Chen, 1990; Palmer, 1994; Pawson & Tilley, 1997)

Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild
Their Lives, Shadd Maruna, 2001

- Not just ceasing...desisting.
- The long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending.
- Desistance from crime is not an event that happens, rather it is the sustained absence of engaging in criminal behavior.

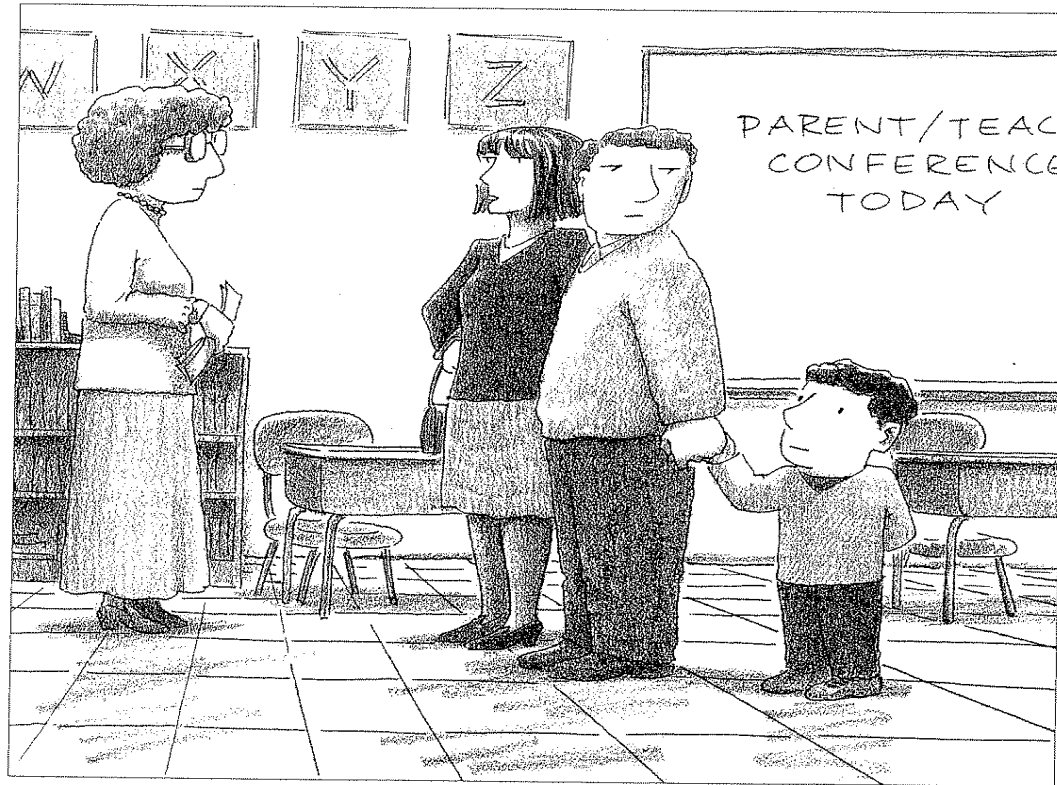


- The focus is not on the transition or change, but rather on the maintenance of crime-free behavior in the face of life's obstacles and frustrations.
- Sustained desistance most likely requires a fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self.



