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Users

FROM NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE TO NARRATIVES OF PEACE: THE
RENUNCIATION OF VIOLENCE AS A DISCURSIVE PHENOMENON

by

Agatha Glowacki
A Dissertation
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From Narratives of Violence to Narratives of Peace: The Renunciation of Violence as a
Discursive Phenomenon

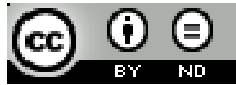
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving parents, who left everything behind over thirty years ago and ventured forth with their infant daughter into America to provide her with a better future. Whatever I have achieved is because of their courageous act of sacrifice.

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ABSTRACT

FROM NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE TO NARRATIVES OF PEACE: THE RENUNCIATION OF VIOLENCE AS A DISCURSIVE PHENOMENON

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George Mason University, 2013

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This study seeks to understand how individuals who have renounced their affiliations to violent organizations, referred to as “formers,” make sense of their transformation through a morphological analysis of their narratives to uncover possible ways this process of renunciation could be encouraged and supported. A hermeneutics of renunciation that frames change as a process of narrative identity transformation bounded by particular discourses provides a powerful means of exploring the dynamics of this transformation. This study examines whether the renunciation of former gang members, right-wing extremists, and terrorists can be facilitated through the presence of specific discourses around transformation. The central argument of the study is that “supporting discourses” can enable the decision to renounce violence by offering models of belief change, political activism, and redemption. Furthermore, “alternate identity discourses” can support the decision to renounce by providing discursive resources to use in

reconstructing a new narrative identity. The purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of the process of renouncing violence, also referred to in some disciplines as deradicalization and disengagement, by providing a social constructionist and post-structuralist perspective that may be of benefit to policy makers, support services and educators, conflict resolution practitioners, as well as to the academic community.

Theoretically, it is demonstrated that identity transformation occurs along the lines of nonlinear narrative change dynamics and that particular discourses play a key role in enabling renunciation. It is also demonstrated that the memoirs of formers represent a specific narrative genre, termed the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*, which can be used as an identity model to support an evolution towards the renunciation of violence.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Much work has been done in the field of conflict analysis and resolution on the prevention of violence, but less focus has been granted towards encouraging individuals already affiliated with violent organizations to leave (Lund 1996; Stinchcomb 2002; Ury 2002; Weine 2009). One reason may be the inherent difficulty of influencing people who have already formed an identity around violence to change, according to social psychological theories of change (Kritsonis 2005; Lewin 1947; Prochaska and DiClemente 1994; Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross 1992). However, such change does occur among some individuals, albeit a limited number, and this study aims to explore this transformation in order to contribute to this under-explored area of research.

1.1 Overview

This particular study departs from the orthodox social psychological approach to behavioral change, an approach grounded in a positivist epistemology that claims unquestioningly “the privilege of knowing the mind of the other” (Richmond 2008). In contrast, the following research is grounded in a post-positivist epistemology that problematizes the claim to interpret the “unknowable other” (Richmond 2008). This approach assumes a researcher does not know something about the research subjects that they themselves do not already know at some level. Such an approach engenders a

research design that creates a kind of “listening,” in which insights are gained by looking to the meaning making processes of the research subjects themselves.

This study seeks to understand how individuals who have renounced violence, referred to as “formers,” make sense of their transformation through a morphological analysis of their narratives in the hopes of potentially uncovering ways this process of renunciation could be encouraged and supported. There is some precedent for studying the autobiographical works of people who have renounced violence in this manner. For example, criminologist Shadd Maruna (2001) has studied life narratives to gain insights into desistance from crime. He argues that allowing ex-offenders to tell their stories is the best method of capturing their recovery and understanding how they create new lives for themselves (Maruna 2001). My inquiry is guided by the theoretical influence of narrative theory, which provides a way in which the narratives of my research subjects can be understood, since narratives “provide privileged access for understanding the way individuals articulate their experiences” (Glover 2004). My theoretical assumption is that my research subjects have come to understand their experiences about renunciation through writing their autobiographies since “we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner 1987).

I eschew the aforementioned social psychological theories of change since I view the person as a narrative Self, composed of various narrative identities that comprise a narrative identity system. Instead, I frame change through a social constructionist and post-structuralist lens of identity transformation that positions identity as being socially constructed and embodied in narrative form (Burr 1995). Because it is a creation, this

perspective sees the narrative Self as something inherently dynamic rather than static and stable, and identity as being contested, unstable, and discursively constructed. In this study, I define the dynamics of this identity transformation as occurring in three stages, which include narrative identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction. Using this frame, I view a “former” as having undergone a process of narrative change in which he or she has rejected their prior narrative identity for a new, alternative one.

At the same time, my theoretical assumption is that individuals are embedded in dominant discourses that serve to constrain their ability to change. Change can, and does, occur however, and my analysis of this process is informed by the concept of resistance as defined by post-structuralist theorist Michel Foucault (Foucault 1982). This approach sees change as intrinsically bounded by particular discourses. A core assumption of this perspective is that certain discourses produce permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible. My specific interest for this study is on the discourses within which my research subjects were embedded that constructed their identities as moral actors and justified their violent acts, how these discourses changed, and how this affected their transformation. A question I pose for this research is whether the process of renunciation could be facilitated through the presence of specific discourses around transformation—which I label “supporting discourses”—and by the presence of discourses to use in rebuilding a narrative identity—which I label “alternate identity discourses.” If so, drawing attention to these specific types of discourses that support the renunciation process could highlight an opportunity for practitioners to utilize.

Specifically, I look to the memoirs of my research subjects to answer the question: *What can we learn about the relationship of discourse to this process of renunciation from how the individual understands their own transformation and the story they tell about it?* By looking at the role of discourse, my focus departs from the traditional analytic category of personal experience, problematized by scholars. Historian Joan Scott (1991), for example, has questioned the authority of experience, arguing that a sole focus on experience ignores its discursive construction and thus decontextualizes it. My study, however, does not completely discount experience; instead, it seeks to redefine it as a discursive construction. Much of the contemporary literature on subjectivity rejects a dualistic framing of the individual person versus social discourse but sees them instead as interpenetrating (J. W. Scott 1991). Scholars such as John Toews (1987) reject discounting experience completely, instead encouraging a redefining of it as discursively, and politically, constructed and a linguistic event in and of itself. According to Toews, “experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (Toews 1987).

This perspective on subjectivity as interpenetrating between experience and social discourse is important for my research since it implies experience can both confirm what is already known and upset what is taken for granted (Toews 1987). The dynamics of this upset—which occurs when different meanings are in conflict, leading to a need to readjust understanding—is something my research subjects conceivably had to face in the process of their renunciation, and which is described in their narratives.

1.2 The Evolution of a Research Agenda

When I first started my research, I intended to analyze “violent extremists.” I very quickly found many problems inherent in this framing of my research, to include issues of power, marginalization, and delegitimization. To start with, the term “violent extremist” is heavily contested and lacks any clear definition. Furthermore, delving into the complexities of the debates made me aware of the implicit positioning being done by those in power in attempting to define this term. I also uncovered the existence of long-standing dominant discourses around the label of “extremist” that have become taken-for-granted knowledge.

The term “violent extremist” has become defined in policy and academic circles to refer to those motivated by an extremist ideology to commit acts of violence. What exactly that means remains unclear. The term “violent extremist” is an *exonym*, meaning a label given to a group or category of people by those other than the people it refers to. The most commonly used definition of an “extremist” refers to someone who has adopted an ideology that violates common moral standards and norms, and “extremism” as the “activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a person or group far removed from the ordinary” (Bartoli and Coleman 2009). However, as Bartoli and Coleman (2009) point out, the problem with this definition is the inherently subjective nature of defining exactly what constitutes “common” moral standards and “ordinary” activities. Furthermore, they highlight how these terms often end up being defined from the perspective of those in power, and invariably become used pejoratively (Bartoli and Coleman 2009). I quickly realized, therefore, there was no set criteria or standards to

objectively define an “extremist,” and the term itself was laden with issues of contestation and power dynamics; in fact, the term had become defined through discourses.

Foucault, who first conceptualized discourse as a driving force behind the creation of truth or knowledge, conceived of knowledge as an “invention” and truth as merely an interpretation, rather than a progressive approximation to the reality of things in and of themselves (Foucault 1977, 131). In his studies, he sought to show how knowledge was a construction of rationalizations, or discourses, which were always intimately linked to power. He spent his life writing about certain specific discourses in a number of spheres in society (Smart 1985, 8). Foucault later developed a theory of discursive formations by studying the conceptions, structures, and forms of organization of knowledge that generate discourses. In *Archeology of Knowledge*, he introduced a new mode of analysis he referred to as “archeology” meant to investigate this domain (Smart 1985, 32). Applying Foucault’s ideas, I began to see how the current discourses about extremism had been socially constructed, in a way closely associated with power, politics, and particular agendas.

One dominant discourse in the U.S. within policy and counterterrorism communities, as well as among elements of the wider American public, associates an extremist with being Islamic. Going back to the example of the Oslo shootings, many mainstream American pundits and media sources—to include the Washington Post and Wall Street Journal—immediately after the incident proclaimed the attacks as the work of Islamic terrorism (Waldron and Gharib 2011). Before any evidence was even uncovered

to support these assertions, the Washington Post went so far as to make policy recommendations based on this assumption, arguing it proved the U.S. shouldn't cut military spending (Rubin 2011). In fact, when the real evidence about the shooting came out, it turned out to have been the work of a white Norwegian. This anecdote provides a small window into how the “knowledge” about an extremist had been socially constructed to mean “Islamic,” and other types of extremists—such as white supremacists or Christian nationalists—have been largely ignored.

The facts show otherwise; according to statistics, the threat of terrorism from Islamic extremists, as opposed to other extremists, has been greatly exaggerated. According to the FBI, non-Islamic American extremists have perpetrated the vast majority of terrorist attacks in the U.S. Of all the terrorist attacks from 1980 to 2005 in the U.S., Islamic extremists carried out only 6%. The remaining 94% were from other groups (42% from Latinos, 24% from extreme left wing groups, 7% from extremist Jews, 5% from communists, and 16% from all other groups) (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2005). However, there still remains a lack of uniformity among law enforcement agencies in labeling these non-Islamic perpetrators. Often, they are labeled as “criminals,” rather than as “terrorists,” which affects how they are prosecuted. Individuals categorized as “criminals” are granted more leniency, while the designation of a suspect as a “terrorist”—which almost always occurs with Islamic suspects but rarely with non-Islamic—results in harsher sentences (Masters 2011).

The American Muslim community has felt great offense, understandably, at this equating of extremism with Islam and harsher sentencing (Whitman 2011). Such a

discourse supports beliefs that Islam is somehow more nefarious than other religions, which has led to greater intolerance among the general public, as evidenced by an alarming rise in anti-Islamic sentiment and hate crimes. The Southern Poverty Law Center testified about this rising anti-Muslim sentiment during Senate hearings in March 2011, which were conducted specifically “in response to the spike in anti-Muslim bigotry in the last year including Quran burnings, restrictions on mosque construction, hate crimes, hate speech and other forms of discrimination,” according to Senator Dick Durbin, chair of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights (Gunter 2011). Meanwhile, a Pew poll released in 2010 found only 30 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Islam (Egan 2010).

There was an effort by the Obama Administration to break this association between extremism and Islam, partly in response to the offense felt by the American Muslim community and partly because of the recognition that it was factually wrong. As part of a new counterterrorism strategy, the Obama administration in June 2011 led an effort to have the counterterrorism community and policymakers define and use the label of violent extremist to encompass all types of extremisms that advocate violence (Sullivan 2011). However, there was much resistance to this change. Many politicians, including Senator Joe Lieberman—one of the most vocal—harshly criticized this idea claiming it was an attempt by the administration to “appease” Muslims it was afraid of offending. Lieberman publicly attacked the proposal asserting that “the administration still refuses to call our enemy in this war by its proper name: violent Islamist extremism” (Patten 2011). Meanwhile, some have claimed that Lieberman and others within the

Republican party have a vested interest in supporting the dominant discourse associating extremists with Islam in order to engender support among conservative voters and anti-Muslim members in their party (Obeidallah 2012; Musaji 2013). In fact, the 2010 Pew poll found that anti-Muslim sentiment was partisan—54 percent of Republicans were found to have an unfavorable view of Islam compared to 27 percent of Democrats (Egan 2010).

Another dominant discourse in the U.S. among both policymakers and the general public equates “extremists” as consistently and cohesively “evil,” beyond the possibility of change or hope of redemption. They are placed into a separate category of Other based on their characterological defects or warped personalities, which are assumed to be innate and immutable. In interviewing government officials, anthropologist Scott Atran found many officials characterized extremists as “destitute and depraved, craven and criminal, or those who ‘hate freedom’” (Atran 2010). Furthermore, they were viewed as nihilistic and immoral, with no real program or humanity, according to his findings (Atran 2010). This discourse is likely rooted in the long tradition of viewing social deviants as persons with immutable and essentially flawed nature (Merton 1957). Irwin (1985) calls this phenomenon the myth of the “bogeyman,” referring to those individuals who are fundamentally and permanently different from “normal” people (Weitekamp et al. 1995). Maruna points out that such a creation may serve a distinctive social purpose since creating such a category of Them “essentially relieves us from having to examine ourselves for signs of deviance. If crime is something that wicked people do, we need not worry that our own behavior is wrong” (Maruna 1998).

In reference to “extremists,” the discourse that sees them as permanently evil has driven the creation of institutions and hard-line, power-based policies like the death penalty, our punitive prison system, and power-based counter-terrorism strategies (Gavett 2011). It also has led to a reluctance to engage, negotiate, or rehabilitate extremists (A. McCarthy 2009). Instead, policies have been developed that focus on control, punishment, containment, or elimination (Benjamin and Simon 2005). Instead of seeking to understand these individuals as humans, the dominant approach has been to blame and shame them. Such severe policies are shortsighted, however, and it appears they have only served to further outrage and incite new generations, perpetuating and exacerbating the cycle of violence (Benjamin and Simon 2005).

Additionally, and perhaps one of the most disturbing consequences, the assumed “truth” that these folks are somehow ontologically immoral, irredeemable, and beyond change has led to a conflation between violent acts and the individuals themselves. This prevents the ability to view such individuals as capable of change, including rehabilitation or even full transformation. Such a view has collective consequences on a national scale by molding societal norms that influence our social institutions, legal systems, and culture. Public policies have become limited by such conceptions of “evil” and “violent people” and subsequently often fail to solve the problem; in the worst cases, they create more injustices. Such a discourse also obviates the need for reflexivity on the part of the policymakers and those in power to question the legitimacy of their own actions (Maruna 1998). In regards to the individuals themselves, this disempowering discourse likely serves to entrench them further within violence rather than enabling them

towards the possibility of transformation. Such inferences are supported by studies in criminology; for example, Maruna found in his studies of criminals that persistent offenders often accept the labels society has applied to them—such as “thief”—and feel unable to change their course of action (Maruna 2001, 75). This points to the importance of understanding how the discursive dynamics in which so-called “violent extremists” are embedded serve to reinforce their violent identities and acts.

The work of several post-structural theorists has demonstrated the centrality of discourse in the structuration of conflict and violence (H. L. Nelson 2001; Jabri 1996; Cobb 2003a) This critical social theory perspective presents a dynamical view of violence as a narrative phenomenon in a world composed of discursive systems. A body of literature grounded in this view posits that delegitimized positions in discourse result in a type of narrative “damage” that lays the groundwork for conflict (H. L. Nelson 2001; Jabri 1996; Cobb 2003a). According to philosopher Hilde Lindemann Nelson, people whose narratives have been marginalized suffer from a damaged moral agency, which is foundational to being human. This type of negative positioning is destructive for identity and requires a type of “narrative repair” to heal. Nelson thus sees negative positioning, or delegitimation, as an existential struggle for survival, which is why damaged narratives are so problematic (H. L. Nelson 2001). Nelson says that although some individuals accept their delegitimized positions, others do not, and if their attempts to constitute legitimacy repeatedly fail, their attempts escalate and potentially lead to conflict (H. L. Nelson 2001). In this view, the response of the other—especially when it is impervious—can lay the groundwork for conditions leading to violence (H. L. Nelson 2001).

Similarly, Harre argues that negative positioning could lead to conflict (Harre and Moghaddam 2003). According to positioning theory, the ultimate purpose of telling a story is to position oneself legitimately with others. This theory asserts that when people are negatively positioned, they will do whatever they need to become positively positioned because they are compelled to be positively elaborated in the discourse of the Other (Bamberg 2004).

Applying this discursive view of violence to “extremists,” it becomes evident how the existing dominant discourses positioning them as immoral, irredeemable, and beyond change likely contribute to their violent actions by inflicting narrative damage onto their identities. Remediating this would entail reformulating the discourse in a way that grants them legitimacy and empowers them towards change. For my study, I chose to attempt such a process of narrative remediation by consciously deciding not to refer to my research subjects as “violent extremists”—which implies an ontological relationship between violence and the person—and instead calling my research subjects “individuals affiliated with violent organizations.” This new designation reclaimed the humanity of the people involved by refusing to reduce them to the label of “extremist” and by separating the individuals from their actions. However, I wanted to do more, to find a way to give voice to these individuals in a way that challenged the dominant discourses. To do that, I adopted a post-structuralist agenda, which seeks to address this issue of the production of knowledge—such as the label of “extremist”—and its relation to power in order to challenge the aforementioned dominant discourses.

1.2.1 Narrative Remediation

With the aforementioned intention in mind, the spirit of my inquiry became guided by a post-structuralist agenda that aimed to re-humanize these individuals by illuminating their stories about their transformation. The post-structuralist approach advocates such a humanization not only because it is morally good, but because such a process stands to alter the existing discourses around these individuals in such a way as to add complexity to the publics' understanding. In this way, humanizing the subjects symbolizes a type of narrative remediation. To do this, I sought to humanize these individuals by focusing on their own words through analyzing their memoirs in order to allow them to tell their story. My intention was to give voice to these people in such a way that it would inspire reflexivity on behalf of readers—especially those in power, such as government officials and practitioners—around their own narratives of those who commit violence.

One way to destabilize conflict narratives, according to narrative theory, is to stop attempting to change “them” and instead turn the focus onto “us,” specifically the disempowering narratives we are telling about these individuals (Cobb 2006). These disempowering narratives could then be changed through a process of “thickening,” which would entail adding new episodes that do not “fit” with the dominant simplified, negative black-and-white story line, and by introducing moral complexity and more complex characters into the dominant discourse (Cobb 2003b). Such actions would allow “our” understanding of “them” to evolve. Such an enriched understanding of them could prompt the destabilization of their conflict narratives, in a counter-intuitive fashion,

which may in turn increase the possibility of their renunciation of violence, according to narrative theory (Cobb 2006).

Focusing on individuals who have renounced violence works towards this end by adding complexity to the dominant discourses around individuals affiliated with violent organizations that assumes they have an inherently unchangeable, malevolent nature. To take this a step further, I purposefully narrowed my focus to include only those individuals who not only renounced violence, but also embraced nonviolence and were actively working for peaceful social change. This stark contradiction directly challenges the dominant discourse of their inherent and unchangeable, malevolent nature. By examining this contradiction through exploring in-depth their stories—and how they came to embrace values of compassion, peace, and tolerance—I hoped to generate a space of intellectual openness and curiosity among readers from which to explore a more nuanced and human understanding of who these individuals are and how they function.

Secondly, I specifically chose to look at different kinds of individuals who commit violence, ranging from gang members, right-wing extremists, to terrorists, in order to challenge the dominant discourse that associates “extremists” with being Islamic. I also aimed to challenge the overall constructs of these categories. Just like with the label “extremist,” such categories of individuals are in themselves artificially created constructs that are often driven by politics and highly contested. The IRA hunger strikes, in which prisoners refused to eat in order to be framed as “political prisoners” versus “terrorists” or “criminals,” illustrates how contested these categories are (Reitan 2003). Furthermore, the label “terrorist” runs into many of the same, if not more, complications

as the label of “extremist.” A 1988 study counted 109 definitions of terrorism that covered a total of 22 different definitional elements (Schmid and Jongman 1988, 5–6). Meanwhile, terrorism expert Walter Laqueur has counted over 100 definitions and concludes the “only general characteristic generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence” (Laqueur 1999, 6). Even inside the U.S. government, different departments and agencies use different definitions reflecting different professional perspectives on the subject (B. Hoffman 2003, 19–20).

Similar to the aforementioned issues around labeling someone an “extremist,” this lack of definition around “terrorist” allows those in power to label, sometimes unjustly, to suit their own agenda. Meanwhile, those in power are able to resist this label from applying to them. The contemporary language on terrorism has become, according to human rights lawyer Conor Gearty, “the rhetorical servant of the established order, whatever and however heinous its own activities are” (Gearty 2002). Gearty explains that since terrorists have been cast as the “evilest of evils,” what the terrorist does “is always wrong [and] what the counter-terrorist has to do to defeat them is therefore invariably, necessarily right” (Gearty 2002). Furthermore, he points out that “the nature of the [established] regime . . . the moral situation in which violence occurs—none of these complicating elements matters a jot against the contemporary power of the terrorist label” (Gearty 2002). Meanwhile, terrorism is a type of violence, not a type of person; it describes what people do, not what people are (Gearty 2002). However, as with the discourse around the label of “extremist,” the discourse around the label of “terrorist” has resulted in a conflation between the violent acts and the individual themselves.

Additionally, looking beyond the labels of “terrorist,” “extremist,” and “gang member,” one can see that there is much crossover among these categories. For example, certain gang members pursue terrorist tactics and even can be said to have political aims in so far as they aim to strengthen their rule over their territory. Meanwhile, both right-wing extremists and terrorists pursue criminal acts and have certain group features that resemble a gang. Many European countries, such as France, even frame terrorists as simply a type of criminal rather than their own separate category (Steiner 2005).

Thus, given all these considerations and driven by a post-structuralist agenda, I chose to focus on the stories of formers by using their own words as expressed in their memoirs, and to analyze across types to deconstruct contested categories. Furthermore, I chose to focus on those individuals who renounced violence and then worked for peaceful social change. My aim in doing so was to humanize and deconstruct dominant discourses in a way that would elicit thicker and deeper understanding among readers. This deeper understanding could potentially enable those who do analysis and planning, in governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations, to reformulate their own accounts, increasing the complexity of their own story as to the nature of this process, as well as how it could be supported. Finally, new and morally complex discourses around these individuals could work towards legitimizing them as humans as a form of narrative remediation that could potentially influence them towards renunciation.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

In the next chapter, *Review of the Literature*, I present an overview of the relevant literature on the process of leaving behind terrorism, right-wing organizations, and gangs,

as understood from the positivist traditions that have studied these processes. This includes literature from the fields of terrorism studies, criminology, and religious studies. Then, I take a step away from the positivist tradition to explore change through the social constructionist and post-structuralist lenses. I review the literature on how identities are constructed narratively and embedded in discourse, as well as how narratives change. In the final section, I provide an overview of the social science literature on conversion, which represents a kind of radical reformulation of identity relevant for my study.

In the third chapter, *Methodology*, I present the qualitative methods of discourse and narrative analysis that are used in this study to analyze the personal accounts of a sample of individuals who have renounced their previous violent affiliations and now work for peaceful social change. I present the hermeneutics of renunciation that I constructed based on theories of narrative and discourse to aid in my data collection and analysis. Since my primary data consists of memoirs written by a sample of formers, I also include some background on the study of autobiographical writing in this section. I end this chapter by addressing how I attended to the issue of reflexivity in my study.

In the fourth chapter, *Data Analysis & Presentation*, I apply the hermeneutical framework of renunciation that encompasses the stages of initial identity formation, disruption, and resolution to the memoirs of my research subjects. The research subjects are focused on in detail with the intention of fully drawing out their stories and preserving their individual distinctiveness. I conclude this chapter with a summary of findings from all the cases, highlighting the key narrative patterns that surfaced.

In the fifth chapter, *Discussion of the Findings*, I analyze the trends and themes that surfaced, specifically attending to what these narrative patterns tell us about the overall process of renunciation as a discursive phenomenon. Next, I compare these findings to those from the positivist studies on disengagement. I conclude by presenting the implications of these findings for policymakers and practitioners looking to enable and support an evolution towards renunciation.

In the sixth chapter, *Formers' Memoirs as a Narrative Genre*, I present an alternative perspective about the possible meaning of the formers' narratives by highlighting the possibility their memoirs adhere to a narrative genre. I explore what a narrative genre is, present the features and functionality of this particular genre—which I name the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*—and conclude by laying out the implications of this alternative explanation and recommending certain policies and practices to support an evolution towards renunciation given this perspective.

In the last chapter, *Concluding Remarks*, I explain some of the limitations of this study and how they could be overcome through additional research. I also highlight some avenues of research for the future that could build off the findings of this study. Lastly, I conclude by presenting the contributions this study offers to the field of conflict resolution and analysis.

1.4 Conclusion

In closing, I was very moved by the work of anthropologist Cynthia Mahmood who wrote a narrative ethnography based on interviews she conducted with Sikh militants, entitled *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*

(Mahmood 1996). Her research challenges and deconstructs commonly used labels such as “fundamentalists” and “terrorists,” and instead presents the complex and multifaceted human experience of these individuals. Her work is an inspiring representation of a post-structuralist agenda that seeks to humanize individuals and give voice to those who have been marginalized. In her opening chapter, pointing to this intention, she writes:

If only militant Sikhs were monsters, psychopaths, criminals, or “evil” men, it would be easy. But they’re not, and my hope is that bringing out the world of Sikh militancy in human terms here will make clear the real problem of conflict resolution: that both sides are populated by human beings, in most cases behaving as decently as they know how in immensely difficult situations. (Mahmood 1996, 7)

In doing my research, I kept her example as inspiration and hoped to follow in the footsteps of her impressive work, which has been referred to as “a stunning presentation of narrative ethnography, achieving the remarkable feat of forcing the reader to enter into the world—and the world view—of those whom most of us would regard as terrorists,” according to terrorism scholar Mark Juergensmeyer. By intimately exposing her readers to the humanity of her subjects, she was able to succeed in the type of narrative mediation that I wish to accomplish. Hopefully, readers of my research will be changed and inspired to reformulate their accounts, along the lines of how her students were changed after reading her work. I will end with a quote from one of these students, who summed up the impact I hope to leave on my readers with my work. Mahmood writes:

“These people are *magnificent*,” one of my students commented after hearing some of my stories, and indeed, in an important sense, they are. Obviously their victims would not agree with this assessment. But this is, in fact, the point: they are magnificent, and the havoc they wreak is devastating. We won’t understand them better by denying either. (Mahmood 1996, 19)

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The transformation process that leads an individual to renounce violence is something that has appeared in different kinds of groups that adhere to violence, or enact violence, including terrorist organizations such as the PLO and IRA, right-wing extremist groups such as the neo-Nazis and Skinheads, and street gangs such as the Bloods and the Crips. My study explores this process beyond the orthodox positivist approaches by applying narrative and discursive frameworks to this area of study. At the same time, however, useful work has been done from the positivist tradition that highlights certain trends that accompany such transformation. Academics who have explored why certain individuals renounce violence have studied this transformation through the lens of psychological and behavioral theories, focusing on intra-psychic factors; social identity and social network theories, focusing on group dynamics; or structural theories, focusing on systemic and situational factors. In the first section of this review of literature, I review the literature from the fields of terrorism studies, criminology, and religious studies around the topic of renouncing violence.

Since my particular focus is on formers who renounced violence and have become actively involved in peaceful nonviolent social activism, I also include a review of one study—the only of its kind—by Garfinkel (2007) that focuses on the process of

transformation of militants from violence towards actively working for peaceful social change.

The aforementioned literature, though useful as a baseline, is all grounded in an epistemology that assumes a rational actor operating in a cost/benefit strategic decision-making manner. My study, however, explores how change occurs for a narrative Self. To explore this aspect, I incorporate literature on narrative and discourse that explains how identities are constructed narratively and embedded in discourse. This literature grounds my study of renunciation as a form of identity transformation. To explore how narratively constructed identities change, I also review the literature on narrative change.

In the final section, I take a step away from focusing on transformation as defined by a change from violence to nonviolence and instead look at it through the lens of conversion, defined as a change in which one adopts a new religion, faith, or belief. Although this particular form of change is not connected to violence, it represents a kind of radical reformulation of identity that is relevant for my study. There is a much more rich history of scholarship in this area than in studying renunciation from violent groups, so the literature has evolved through the decades. Accordingly, I review the range of literature as well as highlight the different frames that have been applied to it. I end this section by highlighting how the most recent research in this area has started to take a social constructionist and post-structuralist turn, mirroring the type of shift my own study purports to take pertaining to the transformation from violence to nonviolence.

2.1 Studies of former terrorists, right-wing extremists, and gang members

The studies of those who leave terrorism organizations, right-wing extremist groups, and street gangs, and exit from cults and new religious movements (NRMs), show that individuals leaving all these groups follow a similar trajectory, despite the difference between these organizations (Rabasa et al. 2010; Noricks 2009; Morris et al. 2010). In this section, I survey the work that has been done in these areas and highlight some of the parallel trends. For my research, I define these groups in the following way:

- **Terrorist organization:** a political movement that uses terror as a weapon to achieve its goals.
- **Street gangs:** any durable, street-oriented group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.
- **Cults and new religious movements (NRMs):** inwardly focused groups centered on a charismatic and authoritarian leader that are faith-based, with ethical, philosophical or political stances.
- **Right-wing extremist groups:** groups that hold extreme nationalist, xenophobic, racist, religious fundamentalist or reactionary views and are involved in violence or acts of terrorism (Carlisle 2005; Disley et al. 2012).

2.1.1 Disengagement and Deradicalization from Terrorism

The most recent work on this topic comes from the field of terrorism studies, which has grown exponentially since the 911 attacks, albeit focused specifically on Islamic extremism (Horgan 2005). Much of this has been due to the increased

policymaker urgency and interest post-9/11. These recent studies on how violent extremists can and do change have focused on what terrorism studies refer to as disengagement, or a change in behavior in which the terrorist stops committing violent acts. There have also been some, albeit limited, studies looking at what is called deradicalization, which is a change in the underlying ideological beliefs that drive the violent acts themselves.

A Persistent Gap in Terrorism Studies

Traditionally, the field of terrorism studies has historically sidelined discussion and research around how violent extremists can and do change. Terrorism scholar John Horgan states in the preface to his book on why terrorists leave—which was published in 2009 and remains the only one of its kind—that the academic community has ignored almost everything to do with disengagement from terrorism (Horgan 2009). In a 2009 RAND report that reviewed the available literature on the topic, Darcy Noricks admitted this process was one of the “most under-theorized concepts in terrorism literature” (Noricks 2009). A 2009 report by the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* echoed these findings, saying, “There is limited data on the rate and trends in defection from extremist organizations. The lack of accurate data presents a significant gap in our knowledge and understanding” (Choudhury 2009). Finally, a 2012 RAND report mirrored these statements by stating, “There are too few studies that look at leaving terrorist groups” (Disley et al. 2012). Overall, the field of terrorism studies has focused predominantly on uncovering the process into terrorist activity, not out.

This reluctance to study why terrorists leave and how terrorism ends has been a persistent issue in terrorism studies since the 80s, according to Horgan (Horgan 2005, 141). He explains, “there are immediate assumptions that interviewing former terrorists cannot or should not be done” (Horgan 2012). Of course, there are certain practical and methodological difficulties—including personal risk factors—to be considered when engaging directly with former terrorists that likely dissuade many researchers from undertaking such an endeavor (Disley et al. 2012). However, even the less risky resource of autobiographies of former terrorists has received relatively little systematic investigation from terrorism scholars (Horgan, Altier, and Thoroughgood 2013). Therefore, in addition to the methodological complications, it appears there are many other reasons for this gap in research, to include: (1) a lack of interest, (2) a belief such disengagement was not realistic or possible, and (3) a belief such change cannot be understood. Firstly, this lack of interest by scholars is often based on the commonly held, yet often implicit, belief that terrorists are no longer relevant once their involvement in terrorism has ended. However, the reality is the opposite is true, as Horgan points out, since once terrorists stop, they provide the best opportunity for research since they are more willing to talk to academics (Horgan 2009). Additionally, some scholars are of the opinion that terrorists are not as interesting or enticing, or deserving of serious, urgent study when no longer committing terrorism. Dingley goes so far as to suggest that scholars of terrorism, who have a major vested interest in keeping terrorism going, would be disadvantaged if terrorist campaigns were to end (Dingley 1999). Alternatively,

Ferguson claims part of the reason lies in a reluctance of terrorism scholars to actually meet and engage with former violent extremists (Ferguson 2011).

In addition to a lack of interest, the next major reason appears to be an assumption that such change is not possible or that it cannot be understood. Part of the reason may stem from the fact that the field of terrorism studies is rooted in positivist-oriented, static, factor-based, causal explanations of terrorists, which inevitably leads to a lack of models or tools for understanding the dynamics of ideological change. Arguably the largest category of theories within terrorism studies comes from an instrumentalist perspective, a tradition that assumes a rational actor model and posits that terrorists act for political benefits. This tradition views extremists as strategically rational, driven by “interests,” and seeking to maximize gain. Proponents in this category discount the role of ideology, values, and emotions as motivating factors (Crenshaw, 1988; Horowitz, 2006). Since this view largely discounts ideology as a motivating factor, it holds little explanatory power in understanding how beliefs change. The studies from within this tradition have explored how and why terrorists disengage from a strictly behavioralist and rational actor model, which I will explore a little later.

The next major category of terrorism theories comes from the expressive view of terrorism that does consider emotional states and religious/ideological values. The most extreme views of scholars in this category include beliefs that terrorist acts are “objectiveless expressions of anger” and posit the existence of a terrorist personality (Rubenstein 2003). This perspective assumes that terrorists are cohesively, consistently, ontologically evil. Certain academics as well as policymakers in government hold this

view. In his interviews with the CT community, Jacobson found that certain counterterrorism experts believe once a terrorist has used violence, they cannot be rehabilitated (Jacobson 2010b, 25). This view undergirds much of the U.S. government's hard-line counterterrorism policies post-911, characterized by a "kill or capture" strategy that sought to kill or lock up terrorists (Hosenball 2011). With such assumptions, there is no possibility of change and hence the only recourse is to control, eliminate or punish terrorists. Since this view largely discounts change, it holds no explanatory power when attempting to understand terrorists who renounce violence.

Less extreme views in this expressive category, however, apply more nuances when exploring the role of emotion, religion and ideology. Yet, most scholars even in this category view the chances of change along the lines of emotion, religion and ideology to be too insignificant or complex to merit much attention. The limited research that exists simply highlights the tremendous difficulties of changing beliefs and worldviews, and the difficulties of understanding this process. The best evidence of this was a 2010 RAND study on deradicalization that surveyed all the current research and was provided to the government as an assessment of the topic. It argued that counterterrorist programs should focus solely on disengagement but not deradicalization due to the difficulty of those motivated by ideologies—especially rooted in religion—to change, as well as the difficulty of understanding this process. It concludes by advising the government ignore questions of deradicalization and instead focus on disengagement—which falls more into the instrumentalist perspective—as a more realistic objective (Rabasa et al. 2010).

It appears the field of terrorism studies has struggled with the question of explaining why terrorists leave because of the natural limitations of their positivist epistemology. Viewing changes in emotion, religion, and ideology through the lens of discourse would help elucidate how this process may function. I will explore this more in later sections. For now, I will next outline some of what their studies have shown us about why terrorists leave terrorism.

Findings from Recent Studies

Terrorism scholar Martha Crenshaw, one of the most prominent instrumentalists of the field, was one of the first to approach the topic back in the 80s and 90s. Unlike many other terrorism scholars, Crenshaw believes former terrorists can be a valuable source of information for scholarship. She states that in her experience, terrorists who have disengaged are willing to disclose substantial details that help provide what she describes as the “primary data based on . . . life histories,” which can be a valuable source for scholars trying to understand terrorism (Crenshaw 2001, 416). Her work, however, focused specifically on how terrorist *groups* end rather than individuals. Her research highlighted the success of negotiated settlements in certain cases between strong governments and weakened terrorist organizations that were induced to embrace political dialogue instead of violence to pursue their aims (Rabasa et al. 2010).¹

Around the same time, Alison Jamieson (1989) published what was the first account of individual disengagement from terrorism. Jamieson wrote about her

¹ Since then, there has developed a small literature on how and why terrorism ends, but it focuses at the group level and at terrorism as a larger phenomenon. Some of the prominent scholars are Omar Ashour, Martha Crenshaw, and Audrey Kurth Cronin. However, since my focus of study is on the individual dynamics of the process, I will not review in depth this literature.

interviews with former Red Brigades member Adriana Faranda. She recounted Faranda's gradual process of what Jamieson labeled as "dissociation," which provided insight into the complexity of the process (Crenshaw 1991; Crenshaw 1987). Around 2004, Tore Bjørgero, an expert on right wing extremists and gang members, partnered with John Horgan, a terrorism scholar with a background in psychology, to produce *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, which was published in 2008 (Jamieson 1989). This book, which was an edited collection of essays, used empirical data and was the first of its kind that explored how and why individuals and groups disengage from terrorism. It was a comprehensive look at a range of terrorist groups, looking at both secular as well as religious ideological groups.

Horgan's 2009 book, *Walking Away from Terrorism*, explored this topic through the words of actual terrorists who have left terrorism. According to the preface, Horgan's goal was to present a comparable volume of work on the topic, but viewed from the perspective of the former terrorists, which he obtained through extensive interviews (Horgan 2009). Also in 2009, the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* also interviewed former extremists in an assessment entitled "Stepping Out: Supporting Exit Strategies from Violence and Extremism" (Choudhury 2009). Funded by the U.S. Department of State, this report explored the potential benefits of establishing a network of former extremists to delegitimize violent extremism. In 2010, the *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* issued a report by Michael Jacobson on terrorist dropouts. In this report, Jacobson reviewed the case studies of individuals who left Islamic terrorist groups, mostly al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, and provided policy recommendations for counterradicalization

programs (Jacobson 2010a). Also in 2010, RAND did a comprehensive report that surveyed existing scholarship on deradicalization and disengagement, both individual and collective (Jacobson 2010a). Lastly, the most recent research was another report by RAND published in 2012, this time specifically focusing on individual disengagement from al-Qa'ida-influenced terrorist groups. This report, which was an analysis of the already available literature, found disillusionment a commonly cited reason for disengagement from all kinds of terrorist groups. However, the authors gave a strong caveat to their findings by emphasizing that all the existing research into the question of how a current terrorist becomes a former one is problematic because causality cannot be inferred (Disley et al. 2012).

Out of all these studies, Horgan's *Walking Away from Terrorism* represents the closest example of the type of research found in my study because it presents the stories of the former terrorists themselves. Horgan spent between 2006-2008 interviewing 29 former terrorists to "gain an insider perspective" (Rabasa et al. 2010). This work represents the most comprehensive series of interviews of former terrorists who explain their perspective and reasons for leaving. However, even Horgan acknowledges it to be simply a start, an "exploratory reflection," and more work needs to be done on this topic. Additionally, he approached interviewing from the perspective of positivism, describing it as his attempt to engage questions about terrorist behavior using "scientific reasoning and rigorous scrutiny." In an article about the methodology of analyzing autobiographies, he warns against taking the interviews too seriously and the importance of interpreting their significance with great caution since such personal accounts are "biased and

incomplete” (Horgan, Altier, and Thoroughgood 2013). These interviews, he says, “simply reflect the degree to which an individual activist is articulate or not, and whether he or she has verbalized openly the rationale or morality.” He goes on to say, “frequently the terrorists providing the accounts will have acquired the ability to couch an explanation for their behavior into such an elaborate, spiritually or ideologically dogmatic framework that we receive very little (if any) notion of the specific limiting factors” (Horgan 2009). Since Horgan’s perspective was to look for causal explanations, it is understandable he would discount personal accounts of formers as biased and incomplete. However, since my project aimed for narrative understanding, not causal explanations, I viewed personal accounts as the very foundation within which meaning making was made, something I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter.

In addition to Horgan’s work, the report by the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* also reflected my aim of using the accounts of former extremists. However, this report was more structured, and hence somewhat slanted, since it interviewed former extremists specifically about the feasibility of developing a network of such individuals. Furthermore, the interviews were augmented with a structured workshop that also included practitioners, policy makers, and community stakeholders (Choudhury 2009).

Research Findings

Since Horgan and others operate from an instrumentalist perspective that discounts the role of ideology, they have focused on the process of disengagement that refers specifically to behavior change and not necessarily a renunciation of ideology. Horgan is the most prominent scholar associated with this topic and has repeatedly made

efforts to define, distinguish, and emphasize *disengagement*, which involves a halt to extremist activities, from *deradicalization*, which involves an ideological renunciation of former extremist beliefs. Deradicalization suggests cognitive and social changes that involve rejecting the shared social norms, values, attitudes, and aspirations of the terrorist group. A 2010 RAND report defined deradicalization as the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to affect social change (Horgan 2009). Terrorism scholar Omar Ashour defines deradicalization as a process that leads an individual (or group) to change attitudes about violence, specifically about the appropriateness of violence against civilians (Rabasa et al. 2010). Ashour adds that deradicalization entails a slow realization and acceptance that social, political, and economic transformation will only occur slowly and in a pluralistic environment (Ashour 2007).

Disengagement, on the other hand, refers to no longer engaging in actual terrorist actions but possibly still adhering to these values and attitudes. Horgan claims there are so many broad and often unrelated multiple factors involved in deradicalization that the terrorism field should instead focus on examining disengagement. This is what has actually happened; most, if not all, the studies that currently exist on why terrorists leave focus on disengagement and not deradicalization. All these studies of disengagement emphasize that just as there is no single reason that leads individuals to radicalization, there is no single overarching reason that explains why some leave, making it a challenging and complex area of analysis. Some claim that why a person leaves is associated with what drew them in the first place (Ashour 2009), while others claim the

process is so complex that there is no correlation (Rabasa et al. 2010). At the same time, they highlight certain commonalities. Overall, these studies explain the process using a rational actor model in which the extremist strategically weighs the various pros and cons of staying and leaving.

Disengagement is viewed as a psychological process that is initiated by cognitive dissonance caused by some sort of trigger that causes a tipping point (Jacobson 2010a; Choudhury 2009). A wide variety of triggers exist, ranging from strategic to petty (John Horgan 2005; Choudhury 2007). They encompass personal factors, setting factors, and the social/political/organizational context (Jacobson 2010a). These are regarded as a form of “push” factors. They are often traumatic or emotional events that serve to create doubts about remaining in the group. However, in some instances, this does not have to be a specific event but rather a gradual buildup of a series of occurrences. Demant says this could be a dawning conclusion that the group’s ideology does not accurately explain the world, or that it has failed to achieve social or political change (Horgan 2009). During this time of vulnerability, the individual goes through a period of questioning one’s beliefs and makes “a simple calculation weighing the pros and cons of exiting” (Demant et al. 2008, 113). The strength of the “push” and “pull” factors will determine whether that individual will ultimately leave or not. Drawing on Jacobson (2010) and Horgan (2009), the commonly highlighted triggers of disengagement can be summarized as follows (Rabasa et al. 2010, 11–12):

Table 1: Disengagement Triggers - Personal Factors

Triggers of Disengagement	
Personal Factors	Petty grievances, such as feeling inadequately compensated
	Unmet expectations of glamour and excitement
	Feelings of being mistreated or undervalued
	Disgust with violence
	Cognitive dissonance through events that conflict with terrorists' worldview, like compassion shown by a supposed "enemy"

The first three factors in Table 1 are somewhat self-explanatory and their petty nature perhaps belies a small-mindedness of the individuals. It can be reasonably assumed that individuals who are affected by such triggers probably have an underdeveloped commitment to the ideology and are more focused on their own self-interest. In such cases, it would likely be easier to get these individuals to abandon the cause when provided with enough incentives.

The last two factors in Table 1 are more interesting because they likely pertain to individuals who are strongly committed ideologically, and yet may be influenced by such triggers. Regarding disgust for violence, the very nature of violence was found to provoke questioning in some minds in a study done by Germany's Federal Intelligence Agency (BFV). They found that when a person is asked to carry out a violent attack by an avowedly religious group, doubts can arise (Horgan 2009; Jacobson 2010a). According to the BFV, the apparent hypocrisy between violent acts and religious principles can create profound dissonance, undermining commitment for the organization. Former Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI) leader Nasir Abas claims the deaths of hundreds of civilians in the 2002 Bali bombing made him reconsider his role in the organization (Jacobson 2010a). This

implies that when the ideology of the individual holds a certain ethical stance towards violence—such as in this case with religious terrorists—there is a potential for attention drawn to the terrorist acts of violence to become a trigger. However, perhaps even without a strong ideological component, the exposure to extreme violence can be disturbing enough to the individual psyche that it can trigger doubt. For example, a former IRA member reportedly became disillusioned after hearing his colleagues talk glibly about the murder of a pregnant policewoman, characterizing the death as allowing them to “get two for the price of one” (Abuza 2009). This member said, “I wasn’t prepared or able to cope with that kind of hate and bigotry” (Abuza 2009). He later went on to become an informant for the Irish and British security services, and claims this was the defining moment that led to that decision. The potential powerful deterring force of violence is also present in the cases of gang members, an area I will explore in a later section.

This is supported by the findings from the assessment “Stepping Out” (Choudhury 2009). Interviews of former extremists found a common trigger for their decision to leave was a direct experience of violence and the consequences of violence. One individual explained, “... that is when you start to doubt yourself; you start to doubt whether you have any sense of morality, because you lost your moral compass. And that is one of the things that pushes you out, you realize that it is amoral” (Choudhury 2009). The assessment compares these findings to the research on trauma, specifically the revulsion that results from seeing violence up close or involvement in violence; “such

moments create an opening in which an individual reassesses their framework for understanding their world” (Choudhury 2009).

Alternatively, experiencing kindness and compassion was found to be a powerful influence in some individuals as well (Horgan 2005, 149). A British psychologist who works with extremist populations found cognitive dissonance was typical when individuals were shown unanticipated respect and kindness. The mindset of the terrorists, according to him, is fashioned to be rigid and polarized so when people who the terrorists have been trained to hate show compassion, this can throw an element of confusion into the terrorist’s worldview—in some cases, even put them on the path to dropping out. In this way, deradicalization can be as much of a spiritual experience, similar to religious conversion, as the initial radicalization may have been, spurred on by a recognition of the shared humanity of the “enemy” (Jacobson 2010a; Demant et al. 2008). Former HT leader Maajid Nawaz recounted he was shocked when Amnesty International took him on as a “prisoner of conscience” since he viewed the West as the enemy. He says this “opened my heart to the fact that the ‘enemy’ went out on a limb to defend me, making me realize that there were good non-Muslims” (Nawaz 2008). Abas said his treatment in an Indonesian prison contributed to a shift in thinking. He recounted he was surprised not to be beaten or tortured and his interrogators even invited him to pray with them (Noricks 2009).

The assessment “Stepping Out” highlights this too, finding many former extremists saying they began to question their involvement after having positive experiences in mainstream society (Choudhury 2009). This included empathy and

support by someone outside the group. One former extremist explained, “I did write a letter to a friend, and she said that something that is affecting your iman [faith] is not something from Islam. So that was when I decided that I had enough” (Choudhury 2009). The assessment compares this finding to research that shows positive personal relationships and interaction can play an important role in triggering change, which brings to attention to role of third parties in influencing individuals to renounce their beliefs. The role of a third party appears to be fairly important in all cases, although influential to varying degrees and in different ways. For those driven by religious ideology, the influence of a religious figure, especially when charismatic, was prominent. A spiritual leader whose intention was to genuinely help the individual and whose expertise was deep was able to introduce would-be defectors to new ways of understanding Islam. Some were introduced to a Sufi version that was more tolerant and mystical, and satisfied a type of spiritual longing (Abuza 2009).

Another key trigger was familial relationships. Mohamed al-Sharkawy, an imam in the UK who works the British government in de-radicalization efforts, argues that wives are the most important factors in determining whether a husband will break away from terrorist and extremist influences. In Singapore, wives have become a key part of the country’s state-sponsored de-radicalization program. Parents are also important since Islam has a strong tradition of obedience to one’s parents, according to former extremist Ed Husain (Jacobson 2010b). The influence of relationships with role models on individuals involved in terrorism is supported by the existing terrorism research that points to the role of social networks in contributing to radicalization (Jacobson 2010a).

Therefore, it is not surprising that social networks and relationships would have an equally important role in disengagement and deradicalization from terrorism.

Another category of triggers are factors associated with setting, referring to a change in circumstances, and can be summarized as follows (Sageman 2008; Bakker 2006; Hegghammer 2006a; Hegghammer 2006b):

Table 2: Disengagement Triggers - Setting Factors

Triggers of Disengagement	
Setting Factors	Moving
	Going to prison

Some of the aforementioned examples, such as the case of Abas and Nawaz, highlight how prison actually served in some cases to foster conditions conducive to transformation. A combination of good treatment, exposure to new information, and time to think and analyze seem to be common factors in bringing about a new mindset. Pluchinsky found that imprisoning violent extremists had one of the following two effects; it either increased their radicalization, or it lead to rehabilitation and reform (Jacobson 2010a). Ferguson relays that those he interviewed who were former prisoners in Northern Ireland attributed their removal from the conflict as key to their disengagement from terrorism. Some accounted their prison experience “provided them the space to sharpen their political ideology and strategy while devising non-violent approaches to achieve their organizational and political goals” (Pluchinsky 2008). Furthermore, they admitted this would have been impossible had they not been in prison

(Pluchinsky 2008). Another former UVF prisoner relayed how prison provided the space to debate and develop ideas; he said, referring to prisons, that “I believe that they were the university of peace, in terms of what we discussed in there, how we decided, how we came about in our discussion how do we get out of this? How do we get, you know, where this is all going?” (Pluchinsky 2008) Another prisoner relayed how prison gave him the space to think; he said, “if you’ve any sort of grey matter in your head at all you have to start and analyze why you finished up in prison and just my thinking just reinforced the fact that everything wasn’t black and white as I had seen it. Prison just gives you an opportunity to be detached from the conflict . . . it gives you time to think” (Ferguson 2011, 113).

A 2005 study by a former Army interrogator explored the effects of detention on detainees at Guantanamo Bay and presented some interesting findings (Ferguson 2011). During her time in 2004 interviewing these individuals, Curcio was struck by how many psychologically re-framed their jihad experience and adopted new parameters for engaging in jihad. She termed this phenomenon “reframing jihad,” which she found more prevalent among youth who demonstrated less rigidity in belief and behavior and more fluidity in thinking (Curcio 2005). This contrasted with the older detainees, who appeared to adhere more strongly to their convictions and be more deeply patterned in their beliefs and behaviors. She assessed that out of those she interviewed, roughly one in four of the young detainees would go on jihad again, but the greater portion of them would not. They repeatedly talked to her about being disillusioned, of having been sold a false bill of goods, and of the “dark side” of jihad—which included the “malaise of prolonged

detention, the betrayal by ‘brother Muslims’ and the loss of health and limbs” (Curcio 2005). They drew the conclusions that recruiters lied to them, allies sold them out, their jihadist leaders exploited them, and that captivity was a highly likely and undesirable outcome. All of these conclusions were made while in captivity, and Curcio was led to believe this setting was an important influence on their realizations (Curcio 2005).