Narratology

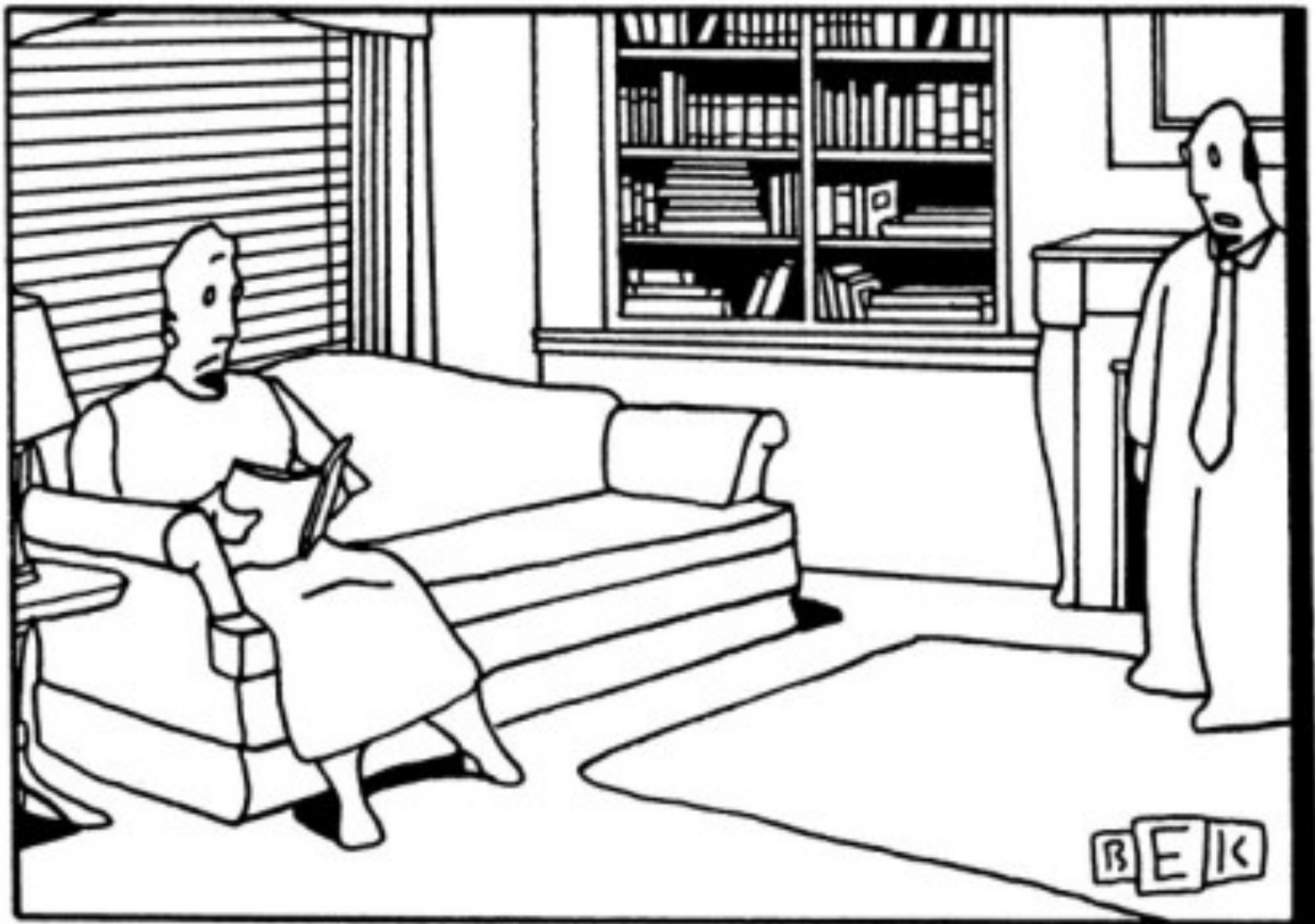
- Adults create an internalized story—or personal myth—to provide their lives with unity, purpose, and meaning (McAdams).
- This sense-making commonly takes the form of a life story or self-narrative.
- The self-narrative is increasingly understood as a critical part of an individual's personality and inner self.




*"We're not too concerned about college . . .
Dale and I are pretty sure he's going to prison."*



- The primary data in such research are the stories that individuals tell to account for their behavior.
- The narratologist's interest in these narratives is not so much the facts they contain (what happened in their lives) but rather in the meanings the individuals attach to such facts—how they choose frame the events of their lives.

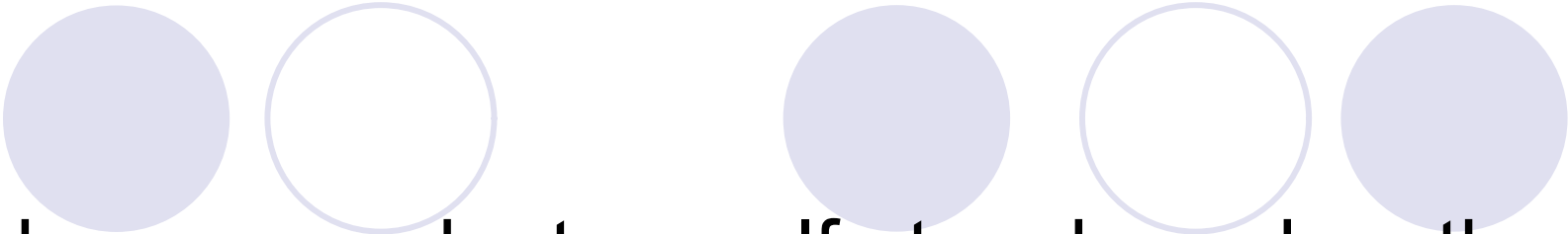


"Let's drive up to New England and watch the leaves die."