It appears that prison could serve to foster conditions conducive to disengagement. However, in his findings, Pluchinsky did find that prison could also radicalize inmates (Pluchinsky 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand how this process occurs so that prison can foster one over the other. At the same time, these conditions conducive to disengagement do not just occur in prison; they could also be present if a terrorist moves or even leaves the conflict area just for a short time, as Garfinkel found in her interviews of former extremists (Garfinkel 2007). The key appears to be a removal from the conflict zone that fosters space for reflection and re-consideration.

The last category of triggers deal with the context, which includes the social/political/organizational factors and can be summarized as follows (Garfinkel 2007; Horgan 2009; Jacobson 2010a):

Table 3: Disengagement Triggers - Context Factors

Triggers of Disengagement	
Social/political/organizational context	Belief the organization was interpreting Islam incorrectly, especially jihad
	Concern about the organization’s direction
	Disillusionment with organization’s hypocrisy

The studies also point out that the individual's decisions are always positioned within a context, be it a group context or within a specific political, economic, and cultural context. These factors can motivate individuals to leave, just as they influence them to join terrorism. In the case of the Italian Red Brigades, studies found that members started to have doubts after it became apparent the organization had failed to achieve its goals, as well as the reality that most of its members were in prison (Horgan 2009). Alternatively, aggressive counterterrorism methods and policies that have placed stress on a group have in some cases led to burnout that encouraged some to leave (Della Porta 2008; Jamieson 1990). Also, according to Jacobson, a significant number of former Islamic militants left their groups because they grew to believe the organization incorrectly interpreted Islam (Della Porta 2008, 80). In "Stepping Out," former extremists highlight the role of inconsistencies in the ideology and the dissatisfaction with answers to intellectual questions lead to doubt. This can also be initiated, the assessment states, when the person enters into an ideological discussion with someone they trust and respect, who then questions them about their ideology and points out flaws, which can also get them to start doubting (Choudhury 2009).

The Role of "Exit Costs"

These three categories represent just some of the common triggers, but in the end, most scholars agree that the trigger can be anything. Ashour, who has studied multiple cases of deradicalization, emphasizes it is important not to underestimate or undervalue the significance of various influences in changing even the most hardened terrorists'

minds. Even those deeply committed may be experiencing seeds of psychological disengagement and could be affected by a catalyst, he says (Jacobson 2010b, 8). At the same time, all the studies also emphasized that even those who want to defect may be unable to because of the strong “exit costs.” One RAND study found “leaving the group is akin to leaving a family, community, and an identity” (Ashour 2009). Tawfik Hamid, a former member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), observed that membership in a terrorist group confers status, authority, respect from others, and a sense of self-importance, all of which make it hard to leave. Other “exit costs” include the loss of excitement or sense of purpose that an individual derives from participation in a terrorist group. Specifically for religious terrorists, if they leave they could lose the belief they are implementing God’s will and/or the belief they will be granted eternal rewards in the afterlife (Noricks 2009).

In his studies on deradicalization of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Abuza found that a large factor determining success was whether the former terrorists would be welcomed back into society or treated as outcasts (Jamieson 1990, 510–513). Wasmund found that often terrorists feel they have little choice but to remain with the terrorist group since otherwise they are wanted by authorities (Abuza 2009). Therefore, a key factor in leaving would be a lessening or counteracting of the “exit costs” and presence of certain exit benefits, like money, leniency in sentencing, or prestige. Abuza also pointed out that when a group was highly interconnected with friendship and kinship ties, especially when reinforced through strategic marriage, the rate of rehabilitation vastly decreased (Wasmund 1986, 221). This shows the strength of group ties in keeping someone

engaged in a group. However, once those ties weaken or are brought into question, this can lead to motivating an individual to consider leaving the group.

The assessment “Stepping Out” named these “barriers to exit,” but echoed the same points (Choudhury 2009). Additionally, however, it also mentioned addressing feelings of guilt, highlighted in their interviews, as well as persisting intellectual questions. One former extremist explains, “What we learnt from literature, we haven’t been given a counter narrative to that. Now I am out, I am still searching for some of the answers to what I have been taught. But there was no literature for me to go to” (Choudhury 2009). The assessment focused also on addressing these barriers, to include providing a new social support network, involvement of parents, and the institutionalization of specific programs to support those who leave extremism. They highlighted research that suggests former extremists themselves can play an important role in interventions targeted at young people involved in extremism. Lastly, they suggested mirroring programs like the deradicalization programs in the Middle East that address ideological concerns, to include normative re-education and a reinterpretation of Islam (Choudhury 2009).

Conclusion

To sum up, all these studies from the field of terrorism see the process as being initiated by a certain trigger—which could include personal factors, setting factors, and/or the social/political/organizational context—that causes cognitive dissonance or vulnerability within the individual, and could serve as a tipping point to start a process of disengaging. This process could progress gradually, which is more often the case, or

could be abrupt and sudden. Certain factors stand out as more influential than others in this process, to include the role of personal relationships, the impact of violence, and the functioning of certain places, like prisons, as a sort of “holding environment.”

2.1.2 Leaving Right-Wing Groups, Gangs, and Religious Cults

A number of other fields outside terrorism studies have also explored the question of why an individual might turn away from violence, leave a group, or cease participation in a particular activity or movement. According to the 2012 RAND report, the factors involved in exit from street gangs, religious cults, and right-wing extremist groups is similar to that on leaving terrorist groups (Disley et al. 2012). Next, I will briefly highlight some of the findings from these other fields, and emphasize their similarities.

Leaving Right-Wing Extremist Groups

Tore Bjørgo is one of the best-known scholars who has done extensive work on disengagement from right-wing extremist groups (Bjørgo 2009). His works centers on a model of push and pull factors, similar to that of Horgan mentioned earlier. Bjørgo has worked with Horgan to develop a common framework for both groupings (Bjørgo and Horgan 2008). Push factors are defined as negative occurrences that make it unattractive to stay in the group, whereas pull factors are opportunities that attract an individual to another alternative. Both factors can also include social forces that either push or pull the person. The common ones, drawing on Bjørgo and Horgan, can be summarized as follows (Bjørgo 2009; Tore Bjørgo 2006):

Table 4: Push/Pull Factors in Disengagement

Pull Factors	Desire for a normal life
	New employment
	New educational prospects
	Desire to establish a family
	New role model or social group
	New, more compelling ideology or belief structure
Push Factors	Criminal prosecution
	Parental or social disapproval
	Counter violence from opposing groups
	Discomfort with group's violent activities
	Loss of faith in ideology or politics of the group
	Disillusionment with group's leadership
	Loss of confidence, status or position in group
	Ejection from group
Exhaustion from tension and uncertainty as a member of a militant group	

The pull factors appear to be more self-originated, and often represent a shifting of priorities. Interestingly, Bjørgo found the strongest reason for leaving a racist militant group was the desire to start a family and take on parental and spousal roles (Bjørgo and Horgan 2008; Noricks 2009). Alternatively, the desire to have a normal life has been a very predominant motivation for leaving (Tore Bjørgo 2006, 11–12). However, Bjørgo does not dig deeper to determine what made the individual start to shift those priorities.

A common push factor was the feeling that one's deeply held ideals that motivated involvement in the first place were being compromised by a new organizational climate or new members. Another common one was the exact opposite; the original ideological impetus that motivated the person to join the group no longer resonated. Similar to the findings on why terrorists leave, the experience of violence was also an important push factor. Another push factor, which seems specific to racist groups,

was the realization of stigma associated with membership in the organization (Bjørgero 2009).

“Exit Costs”

Similar to the work on leaving terrorism, Bjørgero emphasizes high barriers to exit that can make leaving more difficult. Aside from the obvious—sunk costs of time and effort, fear about reprisals, lack of protection against former enemies—the lack of a social network to substitute for the one that is being left behind is a large deterrent.

According to Bjørgero, one of the most common reasons for staying in the group is that the person has nowhere else to go, they risk “ending up in a social vacuum” since they have cut off all their previous relationships when joining. The fear of being isolated, alone, and lonely is enough to discourage exiting even when other strong pull and push factors exist (Bjørgero 2009). Another fear, similar to that of terrorists, is the loss of status and prestige they currently receive from within their close-knit community (Tore Bjørgero 2006, 14).

Leaving Street Gangs

Scholars who have examined some of the reasons people leave street gangs have also found that the most common reason is the personal or individual experience of violence by the gang member (Bjørgero 2009). One major study of desistance from gang activity found that among those studied, the primary motivation for leaving was the gang members’ experience with violence, suggesting that “real” violence was far less romantic than expected (Decker and Lauritsen 2001; M. W. Klein 1995). Other studies have found that gang members often start thinking of leaving when someone close to them, or they themselves, have been the victim of violence (Horgan 2009). Van Winkle and Decker

posit that the ripest time for intervention is the period immediately following a violent incident, although it must occur quickly before the gang can reframe the incident in a way that increases solidarity amongst them (Decker and Lauritsen 2001; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Carey 2009). Otherwise, violence may actually increase a group's cohesion. Assessments of gang intervention programs found social programs that targeted the group as a unit actually increased the group's solidarity and in some cases actually increased violence (Decker and Van Winkle 1996, 270). On the other hand, however, when the intervention program strategically targeted the most recent members or those on the fringe with positive inducements, they were more successful.

Aside from violence, other factors affecting defections related to the group dynamics, which is a primary element of the functioning of gang behavior (M. Klein 1971; Short and Strodbeck 1965). In general, studies on gangs focus intentionally on the social and structural aspects of the gang, because of an understanding that those are key to the functioning of gang membership (Curry and Decker 1998; Tobin 2008; Cottam, Huseby, and Lutze 2011; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). The specific factors that may influence defections are sometimes referred to as the "affiliative factors," to distinguish from the ideological factors that may be more influential in defections from far-right and terrorist groups that have a strong ideological component. Gang members often leave when the costs of remaining in the group increase and begin to outweigh the affiliative benefits they once gained from membership. These benefits refer predominantly to the role of the group as a "surrogate family" and source of close-knit relationships (Brotherton and Barrios 2004). Bjørgo found that gang members often leave when the

benefit of brotherhood they used to get from belonging to the group is undermined by infighting (Tobin 2008; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Other factors that could change affiliative benefits would be a decline in group solidarity and changes in organizational elements.

Whereas these represent push factors, the pull factor of a desire to “have a normal life” was also found to be very common (Bjørge 1999). This represents a change in priorities, similar to those mentioned earlier with terrorists. However, once again the current literature does not delve into why those priorities change. Also similar to the findings from terrorism studies, experiencing kindness and compassion was found to be a powerful influence in some individuals as well. In his memoirs about his two decades of working with gangs in Los Angeles County, Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle recounts dozens of stories of how compassion changed the perspectives of gang members and, in some cases, influenced them to leave. Boyle's *Homeboy Industries* is the largest gang intervention program, and Boyle attributes part of their success to the power of helping gang members view themselves as worthy of love and affirmation (Decker and Lauritsen 2001, 53).

“Exit Costs”

Once again, similar to the other examples, there are certain “exit costs” that prohibit individuals from leaving gangs. Most predominant is the fear of having no other place to go, or losing status and protection (Boyle 2011; Fremon 2008). The loss of protection appears to be a bigger concern for gang members than for those who leave terrorism or far-right racist groups. This is likely because studies show those who do

leave are often harassed by police or rival gang members (Decker and Van Winkle 1996, 272).

Leaving Religious Cults and Sects

Although cults and sects are not violent in nature, the reasons individuals leave them may provide some helpful perspectives, especially given the religious or spiritual tone of certain individuals' motivations in leaving extremist groups. Galanter has researched voluntary and forced departure from religious cults, sects, and NRMs and found it was a long process that often was spurred by disillusionment with the internal management of the organization or loss of commitment to the organization's values (Decker and Lauritsen 2001; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Seeing the group in a negative light was a powerful way this happened. For example, one couple claims they started rethinking their involvement in the Church of Scientology after seeing a church official hitting a subordinate (Galanter 1989). These two most common factors coincide with the most common push factors cited by Bjørge for racist extremist groups. Sometimes, however, the causes for leaving cults are insignificant, such as personal disagreements with superiors (Goodstein 2010). Forming a relationship with someone outside the cult has led members to leave the group (Galanter 1989, 161–165).

Like with the other groups, disengagement was initiated by some kind of trigger that called into question one's adherence to the group (S. A. Wright 1988, 151). Studies of individuals who left convents in the Catholic Church found that once doubt started, it quickly spread. Since these types of organizations are "total," meaning that every aspect of the group's worldview is interconnected, when one piece is called into question, it

brings into question the entire belief system. At this point, the ideology begins to unravel rather quickly (S. A. Wright 1988). At the same time, studies of cults have found that when the source of this doubt is minor or further inconsistencies do not follow, often the individual will deny the discrepancy or rationalize it to maintain cognitive consistency (Ebaugh 1988, 41).

“Exit Costs”

Similar to the other examples, cult members have “exit costs” which discourage leaving, the primary being a sense of having no other place to go. Often when they do leave, they are completely ostracized by their family and friends who are still part of the cult (S. A. Wright 1988; S. A. Wright 1991). Those who leave also lose the ease of having their group meet all their needs, such as religion/meaning, employment, family, friends, and stability (Goodstein 2010).

2.1.3 Embracing Nonviolence after Violence

As I mentioned earlier, there have been almost no studies that have looked specifically and primarily at those who have left extremism and now actively work for nonviolence. A 2007 academic study by psychologist Renee Garfinkel sponsored by the U.S. Institute of Peace is one of the only of its kind (Garfinkel 2007). In the study, Garfinkel looked at the psychological transformation from violence to nonviolence of seven cases of former members of militant groups—Muslim, Jewish, and Christian—who were now “working for peaceful change.” She conducted interviews and found that this change almost always occurred during a time of vulnerability, associated with stress, crisis and trauma. Geographic relocation, which involved novelty, insecurity, and

instability, was an important factor for some, and which may have enhanced vulnerability and potentially inspired an openness to change. The exposure and experience of violence was also something she found to induce trauma and a time of vulnerability. This coincides with the earlier findings that a trigger initiates the process by inducing cognitive dissonance.

Also similar to earlier findings, Garfinkel found that a key factor in the transition were personal relationships, specifically a mentor or friend who supported and affirmed peaceful behavior. This was especially important since leaving militancy entailed leaving one's social network, so the presence of a role model or friend to lean on as a replacement was an important enabler. In many cases, the individual had an experience of unexpected compassion from someone previously identified as an "enemy." This led to a realization of commonality with them. This often led or enhanced the perception that their existing values and beliefs were wrong or misguided. In some cases, especially among those who were religious, this precipitated a "reorientation in outlook and direction" that was a type of spiritual conversion (Garfinkel 2007).

Overall, she found the move from violence to nonviolence to be a lengthy process that involved much iteration. According to Garfinkel, the essential element driving this process was recognition of the shared humanity of the Other, which was a difficult step that needed to be repeated over and over again (Garfinkel 2007). She also found their metamorphosis into an advocate of peace was a form of "positive post-traumatic growth," evidenced in a variety of other populations who have likewise experienced traumatic events (Garfinkel 2007, 14).

2.1.4 Summary

The aforementioned studies are all grounded in a psychological perspective and point to disengagement as a long-term process spurred on by some trigger that precipitates a cognitive opening. The cognitive opening happens because the trigger brings to light an inconsistency in the person's current worldview. This contradiction opens the individual to doubt and receptivity to new and different ideas. This trigger is often a traumatic event and may be caused by a variety of factors. A common, yet perhaps unexpected, source of trauma can be the acts of violence themselves. However, this traumatic event can also lead to a strengthening of commitment to the group and solidifying of group solidarity, as the studies of those who leave street gangs suggests. Additionally, in some cases, the trigger is not a traumatic event but something more banal, or a gradual buildup of small occurrences.

From this cognitive opening, the individual embarks on a period of questioning and reflection. Horgan, Jacobson, Bjørge, Ashour and others view this second phase as a process of strategic calculation on the part of the individual. In addition to perceiving contradictions in one's beliefs, the individual may begin to realize their investment of time and resources is outweighing the material, psychological, and communal benefits of belonging to the extremist group. In other words, according to this view, they embark on a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether they should stay or go. This perspective by Horgan and others is based on rational choice theory and predicts an extremist will leave the group when the expected utility of moderation exceeds the utility of extremism (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996a). Once the individual believes that increased participation

and commitment will not produce the continued desirable outcomes in the future, they will likely abandon the group. This decision point will differ based on each person's individual calculation of his or her investment and rewards.

This calculation will also be affected strongly by the level of commitment of the individual to the group and ideology. Noricks predicts the probability an individual will disengage is inversely proportional to the degree of commitment, which can be measured in terms of affective, pragmatic, and ideological bonds (Rabasa et al. 2010). Affective bonds refer to the emotional attachment to the other members of the group and to the group itself. Pragmatic bonds are the practical factors that make leaving difficult, or the "exit costs." The ideological bonds are the reasons used to justify the actions the individual takes for the group and the sacrifices (Noricks 2009). Another important factor in this calculation is the individuals' roles and responsibilities in the group (Rabasa et al. 2010).

Some scholars do point out that certain kinds of extremists are less susceptible to triggers than others, particularly when ideology plays a more important role, and especially in cases of religious ideology as with Islamic extremists (Rabasa et al. 2010, 12). Those extremists will be less susceptible to material rewards and punishments and more motivated and persistent. However, ideology plays a big role in getting individuals to leave terrorist groups, especially religious ones. On the other hand, studies have found that exiting from right-wing extremist groups and street gangs is motivated not by ideological reasons but rather by disappointment in the organization or practical factors

such as desire for a normal life. Group dynamics and affiliative factors play an important role in these cases (Demant et al. 2008).

In some cases, ideology also plays a role in getting individuals to leave cults, specifically when the ideology fails to fully explain circumstances or fails to affect political and social change (Morris et al. 2010; Demant et al. 2008; Bjørge and Horgan 2008). Alternatively, disillusionment with the group and/or members not living up to the ideological ideals plays an important role as well. These ideological misgivings are often compounded by more pragmatic reasons, such as harsh living conditions, burnout, or lack of compensation (Ebaugh 1988). The studies do not address whether there are differences among various ideologies, however, especially between those that are secular and those that are religious.

The entire process can be summarized by being broken down into the following stages (Noricks 2009):

Table 5: Disengagement Process

Disengagement Process for Terrorists, Right-Wing Extremists, and Gang Members	
Stage 1: Trigger	Traumatic event or emotional crisis or gradual realization; creates a cognitive opening
Stage 2: Cost-Benefit Analysis	Weighting the costs and benefits of leaving vs. staying in the group
Stage 3: Turning Point	Expected utility of leaving exceeds utility of staying
Stage 4: Disengagement	A change in behavior in which he/she stops committing violent acts
Stage 5: New Identity	Developing a new identity and reintegration into society

Stage 6: Likelihood of recidivism	Depends on finding a new job and new social network; acceptance by a supportive community; and whether the person deradicalized
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In sum, the existing literature on those who leave street gangs, terrorist organizations, right-wing extremist groups, cults, and NRMs describes a similar trajectory of disengagement. The literature provides a general overview of how this process commonly occurs among a wide cross cutting sample of individuals. However, since the literature is grounded in a positivist tradition that focuses on empirical, rational and logical causal factors, it asserts that individuals make cost-benefit assessments in a rational choice manner. Such a limited view of the human individual fails to account for the constructed nature of identity and social reality, and hence provides only a narrow understanding of how individuals make such decisions to leave. The socially constructed and narrative nature of Selfhood is where I turn to next.

2.2 Renunciation as a Discursive Phenomenon of Narrative Change

Language is the prime site of the construction of the person . . . we can only represent our experiences to ourselves and to others by using the concepts embedded in our language, so that our thoughts, our feelings, and how we represent our behavior are all ‘pre-packaged’ by language. (Burr 1995, 39)

In the following section, I review the relevant literature on narrative selfhood and identity, which forms a baseline for this process of change as framed through a social constructionist and post-structuralist lens of identity transformation. Whereas the positivist fields of study presented earlier frame this process as “disengagement,” I depart now from using this label and instead move towards using the label of “renunciation” in

order to differentiate the social constructionist and post-structuralist perspective on this phenomenon. In this section, I incorporate literature that explores the dynamics of narrative identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction. Since identity change does not occur in a vacuum, I also review the literature on discourse as both a constraining and enabling factor of change. Since dominant discourses often serve as constraining factors for change, I incorporate the concept of resistance towards dominant discourses as outlined by Foucault. This concept forms the basis of how I understand my subjects to resist their old narrative identities to the point of renunciation.

2.2.1 Narrative Selfhood

“Through narrative we create and re-create selfhood.” (Bruner 2003, 85)

In order to understand the process of renunciation, we must first understand the human person. According to a positivist-oriented psychological or social psychological explanation, a human person is defined as:

. . . a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against such other wholes and against a social and natural background. (Geertz 1979)

This type of person appeals to reasons and logic and fits the rational actor model. However, scholars in recent years have contested this ontological nature of the Self (Bruner 1990, 99–138). After a long history of debate, the idea of a directly observable Self with a real and essential nature has been deconstructed and replaced with the idea of a constructed, conceptual Self. Hence, the positivist-oriented psychological perspective has been replaced by a social constructionist psychology that asserts an interpretive, constructivist, and distributive view of psychological and social psychological

phenomenon (Geertz 1979). The differences between these two perspectives are summarized in Table 6:

Table 6: Social Constructionist vs. Positivist Perspectives of the “Self”

SELF	Social Constructionist psychology	Positivist-oriented psychology
	constructed, conceptual Self composed of stories identified with and lived out	directly observable Self with a real and essential nature separate from others
	Self as a storyteller that enacts the roles assigned within the stories they perceive as real	Self as a as a strategist that acts based on reasons and logic
	Dynamic and constantly changing	Static
	Self shaped by culture, history and interpersonal interaction	Self as separate and independent from other wholes and against a social and natural background
REALITY	Social Constructionism	Positivism
	Socially constructed reality that can only be interpreted	Existence of an objective and freestanding reality that can be discovered
	Knowledge as constructed through social processes	Truth as objective
	Importance of language as window into meaning making	Importance of human experience as window into meaning making

Scholars from the social constructionist view have explored how such a Self is created. As Bruner accounts, scholars first assumed the constructed Self functioned as a strategist that followed logic and rules, which he believes was likely influenced by the old rational actor paradigm (Bruner 1990, 110). A different view emerged in the 70s and 80s, which viewed the Self as a storyteller spinning stories about itself and about life in general (Bruner 1990, 110). This shift was influenced by literary theory and emerging theories of narrative cognition. From this perspective, there is no separate and substantial Self but rather a composition of stories a person identifies with and lives out. In *Narrative*

and the Self, philosopher Anthony Paul Kerby defines the self as a “semiotic subject” that is the product of “narrative constructions”; moreover, he and other scholars have described self narration as the defining act of the human subject (Eakin 1999; Kerby 1991). This view asserts humans know themselves and other through stories, which they also use to act based on the roles they are assigned. There is now even evidence from neuroscience that if we lacked the capacity to make stories about ourselves, there would be no such thing as selfhood (Sacks 1986).²

Concurrently, these scholarly explorations have led to a growing appreciation of the effects of interpersonal interaction in shaping and directing the formation of a storytelling Self, a concept referred to as transactional contextualism (Bruner 1990, 105). Such an appreciation takes into consideration the social situation, specifically culture, within which people function, making the Self a creation that is distributed and culturally, historically situated. This view also posits that in addition to constructing a Self, people also construct a social reality that is negotiated between and among one another. This constructionist view holds many implications for understanding humans and human behavior, including personal transformation. To explore further the implications of this perspective, I will next turn to how the view of a narrative Self has impacted our understanding of identity, an area of great importance since I frame renunciation as a process of identity transformation.

² Oliver Sacks has studied patients with a neurological disorder called dysnarrativia, which is a severe impairment in the ability to tell or understand stories. He found that in those patients, selfhood virtually vanishes.

2.2.2 Narrative Identity Construction & Reconstruction

Within the existing scholarship on identity, there is a split along “essentialist” definitions in which identity is absolute and knowable, and “constructionist” definitions in which identity is whatever people agree it to be in any given historical and cultural context (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 3). Contemporary theories of identity grounded in positivism assert it to be an “essential, cognitive, socialized, phenomenological or psychic phenomenon” that rules human action (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 3). This assertion is based on an assumption that individuals hold a “private, pre-discursive and stable identity” that does not change, although people may present themselves differently in different contexts (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 3). Since this view locates identity in “private” realms of cognition and experience, scholars within this tradition focuses on these elements to define identity in their scholarship (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 4).

In sharp contrast to such a framing of identity, scholars from the social constructionist perspective assert identity to be actively, constantly, and dynamically constituted in discourse (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 4). They reject the idea of an absolute self that can be located behind discourses. This view locates identity in “public” realms of discourse and other semiotic systems of meaning making, making these elements—found in talk and texts—the object of study. Since this approach explores how people perform, ascribe, and resist identity, it is ideal for the type of exploration my study on renunciation represents.

In their work, constructionist scholars have interpreted the role of language as integral to this dynamic nature of identity construction and reconstruction. The analysis

of *language* overrides the importance of human *experience* as the most fundamental component for understanding the nature of reality (Oksala 2007, 33). Language itself is believed to structure how we come to understand ourselves, understand others, and understand the world around us. As Burr says, “our experience of the world, and perhaps especially of our own internal states, is undifferentiated and intangible without the framework of language to give it structure and meaning. The way that language is structured therefore determines the way that experience and consciousness are structured” (Burr 1995, 34–35). She goes on to say that “what we take being a person to mean—such as having a personality, being motivated by drives, desires, having loves, hates and so on—is not part of some essential human nature which would be there regardless of language. These things become ‘available’ to us, through language, as ways of structuring our experience” (Burr 1995, 34).

Within social constructionism, certain scholars have focused specifically on how language structures reality in narrative forms (Sarbin 1986; Shotter 1988; K. J. Gergen 1994; M. Gergen 1983). These theorists claim reality itself is constructed through the human mind via narratives, making narrative the “architecture of meaning” (Cobb 1993). Bruner states that we instinctively “cling to narrative models of reality and use them to shape our everyday experiences” (Bruner 2003, 7). Narratives are a particular form of language composed of elements that include beginnings, middles and ends, with a recounting of events that is spatial and temporal (Chatman 1978). The central features of a narrative include a narrator, characters, settings, plot, events that evolve over time, crises and resolutions (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 133). These elements form the structure

individuals use to organize and make sense of experiences; incoming data is molded into meanings and patterns encased in narrative forms that become an internalized reality (Riessman 1993).

Just as narratives create reality, they create peoples' identities. "We speak our identities," says Mishler (Mishler 1999, 19). Our lives are storied (Bruner 1986; G. C. Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992). Put in a different way, people *are* their stories (Cortazzi 2001, 388). Narrative psychologist Dan P. McAdams claims identity takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, plots, and themes (McAdams 2003, 187). Another narrative psychologist, Theodore R. Sarbin echoes this, saying we create our self through narrative in the form of a life story, and in order to maintain consistency in that narrative, we engage in "smoothing," choosing, and molding experiences and events to fit the main theme of that life story (Burr 1995, 135). "We 'become' the stories through which we tell our lives," says Riessman (Riessman 1993a, 7). Gergen refers to this construction of identity as a "self-narrative," or an individual's account of the relationship among several self-relevant events across time. In developing this self-narrative, we establish coherent connections among all these life events (Gergen 1994, 187). Bruner calls the autobiographical process as a process of narrative self-making, drawing on philosopher Nelson Goodman's notion of "worldmaking" (Gergen 1994, 187). Literary theorist Eakin views narrative and identity so intimately lined that "narrative is not merely a literary form but a mode of phenomenological and cognitive self-experience," and that self and story are "complementary, mutually constituting aspects of a single process of identity formation" (Eakin 1999, 100).

From this perspective, identity is simply another narrative construction. It is composed of core narratives that have to do with how we understand who we have been, who are going to become, and how that relates to others around us (Berger and Luckmann 1966). At the same time, this process does not occur in a vacuum nor is it a wholly independent creation. Sarbin and Gergen both point out that the narratives we construct about ourselves are not simply private, but heavily dependent on willingness of co-actors in the construction of our story. Since our stories must be compatible with those of others who feature in our accounts, this makes them subject to social sanctioning and negotiation (Burr 1995, 137).

The construction of identity is also heavily influenced by the familiar stories that represent the culture's shared social understanding. Scholars point out how personal stories are connected in some way to wider cultural stories, also referred to as master narratives, cultural plotlines, discourse, or interpretative repertoires, according to the tradition being cited (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 139). Some characterize this process as a way in which stories of identity are "disciplined" by social circumstances and practices (Dunn 1998). Bruner emphasizes how narrative self-making is always dependent on the symbolic system in which it is conducted, composed of opportunities and constraints (Bruner 2001). Narrative theorist Walter Fisher (1989) has suggested that all symbolic action, which can be understood as part and parcel of stories, is grounded in particular histories and cultures with narrative formulations creating a rhetorical reserve of those very histories and cultures (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001, 11).

Social constructionist scholars Holstein and Gubrium (2000) caution that self-construction is a complex process that responds to multiple “layers” of interpretive constraint and narrative resources. “The contingencies brought to bear at any particular place and time coalesce from a vast array of possibilities, including those taken from broader cultural understandings such as might be drawn from race, gender, class, and myriad other configurations of meaning,” they state (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 167). Narrative resources include available plots, themes and characterizations, which Holstein and Gubrium refer to as “local culture,” defined as “situated discourses that specify locally accountable selves” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 161). Such a vast assemblage of interpretative possibilities invites what they call narrative slippage and innovation (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 167). Although local conventions and resources condition interpretation, Holstein and Gubrium do not believe they determine the way individuals think about who they are, preserving a sense of agency within individuals themselves (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 164).

In sum, this narrative view of identity is starkly different from the static psychological view because it emphasizes its dynamical nature and the role of context. The focus is on identity as performed, dynamic, culturally and historically located, constructed in interaction with people and institutions, as continuously re-made, and as contradictory and situational (May 2004). Since this view discounts the validity of an essential human nature, it implies a person’s identity can change, can be constructed differently. This change also occurs in and through language. “Language is the place where identities are built, maintained, and challenged,” says Burr (Burr 1995, 43). This

identity construction and deconstruction is a dynamic process that is always occurring; identity is constantly being sought after, contested, validated, and maintained (Burr 1995, 46).

At the same time, this dynamic process is influenced by interactions with others, as well as the context (Burr 1995, 39). As mentioned earlier, the context is composed of the discourses available. These very discourses form the structure and content of our thoughts, including the core issues of personhood, identity and change. Furthermore, the discourses that form our identity have particular implications for what we can do and what we should do (Burr 1995, 54). Thus, the network of discourses serves to structure, constrain, and influence identity construction, as well as the possibility of identity change and reconstruction. I turn to the role of discursive resources next.

2.2.3 Discourse as Constraining & Enabling Change

Whereas developmental and psychological theorists would argue for the existence of stable personality traits independent of context, narrative theorists argue that people enact an identity dependent on the network of stories they are embedded in. These networks of stories serve as the discursive resources from which we draw on to become who we are. “Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with others . . . We are the end-product, the combination, of the particular versions available to us” (Burr 1995, 51).

Within the study of discourse, there are many perspectives on the agency of the individual regarding this change. Scholars on one end of the spectrum view the person as tool-user and the discourses as the toolkit. Discourse is viewed as a collection of

metaphors and linguistic devices that create an interpretative repertoire, something which people draw upon in constructing their accounts of events (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

The person is seen as a moral actor who positions themselves with respect to moral rules and expectations of their culture. From this viewpoint, the discursive resources are seen as a social resource available to all who share a language and culture, and which could be drawn upon by anyone to bring about a particular desired representation of an event.

These discursive resources enable individuals to justify particular versions of events, excuse or validate behavior, fend off criticism or maintain credible stances in interaction.

Some scholars like Gergen claim individuals are ultimately driven to use discursive repertoires as a warrant of their actions, to give socially acceptable accounts of themselves according to context (Gergen 1989).

Another group of scholars also claims individuals are guided to use discourse by the accounting and warranting conventions of their culture. This view emphasizes a performative role of language whose goal is of accounting for conduct within a moral framework within the specific system of rules of conduct of one's culture (Burr 1995, 128). This perspective, however, goes further by claiming that the very concept of Self, and hence agency, is itself constructed in language. Scholars like philosopher and psychologist Rom Harré claim that the structure of our language causes us to adopt particular fundamental assumptions about human nature and live them out daily in interactions (Burr 1995, 126). Our psychology is structured by the stories about the nature of humanity embedded in our language, they claim. The language of Self serves as an organizing principle that structures experience; the Self is more of a conceptual

construction than an ontological reality. From this perspective, when we hear someone give reasons for action, we are witnessing an account of Self in the process of construction, not a description of cause-effect relationship (Burr 1995, 132).

Finally, another group of scholars take a post-structuralist approach that views individuals as subject positions in discourse. This view takes on a much more dynamic view of Self and defines it through a framework of discursive positioning. Positions in discourse are associated with speaking rights and hence directly tied to power. They come with their own structures of rights, obligations, and possibilities for action, and influence identity (Burr 1995, 149). These positions are the result of a negotiated account production referred to as positioning (Burr 1995, 140). This view sees a self-narrative as a negotiated joint product that emerges from social interaction and draws from the socially and culturally available discourses (Davies and Harre 1990). This view shifts the focus from an intra-psychic domain and into a societal one. Within this view, an individual is seen as simultaneously produced by and manipulator of discourse (Burr 1995, 141), although the extent of personal choice and agency is debated (Burr 1995, 153).

In sum, although scholars differ on these varying points, most agree by viewing these discourses and discursive practices as the raw materials and manufacturing processes from which people are produced. For my research, my theoretical assumption is that the person has some room for maneuver and choice within the discourses they are embedded in. As stated by Holstein and Gubrium, I view an individual as being “artfully agentic and culturally circumscribed” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 12). Thus, I pay

careful attention in my study to the constraints on the agency of the person, examining closely the social mechanisms and discursive understandings through which subjectivity is constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 13).

Overall, I place a heavy emphasis on discursive resources as constraining factors because they have a big role to play in identity transformation—or the lack thereof. Discourse theory tells us such change is not easy since it is inherently tied to power relations. For example, dominant discourses are tied to social arrangements and practices, which support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups, so change implicitly challenges their associated social practices, structures, and power relations (Burr 1995, 152-3). Therefore, any attempts to change will most definitely be challenged with resistance. Furthermore, positions in discourse become part of an individual's psychology, providing a sense of self, ideas and metaphors with which we think, and the self-narratives used to talk and think about ourselves (Burr 1995, 152). This creates a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions that makes change more difficult (Burr 1995, 152). Although not easy, personal change is certainly possible, however. The first step in change entails recognizing the discourses (and positions provided by them) that are currently shaping our subjectivity. The next step entails devising strategies for how unacceptable positions might be resisted and positions in alternative discourses take up (Burr 1995, 152). For my research, I primarily draw upon the ideas of Foucault, who viewed this process of change as resistance.

2.2.4 Identity Transformation as Foucaultian Resistance

In his early and most popular work, Foucault strongly discounted human agency, problematizing the assumed critical reason and personal autonomy of a human being. He strongly questioned the importance of the rational, autonomous, and individual subject and his or her psychological attributes (Oksala 2008, 47). Instead, he pointed to the social processes through which humans were constructed and aimed to present a “genealogy of the modern subject as a historical and cultural reality” (Foucault and Sennett 1982, 9). His philosophical-historical ideas dealt with how the individual is constructed through a web of power and knowledge relations. He saw this web as being composed of underlying, unconscious structures of thought—discourses—that formed the context of an individual’s thinking. Foucault explored these concepts through studies that focused on crime and punishment (1991, 1994), sickness (1994), madness (1961, 88), and sexuality (1978).

Towards the later parts of his life, however, Foucault changed his thinking about human agency and started exploring resistance to technologies of power. His emphasis on resistance is particularly prominent in his later writings on power and sexuality (Sawicki 1991). In a later interview, Foucault stated that “as soon as there’s a relation of power, there’s a possibility of resistance. We’re never trapped by power; it’s always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy” (Sawicki 1991, 24–25). He began to see how the inherent fluid nature of discourses enabled a discernment of the interpretative possibilities available for self construction (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 94). Foucault came to view the subject as “acting intentionally and

voluntarily—within, to be sure, cultural and institutional systems that organize their ways of doing things” (T. McCarthy 1991, 70). He came to believe that although a person was constructed by discourse, they also partake in this construction and thus are capable of exercising some choice with respect to the discourses and practices they embrace (Sawicki, 91). Given the right circumstances, he believed a person to be capable of what he termed “critical historical reflection,” or of critically analyzing the discourses that frame their lives and of claiming or resisting them according the effects they wish to bring about. He saw this change occurring through the opening up of marginalized discourses, which serve as important sources of resistance (Burr 1995, 90). In the case of identity, this promotion of repressed discourses makes them available as alternatives from which to fashion alternative identities (Burr 1995, 90).

In his last writings before his death, Foucault became interested in the individual’s own role in shaping him or herself, focusing on what he termed as “practices of the Self” (Oksala 2008, 97). Such practices or technologies of the Self refer to the forms of understanding the subject creates about him or herself and the practices by which he or she transforms his/her mode of being (Oksala 2008, 96-97). These practices of the Self, therefore, represent the ways individuals modify themselves by actively refusing, adopting, and altering forms of being a subject (Oksala 2008, 99). The main point of these practices for Foucault was their dynamic nature, and he argued that our lives could be creatively formed and transformed.

Specifically, Foucault explored historical forms of understanding that subjects create about themselves and ways in which they form themselves as subjects of a

morality (Oksala 2007, 97). The last two volumes he published before his death, *History of Sexuality*, were historical studies of the sexual morality of Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, which aimed to trace that particular conception of ethics (Oksala 2008, 92). Foucault reportedly accepted the Kantian belief that we construct our ethical position, and these studies represent Foucault’s attempts to rethink ethics (Hacking 1986, 239). Foucault’s views on ethics are summarized in Table 7 (Hacking 1986, 237-238).

Table 7: Elements of Foucault’s Construction of Oneself as a Moral Actor

“ethical substance”	Part of ourselves and our behavior that is relevant for ethical judgment
“mode of subjection”	What you use to internalize these concerns, anything from outside we take as authority
“asceticism in a very broad sense” “the self forming activity”	How we get it to work; we restrict certain things for a particular end
“teleology”	The kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way

For Foucault, ethics were the manner in which one forms oneself as a subject of morality acting in reference to its prescriptive elements. He described this process as “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rappor a toi*, which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own action” (Hacking 1986, 235). Morality, on the other hand, was seen as a set of values and rules of action that form moral codes and taught to individuals by some institution (Oksala 2008, 93). Moral behavior referred to the behavior in relation to that code (Oksala 2008, 93). For him, this process by which subjects form themselves as ethical subjects resembles the creation of a work of art. He claimed ethical practices of

the self were closely linked with aesthetics, thus calling them the *aesthetics of existence* (Oksala 2008, 97).

For my study, I apply both Foucault's concept of resistance using critical historical reflection and his conceptualization of the self as a moral actor constructed around a set of values. Firstly, I use critical historical reflection as a lens for understanding how my research subjects came to resist their prior narrative identity. Secondly, I define their identity through the language of morality—as a set of values and rules of action that could be resisted given the right circumstances. Since my research subjects all initially adhered to a moral code that permitted violence, which was subsequently replaced by a new moral code of nonviolence, I found Foucault's framing helpful in distinguishing the role of discourse in affecting this change.

Specifically, I looked to the memoirs of my research subjects to answer the question: *What can we learn about the relationship of discourse to this process of renunciation from how the individual understands their own transformation and the story they tell about it?* The accounts of my research subjects elucidate how the interpretive frames of former extremists are shaped by the broader discursive context since “the things people say and write, from the perspective of a post-structural social constructionism . . . are manifestations of discourses” (Burr 1995, 51). My theoretical assumption is that discourse structures narratives, thus I depart from an instrumentalist view that presumes speakers are in full control of their own narratives. My assumption is that speakers do at some level use stories in a pragmatic fashion as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein described, but I also attend to the ways in which this usage is

disciplined by the discourses they are embedded in as Foucault described (Foucault 1982; Wittgenstein 1953).

2.2.5 The Dynamics of Narrative Change

As presented in the previous section, an individual can be understood as a socially constructed amalgamation of stories, subject to change. The individual and their change are bounded by their context and the discursive resources available inherent within their environment. This presents a macro-level view of transformation. However, within the field of narrative studies, there are certain theories about how narratives change that may inform an understanding of renunciation as identity transformation from a micro-level perspective. In the following section, I present a framework of how change is perceived in narrative theory from a systems theory perspective of nonlinearity, an approach that sees change through the processes of disruption, disequilibrium, and destabilization. I then use this as the ground for exploring specific ways narratives change.

Nonlinear change

An interesting and emerging frame of understanding conflict dynamics can be found in the area of complexity science, which attempts to apply discrete systems and complexity theory (DST) to social conflict. Conflict practitioners have known for a while that conflict is a system and that change is not linear (Sandole 1999; Bartoli 2001). Conflict practitioners are now applying DST, chaos theory, mathematics, quantum psychics, and computer modeling to elaborate on those same conclusions (Nowak et al. 2006; Coleman 2011; Vallacher et al. 2010). These studies are finding that deep rooted and protracted conflicts operate like dynamical systems. In these types of systems,

changes in one realm cause changes in all of the others, forming what physicists refer to as a "complex system." When applied to conflict systems, this implies the intervention goal is not to directly change the issues per se, although that remains important, but rather to change the state of the overall system. In this way, intervention can be thought of as perturbation, or an act of disrupting the equilibrium of a system through nonlinear change (Vallacher et al. 2010).

The dominant feature of a complex and dynamical system is the attractor. An attractor refers to a subset of potential states or patterns of change to which a system's behavior converges over time (Vallacher et al. 2010). In situations of intractable conflict, it is the strength of the dominant attractor that keeps the conflict from being constructively resolved. This attractor functions like a cognitive schema by filtering information in a way that is congruent with its content (Vallacher et al. 2010). Information that contradicts the content is automatically thrown out or rationalized away. When intervening to change the state of the system, it becomes key, then, to replace this dominant attractor with a latent one (Nowak et al. 2006). This can be done by tipping the system over onto a new attractor.

Building off this frame, narrative theory would take this idea one step further and say that not only are social conflicts a form of complex systems, but they are organized discursively. Whereas DST theory states that conflicts are a result of the attractor landscape of the system, narrative theory expounds on this by claiming this attractor landscape is organized in terms of discourse. Therefore, changing that landscape, as DST advocates, is a function of changing the dominant discourse and narratives. Given that the

narrative landscape is a complex, dynamical system, there are important implications for the nature of narratives and nature of narrative change. Firstly, narrative itself has agency; it is a coherent, closed system that seeks to maintain certainty and coherence (Dewey 1929). Due to this, narratives are resistant to change, will not tolerate reorganization easily, and seek to maintain the status quo (Cobb 2003a). There are limited ways in which narrative can and will tolerate transformation. Since it operates as a complex system, a narrative changes through step jumps and tipping points. Therefore, direct frontal attacks, or telling it directly that it is wrong, will not work because it will trigger defensive responses; instead, provocations must come from the sidelines (Cobb 2003a).

The aim of such provocations is to unseat certainty and bring about a state of uncertainty and exploration. Scholars have theorized that change happens in uncertainty (Dewey 1929). Certainty is a function of the coherence of the narrative, and so provocations aim to dislodge coherence through an insertion of new beliefs, which brings about an element of doubt. Information can be thought of as “news of difference,” the opposite of certainty, and conflict resolution theory posits that conflicts can be mitigated by increasing information of difference (Bateson 2002). In narrative, meaning is created through the structure of plot, character, and themes, so new information can destabilize the system by reducing coherence through altering one or more of these features.

This alteration is meant to create a turning point, defined as a shift in meaning. As these narrative systems become destabilized from their equilibrium, they reach a tipping point and disorganize (Sluzki 1998). At that point, the narrative system seeks to re-

establish clarity and reconfigure. Once it stabilizes again, it has become something new. However, this new story cannot be too different from the old one, because otherwise it would not be recognized and might be rejected (Sluzki 1992). Yet, it also cannot be too similar because then the old one would reconstitute back to the older version that is more familiar (Sluzki 1992).

In addition to the destabilization of dominant conflict narratives, a post-structuralist perspective argues there must be a normative element in narrative intervention that guides narratives towards “better-formed” stories (Cobb 2003, 2006). A key component of these would be a re-establishment of legitimacy for all parties involved. These stories would have parties establish their own legitimacy, elaborated by their Others, and offer a description of their Others as having some degree or dimension of legitimacy (Cobb 2006). Some techniques to create these “better-formed” stories include circular questions, appreciative inquiry, positive connotation, and reframing. Positive connotation, or the framing of intentions as positive and legitimizing, is particularly powerful in counter narratives because it releases defensive posturing (Shoham-Salomon and Rosenthal 1987). According to Cobb, a good counter narrative needs to have the Self as a fully developed moral agent (Cobb 2006). This type of Self includes both positive and negative, legitimizing and delegitimizing characteristics.

Liminal Spaces & Ritual

The field of conflict resolution has explored the evolution of narratives and the literature on narrative mediation and negotiation practice holds important insights for understanding how narratives change. This type of narrative work focuses on

destabilizing the conflict story, in much the same way as the nonlinear perspective discussed earlier. Narrative facilitation, mediation and negotiation, and at times dialogue, entails a type of narrative transformational process in which the existing narratives, which are conflict inducing, are reconstructed and reorganized into new narratives. Much of the theory comes from work done in narrative therapy. The task of the mediator, then, is to destabilize and open up conflict narratives to permit the development of new ones (Cobb 1993).

However, it is not that simple because narratives are difficult to change. It is extremely difficult to break out of stories and one can easily become trapped in a conflict narrative with an opposing narrative that challenges one's identity or even one's existence. Third-party mediators are particularly helpful, then, in helping narratives evolve. A big factor in doing so is creating the proper holding environment of space for such a change to occur. Thus, workshops and dialogues that use narrative theory are purposefully created to induce an atmosphere of learning and be experiential, and tend to have reflective practices that encourage self-reflection, uncertainty, tolerance, and attention to relationships. This creates a safe space for the telling of personal stories and exploring issues pertaining to the conflict.

This intersubjective space of interaction can be understood through the literature on rituals and creation of transformation through "liminal space" (Chaitin 2003; Cobb 2001; I. Z. Hoffman 2001). To understand more about liminal space, we can turn to the work of Victor Turner who has studied ritual and its effects on significant transformation (Turner 1987). According to Turner, ritual is a place to think about transformation.

According to the literature, ritual allows for the evolution of the nature of the person in the context of the group that they are part of. Turner says there are three phases: a separation phase, a liminal phase, and an aggregation phase. In the separation phase, the people are segregated into their associated groups and narratives are highly polarized (Turner 1987). In the second phase, Turner says reversals start to occur (Turner 1987). He argues it often happens when the markers that people use to identify themselves are stripped off (Turner 1987). However, not only are these markers taken away but they are actually reversed. This refers to how the structures of power and hierarchy are turned upside down.

According to Cobb, this liminal phase of narrative is when the structures of legitimacy and de-legitimacy are flipped. Cobb applies this technique in her narrative practice through “playful irony” (Cobb 2006). This happens by co-creating a description with people about an “underbelly” that relates to their strength and which forms the basis of their legitimacy. This underbelly is explored playfully, in a nonthreatening manner. When successful, the individuals are left less legitimate—or more morally complex—than in the beginning of the conversation, and the Other is a little more legitimate. This shift is a major turning point (Cobb 2006; Cobb 2003a).

Critical Moments in Negotiation

The field of conflict resolution also elaborates further by talking about critical moments, specifically in the context of negotiation. Scholars have theorized on the types of critical moments necessary for a certain transformation to occur. This view of conflict transformation differs from conflict management, which operates from a bargaining

paradigm. Linda Putnam, a scholar of negotiation, defines conflict transformation as “moments in the conflict process in which parties reach new understandings of their situation, ones that redefine the nature of the conflict, the relationship among the parties, or the problems they face” (Putnam 2004, 276). These new understandings involve different meanings and interpretations of events, and are sometimes referred to as “ah-ha moments” (Galtung 1996). In this context, however, transformation is seen to result from the communication between parties during a negotiation. Putnam describes a shift from debate towards dialogue, which is characterized by speaking and listening in ways that break conflict spirals, reframe issues, and lead to new understanding. She goes further to describe this shift as consisting in changing levels of abstraction, allowing discourse to break from old patterns of communication and allows for new understanding to emerge.

The negotiation literature identifies five shifts that signal this transition: (1) specific to general, (2) concrete to abstract, (3) part to whole, (4) individual to system, (5) literal to symbolic (Putnam 2004). A critical moment can occur in any of these shifts. With (1) specific to general, there is a move from details about the conflict towards broad common goals the parties share. With (2) concrete to abstract, the parties recreate new meanings together in such a way that allows them to redefine issues. With (3) part to whole, there is a move from content of the conflict towards crafting solutions. With (4) individual to system, there is a refocusing on system level frames such as moral responsibility, future generations, and nature of community. And lastly, with (5) literal to symbolic, there is a shift from expressive language to symbolic language, which includes metaphors that transcend existing polarizations and stereotypes (Putnam 2004). All these

shifts alter meanings in such a way that transformation becomes possible between the two parties.

Putnam also discusses the importance of internal conditions within a negotiation process that make transformation possible. These include: (1) emotional frustration with the current situation, (2) a stance of curiosity, (3) connecting with the other party, and (4) building recognition and trust (Putnam 2004). The emotional frustration Putnam highlights is quite similar to the role of triggers and emotional trauma mentioned in the literature about the disengagement process. Putnam says this frustration helps disputants reflect on the situation and become open to change, similar to the concept of cognitive opening as presented by Horgan, Bjørge, and others.

Next, Putnam describes how third-party negotiators foster conditions conducive to curiosity, which is similar to the aforementioned concept and function of liminal spaces (Putnam 2004). A spirit of learning and exploration is encouraged, rather than attack and defend patterns. This coincides with the aforementioned understanding of narrative change as nonlinear, and futility of direct frontal attacks which often only lead to an escalation of conflict. Next, connecting with the other person refers to learning about the other person's story, in a way promoting empathy. The power of this relational connection was evidenced by earlier examples of the impact on former extremists of experiencing kindness from a supposed Other. This is also connected to the last factor Putnam mentions, the building of recognition and trust (Putnam 2004). She says this occurs through recasting of judgments about Self and Other, which appeared to happen in some of these anecdotes where extremists were treated with compassion by that Other.

Putnam concludes by pointing out certain external conditions that foster transformation (Putnam 2004). One of the most prominent is the presence of complexity on a systemic level. She asserts, referencing the theories of Johan Galtung, that the more a conflict is unpredictable and complex, the more potential for constructive transformation. This coincides with the aforementioned discussion of narrative change occurring through increasing complexity, which breaks coherence and opens up curiosity and doubt, and can lead to new stories.

Counter narratives

Lastly, another frame of analysis from narrative studies that deals with narrative change is that of master narratives and counter narratives. This focus examines how counter narratives can influence master narratives towards change. In the case of former terrorists, right wing extremists, and gang members, the original narrative around violence can be regarded as the master narrative, and the alternative narrative around nonviolence as the counter narrative. There is a growing body of research on counter narratives and dominant or master narratives that can shed light on how both change (Bamberg and Andrews 2007; Giroux 1996; H. L. Nelson 2001; Andrews 2002).