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- The narrative identity can be understood as an active information processing structure, a cognitive schema, or a construct system that is both shaped by and later mediates social interaction.
 - Essentially, people construct stories to account for what they do and why they did it. These narratives impose an order on people's actions and explain people's behavior with a sequence of events that connect up to explanatory goals, motivations and feelings.



- These self-narratives then act to shape and guide future behavior, as people act in ways that agree with the stories or myths they have created about themselves.
- The construction and reconstruction of this narrative, integrating one's perceived past, present, and anticipated future, is itself the process of identity development in adulthood.

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- Each person adopts a self-story based on the limited range of interpretations or narrative archetypes “proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” (Maruna citing Foucault 1998).
 - A person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though it is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going (Maruna citing Giddens 1991).



Charles is based on an old Ukranian folktale

Liverpool Desistance Study

- Two carefully matched sample groups: one group that is still active in criminal behavior--*persisters*-- and one that is actively going straight-- *desisters* (over 1 year crime free).
- 50 participants: 30 desisting, 20 persisting.
- Using narrative methodology, the life stories of the participants were content analyzed and compared quantitatively and qualitatively for the systematic differences between the groups.



Condemnation Script

- Active offenders in the sample largely saw their life scripts as having been written for them a long time ago.
- The long-term, persistent offenders generally said that they are sick of offending, sick of prison, and sick of their position in life.
- Yet they said they feel powerless to change their behavior.



"Just don't be yourself."



Redemption Script

- Begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator.
- Gets involved with drugs/crime to achieve some sort of power over bleak circumstances.
- With the help of someone who believed in the ex-offender, is able to do what he was always meant to do.
- Seeks to give something back to society as a display of gratitude (and self worth).



Thematically, the narratives that desisters make out of their lives differ from those of active offenders in three fundamental ways:

- 1. An establishment of the core beliefs that characterize the person's "true self"
- 2. An optimistic perception (some might say useful "illusion") of personal control over one's destiny
- 3. The desire to be productive and give something back to society, particularly the next generation



"Hey, pal, do you have any idea who I think I am?"



Generativity

- Maruna's research suggests that offenders who create what he refers to as generative narratives have a higher rate of success.
- Termed by Erik Erikson, generativity has been defined as: "The concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation manifested through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to benefit youth and foster the development and well-being of individuals and social systems that outlive the self" (Maruna citing McAdams & de St. Aubin 1998)

The DNA of Desistance

- Five distinct themes that can hopefully be identified, and maximized, in the narratives of individuals reentering community life after incarceration:
(excerpted and paraphrased from Maruna citing Stewart et al. 1988)
- 1. *Caring Versus Self-Absorption and Failures of Caring*
Expressions of concern with the capacity to care for others.
- 2. *General Concerns With Generativity*
Expressions of concern about making a lasting contribution, especially to future generations.



- 3. *Children*

The care and nurturance of one's child.

- 4. *Need to Be Needed*

Expression of an inner need to be needed by another or by others in general.

- 5. *Productivity Versus Stagnation*


Expressions of developing and growing through generative outlets. Rather than simply the performance of an occupation-related task, clear emotional investment and commitment must be involved.




"It's interesting—with each conviction I learn a little more about myself."

Rebiographing

- Selectively and creatively reinterpreting past events to suit future aspirations (Maruna citing Rotenberg).
- Not all of the roles played by offenders have been deviant ones. All have played the role of thief or junkie, but they have also occasionally played the loving parent, working-class hero, loyal friend, and so forth. By falling back on these other identities, they are able to deemphasize the centrality of crime in the life history and suggest that they were just normal people all along.

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- LDS desisters recast their criminal pasts not as the shameful failings that they are but instead as the necessary prelude to some newfound calling.
 - If this can be accomplished, desistance can be reshaped as a process of “maintaining one’s sense of self or one’s personal identity” rather than the “schizophrenic” process of rejecting one’s old self and becoming a “new person” (Maruna citing Waldorf 1991 & Rotenberg 1978)


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- Although self-narratives do change, this change tends to involve incremental, internally consistent shifts rather than a wholesale overthrow of the previous self-story.
 - The life stories of desisting narrators maintained this equilibrium by connecting negative past experiences to the present in such a way that the present good seems an almost inevitable outcome.