Whereas the concept of master narratives, also known as dominant discourses, has been theorized for quite some time now, the concept of counter narratives is a rather new one (Talbot et al. 2011). Furthermore, scholars differ in their definitions and conceptualizations of counter narratives. Counter narratives are thought to exist in relation to master narratives, and “always (at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched” (Tore et al. 2011, 151). Andrews presents them

as a phenomenon, as “stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews 2002). Others see them as functioning by “exposing the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told” (Harris, Carney, and Fine 2011, 13). Mark Freeman (2004) characterizes them as causing a sense of discontinuity and rupture. They are disruptive and “sometimes surge into reflection, infusing one’s history with new meaning, complexity, and depth” (Freeman 2004).

Master narratives, on the other hand, are internalized storylines that serve as a blueprint for other stories. They can be regarded as a vehicle through which we comprehend our stories and those of others. In this way, they are similar to the concept of “attractors” presented above in reference to nonlinear change. Since they are internalized, counter narratives are a foundational piece in the ongoing social construction of normalcy. However, when personal experience does not match the master narrative that has been internalized, this could lead to an opening, which brings about questioning and becoming aware of new possibilities (Andrews 2002). In the framework of nonlinear dynamics, this could be regarded as a perturbation that disrupts the coherence of the current narrative system, and could lead to a new formulation.

However, even with this opening, the literature states that narratives are difficult and reluctant to change. Master or dominant narratives, which are deeply entrenched, are even more resistant to transformation. Nelson and others argue that master narratives have a great ability to absorb disconfirming evidence and are often evidence-resistant (H. L. Nelson 2001). They are able to assimilate resistance by enveloping it with plausible

stories. Two of the most prominent ways they do this is by: (1) papering over/distorting inconvenient facts; (2) undermining the cognitive authority of people in position to point out inconvenient facts. But Nelson points out that despite their strength—even when the narrative is entrenched at the center of one’s web of belief—they cannot absorb all disconfirming evidence. Squire concurs, and says that dominant narratives are “always less stable and unified than they appear, more susceptible to fracture and subversion” (Squire 2002).

Counter narratives function to overcome this through strategies more akin to counterinsurgency and guerilla warfare than frontal assaults, which makes sense, given that narratives change in a nonlinear fashion. Nelson says counter narratives often start small like a crack, and then grow large (H. L. Nelson 2001). Counter narratives challenge dominant narratives in mainly three ways; they: (1) refuse—deny the dominant narrative applies to oneself; (2) repudiate—oppose it with a counter-story but only sporadically; and (3) contest—to oppose it publicly and systemically. In summation, dominant narratives can be attacked by drawing attention to certain key weak points summarized in Table 8 (H. L. Nelson 2001).

Table 8: Strategies for Counterstories

Exploiting Weak Points of a Dominant Narrative	
Tensions/cracks within	Narratives are composed of a bricolage and some portions of it are in tension with one another; a counterstory can engage with master narrative at these points to undermine credibility of some of its parts
Tensions among	Some portion can be dislodged by setting a counterstory between it and another master narrative that is at odds with it
Prescription and description	Norms and how people actually behave always differ; lack of

The openings for counter narratives are created when, for whatever reason, our experiences do not match the master narratives we have assimilated and we begin to question them (Andrews 2002). Andrews says this creates a challenge since our life stories become deviant compared to the regular storylines of the master narratives. She states: “The challenge then becomes one of finding meaning outside of the emplotments which are ordinarily available. We become aware of new possibilities” (Andrews 2002).

The theory on counter narratives is relevant when examining the issue of identity, and identity change. As mentioned earlier, narratives are identity constituting. Counter narratives, then, can be practical tools for re-identifying persons. In order for a counter narrative to re-identify a person, it must be accepted as identity constituting in the first place. It must also be culturally digestible and widely circulated, and seek to free the moral agency of the people it depicts. In sum, Nelson specifies the following three components that a narrative must have in order to constitute an identity (H. L. Nelson 2001):

1. **Explanatory force**—explain the person to herself and others (in a way that is consistent with data, coherent, sufficiently broad in scope)
2. **Correlation to action**—correlation between the person and their actions; both past and future; explain past actions and structure the field of future actions;
3. **Heft**—woven around the features they care about most (H. L. Nelson 2001).

Summary

There are several theories about how narrative change occurs. Overall, we know that narratives are resistant to change and so there are limited ways in which narrative can and will tolerate transformation. Since narrative operates as a complex system, changes are nonlinear and happen through step jumps and tipping points. Therefore, change must come in the form of provocations from the sidelines. These provocations aim to increase the complexity of the story in order to unseat certainty and disrupt coherence. In negotiation literature, these are referred to as critical moments, or changes in communication among parties in which levels of abstraction shift and bring about a new plane or dimension of interaction. This often leads to new understandings, new meanings and new interpretations. This occurs in a type of liminal space conducive to exploration, which allows structures of legitimacy and de-legitimacy to be flipped. The theories on counter narratives tell us that counter-stories can be practical tools for re-identifying persons. Dominant narratives can be attacked by drawing attention to its weak points, namely the tensions within, tensions among, and gaps between prescription and description. They can then be replaced by new narratives that are identity-constituting.

2.3 Radical Personal Change: Studies on Conversion

Social science has studied personal transformation through the lens of conversion, mainly in the field of the sociology of religion. Conversion refers to an internalization of a new belief system that implies a new reference point for the convert's self-identity, and well as a new social structure of affiliation (Rabasa et al. 2010). This area of study started out focusing specifically on religious change, but has since then moved to a more secular

conceptualization of conversion as a radical personal change. Although this area of research does not involve looking at how violent individuals change and leave extremist groups, the theoretical insights about change do provide some interesting elements for us to consider. Furthermore, since some of the individuals I research assert self-professed “spiritual conversions,” this body of literature holds useful explanatory power for my study.

2.3.1 The Evolving Conceptualization of Conversion

Most of the research on conversion has been focused predominantly with identifying its causes. Less work has been done on defining the actual process. According to Snow & Machalek (1984), conversion is still rather ambiguously conceptualized and scholars have not reached a consensus on its basic characteristics. One element all scholars universally agree upon, however, is that conversion involves radical personal change (Hefner 1993). Scholars still debate about whether this change is sudden or more gradual, single or multiple, or a mixture of all these elements. They also disagree upon the degree of change that would justify a “radical” personal change from a less drastic one (Snow and Machalek 1984).

Theories about the causes of conversion have fallen into three major categories over time (Bankston, Forsyth, and Floyd 1981, 285). During the first three decades of the twentieth century, conversion was predominantly characterized by theological and psychological descriptions (Snow and Machalek 1984). William James was the first scholar to focus on the study of conversion with his 1902 book *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1902; Pratt 1926; E. T. Clark 1929). James concentrated on the

psychological aspects of the conversion experience and distinguished two categories: (1) a sudden and emotional conversion to a previously foreign faith, and (2) a slow and gradual transition in which learning new values takes place over a period of time. He defined conversion as “the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided or consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, by consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities” (James 1902). Other scholars of this era stayed within these parameters and built off his definition. These early scholars also theorized that age was a significant factor, with rapid conversion more prominent among adolescents and youth (James 1902, 160).

Interestingly enough, the second category of theories was highly influenced by the experiences of American POWs during the Korean War. As a consequence, this second grouping developed a view of conversion as a form of "brainwashing" or “mind control.” A “coercive persuasion” model of conversion became dominant (Segal 1990). One of the prominent scholars in this category, William Sargent, theorized brainwashing can be stimulated in two major ways: (1) *sensory deprivation*, mainly through solitary confinement and sleep deprivation, but also including sensory deprivation through practices like contemplation and meditation; and (2) *overstimulation*, through harsh interrogations that involve strong lights, loud noises, etc, but also including music, drumming, dancing (Miller 1957; Bauer 1957; Sargant 1957; Lifton 1961; Schein 1961). This body of theories viewed conversion as “mind control,” which led to the practice of “deprogramming,” a topic also prevalent in the literature pertaining to cults and religious sects. Margaret Singer was one of the first to theorize and use this intervention technique,

which is a process of deconstructing a cult's emotional, psychological, and informational control over a person (M. Singer 1995). Singer defines deprogramming as "providing members with information about the cult and showing them how their own decision-making power had been taken away from them" (M. Singer 1995). Deprogramming became controversial due to its practices of coercion and even forced kidnapping, and was later replaced with "exit counseling," which refrains from coercive tactics (M. Singer 1995).

The third category was grounded in social science and largely characterized by the Lofland-Stark conversion model that highlighted the role of "cult affective bonds" and "intensive interaction" (Ross 1999). John Lofland and Rodney Stark developed their model after studying the Unification church of Reverend Sun Myung Moon (J. Lofland 1966; Heirich 1977; J. T. Richardson 1980; Bromley and Shupe 1979; Downton 1979; Snow and Phillips 1980; J. Lofland and Skonovd 1981; Long and Hadden 1983). Their model is meant to predict conversion based on psychological, social, and accidental variables. The specific elements that lead to conversion they describe are:

- (1) Individuals perceive themselves as active religious seekers;
- (2) They experience tension or dissatisfaction;
- (3) They use a religious perspective to interpret their tension or dissatisfaction;
- (4) The following environmental factors are present:
 - (i) A cult is encountered at a crisis point;
 - (ii) Strong affective attachment with the committed believers;
 - (iii) Minimal contact with non-believers;

(iv) Intensive interaction between the individual and the group (J. Lofland and Stark 1965).

The theories on conversion from all three categories of groupings have identified a range of causal factors that may lead to conversion. Snow & Machalek (1984) have grouped all these factors into the following general types:

- (a) Psychophysiological responses to coercion and induced stress;
- (b) Predisposing personality traits and cognitive orientations;
- (c) Situational factors that induce stress;
- (d) Predisposing social attributes;
- (e) Social influences (John Lofland and Stark 1965).

Theories dealing with conversion as brainwashing or mind control refer to the psychophysiological conditioning factors, whereas theories that view conversion as a result of “susceptibility” refer to the predisposing personality and cognitive traits (Snow and Machalek 1984). Both of these views frame conversion in a biased, negative light, dismissing any possibility of authentic change, and hence have limited explanatory power. Theories that view conversion as resulting from stress have been critiqued due to the inherent difficulty of accurately judging the influence of tension given the biographical reconstruction of converts’ narratives (Levine 1980). Studies found that converts were likely to view their past negatively and hence exaggerate their pre-conversion stress (Levine 1980).

Interest in predisposing social attributes emerged from studies of new religious movements, which found devotees to be predominantly in their twenties, middle class,

highly educated, and from stable family backgrounds (Snow and Machalek 1984). These studies inspired assertions that certain social characteristics cause conversion. However, as Snow & Machalek (1984) point out, these characteristics could just reflect this sample's general availability—such as their free time, disposable income, etc—but not necessarily predict conversion (Judah 1974; Snow 1976; Bromley and Shupe 1979; Ungerleider and Wellisch 1979; Barker 1983; Barker 1980; Rochford 1982; Beckford 1983).

This leaves theories around the role of social influences, which are the most recent, have withstood critiques, and currently represent the general consensus among scholars. This category encompasses three categories: social networks, affective and intensive interaction, and role learning. As with terrorism studies,³ social science has theorized that *social networks* are very important in explaining how people get recruited into new religious movements and organizations (Snow and Machalek 1984). Mirroring findings from terrorism research, these include friendship and kinship ties. *Intensive interaction* with others is very influential because positive interpersonal ties function as a “credible information bridge” that intensifies the pressure to accept appeals. Meanwhile, the *role learning* aspect views conversion as a process of imitation of influential role models, discounting any actual transformation of consciousness. (J. Lofland and Stark 1965; Gerlach and Hine 1970; Bibby and Brinkeroff 1974; Heirich 1977; Barker 1980; Snow and Phillips 1980; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Rochford 1982).

³ Marc Sageman has theorized that terrorism is a collective rather than an individual phenomenon in which friendship and familial ties are of most importance (Sageman 2008).

In sum, the literature on conversion has historically focused more on the causes rather than the definition of this change. Furthermore, much of the scholarship about the causes has revolved around predictive models, such as the Lofland and Stark model, which hints at a more positivist agenda of control and predictability. At the same time, recent findings on the role of social networks and affective interaction in causing conversion resonate with the aforementioned findings from terrorism studies and criminology on the motivating factors compelling individuals to leave violent groups. Although the turn towards social influences on individuals is promising, all these theories still operate from largely positivist models that assume humans to be rational actors and hence focus on intra-psychic processes to understand social dynamics.

2.3.2 A Post-structuralist Approach to Conversion Studies

At the same time, certain scholars are departing from positivist approaches and applying post-structuralist and social constructionist frames to the study of conversion. They define conversion as a change in one's universe of discourse, a view that departs from the orthodox tradition of defining conversion as a transformation of beliefs. Scholars such as Travisano and Snow & Machalek (1983, 265) argue conversion involves changing something more fundamental than beliefs—departing from the traditional emphasis on intrapsychic processes—and focusing instead on what Mead refers to as a "universe of discourse" (Pratt 1926; W. H. Clark 1958; Parrucci 1968; Lynch 2011; J. T. Richardson 1980; Bankston, Forsyth, and Floyd 1981). According to Mead, individual modes of discourse are linked to the "universe of discourse" within a society (Snow and Machalek 1983; Travisano 1970). Travisano theorizes that this discursive nature of

conversion is rooted in a transformation of what Burke called the "informing aspect" of one's biography (Mead 1962). Therefore, conversion involves the substitution of one universe of discourse by another. Alternatively, it may also involve the elevation of a formerly peripheral universe of discourse to a dominant status, with primary authority (Travisano 1970).

Given this, Snow and Machalek have argued that an indicator of conversion would be a change in the converts' speech (Burke 1965). Based on their research of converts to the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement, they identified four rhetorical properties that distinguish the convert from others: (1) biographical reconstruction, (2) adoption of a master attribution scheme, (3) suspension of analogical reasoning, and (4) embracement of the convert role (Snow and Machalek 1983). They found the most prominent and frequently acknowledged feature of converts' speech to be biographical reconstruction. This is a process of both a dismantling of the past and, concurrently, reconstituting it. This re-storying involves selecting certain aspects to use and others to discard, ultimately forming a completely new story. This new version is in line with the convert's new universe of discourse (Snow and Machalek 1983). Another common characteristic of converts' accounts is their temporal variability; they are not fixed accounts but constantly redefined and elaborated over time. The existing and available ideological resources, or discourses, drive this ongoing reconstruction (Snow and Machalek 1983). They note that "conversion represents in exaggerated form the fundamental nature of selfhood—its capacity for reflection, change and reorganization"

(James 1902; Berger 1963; Burke 1965; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Travisano 1970; Taylor 1976; Jones 1978; Beckford 1978).

Since Snow and Machalek (1983; 1984) point to the importance of language in understanding the process of conversion, they also examine the status of converts' accounts. On the one hand, they point out these accounts do not accurately represent what actually happened. They view accounts as having a socially constructed nature, in which "each prospective convert brings his or her personal biography to the process, but this contribution is colored by the group's universe of discourse" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 176). Converts' accounts also have temporal variability, meaning they vary and change over time, are redefined continuously. Lastly, they are retrospective in orientation; they tell us "more about the converts' present experience than about his or her past" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 177). Given this, they assert converts' accounts should be "treated as topics of analysis, rather than as objective data on why and how conversion first occurred" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 175). On the other hand, however, they acknowledge converts are the experts of their lives and thus acknowledge the import of the phenomenological aspect of the conversion process.

Although acknowledging the usefulness of conceptualizing conversion as a change in the "universe of discourse," Staples and Mauss (1987) develop their own alternative ideas on conversion based on interviews with evangelical Christians. They argue Snow and Machalek's theory of conversion is flawed because three of the four "rhetorical indicators" of conversion fail to distinguish religious converts from people who are religiously committed (Staples and Mauss 1987). They also claim Snow and

Machalek's theory offers a weak conceptualization of the person who experiences conversion; in contrast, Staples and Mauss (1987) see conversion as involving primarily a change in the self-concept, or the way a person thinks and feels about his or her self. They distinguish the self-concept change involved in conversion from other more common changes such as role changes by using the term self-transformation. They define self-transformation as a change in what Turner (1976) has referred to as the "real self," the person we are really are, versus the "spurious self," the person we might be in a particular role or under a particular set of circumstances. They view the process of self-transformation as occurring through language.

Staples and Mauss (1987) also critique Snow and Machalek for identifying converts based on rhetorical indicators rather than the subject's self-conception as a convertor; "from Snow and Machalek's point of view, the researcher or analyst is better qualified to determine who is or is not a convert than are the subjects themselves" (Staples and Mauss 1987). Instead, they argue that since conversions are inherently subjective phenomenon, "the subject, and only the subject, is qualified to tell us who he or she really is" (Staples and Mauss 1987). Emphasizing this subjective nature of conversion, they also critique Snow and Machalek's cautions against using converts' accounts, saying it is a mistake to ignore what the subjects themselves say, "particularly when they are telling us who they are" (Staples and Mauss 1987).

They end by calling for a merging of two trends in the study of conversion, that of the Snow and Machalek (1983) approach, with its emphasis on language, rhetoric, and universe of discourse, and studies of self-transformation that focus on the self-concept.

These two trends are reflective of the approach I take in my study, viewing transformation from violence to nonviolence as a form of self-transformation achieved primarily through language. Given the essentially subjective nature of the change I study, similar to the subjective nature of conversion, I adopt the approach of Staples and Mauss regarding the narrative accounts of my research subjects. Furthermore, rather than discounting these accounts due to their “subjective” nature as Snow and Machalek (1984) do, I view my subjects’ own experiences as depicted in their memoirs as the prime site of meaning making around their transformation process.

2.4 Conclusion

Given the preceding discussion, for my study I frame an individual as a socially constructed amalgamation of stories, subject to change. I frame the process of renunciation as a process of transformation from an identity that embraces some particular violent group affiliation to another identity that embraces nonviolence. From this perspective, a former gang member, former right-wing extremist or former terrorist is understood as having undergone a process of narrative change in which he or she has rejected their prior narrative identity for a new, alternative narrative identity system. Although the individual is an active participant in this change, they are nonetheless also bound by their context and the discursive resources available inherent within their environment. Consequently, change is seen as a process of resistance towards the existing dominant discourses, which occurs through an individual’s undertaking of critical historical reflection.

Applying the aforementioned literature on conversion, the process of renunciation can be framed as a process of self-transformation characterized as a change in an individual's universe of discourse in which one universe is substituted for another, or a formerly peripheral universe of discourse becomes elevated to a dominant status, with primary authority. For the purposes of my study, the discourses that are most pertinent are those that affect the construction of my research subjects as moral actors. The universe of discourse for my research subjects theoretically will be shown to change from one that condones violence towards one that embraces nonviolence.

Given this, the question addressed by the proposed research is: *What can we learn about the relationship of discourse to this process of renunciation from how the individual understands their own transformation and the story they tell about it?* This inquiry seeks understanding around how the potential for identity transformation is affected by discursive resources that can complexly and richly account for the individuals' experiences in a way that is compelling. A corollary question that stems from this main inquiry is whether this process of renunciation could be facilitated through the presence of specific discourses around transformation and by the presence of alternative discourses to use in rebuilding a narrative identity. If so, it could provide a practical way for practitioners to encourage and support the renunciation process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This research is an exploratory study that seeks to apply the epistemological perspective of social constructionism and post-structuralism to the topic of renouncing violence, something that has been studied through mostly positivist lenses. Qualitative methods of discourse and narrative analysis are used to analyze the personal accounts of a sample of individuals—referred to as “formers”—who have renounced their previous violent affiliations and now work for peaceful social change. This study applies narrative analysis to the memoirs of formers to understand how they perceive their renunciation through their narration. It also applies discourse theory to understand the role of dominant and latent discourses in the construction of their identities as moral actors throughout their transformation. To aid in my data collection and analysis, I apply a hermeneutic of renunciation that was created specifically for this study and informed by theories of narrative and discourse.

This study uses qualitative methods and is grounded in an epistemology of invention and interpretation, rather than discovery and evaluation, so aims to produce understanding versus generalizable truth. The research design reflects assumptions from the social constructionist tradition that truth is plural, contextual, and historically produced through discourses, and based on inter-subjectivity instead of the classical objectivity. The research design also reflects the assumption that reality is socially

constructed through an ongoing, dynamic process reproduced by people acting on their interpretations of it (Burr 1995; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Goffman 1986; Schuetz 1945). Due to these epistemological and ontological assumptions, the positivist-oriented concepts of validity—the idea that research closely captures the real world—and reliability—the idea that the results are repeatable—is not relevant to this project (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). This research is not aiming for a discovery of facts, but instead aims for any usefulness that the researcher’s interpretation, or subjective and intuitive “reading,” of this phenomenon might have to create change (Burr 1995, 162).

I appreciate the limitations of this constructionist approach, and acknowledge that valuable information may also be gained from positivist methods, such as the traditional approach of factor analysis. In fact, in the review of literature, I highlight the findings of such studies that sought to uncover causal factors to help predict how and why individuals affiliated with violent organizations renounce violence. Meanwhile, the particular aim of my research, however, was to explore the interpretation of this process by the research subjects themselves as depicted in their narratives, and in doing so develop a deeper understanding of renunciation as a discursive phenomenon. Since my study examines narratives to uncover patterns that may deepen our understanding, my study represents a morphological analysis of memoirs. Morphology refers to the study of narrative structures across a particular genre. I follow the precedent first set by narrative structuralist scholar Vladimir Propp who first analyzed the morphology of Russian fairy tales and found they contained particular plot elements occurring in a regular sequence,

thus ushering in the first form of folkloristic morphology (Propp 1968). For my study, I analyze the morphology of formers' memoirs.

Since this is an exploratory study, there was a strong emergent nature to my data analysis. Therefore, the data collection and data analysis were weaved together as an iterative process with multiple series of data collection and analysis throughout. This process was small and deep, focused on obtaining the storylines, which were then investigated to uncover the discursive resources the individuals themselves may not have realized they were drawing upon. I continued this iterative process until patterns emerge with sufficient redundancy in order to capture the diversity that was present. As mentioned earlier, this approach was meant to uncover patterns—not causes—to advance a deeper understanding of the renunciation process as a discursive phenomenon.

3.1 Data Collection

This study examines the personal accounts of the formers and attends to the discursive resources on which they draw when they speak about their transformation in order to analyze the relationship between discursive resources and the process of renunciation. The primary data consists of memoirs written by a sample of formers who have renounced their previous violent affiliations and now work for peaceful social change.

3.1.1 Textual Study

The post-structuralist tradition grants a high importance to texts, which are viewed as a way to tap into broader discourses. Personal accounts are a form of texts that refer to how individuals construct themselves to others. McAdams also argues that

narratives can be viewed as a psychosocial construction of a person's identity (McAdams 1993). The primary source of data for this study is publicly available information produced by the research subjects in the way of autobiographies, or memoirs, which are considered a type of narrative material (Gubrium and Holstein 2008). This study relies on an archival analysis of these sources.

Memoirs are used as the primary source since autobiographical narratives or life stories represent our best "inroad into the phenomenon of self-understanding and selfhood" (Freeman 1993, 6). Additionally, since this study is guided by a post-structuralist agenda that aims to re-humanize formers, focusing on their memoirs provides a way of giving them voice by illuminating their stories. Moreover, I chose to use their memoirs over autobiographical interviewing for reasons of privacy. Bakan argues that using published and public autobiographical data allows researchers to avoid the ethical problems of harming interview subjects by publishing sensitive information about their personal and inner lives (Bakan 1996). Maruna points out this consideration of privacy is of particular ethical concern in regards to populations such as ex-offenders, which he studied (Maruna 1997a, 62–63). The same holds true for the population I am studying, that of formers.

Autobiographical narratives, meanwhile, allow researchers to explore subjective understandings in great complexity and draw interpretations about how persons make sense of self and world (Schiff and Noy 2006). Albert Stone, a scholar of autobiography, has called autobiography "the activity of explaining oneself by telling one's story" (Stone 1982, 10). This study assumes autobiographies are an integral part of formers' selfhood

since “who we are as individuals derives as much from the way we story ourselves, the textual material available for storytelling...as from who and what we might ostensibly be in our own rights” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 205).

Furthermore, this study assumes that narratives are not merely about the self, but rather in some way a constituent part of self. Many scholars have argued that narrators partly construct themselves when they construct their autobiographical stories. Eaken says, “the writing of autobiography is properly understood as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation in which acts of self-narration play major part” (Eakin 1999, 101). This model of the human subject takes “acts of self-narration not only as descriptive of the self, but, more importantly, as fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject” (Kerby 1991, 4). This study also draws from theories on the performative nature of language, which assert that when someone gives an account of an event, that account is simultaneously a description of the event and *part of the event* because of the constitutive nature of language (Burr 1995, 161). For autobiographies, this implies that while telling their stories, “autobiographical narrators often enact a characteristic type of self, and through such performances they can become that type of self” (Wortham 2000). These theories highlight the capacity of speech to perform a type of constructed identity, and when applied to this study imply that the particular act of writing a memoir, to some degree, constitutes part of the former’s identity.

Certain insights about the nature of the Self and memory from a social constructionist perspective, as well as emerging studies in neuroscience, highlight certain complications with the analysis of autobiographical writing, however. Firstly, the social

constructionist view of a person as a narrative self that is constantly changing creates certain analytical difficulties for the study of autobiographies, which claim to represent “something too fixed and unified to represent the complexity of self-experience” (Eakin 1999, x). The reality is, according to Eakin, one of the foremost scholars on autobiographical writing, that there are many stories of self to tell, and more than one self to tell them (Eakin 1999, xi). As Bruner points out, “No autobiographer is free from questions about which self his autobiography is about, composed from what perspective, for whom. The one we write is only one version” (Bruner 2003, 74). Because of this complexity, autobiography has been traditionally known to be the “slipperiest of literary genres” (Eakin 1999, 2).

This nuanced understanding of analyzing autobiography is reflective of postmodernism, and actually a relatively recent evolution in understanding. How scholars have regarded autobiographies has changed over the years as scholarly understanding of the ways in which people construct a “self” and a “life” has changed. Up until the nineteenth century, most scholars viewed autobiographical writing as writing about an “essential self” (Bruner 2001, 26). Even Eakin himself once believed studying autobiography would result in “a final and irreducible selfhood” (Eakin 1999, x). Ten years later his thinking has evolved, although he cautions against swinging towards the polar opposite through a wholesale deconstruction of the self as subject proposed by Nietzsche, Lacan, and others. Such deconstructionists have claimed the impossibility of ever using the category of the self since it is “illusory,” thereby reducing all autobiographical writing to fiction. The famous example of this is the 1977 postmodern

autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, in which Barthes explicitly disavows any connection between the “I” of his text and any self as referent (Barthes 1977).

Instead, Eakin advises a middle way of approaching autobiographies by embracing the spirit of a cultural anthropologist, which entails “asking what such texts can teach us about the ways in which individuals in a particular culture experience their sense of being ‘I’” (Eakin 1999, 4). Such an approach points not only to the way autobiographies testify to the individual’s experience of selfhood, but also how their autobiography is mediated by the discourses in which they are embedded. These discourses form the raw materials for creating what he refers to as the “conceptual self,” based on cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser’s five aspects of the self.⁴ Individuals create their conceptual self—defined as the social roles, personal traits, theories of mind, of subject and person that comprise our self-concept—by drawing on their culture’s store of conceptual selves as models, according to Eakin (Eakin 2008, 27). In creating self-narratives, individuals are disciplined to follow these cultural models by “social accountability,” in other words, “what we talk of as our experience of our reality is constituted for us largely by the *already established* ways in which we *must* talk in our attempts to *account* for ourselves...to the others around us” (Shotter 1989, 141).

Since available models of identity play a formative role in the development of a person’s self-concept, autobiographies themselves represent such models of identity, or discourses, that individuals use in constructing themselves. Stromberg explores the influence of identity models in his study of how Christian conversion narratives were

⁴ Neisser’s selves include the following: the ecological self, the interpersonal self, the extended self, the private self, and the conceptual self.

used by individuals to reframe their personal experience in terms of a canonical language (Stromberg 1993). In one example, he shows how a female who had trouble maintaining clear boundaries around herself was able to use Christian narratives of self to sustain a balanced connection to God, and thus maintain balance in her life in general (Stromberg 1993). This implies my research subjects may have drawn upon existing identity models such as other memoirs and forms of autobiographical writing when constructing their own life narratives since “we use, or are encouraged to consult, the texts that are available in a particular setting to formulate who we are” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 205). It also implies their own memoirs could themselves represent such narrative maps of identity for others to follow, possibly serving as supports in the process of renunciation by presenting a ready-made identity (of a former) to adopt.

Another complication in the analysis of autobiographies is the topic of memory; scholars studying mechanisms in the human brain have found subjectivity to be built into the nature of memory. Studies in neuroscience are showing that memories are not factual representations of reality as once thought; memories are actually perceptions newly occurring in the present rather than images stored in the past and somehow recalled to the present (Eakin 1999, 19). Neuroscientist Gerald M. Edelman often speaks of perceiving as “creating,” and remembering as “recreating” or “re-categorizing” (Sacks 2013). Neurologist Oliver Sacks has found in his research that after a memory is constructed, there is no inner, psychological nor outer, neurological way of distinguishing true from false (Sacks 2013). He explains:

There is, it seems, no mechanism in the mind or the brain for ensuring the truth, or at least the veridical character, of our recollections. We have no direct access to

historical truth, and what we feel or assert to be true depends as much on our imagination as our senses. There is no way by which the events of the world can be directly transmitted or recorded in our brains; they are experienced and constructed in a highly subjective way, which is different in every individual to begin with, and differently reinterpreted or re-experienced whenever they are recollected . . . Frequently, our only truth is narrative truth, the stories we tell each other, and ourselves—the stories we continually re-categorize and refine. (Sacks 2013)

The complexities inherent within memory and temporality do not reduce validity but do point to an understanding of autobiography as a reconstructed story of the past that functions as a metaphor for the story of that story, the “story of the autobiographical act unfolding in the present” (Eakin 2008, 156). Authors of autobiographies, however, will likely continue to believe their stories represent a recovery of the past. For scholars, there are certain ways around this paradox. Instead of attempting to uncover “semantic memory,” which contains conceptual and factual knowledge and has been problematized by neuroscience, some theorists of autobiography have instead chosen to focus on what is called “episodic memory,” the type that allows us to recall the personal incidents that uniquely define our lives (Eakin 1999, 107–108). This refers to those episodes that are more central to self-definition since they are “vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories, and related to an important unresolved theme or enduring concern in an individual’s life” (J. A. Singer and Salovey 1993, 13). The existing cultural discourses and models of identity, however, discipline even this type of recall. As Nelson states, “the autobiographical memory system is a product of social and cultural construction” (K. Nelson 1988, 266). Gergen also argues for a social constructionist perspective towards the phenomena of autobiographical memory, saying that “to report

one's memories is not so much a matter of consulting mental images as it is engaging in a sanctioned form of telling" (Gergen 2008, 90).

Certain constructionist scholars of autobiography have gotten around the issue of memory and its implications for "historical truth" by relying on what has been called "narrative truth." Contemporary social constructionist scholars such as William Spengemann or Janet Varner Gunn have focused on autobiographies as depictions of reality and identity, rather than as factual accounts of an essentialist reality and identity. For example, Jerome Schulster's analysis of Richard Wagner's autobiography attempts to ascertain "narrative truth" rather than looking for "historical truth" (Schulster 2001). He asserts that even though Wagner underwent some "rewriting" of his past, this did not discredit his autobiography since it still held "narrative truth" (Schulster 2001). Wagner's account, while perhaps not factually accurate, is an important element of understanding him as a person since it was as part of Wagner's personal myth, which supports a major component of his identity, Schulster argues (Schulster 2001). In another example, Jacques Voneche's studies of Jean Piaget's self accounts found them to represent multiple autobiographical identities, also suggesting a lack of "factual" truth (Voneche 2001). However, Voneche, like Schulster, does not believe this invalidates the material. Instead, he argues this is to be expected since autobiography is an enormously flexible genre of *Selbstdarstellung* (self-presentation), which makes it vary according to the target audience of which the plot of a life and an identity is fashioned (Voneche 2001).

Given these and other examples, Mark Freeman advocates for scholars to move beyond the assumption of singular identities linked to singular stories to be told about them (Freeman 2001). Without the possibility of a total account, this implies there will never be explanatory completeness or exhaustiveness, or any testable propositions subject to procedures of verification. Instead, the approach is interpretive. Freeman calls it “poetic” since it creates meaning through interpretation (Freeman 2001). “The poetic realm holds a more expansive and serviceable conception of truth as well as a more humane conception of human lives and how they might be approached by those of us who seek to understand them,” he says (Freeman 2001). Instead of using various measure of validity, he calls for categories of appraisal including things like “verisimilitude” and “lifelikeness,” “capacity to express depth of human feeling” or “ability to convey the utterly contradictory nature of human existence” (Freeman 2001).

This type of “narrative truth” is not a pale version of “historical truth” but rather just as important—if not more so—in that people act based on it. Freud stumbled upon this reality when working with patients whose stories seemed implausible or lacked evidence, especially those dealing with sexual abuse in childhood. He came to regard many as distortions or even outright inventions, constructed unconsciously, but just as important since his patients believed in them absolutely. He found these stories to have powerful effects on their lives, regardless of whether they originated in actual experience or fantasy. Freud referred to this as “psychological truth,” but psychoanalysts today have come to adopt the language and distinction of “historical truth” and “narrative truth” (Donald 1984).

In my own inquiry, I am not seeking to obtain “historical truth” by way of facts based on the literal experiences of my research subjects. At the same time, there is a very empirical commitment in my research as it relates to the discourses I collect. However, I do not expect the memoirs I research to convey fully accurate factual evidence, or represent the only possible story about the respective individuals’ transformation. My interest builds off the type of “narrative truth” outlined above in that I am attempting to make sense of how my research subjects make sense of their transformation. What I am seeking to explore is how my research subjects explain to themselves their own unfolding transformation of identity throughout their renunciation process, and how they are influenced by existing cultural models of selfhood and identity, or discourses, in the process. I call this approach a form of “narrative understanding,” which refers to a type of narrative research that aims for understanding phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them (Riessman 1993b). This approach builds off the concept of *phronesis*, as explained by Kearney below:

What narrative promises those of us concerned with historical truth is a form of understanding which is neither absolute nor relative, but something in between. It is what Aristotle called *phronesis*, in contrast to the mere chronicling of facts of the pure abstraction of scientific *theoria*. It is closer to art than science; or, if you prefer, to a human science than to an exact one. (Kearney 2001, 149–50)

Phronesis is often translated as “practical wisdom,” which relates to my theoretical assumption that such a narrative understanding is important and pragmatic since dealing with issues at this discursive level will lead to actual changes and reforms (Richmond 2008). This is because the meanings people adopt toward occurrences steer

their responses (Schuetz 1945). Since narratives constitute opportunities for and means of carrying out action, they help effect and transform social realities (Brenneis 1988).

Lastly, a final complication in the study of autobiographies is the traditional model of identity they presuppose, which is emphatically individualistic, featuring a “separate and unique selfhood” (Feldman 2001, 34). Scholars have traced this trend to the 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Enlightenment concept of individualism, which sharply contrasts with current understandings of relational identity (Eakin 1999, 47). Eakin notes the irony of how the “Enlightenment model of the autonomous, rational individual that fostered the rise of the genre may also be responsible . . . for restricting its possibilities” (Eakin 1999, 53). There really is no way around this complication, other than waiting for more, newer forms of memoir writing to emerge that represent relational selves living relational lives. Certain autobiographies have indeed begun to emerge that represent a more relational understanding, largely the result of feminist critiques that view women’s lives as inherently more relational. However, the predominant nature of memoirs for this study of formers still reflects the model of the rational independent individual. Given this, in doing my research I attended to how my research subjects likely constructed themselves as more independent than they were, and potentially ignored certain relational aspects of their identity formation when writing their memoirs. Follow-on research that would involve interviewing the research subjects could potentially tease out more of the relational aspects that may be missing in their memoirs.

Finally, memoirs by nature are irremediably selective and incomplete, complicated by factors of memory, motive, and context. Given this complexity, my analysis focuses on the particular version of the story as produced in formers' memoirs, in this "specific telling of a told" (Mishler 1995). One example of how "a told" may be assembled from the telling of persons is Shay's (1995) analysis of long term psychological effects of combat trauma for U.S. Vietnam War veterans. Listening to their stories, Shay concluded there was a collective or shared story, one that helped him understand the seriousness and intractability of their problems (Shay 1995). Mishler applied this strategy to life history interviews with craftsman furniture makers, determining what he termed their work history narrative (Mishler 1999). This is the approach I take, in addition to adopting the spirit of a cultural anthropologist, mirroring Eaken, looking to gain a "narrative understanding" of how my research subjects understand their sense of being "I" as narrated in their memoirs, within the context of discourses they find themselves in.

3.1.2 Memoirs as a Genre

'Memoir' is defined as some portion of life. Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, omitting nothing significant, memoir assumes the life and ignores most of it. The writer of a memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense—childhood, for instances—or that was framed by unique events. By narrowing the lens, the writer achieves a focus that isn't possible in autobiography; memoir is a window into a life. (Zinsser 1998)

My specific unit of analysis is the memoir narrative, a culturally and historically changing form of autobiographic writing, or self-narration. One way literary scholars have differentiated between a full autobiography, which covers the full span of life, and

the memoir is that the memoir limits what is included by choosing a particular frame to impose (S. Smith and Watson 2010; Kirby and Kirby 2007; Larson 2007). This limiting frame can be a particular period of life, particular place, person, or a particular theme, or combination of these (Rainer 1998). Some common frames of memoirs have evolved to become distinct literary sub-genres of memoirs in their own right.

Given the socially constructed nature of autobiographical writing, what causes certain types of memoirs to emerge, grow in popularity, and become sub-genres is governed by the cultural and historical trends of the time. In an analysis of the memoir, journalist and English professor Ben Yagoda traces the history of memoir writing by correlating it to such trends (Yagoda 2010). He makes the claim that the memoir was originally created—and remained so from the days of the classic philosophers through medieval times—as a vehicle for (mostly) men to tell their stories of conquest, failure, redemption, doubt and/or belief presuming the world was anxiously waiting to know their thoughts (Yagoda 2010). Others have characterized early memoir as consisting of personal accounts of the accomplishments of famous people, usually written towards the end of their lives (Kirby and Kirby 2007, 1).

Yagoda, and others, have traced back the origin of the memoir to the fifth-century classic *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Yagoda 2010; Hampl 1999). Up until then, there had been a long history of biographical writing about military exploits, but Yagoda argues that Augustine's memoir represented a shift from an external struggle to invisible, internal one (Yagoda 2010). Augustine's memoir established the sub-genre of the "Spiritual Confessional Memoir" that followed a trajectory from utter abjection to

improbable redemption and salvation. The “Spiritual Confessional Memoir,” which was driven by a witnessing of remarkable inner transformations, remained dominant up through in the post-Classical tradition, which ushered in the rise of the “Spiritual Memoir” such as the one by St. Theresa of Avila (Yagoda 2010). This particular sub-genre appeared to eschew the confessional aspects of the “Spiritual Confessional Memoir” for more of a focus on one’s spiritual transformation.

This trend reversed after the Reformation, with the ushering in by Protestants of a new subgenre in line with the Puritan call for “a narrow examination of thy selfe” that focused on confessionals of one’s waywardness (Yagoda 2010). This period also ushered in what became known as “conversion narratives,” stories focused on conversions and changes of faith. Within existing historical and literary critical writing, conversion narratives are most often defined as a seventeenth and eighteenth century religious genre, in which a convert offers the testimony of his or her spiritual rebirth within a new Church or faith (Hindmarsh 2008; H. Smith 2010). Subsequent to this period, memoir writing lost its spiritual theme and became secularized, starting with Rousseau’s *Confessions*, published in 1782 (Yagoda 2010). From then on, memoirs were no longer about obtaining salvation and redemption from God, but instead about confessing a shameful secret in order to gain acceptance by other people.

That trend continued until the present day, which has been referred to as “the age of memoir,” a term used to reflect the vast amount of memoirs being produced as well as the interest of publics in consuming them (Eakin 1999, 142–143). This is evidenced by the regularity with which memoirs are featured in publications such as the *New Yorker*

and the *Atlantic*, and how often the memoir has topped the New York Times non-fiction bestseller list (Eakin 1999, 157). Between 2004 and 2008, the number of memoirs published increased 400 percent (Yagoda 2010). One drive for this contemporary proliferation is simply logistical, a combination of technology enabling easier production and leisure time enabling more reflection. There was a similar explosion of memoirs back in the seventeenth century when advances in printing technology and paper production enabled publication on a greater scale than before, according to Yagoda (Yagoda 2010). Eakin also associates that period of booming autobiographical writing with people's acquisition of a distinctly personal space in which to live and a distinct type of selfhood that focused on individuality, driven by bourgeois capitalism (Eakin 2008, 91). For the first time, individuals in the seventeenth century had the education, leisure, and private space to compile their thoughts, which he claims took on a sort of capitalist value as material objects themselves (Eakin 2008, 92).

Fast-forward to modern times, which are similar in that they are influenced by tremendous advances in media and means of distribution, as well as the huge impact of the Internet. However, in addition to memoir writing being empowered by advances in media production, a new concept of selfhood has led to its boom. This new American selfhood consists of a confusion between private and public life, says Yagoda, driven by technology that has made us privy to the most intimate details of other people's lives (Yagoda 2010). This has led to a normalization of divulging what once was private to the public, a trend driving the recent "real world" television and talk shows. There is concurrently an eagerness of people to tell their stories driven by the belief "that

confession is therapeutic and therapy is redemptive and redemption somehow equals art” (Yagoda 2010). Much of this has led to voluminous memoirs of “victims, narcissists, and celebrity-wannabes,” and ushered in what Yagoda calls the “extreme misery memoir,” which chronicles “dysfunction, abuse, poverty, addiction, mental illness, and/or bodily ruin” (Yagoda 2010).

The current memoir craze has also led to a memoir backlash, with critics disparaging such writing as exhibitionist, narcissistic, and exploitative (Larson 2007, 181). Many have dismissed the literature as an exhibitionist display solely for money (Dowd 1997). Yagoda points out, however, that such criticisms mirror those made in the wake of the previous memoir boom, centuries earlier (Yagoda 2010, 66). This current backlash, however, has been intensified by the countless stories of falsified memoirs that emerged starting in 1996, which included the well-known case of author James Frey’s fraudulent stories in his memoir *A Million Little Pieces* (Yagoda 2010, 21–22). Despite this backlash, others have claimed memoir writing to be a useful process of self-expression and healing. Educator Mary Anne Sacco has defended the power of memoir to “transform” the writer’s life and the lives of others, and subsequently has conducted memoir workshops for second-graders (Sacco 1997). “Contemporary life writing has become a storehouse, a remarkably flexible set of discourses and practices for adapting voices, claiming citizenship, traversing space and time, witnessing to violence, confronting grief, resituating embodiment and sexuality, chronicling addiction and recovery, feeding hungers, imaging nature, and negotiating celebrity” (S. Smith and Watson 2010). This trend has led to the emergence of organizations, websites, books,

workshops, and classes devoted to training and enabling average people to write their memoirs.⁵ Yagoda claims that “memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged” (Yagoda 2010, 28).

Some scholars believe the modern version of the memoir has acquired particular characteristics. Kirby and Kirby (2007) even distinguish the modern memoir by referring to it as the Contemporary Memoir (CM) (Kirby and Kirby 2007; Yagoda 2010). The CM is defined as both a story but also a reflection that provides authors a way to find meaning in their past (Kirby and Kirby 2007, 1–2). This has been driven by a new American value of personal inquiry and individual knowing, potentially influencing American culture toward “a truth-telling mode like memoir” (Larson 2007, 190). These scholars also claim the CM has taken on characteristics akin to a novel, something Yagoda also asserts, pointing out that the memoir is currently filling a gap created by the gradual displacement of the novel from its once central position in literary culture (Yagoda 2010). CMs are vehicles that “take readers with them on journeys into unknown territory where writers use the form to try to understand and make sense of the unexamined experiences they have yet to comprehend fully” (Kirby and Kirby 2007, 2). Since memoir “is a significant and powerful genre for chronicling bravery and suffering and for bringing to consciousness failures of the past,” they mirror the novel but instead provide an honest

⁵ See *Memoirs By Design*: <http://www.memoirsbydesign.com/>; the *Center for Autobiographical Studies*: <http://www.centerautobio.org/>; *Memoirs By Me*: <http://memoirsbyme.com/>; *Write My Memoirs*: <http://www.writemymemoirs.com/>.

recounting of human struggles and triumphs (Kirby and Kirby 2007, 3). It appears the CM has fulfilled the prophecy once pronounced by H. G. Wells in *Experiment in Autobiography*, in which he predicted the following:

As mankind “matures,” as it becomes more possible to be frank in the scrutiny of the self and others and in the publication of one’s findings, biography and autobiography will take the place of fiction for the investigation and discussion of character. (Wells 1984)

In addition to performing the functions of truth telling, individual inquiry, and providing tales of adventure akin to the novel, the different types of memoirs today are prolific, ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime (Yagoda 2010, 11). Indeed as one scholar admits, “in the last ten years, writers have been distinguishing the form faster than we can analyze their attempts” (Larson 2007, 17). The traditional themes that Yagoda claimed originally characterized memoir writing (stories of conquest, failure, redemption, doubt and/or belief) are echoed in some of the sub-genres that exist today, specifically the “War Memoir” (conquest), “Confession Memoir” (failure), “Redemption Memoir” (redemption), and “Spiritual Memoir” (doubt and/or belief). The “Spiritual Confession Memoir” ushered in by Augustine appears to have fractured into a non-spiritual “Confession Memoir” that at times even lacks an apologetic tone, a “Spiritual Memoir” that often lacks any tie to a particular religion, and a “Redemption Memoir” that sometimes places redemption in non-spiritual sources. Yagoda believes the “Redemption Memoir” to be a particularly popular form given the American penchant for a tragedy with a happy ending (Yagoda 2010). He defines this genre as consisting of “an account of the author’s wayward past (and the more wayward the better), his or her

discovery of some sort of secular or sacred light, and then, finally, sweet redemption” (Yagoda 2010, 52).

Table 9 outlines some of those which have emerged as sub-genres of memoir along with current examples (Rainer 1998):

Table 9: Examples of Memoir Sub-Genres

Memoir Sub-Genres	Description	Recent Example
Philosophical Memoir	Demonstrates a worldview through the writer’s own story.	Kelle Hampton’s <i>Bloom: Finding Beauty in the Unexpected-A Memoir</i> recounts how her experience raising a daughter with Down syndrome taught her to celebrate the beauty in the unexpected; published in 2012.
War Memoir	Offers an insider look at combat and harrowing real-life drama, often accentuating heroism.	Nick Popaditch’s <i>Once a Marine: An Iraq War Tank Commander's Inspirational Memoir of Combat, Courage, and Recovery</i> about his experiences in Iraq; published in 2008.
Confession Memoir	Acknowledges actions considered morally wrong that one would otherwise prefer to keep hidden.	Kathryn Harrison’s <i>The Kiss: A Memoir</i> about her obsessive love affair with her father; published in 2011.
Spiritual Memoir	Describes one spiritual journey of awakening and discovery of what is sacred.	Anne Lamott’s <i>Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith</i> describes how she learned to shine the light of faith on the darkest part of ordinary life, exposing surprising pockets of meaning and hope; published in 2000.
Vocational Memoir	Relates the recognition and fulfillment of a particular “calling.”	Eugene Peterson’s <i>Pastor: A Memoir</i> about how he stumbled into his vocation and his difficult journey to discover just what being a pastor really means; published in 2012.
Redemption Memoir	Revolves around the recounting of one’s sins followed by the mending of one’s ways in a “sinner redeemed” formula.	Weldon Long’s <i>The Upside of Fear: How One Man Broke the Cycle of Prison, Poverty, and Addiction</i> recounts how he went from being a drunken criminal in a jail cell to the CEO of a multimillion dollar business through the grace of God; published in 2009.

The sub-genres of memoirs in Table 9 only represent a sampling, but I specifically chose them since they have elements similar to the memoirs in my study. Before starting my research, I theorized that the memoirs for my study, which all revolve around the process of renunciation from violence to nonviolence, would likely resonate with certain elements of the sub-genres highlighted in Table 9. I predicted they would likely include elements of the “Confession Memoir” since they will include an exposure of past acts of crime and violence, perhaps resemble somewhat the “War Memoir” by including descriptions of harrowing conflicts and battles, and mimic the “Vocation Memoir” by detailing their prior vocations as gang members, right-wing extremists, and terrorists. Also, since the memoirs I study are limited to those written by formers who transformed to embrace nonviolence, I predicted they might mirror the “Redemption Memoir” by including the role of their peace work as a form of redemption and atonement. Lastly, I hypothesized their memoirs may follow the trajectory of the “Philosophical Memoir” by presenting the philosophy of their newly formed identity that drives their nonviolent social change work. In some cases, this philosophy may have a spiritual bent, so it would more likely reflect the “Spiritual Memoir.”

When a particular form of memoir is defined as a specific genre, or sub-genre, it implies all narratives within that category share specific characteristics since a “genre” is defined as a set of stories that share certain norms, tendencies, and expectations (Frye 1957). Since the development of the field of narratology in the 1960s, scholars have been studying and identifying different types of story genres (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 130–131). In his work on narratives, Denzin has referred to the “genetics of genre” (Denzin

1989a). Bruner includes genre as one of ten features of narrative, referring to it as a way of “constructing human plights” and as a guide for using the mind (Bruner 1991).

Canadian literary critic Herman Northrop Frye (1957) produced a grammar of narrative genres, claiming that four basic categories capture all the plotlines of literature (tragedy, comedy, romance, satire), and historian Hayden White (1973) applied these modes to his study of historical narratives (H. White 1973; Frye 1957). Finally, Propp (1968), referred to earlier, is perceived as a pioneer analyst of narrative structure due to his morphology of Russian fairy tales (Propp 1968).

Thus, when analyzing the memoirs of my research subjects, I attended to the “genetics of genre” with an interest in identifying possible similarities between some of the established sub-genres of memoir and their own. Furthermore, I kept open the possibility the memoirs of formers could represent a subgenre of memoir unique to itself.

3.1.3 Sample Selection

My study represents a morphological analysis that looked for patterns across subjects to identify an overall pattern of narrative transformation. For my sample of formers, I chose individuals from different backgrounds who have renounced their prior affiliations with violent organizations, such as gangs, extremist groups, and terrorist organizations, for affiliations with nonviolent pro-social movements and groups. The individuals include former gang members, former religious and non-religious terrorists, and former religious and non-religious right-wing extremists. The sample set ranges across categories and characteristics, but what drew them all together was that their initial identity was constituted in such a fashion as to delegitimize an Other, and they had

adopted a narrative that justified violence—whether or not they actually committed it, and if so, to varying degrees—towards that Other. This study was not interested in the nature of their violent acts, which varied from terrorist tactics to criminal violence according to the individual, but in understanding individuals whose narrative constructions made them violence-oriented towards an Other.

The primary criterion for my sample was to choose individuals who have renounced their prior narratives justifying violence rather than simply stopped their violent behavior. A second criterion was that these individuals were also actively working for peaceful social change. My intention, as laid out earlier, was a post-structuralist one, focused on challenging the dominant discourse around individuals affiliated with violent organizations that assumes they have an inherently unchangeable malevolent nature. My hope was to destabilize this discourse by introducing moral complexity by highlighting the examples of individuals who not only renounced violence, but also transformed into positively engaged members of society. By exploring in-depth the stories of such unexpected transformations, I hoped to generate a space of intellectual openness and curiosity among readers from which to explore a more nuanced and human understanding of who these individuals are and how they function. My ultimate aim was to redirect attention from the individuals themselves and towards the discourses within which they were embedded, and how those discourses enabled and disabled their violent actions.