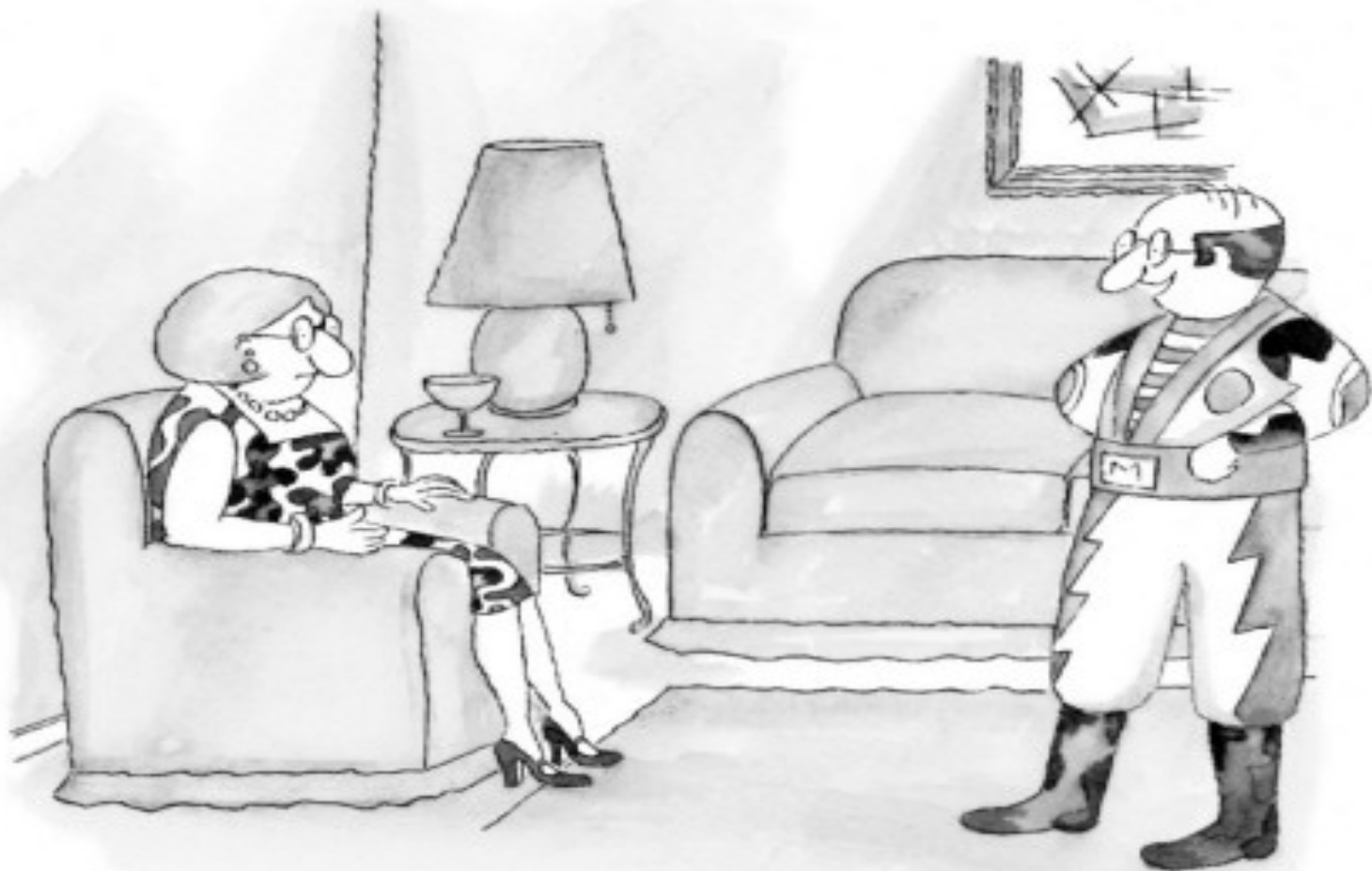


"But that was the old me—this is the remix."

Not Being Bad vs. Making Good

- Avoidant motives can be powerful catalysts for action, but they may not be enough to sustain long-term resolve against powerful temptations.
- The skills required for initiating behavior change are usually different from those required for maintaining it (Maruna citing Earls, Cairns, & Mercy 1993).

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- Building a life that diminishes the willingness of an ex-offender to recidivate calls upon the generative potential of their past, present and future self story.
 - The informal authority derived from community members' voluntary support and accountability may best facilitate the construction and realization of these mutually beneficial narratives.



Victoria Roberts

"I can't seem to live in the present, you don't want me to live in the past, so I'm opting for the future as I see it."



CONTACT INFORMATION

- Derek Miodownik
- VT Department of Corrections
- 103 South Main St.
- Waterbury, VT 05671
- 802 951 5026
- Derek.Miodownik@state.vt.us