I chose individuals from three main categories: (1) former gang members, (2) former right-wing extremists, and (3) former terrorists. I purposefully chose not to define

my sample set to one specific category since my theoretical assumption was that all violence is performative, implying the only difference between these types of individuals was their associated narratives justifying violence. I drew from Corbin, who through his extensive work studying the anthropology of conflict found violence to be mostly conceptual, not instinctual, emotional, customary or blind (Corbin 1977). Nonetheless, for the purposes of my research I did adhere to these constructed, contested categories as a way of organizing my research subjects. It is clear that there is much that is problematic with these categories; however, I found the categories useful not just for organizational purposes but also important to maintain since they mirrored how the research subjects categorized themselves according to their prior identities. Also, as outlined in the literature review, past studies have been conducted categorizing these into three types consisting of gangs, right-wing extremist organizations, and terrorist groups, setting a precedent for looking across these categories (Rabasa et al. 2010; Noricks 2009; Morris et al. 2010). Similarly, my research aimed to deliberately look across categories to see if similar patterns emerged.

I chose three individuals from each of the three categories who had written memoirs for a total sample size of nine individuals. I limited my sample to this number because I intended to analyze each of their case studies in-depth in order to preserve nuance and complexity, as well as humanize them individually. The orientation of this study is one that seeks generalizations through the accumulation of “particularities,” which are discovered only through detailed microanalysis of individual cases (De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 1996, 17). I chose memoirs that were circulating most broadly

and having the greatest effect. I also narrowed my selection by interjecting diversity within the three categories. The individuals I ultimately chose for my sample are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Sample Set

Former Gang Members		Former Right-wing Extremists		Former Terrorists	
Hispanic Gang	Luis Rodriguez	Islamist Group	Ed Husain	Nationalist Terrorist Group	Shane Paul O’Doherty
African American Gang	Stanley “Tookie” Williams	Skinhead Group	Arno Michaels	Islamic Terrorist Group	Kamal Saleem
African American Gang	Sanyika Shakur, a.k.a. Monster Kody Scott	Skinhead Group	Frank Meeink	Islamic Terrorist Group	Walid Shoebat

Within the category of former gang members, I found there to be a plethora of memoirs written by African Americans, and hence chose those that appeared to be most read and cited. However, I wanted to add diversity so included a former Hispanic gang member who had written a memoir, the only of this type.

In the category of former right-wing extremists, I also found a large, albeit slightly smaller, number of memoirs written by former Skinheads. However, I did not want to restrict this category to Skinheads, which is the most common association. From my background research, I knew there existed certain religiously motivated right-wing extremists, to include Islamists, so wanted to include them as well. There was a well-known memoir written by a former Islamist, so I chose to include him as well as my third

sample. Having both the Skinheads and Islamists also allowed me to have religiously-inspired and racist-inspired right-wing extremists, which added even more diversity.

For the last category, that of terrorists, I found memoirs harder to come by. I found a few written by former Islamic terrorists and chose two that were the most broadly circulating. However, I was keen not to focus solely on Islamic terrorism, which is currently the most common association, or even of religiously inspired terrorism. Therefore, I also included the memoir of a former nationalist terrorist who had left the IRA, the only of this type.

In my sample, there are two memoirs—*Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* and *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead: The Frank Meeink Story as Told to Jody M. Roy, Ph.D.*—that have the word “autobiography” in their title. Despite this, I included them since they fit the definition of a memoir by being about a particular part of their lives rather than an exhaustive and comprehensive overview of their entire lives, as would befit an autobiography. Furthermore, they are categorized by online bookstores such as Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com as “memoirs.” Additionally, there are two memoirs that were not written solely by the former themselves. One of these—*The Blood of Lambs: A Former Terrorist’s Memoir of Death and Redemption*—was written with the addition of a “contributor.” The other—*Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead: The Frank Meeink Story as Told to Jody M. Roy, Ph.D.*—was co-authored with another person. Nonetheless, I chose to include these two since my intention was to study the most dominant memoirs, and they were both some of the most

widely circulating. Furthermore, I was interested in seeing what difference, if any, this would make in comparison to the others.

As I mentioned earlier, what my research subjects all had in common was an initial identity that was constituted in such a fashion as to delegitimize an Other, along with a narrative that justified violence towards that Other. They all also went through a process of renunciation from violence to nonviolence. However, the individuals in my sample also had something else in common, namely that they all chose to write memoirs after their renunciation. This unifying characteristic added a degree of complexity by differentiating them from other formers who did not chose to write their autobiographical narratives. An interesting avenue for follow-on research would be to compare formers who wrote their memoirs with those who did not.

Pertaining to the formers who choose to write their memoirs, there were likely a number of different reasons that compelled them to do so, as well as enabling conditions to include writing talent, logistical support, and opportunity. For my study, I refer to the different reasons that may have motivated them as the “politics of memoir writing” to dispel any notions of neutrality behind their drive to write. As Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) point out, “stories are told for a reason” (Mankowski and Rappaport 2000, 481). Storytelling is said to be a *performance* (Toolan 1988) in which the storyteller tries to *convince* the audience about something important that took place (Riessman 1993b). Narrative is not only as Richardson (1990) states “a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation,” but also a mode of argument (L. Richardson 1990). Hence, when studying narratives, it is important to keep in mind that people use stories to promote

their own personal interests and the interests of members of their associations (Glover 2004). Furthermore, all people use narratives as a means of persuading and shaping the thoughts of others (Glover 2004).

Autobiographical narratives, in particular, have been understood by scholars as serving a variety of purposes. They have been framed as a therapeutic tool (Anderson 1999; Cohler 1988; M. White and Epston 1990), as a means to criticize unjust social orders (G. C. Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992; Zuss 1997), and as an educational tool (Cohen et al. 2002; Witherell and Noddings 1991). Certain other scholars have described how autobiographical narratives can play a central role in the construction of a religious identity, often by highlighting a conversion experience to emphasize their faith and position themselves with a religious community (Cain 1991; Stromberg 1993). Eakin asserts the importance of taking into account the self-understanding and self-acceptance that comes with autobiographies, related to their supposed therapeutic nature mentioned by others (Eakin 2008, 128). Similarly, others have said memoir writing can help writers discover importance in their lives, providing an opportunity to “find threads of meaning and untangle them to form a ‘clear line’” (Kirby and Kirby 2007; Welty 1983). Another role autobiographies fulfill is that of social accounting, a phrase Eakin gives based on psychologist John Shotter’s theorizing (Eakin 2008, 25). Lastly, they can be a vehicle enabling a remodeling of the anticipated future (Eakin 2008, 158).

However, as Eakin points out, “we never really know why writers write what they write, and this unknowability can make any inquiry into an author’s intentions seem fruitless if not impertinent” (Eakin 1999, 149). Therefore, for my study, rather than

speculate on the possible motivations behind my research subjects’ decision to write their memoirs, I chose to present what they themselves have stated as their motives. I also include information about the conditions around their memoir writing. To find this information, I researched the memoirs themselves, including the Acknowledgements section, and publicly available information from interviews, articles, their biographies, and their personal websites. I present these details in a chart in the beginning of each case study, using the template depicted in Table 11.

Table 11: Template for Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	
Description	
Author	
Date of publication	
Approximate time of renunciation	
Stated motive for writing	
Writing experiences prior to memoir	

I chose to include this information believing it could showcase certain trends that speak to the conditions around writing memoirs common among my research subjects, trends that could highlight interesting insights around the context of their production.

3.2 Constructing a Hermeneutics of Renunciation

A major task for this study was choosing how to represent and interpret the narrative accounts of my research subjects. This included the form by which I rendered

their stories into this report as well as how I manipulated their texts during the analysis to assist in interpretation. I chose to create a hermeneutical framework informed by narrative and discourse analysis that would facilitate my analysis by highlighting ideas, themes, and patterns that otherwise would remain buried in text. This hermeneutical framework would also provide a way of choosing among complex narrative accounts the elements that could answer my research questions.

My overall aim in creating a hermeneutical framework was to devise a tool that would allow me to attend to the processes of narrative identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction. My theoretical assumption was that identity is contested, unstable, and both narratively and discursively constructed (Burr 1995, 141). I also wanted to devise a way to obtain greater specificity and granularity of the entire identity transformation process, to help me discern and present three separate stories: (1) their pre-transformation story, (2) their transformation story, and (3) the story about who they had become now. Lastly, I wanted a way to pay particular attention to possible clues and fragments of the wider discourses my research subjects drew upon and were embedded in.

In building this hermeneutics of renunciation, I drew from one type of narrative analysis method, which addressed the structure of the narrative, and discourse analysis. These methods are described below.

3.2.1 Narrative Analysis

Since I would be using narrative material, I knew that an important tool for interpreting the relevant data would be narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is an

interpretive tool used to examine the lives of individuals through the stories they tell (Richmond 2008). It can be used to acquire a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals organize and derive meaning from events (Polkinghorne 1995). The narrative approach has been used to study an individual's identity over a lifespan, and I believed it would provide me a way to discern the processes of narrative identity construction, disruption, and resolution. Within narrative theory, there exists a variety of ways to approach, view, and analyze narrative material. For my study, I was most interested in the first level of narrative analysis, structural analysis, which seeks to account for the component parts of narrative, or the elements that are internal to it. It focuses on the major elements of a narrative structure, commonly defined to be: setting (where/when), characters (who), conflict (what), plot (how), and theme (why) (Gubrium and Holstein 2008). However, these components do not represent the definitive parts of a narrative; in fact, philosophers, folklorists, literary critics, and discourse analysts have analyzed these elements in different ways since the time of Aristotle (Ochs 194 in Dijk).

I chose this type of narrative analysis because it permits parts of a narrative to be abstracted and then compared across narratives. One example of structural narrative analysis is Mishler's work on the life stories of craft artists, mentioned previously (Mishler 1999). For this study, Mishler (1999) broke the different narratives down into identifiable parts, which he compared looking for patterns across the individual narratives. Both his comparative approach across life stories and framing of research questions through the lens of identity were elements that I incorporated into my hermeneutical framework for renunciation. However, Mishler's work focused on identity

creation whereas I aimed to look at identity transformation. Thus, I decided to pay particular attention to the components of the subjects' stories that depict their transformation to account for the production, and hence enactment, of this change.

What I was interested in specifically were the components of stories that convey disruptions, transformations, and change. Narrative theorists have emphasized different ways that stories specify a key event that disrupts the equilibrium of ordinary expected circumstances. These disruptions are generally seen as provoking psychological responses and actions that attempt to reinstate a sense of equilibrium (Ochs 197 in Dijk). Often, these disruptions lead to outcomes that may engender further psychological responses and actions. Some of the prominent ways theorists have referred to this disruptive portion of a story are as: a complication (Aristotle 1962); trouble (Burke 1962); a deviation from the ordinary (Bruner 1990); a complicating action (Labov 1972); an initiating event (Stein and Glenn 1979); and as an inciting event (Sharff 1982).

As I mentioned earlier, one of the first scholars to talk about this type of transformation was Aristotle. In what is likely the first philosophical treatise on literary theory around 335 BCE, called *Poetics*, Aristotle elaborated on the various features of literature (Lucas 1923; Aristotle 1984). He distinguished simple plots, in which action is continuous, from complex plots, in which there is a "peripeteia" and/or "anagnorisis." Peripeteia is a reversal of circumstances, a turning point. He defined this as "a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity" (Aristotle 1984). Peripeteia involves changes of character, as well as external changes related to the situation. This element marks a good drama, especially a tragedy.

The classic example of peripeteia is the Biblical story about the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. Anagnorisis, on the other hand, refers to a type of recognition or discovery in which a character learns about something she/he was previously ignorant of. Aristotle regarded a “superior tragedy” as composed of anagnorisis leading to peripeteia, an affect that will produce pity or fear, the distinctive mark of a tragic situation (Aristotle 1984). Aristotle in *Poetics* highlights the example of Oedipus as representative of an anagnorisis that leads to peripeteia.

Fast forward from Aristotle, modern narrative scholars studying personal narratives have pointed to the importance of turning points and adaptations in a life history that should guide the scholar in deciding what to analyze in biographical accounts (Mandelbaum 1973). Given that scholars cannot examine the entire life account of an individual, scholars assert that these turning points have more consequence in a personal narrative than others. Mandelbaum (1973) specifically highlights turning points as the most salient features to focus on (Mandelbaum 1973). Denzin (1989) also draws attention to turning points, defining the biographical method as “the studied use and collection of life documents which describe turning points in individuals’ lives” (Denzin 1989b, 7). He also identifies “epiphanies” as another important feature of a biography. These represent interactional moments and experiences that leave marks on people’s lives by altering their fundamental meaning structures. These turnings, turning points, and epiphanies, can be viewed as rhetorical devices in a story, or the pivot, or “complication,” of a narrative structure (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Cortazzi 1993).

Although narrative theorists have chosen a variety of ways to view the elements of stories that convey transformations and change, I ultimately chose to adopt William Labov's story structure analysis, in which he refers to the part of a story that conveys change as the complicating action (Labov 1972). I chose his model because he also includes a component that conveys how this change is interpreted, the evaluative point, which was key towards understanding how my research subjects understood their process of renunciation. Labov's framework originated out of his 1972 analysis of narratives of personal experience in which he gathered oral narratives of lived experiences in the course of interviewing a population in New York City. He found these stories followed the pattern first outlined by Aristotle of a beginning, middle and end, but also found they included the following six elements: Abstract; Orientation; Complicating Action; Evaluation; Result or Resolution; and Coda (Labov 1972, 363). As I mentioned, Labov referred to how the complicating action is resolved and ultimately understood as the evaluative point, a key part of the narrative. According to him, stories normally have a point that organizes the construction of the narrative, and this is often a moral evaluation of an occurrence, an action, or a psychological stance related to a set of events (Ochs 193 in Dijk). Labov went on to distinguish this element from the other five components, claiming the evaluation of the narrative forms a secondary structure, one that involves the positioning of the narrator in the storytelling (Labov 1972, 369).

Since I was interested in how my research subjects constructed—and reconstructed—themselves as moral actors, this element was uniquely suited for my study. Other narrative theorists have claimed that evaluative clauses contain much of the

moral language people use when apprehending their past self's actions and evaluating those actions against the present moral order (Walton and Brewer 2001; Linde 1993). This component is thought to represent the narrator's self-evaluation and any dissonance between their personal values and the shared values of the particular discourse communities they inhabit. Overall, the "evaluation" can be seen as a window into meaning making (Polyani 1979). In thinking about how to apply this to my study, I came across the work by Polyani (1989) who focused on the evaluative point in her use of structural analysis to show how American stories reflect American culture. Examining the structure of autobiographical stories, Polanyi paid close attention to the storyteller's own evaluation of the events he or she narrated (Polanyi 1989). Polyani argues there are no fixed rules for interpreting the evaluation, and that researchers must attend to the circumstances, events, and states highlighted by evaluative devices and then infer the point of the narrative (Polanyi 1989). I mirrored her efforts in my own work, attending to my research subjects' evaluation of the events that drove their renunciation through the use of inference.

3.2.2 Values and Identity Transformation

After reviewing the aforementioned theories in narrative analysis, I decided to focus on the structural elements of my research subjects' accounts pertaining to the complicating action and the evaluative point. However, as I mentioned, I was specifically interested in how my research subjects constructed—and reconstructed—themselves as moral actors. I was looking for a way to focus on the ethical dimension of my research subjects' identities as the frame through which to understand their transformation. Both

in their prior identities of affiliation with a violent organization and their new identities as former, my research subjects had constructed their narrative identity to justify themselves as morally good. Therefore, the key element that changed—and that deserved attention—was the meaning making behind their formulation of what “morally good” meant.

Certain scholars have linked narrative and identity with normative ideas of what a life is, or is supposed to be, if lived well. Freeman and Brockmeier refer to this element as the conception of the “good life,” and point out that narrative construction of identity has this ethical dimension, in addition to a psychological, social, and aesthetic dimension (Freeman and Brockmeier 2001). Moreover, Freeman and Brockmeier argue autobiographical narratives are especially useful vehicles for exploring this ethical dimension of identity construction (Freeman and Brockmeier 2001). Parker claims that ethics is central to life writing, contending that “all autobiographers necessarily define themselves in relation to strongly valued goods” (D. Parker 2007, 172). He goes on to assert that “life narrators feel a need to speak from a moral orientation they take to be right” (D. Parker 2007, 87). Walter Fisher (1989) also explores the ethical dimension, but through the lens of values and how they drive action. He argues that narratives are built up on universal value-logic of “good reasons” that direct particular beliefs and actions, reminiscent of Bruner’s idea of narrative as “folk psychology” (Fisher 1989, Bruner 1990). Fisher goes on to explain that all interaction should be interpreted by looking into a larger narrative, which the analyst can formulate to account for the particular values and logics present in any action; he says, “an analyst can formulate narratives as a way of

revealing how values and rationalities are pressed into rhetorical service” (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001, 11).

Social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad’s study *Everyday Life Philosophers: Modernity, Morality, and Autobiography in Norway* (1996) looks at the construction of selfhood through the lens of moral values and how they are transmitted in twentieth-century Norwegian society (Gullestad 1996). Her research of autobiographies led her to theorize that values were crucial elements of identity, that “constructions of self and identity are . . . dependent upon moral notions” (Gullestad 1996, 20). Gullestad refers to individuals as engaged in a dynamic process of self-invention in which “they creatively refashion and adapt the knowledge, values, and ideas they receive” (Gullestad 1996, 31). She says, “I am, in other words, not only interested in what people think and do, but also in what they think and act with, i.e., the ideas, values, concepts, and beliefs they routinely use as tools for thinking and acting” (Gullestad 1996, 21). Eakin references Gullestad’s work in his own exploration of narrative identity because he himself agrees with her fundamental insight that “values contain the materials for building identity and life story” (Eakin 2008).

I decided to draw on Gullestad’s work on values and narrative identity construction for my study. This influenced me to focus on narrative identity through the lens of values, looking specifically at the narratives my research subjects used to construct themselves as moral actors and compose their system of values. I also chose to track how their understanding of those values changed over the course of their

transformation. However, since these narratives of value are constrained by discursive dynamics, I wanted to incorporate theories of discourse.

3.2.3 Discourse Analysis

Narrative theory posits that narrative identity construction (and re-construction) does not occur in a vacuum. Eakin points out how discursive resources serve as the raw materials from which people draw to create their identities; he says, “latent in the discourses used to express a culture’s values, I argue, are metaphors for self and life story, rudiments of plots and character that individuals draw on as they live their lives and—sometimes—write them” (Eakin 2008, 109). Therefore, I also wanted to attend to the context within which transformation occurred. Specifically, I aimed to pay attention to the network of stories, or discourses, the subjects were embedded in that served to structure, constrain, and catalyze their identity transformation. In order to unpack the competing identities and unveil the discursive struggle around them, I turned to discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is more of an approach to research than a hard and fast methodology, and there is a wide range of approaches one can take within this category. Overall, however, it is applied to research questions concerning the construction of accounts, the identification of discourses and interpretative repertoires which are drawn upon in interactions and which have identity implications. Discourse defined broadly refers to a “practical, social, and cultural phenomenon” (Van Dijk 1998, 2). Both “terms” and the practice of “description” are considered discourse phenomenon (Van Dijk 1998, 2). In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defined a discursive formation as the

presence of a systematic dispersion of objects, types of statements, concepts, and thematic choices, which together create an order, correlations, “positions in commonspace,” that have a reciprocal functioning (Foucault 1995). To identify discourses, I looked for recurrent themes, coherent sets of statements or phrases that appear to talk about or represent events in similar ways, and metaphors that bring with them particular images of the events described (Burr 1995; Kane 1997).

Since I was specifically interested in the role of discourses on my research subjects’ narratives of value, I turned to Foucault’s theories that explored the role of values, morals and ethics. As presented earlier, towards the last years of his life, Foucault explored technologies of Self, or what he termed “practices of the Self.” He defined these as the forms of understanding a subject created about him or herself and the practices by which he or she transformed his/her mode of being (Oksala 2007, 96–97). Foucault understood this as the ways in which individuals form themselves as subjects of a morality, which he conceived as a set of values and rules of action (Oksala 2007, 97).

Thus, for my hermeneutical framework, I combined the ideas of Gullestad and Foucault to frame identity as a narrative construction encased in values and embedded in discourse. My theoretical assumption was that certain key categories of values of an individual were so deeply embedded that they remained constant throughout their process of transformation, but the discourses that defined the narratives around those values—what they meant and how to act upon them—changed. Another theoretical assumption was that the presence or absence of latent, competing discourses would serve as a key

factor in how strongly the dominant discourses that defined those values were entrenched.

The concept of latent discourses refers to those alternative stories existing within the discursive field of the individual that are not fully developed or manifested, and in some cases remain concealed. These latent discourses often lie dormant or hidden until certain circumstances become suitable for their development or manifestation, at which point they may emerge and claim dominance. This concept is akin to political scientist James C. Scott's idea of "hidden transcripts" (J. C. Scott 1992). In analyzing power dynamics within societies, Scott refers to the open, public interactions between dominators and the oppressed as "public transcripts," and uses the term "hidden transcripts" to refer to the hidden actions of resistance that occur behind the scenes (J. C. Scott 1992). When applied to discourses instead of people, the metaphor can be translated to frame dominant discourses as those openly at play along the lines of public transcripts, and latent discourses are those hidden, oppressed potentialities that may resist in various ways. To identify the hidden transcripts, Scott advises careful attention on what lies behind and beneath the surface of public and observable behavior (J. C. Scott 1992). For my research, therefore, I aimed to remain diligent in attending to possible discourses that may exist for my subjects but might not be evident in their behavior.

Therefore, my analysis consists of identifying the values driving my research subjects and discerning the discourses—both dominant ones that are in play, but also latent discourses that were not currently in power but had the potential to emerge—that effect how those values are understood, acted upon, and ultimately change.

3.2.4 Language of the Other

“The construction of Self in narrative always goes along with the construction of the Other.” (Glover 2004)

In addition to attending to the discourses around values, I wanted to focus on how my research subjects constructed the identity of the Other. I took specific interest in this process because of the implications between the language of the Other and violence. Narrative theorists who have studied the construction of the Other in conflict narratives such as Sara Cobb have found that such narratives externalize responsibility for bad outcomes onto an Other (Cobb 2006). They have moral frameworks that are polarized, binary, and simplistic. The characters are oversimplified, often having flat character traits with little complexity (Cobb 2006). Furthermore, the victims are positioned as perfectly innocent with good characteristics and legitimate intentions, while the victimizers are fully to blame, with bad characteristics and illegitimate intentions (Cobb 2006). In this way, they advance a de-legitimation of the Other, and in some cases, the speaker’s own legitimacy is premised on the basis of the de-legitimation of the Others in the narrative (Cobb 2006). This de-legitimation can easily drive and justify acts of violence.

Since my subjects are individuals who previously adopted narratives justifying violence towards an Other, I want to study how their transformation affected their construction of Self and Other. Specifically, I was looking to discern whether there would continue to be a sharp polarization, or whether there would be added ambiguity and evidence of interdependence in their formulations after their change.

3.2.5 A Hermeneutical Framework of Renunciation

Incorporating the aforementioned theories, theorists, and lines of thought, I devised the following framework for interpreting the accounts of my research subjects. Since the renunciation process itself is quite complex, I wanted to use three organizing frameworks that represented distinct phases in the transformation process. I decided to formulate three charts—which included the formation of initial identity, disruption, and resolution—that would keep track of the values and the discourses the formers were informed by, and how these changed. These charts are fully explained in the sections that follow.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

The first part of my framework is meant to capture the subjects' reasoning for joining the organization. Since their membership in their respective organizations created an identity for them, I refer to this first stage as "Formulation of Initial Identity." This section entails analyzing the memoirs of the sample set attending to language that indicates the values that composed their initial identity. It also entails discerning the central discourses that define these values and their implications for the subjects as moral actors. These functions are drawn from narrative analytic practices that allow for the researcher to draw upon their knowledge and the research to label the narrative, in this case the discourse (Riessman 1993b).

To identify the categories of values for each research subject, I first read through each memoir to discern overall patterns of particular actions, beliefs, and feelings that would point towards certain values. I framed these values as evaluative points of my

research subjects' moral identity given that Labov (1972) defined the evaluative point as a moral evaluation of an occurrence, an action, or a psychological stance. Other narrative theorists have also claimed that evaluative clauses contain much of the moral language people use when apprehending their past self's actions (Walton and Brewer 2001; Linde 1993). Polanyi argues there are no fixed rules for interpreting the evaluation, so researchers should attend to the circumstances, events, and states highlighted by evaluative devices to infer the point of the narrative, which I did (Polanyi 1989). I limited the categories of values to four per research subject since my initial readings resulted in roughly this number of values emerging, and kept it uniform for all research subjects to make it easier to compare across cases. I then constructed my own definitions for each value based on a composite of commonly used definitions that best fit the evaluative points that emerged.

Table 12: Template for Research Subject Values

Value	Definition
Value	Definition
Value	Definition
Value	Definition

Next, I focused on discerning the central discourses that defined these values for my research subjects. My theoretical assumption was that the discursive field consists of both driving dominant discourses as well as certain latent ones that are circulating but suppressed by the dominant ones, so categories are included to account for both. This

theoretical assumption is derived from theories on counter narratives that view counter narratives as existing in relation to master narratives, and “always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories” (Tore et al. 2011, 151). As mentioned earlier, in my study I frame dominant discourses as master narratives and latent discourses behaving in a similar manner to counter narratives. Also, this section calls for tracing the discourses back to their possible sources, referred to as the “References,” which represents a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge. For the final part of the framework, a category is included to capture the discourses around the formulation of an Other to study how this changes throughout the transformation process.

Table 13: Template for Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value:	DOMINANT DISCOURSE:	
	LATENT DISCOURSE:	
Value:	DOMINANT DISCOURSE:	
	LATENT DISCOURSE:	
Value:	DOMINANT DISCOURSE:	
	LATENT DISCOURSE:	
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other:	DOMINANT DISCOURSE:	
	LATENT DISCOURSE:	

Stage 2: Disruption

The second part is meant to capture what happened to cause doubt. This section entails analyzing the memoirs attending to language that symbolizes the complicating actions, which refer to the parts of the research subjects’ story that describe events—and the subjects’ interpretation of them—that spurred doubt about the discourses they had adopted.

Table 14: Template for Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Action/s
Value: Discourse	
Value: Discourse	
Value: Discourse	
Language of Other: Discourse	

Stage 3: Resolution

The third stage is focused on the resolution, or how the disruption is resolved within a story, according to Labov’s story structure analysis. Narrative theorists have emphasized disruptions are generally seen as provoking psychological responses and

actions that attempt to reinstate a sense of equilibrium (Ochs 197 in Dijk). Often, these disruptions lead to outcomes that may engender further psychological responses and actions. For the purposes of this framework, the third stage deals with this reinstatement of equilibrium through the formation of a new identity.

This section is divided into two parts, both of which are viewed as essential components to the resolution. The first part, “Choosing to Leave,” captures Labov’s concept of the evaluative point, which is how the complicating action is resolved and ultimately understood (Ochs 193 in Dijk). Since this study examines subjects whose evaluative point resulted in them leaving their initial identity and organization, this part is meant to capture the supporting discourses and discursive resources that undergirded this action. The subjects could have chosen a variety of different ways to make meaning of the doubts that arose in Stage 2, but were influenced specifically to choose to leave.

A post-structuralist approach would argue that this action was grounded in discursive dynamics. Mark Freeman (2001) has explored this topic of narrative and change, questioning to what extent can one write and live new narratives, especially those that transform or even replace current ones. He has found that even the most revolutionary changes are still examples of certain cultural models, and are made possible by discourses within that culture around change and dynamism that enable such transformation. “Even the most revolutionary thinking and living maintain a connection to the expected and expectable, and prevailing ideas about what good lives are all about,” he states (Freeman 2001). As such, the framework includes a category to reflect the discursive resources enabling transformation, which I term “supporting discourses.”

The second part, “Formation of New Identity,” captures the new and re-emerging discourses that were available for the subjects to reformulate their identity, which were also extremely important because they made transformation possible. I call these “alternative identity discourses.” According to discourse theory, unacceptable positions in discourse could be resisted more easily if positions in alternative discourses are available as substitutes (Burr 1995, 152). Foucault emphasizes this nature of discourse as both an effect of power, but also “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1980). Alternative discourses for the self are present throughout contemporary society and the “possibilities for competition are seemingly endless” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 230). Therefore, of particular interest in this category of the framework were the discursive resources available in reformulating the identity of my research subjects, with the understanding that particular types of discourses serve to catalyze or restrain transformation. These alternative identity discourses could be completely new, resulting from being exposed to new contexts and circumstances, or re-emerging ones that used to be latent but now have ascended in power given the failure of old dominant ones to be compelling.

Lastly, this section also includes the reformulated accounts of the Other, and the discursive resources that were drawn upon to construct this new understanding, reflected in the last section of the framework.

Table 15: Template for Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supporting Discourses	References	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity discourses	References
Value: Discourse	Re-emerging LATENT DISCOURSE:	
	NEW DISCOURSE:	
Value: Discourse	Re-emerging LATENT DISCOURSE:	
	NEW DISCOURSE:	
Value: Discourse	Re-emerging LATENT DISCOURSE:	
	NEW DISCOURSE:	
Language of Other: Discourse	NEW DISCOURSE:	

This hermeneutics of renunciation allows attention to be focused to the processes of identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction. When applied, it allows the researcher to identify stages in the subjects’ evolution as a way to obtain three separate

stories: (1) their pre-transformation story, (2) their transformation story, and (3) the story about whom they have become now. Furthermore, it calls for paying particular attention to possible clues and fragments of the wider discourses the research subjects drew upon and were embedded in. Lastly, it enables attention to be focused on how the construction of Self and Other shifts throughout the transformation process.

3.3 Addressing Reflexivity

Since my research is qualitative, a key component of my study is addressing reflexivity. The perspective of the researcher shapes all research, but especially qualitative research in which the researcher is often constructed as the “human research instrument” (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Furthermore, narrative theory argues that a semblance of objectivity can only be created when the personal is included in the research since the researcher always comes with his/her own optics (Law 2000). Thus, I have taken specific steps to foster reflexive research design and have attended systematically to the effect of the researcher at every step of the research process. For the sake of transparency and to remain cognizant of my own bias, I kept a reflexive journal of my reflections throughout the dissertation process to ensure that the researcher is included in the research. For the reflexive journal, I followed the guidelines of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who advocate a researcher make regular entries during the research process, in which are recorded methodological decisions and the reasons for them, logistics of the study, and reflection on what is happening in terms of one’s own values and interests (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This type of journal creates transparency in the research process by providing what Ortlipp (2008) calls a research “trail” of gradually

altering methodologies and reshaping analysis, as well as an opportunity for the researcher to reflect critically on research processes and practices (Ortlipp 2008).

3.4 Conclusion

In sum, my research represents an exploratory study that applies narrative analysis and discourse analysis to the memoirs of formers to understand how they perceive their renunciation through their narration. This approach is meant to uncover patterns—not causes—to advance a deeper understanding of the renunciation process as a discursive phenomenon. To aid in the data collection and analysis, I apply a hermeneutic of renunciation created specifically for this study and informed by theories of narrative and discourse. This hermeneutic framework aids in the morphological analysis by capturing narrative patterns across the memoirs of my research subjects.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS & PRESENTATION

In this chapter I apply the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I introduced earlier to each of my research subjects. I start with former gang members, followed by former right-wing extremists, and end with former terrorists. For each case, I introduce the research subject with a short biography that encompasses the individual's prior affiliation with a violent organization to their current nonviolent work in order to orient the reader. I follow this with the chart depicting the context and conditions of memoir writing to set the stage. Next, I present the hermeneutics of renunciation according to the stages of initial identity formation, disruption, and resolution. I conclude each section with a summary of the key trends that emerged from that case study. I do this for each of my research subjects. At the end, I provide a summary of findings from all the cases, highlighting the key patterns that surfaced.

My intention for this chapter was to focus heavily on my research subjects in order to fully draw out their stories. Therefore, the sections for each subject are purposefully in-depth. In addition to exploring their stories, I also provide some initial analysis throughout to elucidate key elements unique to each case. In the subsequent chapter, I generalize their situations in order to focus exclusively on analyzing the aggregate trends that surfaced. This chapter, however, is meant to keep their situations as

individualized as possible in order to preserve their uniqueness, which would otherwise gets lost by only generalizing across their cases.

4.1 Former Gang Members

4.1.1 Luis J. Rodriguez

Orientation: Luis J. Rodriguez first joined a gang at age 11 in the East Los Angeles area and by the time he was 18, he had been arrested for numerous crimes, including stealing, fighting, rioting, attempted murder, and assault. Around that time he became politically involved in the Chicano Movement, which inspired him to leave the gang lifestyle and dedicate himself to helping Mexican Americans through writing and advocacy. He has since published memoirs, fiction, nonfiction, children’s literature, and poetry, and won literary awards and fellowships. He is also an avid speaker on issues of violence and gangs and visits prisons, juvenile facilities, schools, homeless shelters and more throughout the U.S. and the world (L. J. Rodriguez 2013).

Table 16 depicts the context and conditions that led Rodriguez to write his memoir.

Table 16: Rodriguez - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.</i> (L. J. Rodriguez 2005)
Description	The award-winning and bestselling classic memoir about a young Chicano gang member surviving the dangerous streets of East Los Angeles—and his heroic struggle to free himself from its grip. ⁶
Author	The son of Mexican immigrants, Luis J. Rodriguez began writing in his early teens and has won national recognition as a poet, journalist, fiction writer, children's book writer, and critic. Currently working as a peacemaker among gangs on a national and international level, Rodriguez helped create Tia

⁶ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

	Chucha's Café & Centro Cultural, multi-arts, multimedia cultural center in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. ⁷
Date of publication	1993
Approximate time of renunciation	1972
Stated motive for writing	Written as a cautionary tale for his son Ramiro, who joined a Chicago street gang at the age of fifteen. “I’ve pursued writing this book—after a 10-year lapse. The writing first began when I was 15, but the urgency of the present predicament demands it finally see the light of day” (L. J. Rodriguez 2013).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	Rodriguez started writing at the age of fifteen, and then finished a draft when he was twenty-three, but never got it published. He resuscitated the manuscript in his late 30s after he had gained some success in the world of writing. In 1980, he began attending night school at East Los Angeles College, working for several area publications, and attended a workshop for minority journalists at UC Berkeley. Soon thereafter, he started working for the <i>San Bernardino Sun</i> . During this time, he also organized and published a Chicano art journal and facilitated writing workshops in prisons and juvenile centers (L. J. Rodriguez 2013). In 1985 he moved to Chicago, where he became editor of the People's Tribune, then a writer/reporter for radio. Luis also became active in the Chicago poetry scene and founded Tia Chucha Press to publish his first book <i>Poems Across the Pavement</i> (L. J. Rodriguez 2013).

What follows next is my analysis of Luis J. Rodriguez’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Luis J. Rodriguez’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Rodriguez had certain embedded categories of values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Rodriguez’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values found in Table 17 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **intellect, strength, recognition, and belonging**, which I define in Table 17.

⁷ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

Table 17: Rodriguez - Values

Intellect	Using one’s capacity for understanding, thinking, and reasoning; imagination, creativity, contribution of new ideas
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Belonging	Acceptance as a natural member or part; a sense of inclusion, affiliation

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values for Rodriguez and their implications for him as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.” All of this is depicted in Table 18.

Table 18: Rodriguez - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Intellect	It is impossible for Mexican Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits (DOMINANT)	--His father was an educated man, a philosopher, but he himself had very little options of education since he didn’t know English well and the school system, at the time, didn’t know what to do with immigrants --His father was a high school principal back in Mexican but drew the ire of local chieftains and was forced to flee, which is how they landed in America (15) --His father started in America on a six-month study program for foreign teachers but ended up working as a janitor (15) --In school, “I knew I wasn’t wanted” (26) --Teachers did not know how to integrate non-English speaking students so “they just made it a crime to speak anything but English” and he was always embarrassed because he constantly

		<p>“mixed up all the words” (27)</p> <p>--He was eventually kicked out of school and started working as a bus boy at a Mexican restaurant (100)</p> <p>--“The Spanish had been beaten out of me in early years of school- and I didn’t learn English very well either. That was the predicament of many Chicanos. We could almost be called incommunicable” (219)</p>
	Expressing oneself through writing and arts brings happiness (LATENT)	<p>--A distant relative was a song writer and artist and he always was drawn to her free spirited ways; “I secretly admired Tia Chucha, the most creative influence in my childhood, while others talked holier-than-thou about her irreverence, her eccentricities” (59)</p> <p>--“though I didn’t know how to write or paint, I had a great need to conceive and imagine, so encompassing, I had to do it even when I knew my works would be subject to ridicule” (219)</p>
Value: Strength	Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican, and trump any moral rules (DOMINANT)	<p>--He was ashamed by how his father was treated with disrespect, and he was sick of how he was beaten up when young - both by his older brother and then by school kids (especially white boys)</p> <p>--When in elementary school, he watched a gang of junior high schoolers, Thee Mystics, start a fight and even intimidate teachers. His reaction was of awe; “I wanted this power. I wanted to be able to bring a whole school to its knees and even make teachers squirm.” (42)</p>
	There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances (LATENT)	<p>--He felt reluctant to engage in violence but after he joined the Sangras, he was forced into it</p> <p>--“But to me, stealing and taking someone’s life were two distinct capabilities...killing for stealing didn’t sit well with me. This was a problem. A big problem”; later his friend pointed out that he’d better get used to it since he had no other option (76)</p> <p>--His mother was always upset and disappointed with his gang related activities</p>
Value: Recognition	The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a Mexican man, was through gang life (DOMINANT)	<p>--Long cultural historical tradition of Mexican gangs</p> <p>--barrio gang experience called The Crazy Life or La Vida Loca, influenced by the Mexican Pachuco gangs of the 30s and 40s and later recreated with the Cholos. (4)</p> <p>--“I also learned something—if my throat had been cut, like the two murderers in my cell wanted to do, who’d care? The deputies protected Charles Manson, but I was a nobody. I learned again how injustices might happen for a Chicano street kid from the barrio.”</p> <p>--He learned he was labeled right from the start as “a criminal, alien, to be feared...a thug” and so embraced this as something to be proud of (84)</p> <p>--He tried to pursue his passion of playing the saxophone, but after it broke he was completely disheartened because he couldn’t afford another one (87)</p>
Value: Belonging	To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang (DOMINANT)	<p>--“Our first exposure to America stays with me like a foul odor. It seemed a strange world, most of it spiteful to us, spitting and stepping on us, coughing us up, us immigrants, as if we were phlegm stuck in the collective throat of this country.” (19)</p>

		<p>--When they first came, they encountered many whites telling them to their faces they didn't belonged, and that America was not their country; "the refrain 'this is not your country' echoed for lifetime" (18-19)</p> <p>--Never felt a sense of belonging or acceptance from his family, especially from his father, and his brother would always beat up on him, so he had to turn to the gang to gain it. Later, his mother disapproved of his gang life and threw him out of the house, so he was forced to live in the garage and she also "stayed uninvolved" (133)</p> <p>--"Chicano/Mexicano fathers have the problem of inheriting the wrong "macho" concept of manhood—that one doesn't cry, or feel, and being tough is being a man....I'm not putting down all fathers, of course, but my dad was one of those emotionally detached fathers."</p> <p>--In school, "I knew I wasn't wanted" (26)</p> <p>--Teachers did not know how to integrate non-English speaking students so "they just made it a crime to speak anything but English" and he was always embarrassed because he constantly "mixed up all the words" (27)</p> <p>--His first gang, or clicas as they called themselves, was in elementary school when five of them formed "Thee Impersonations"; "it was something to belong to—something that was ours" (41)</p>
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other: Whites	Whites were hostile and would never accept or respect Mexicans (DOMINANT)	<p>---"Our first exposure to America stays with me like a foul odor. It seemed a strange world, most of it spiteful to us, spitting and stepping on us, coughing us up, us immigrants, as if we were phlegm stuck in the collective throat of this country." (19)</p> <p>--When they first came, they encountered many whites telling them to their faces they didn't belonged, and that America was not their country; "the refrain 'this is not your country' echoed for lifetime" (18-19)</p> <p>-In school, "I knew I wasn't wanted" (26)</p>

One of his main values was **intellect**. Although he was very intelligent and had the example of his father as an intellectual, pursuing an intellectual life through education was never an option for him due to his immigrant profile. Much of this was due to his lack of English proficiency and the inability—and unwillingness—of schools to handle Mexican immigrants. At the time he and his family moved to America, there were few resources and opportunities for immigrants like himself to learn English adequately to

succeed in school. Thus, the dominant discourse that defined **intellect** for him became: *“It is impossible for Mexican Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits.”* This discourse subjugated his value of intellect, so I refer to it as a “repressive dominant discourse.” It led him to drop out of school completely and forgo his interest in intellectual pursuits. Instead, he ended up joining local gangs, which exposed him to discourses that defined for him his other values of **strength**, **recognition**, and **belonging**. However, he was still affected by a latent discourse around intellect that said: *“Expressing oneself through writing and arts brings happiness.”* This existence of a latent, albeit suppressed, alternate discourse signaled vulnerability in the power of the dominant one.

Meanwhile, his dominant discourses were affected heavily by the existing gang culture and the historical precedent of the Mexican Pachuco gangs, which steered him towards an identity wholly affiliated with a gang. There he found discourses that addressed his value of **belonging**, which he never felt from either his family (being beaten up by his brother and disliked by his father) or the surrounding American culture that discriminated against Mexicans. The dominant discourse he embraced that defined for him **belonging** became: *“To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang.”* Meanwhile, there was no alternative latent discourse, making this a powerfully established one. Being in a gang also exposed him to a discourse around **strength** that stated: *“Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican, and trump any moral rules.”* However, he still held onto a latent discourse

around this value that he received from his family, one that stated: “*There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances.*”

He became inoculated to the violence inherent in gang life, aided by his extensive use of alcohol and drugs. Meanwhile, gang life exposed him to a discourse around **recognition** that stated: “*The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a Mexican man, was through gang life.*” For him, this made sense since he had grown up watching his father and other Mexicans get repeatedly disrespected by the white community. Again, there was no alternative latent discourse around this value, so it became strongly entrenched. However, it never satisfied him—he even tried committing suicide at one point—and so all these dominant discourses were vulnerable to competing ones, including new ones that might emerge and not just already existing, latent ones.

Additionally, Rodriguez’s dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Rodriguez’s identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

Rodriguez’s construction of **Other** was defined by the discourse: “*Whites were hostile and would never accept or respect Mexicans.*” This was largely a reactive, defensive construction formed by Mexican gang members as a resistance to the hatred

and discrimination they encountered by white Americans. This was reinforced in Rodriguez by being constantly reminded that he did not belong and was not welcome, which solidified this polarizing and demonizing discourse about the Other. Meanwhile, he developed romantic, idealistic notions about Mexicans, aided by his reading of old myths and tales of Pancho gangs and Chicanos. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self—which referred to Mexicans—and an evil Other who was deemed as aggressive and antagonistic at best, and the enemy at worst. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if Rodriguez encountered people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. However, Rodriguez purposefully took certain measures to segregate him from the Other, so this made exposure less likely.

Table 19: Rodriguez - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Intellect: It is impossible for Mexican Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits</p>	<p>--“By 1970 I felt disjointed, out of balance, tired of just acting and reacting. I wanted to flirt with depth of mind, to learn more about my world.” (113) --Began writing as a teenager at age 15 and then later in juvenile hall, despite believing his writing was worthless (134) --He started getting interested in school and going to the library --He father would bring him along to the college where he worked as a janitor, and Rodriguez started visiting its library where he read prolifically. “I learned not to be angry with my father. I learned something about my father’s love, which he never expressed in words, but instead, at great risk, he gave me the world of books – a gift for a lifetime.” (139) --“A power pulsed in those books I learned to savor, in the magical hours I spent in the library- and it called me back to them” (139) --He admired adults he met through the La Casa Community Center who were “full of ideas and concepts; they were, I realized, similar to my father” (113) ---He started nurturing his creativity through murals and poetry; East LA was full of artists and musicians who inspired him; art centers started sprouted up in the 1970s when the Chicano movement was growing and creative organizations</p>

	<p>and publications “flowered into existence” in prisons (165) --He met some of LA’s best muralists and “another world opened up to me” (201) --A mentor entered his poems and writings into a Chicano Literary Contest and he won (218)</p>
<p>Strength: Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican, and trump any moral rules</p>	<p>--“I had certain yearnings at the time, which a lot of us had, to acquire authority in our own lives in the face of police, joblessness and powerlessness....but I was frustrated because I felt the violence was eating us alive” (113) --was part of the infamous walkouts staged by students demanding equality in education. --eventually returned to and finished high school, becoming leader of the Chicano student organization there and leading several school walkouts. --He was influenced by the books he read about revolutionaries and started becoming interested in advocating for Mexican Americans rather than just gang banging --He also started boxing on the team set up at the Community Center, and this made him feel strong and empowered (149) --In 1970 he was part of the Chicano Moratorium Against the War protest march, which became the largest anti-war rally ever held in a minority community, and a source of pride for him (160)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a Mexican man, was through gang life</p>	<p>--He was asked to take a leadership role in the Youth Center by a Center leader he highly respected, who told him he was needed due to his intelligence and strong leadership capabilities; “we are going to make deep changes and you’re one person who can help make them” (147) --He also started boxing on the team set up at the Community Center, and engaged in competitions which the community and his family attended (149) --eventually returned to and finished high school, becoming leader of the Chicano student organization there and leading several school walkouts. --The school created Chicano classes and hired a Chicano teacher, making him feel like he belonged --started painted murals in the Rosemead/South San Gabriel communities --He was influenced by the books he read about people like Malcolm X who changed and became heroes for the civil rights of their people --In 1970 he was part of the Chicano Moratorium Against the War protest march, which became the largest anti-war rally ever held in a minority community, and a source of pride for him (160) --Around this time, Chicanos formed new defense organizations including the Brown Berets, which followed the example of the Black Panthers, and the student groups became involved with them (165) --He met some of LA’s best muralists and “another world opened up to me” (201); he started doing murals which drew respect and recognition --A mentor entered his poems and writings into a Chicano Literary Contest and he won (218)</p>
<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang</p>	<p>--He became involved in the Youth Center --eventually returned to and finished high school, becoming leader of the Chicano student organization there and leading several school walkouts. --The school created Chicano classes and hired a Chicano teacher, making him feel like he belonged --his old gang friends shot at him, giving him a warning; he felt betrayed</p>
<p>Language of Other:</p>	<p>--He learned through the Chicano movement that nationality did not matter,</p>

Whites were hostile and would never accept or respect Mexicans	which brought into question his previous hatred of whites; he started focusing on social class and issues of social justice instead --the collective was class-blind and accepted workers of all colors and nationalities, something he found “was an unconquerable idea” (185) --He started softening towards whites after they began to make accommodations to the Mexican Americans, starting in his school when they instituted resources for immigrants
--	--

The complicating actions occurred in two ways. One was an increasingly heavy toll on his psyche from the violence, something he had never been comfortable with due to his latent discourse about **strength**. He had dealt with the shock of violence by numbing through alcohol and drugs, but this became increasingly difficult to sustain and so he started to question his dominant discourse that defined for him **strength**. Next, experiences in school in which whites attempted to respect and accommodate Mexicans started to make him doubt the discourse behind his formulation of the **Other**.

Concurrently as his dominant discourses around gang life were being challenged through an exhaustion of violence, he was introduced to new opportunities and new, alternate discourses that fit better. Much of this revolved around his re-introduction to school and exposure to libraries. By the time he returned to high school, things had progressed and they were more accommodating towards immigrants and granted more resources. A teacher who believed in him directed his talents towards writing and the arts. Meanwhile, he started reading voraciously in libraries and even starting writing his own book on a broken-down typewriter, driven by a need to express himself. These started making him feel empowered to reconsider his latent discourse around **intellect**, which he

had previously given up on, and challenge the dominant discourse he had adopted, especially since it was a repressive dominant discourse.

It appears that during this time he started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had looked to outside authority—gang peers and culture—for guidance and definition of his values, during this time he started becoming comfortable with the idea of being his own authority. During this time of questioning, it appears being able to write and express himself in words allowed him to organize his own thoughts and find his own voice. It appears writing, as well as expressing himself through arts, helped him engage in a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

During this time, he became exposed to the Chicano movement, which appealed to him. Perhaps due to his growing confidence, he became involved in the local community center—including taking on leadership positions—and became exposed to new discourses around political activism that represented alternative ways to define his values of **strength, recognition, and belonging**.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Rodriguez’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed

his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 20: Rodriguez - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supportive Discourses	References	
Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous	--Examples of revolutionary figures like Malcolm X who changed and became heroes for the civil rights of their people (138)	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative Identity Discourses	References
Intellect: It is impossible for Mexican Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits	Even a Mexican American can find success as a poet, artist, and author in America (NEW)	--he travels and speaks about the role that art and self-expression play in creating community and mitigating violence --“through my work, writing, talks, and commitments, I’ve gained an intellectual, literary, and revolutionary life”
	Expressing oneself through writing and arts brings happiness (Re-emerging LATENT)	--“Poetry is important because it allows people to have a voice and to find imaginative ways of looking at the world”
Strength: Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican, and trump any moral rules	There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances (Re-emerging LATENT)	--He started recalling the morality his mother instilled in him when younger, especially now that his son was born
	The Chicano movement and political activism provides a way to fight against oppression (NEW)	--In his senior year of high school he became president of the Chicano club, the student council’s Speaker of the House, and columnist for the school newspaper. (212) --Became involved in walk outs, revolutionary talk, revolutionary books, protests, meetings, organizing
	The young generation needs to understand that violence and gangs are not sources of strength (NEW)	--was inspired to write his memoirs after his son joined a gang --he travels and speaks about the role that

		art and self-expression play in creating community and mitigating violence --he wrote his memoir partly to dissuade his son, who had just joined a gang
Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a Mexican man, was through gang life	A way to gain respect and status was through the arts and education (NEW)	--“through my work, writing, talks, and commitments, I've gained an intellectual, literary, and revolutionary life” --Among countless literary awards and fellowships, best-selling author Luis J. Rodriguez received an “Unsung Heroes of Compassion” Award, presented by His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang	Getting involved with the Chicano movement and the community is a way to gain belonging (NEW)	--After lobbying by the new Chicano Student center that he led, the school agreed to make changes and instituted a special class on Chicano history and culture and hired a Chicano teacher – which made Rodriguez start to feel like he belonged (182)
	Getting educated and finding his voice is a way to feel a part of the greater society, and part of the intellectual scene (NEW)	--As columnist for the school newspaper he wrote about justice for Chicanos, saying in one column that “its important for Chicanos feel this is their school too. Its about time we became part of America” (212)
Language of Other: Whites were hostile and would never accept or respect Mexicans	All people, regardless of race, who struggle with injustice in America are victims and compatriots (NEW)	--Began to see both black and brown youths as the general scapegoats of the greater society. --Stopped demonizing whites and instead viewing them as partners in his anti-violence efforts

In his case, there did not appear to be a definitive, conscious decision to leave gang life. Instead, it happened gradually as he became more involved in political activism. At some point, he realized how removed he had become from the gangs when old associates shot at him in anger, as a warning, while he walked on the street. In a way, it appears they realized he had “left” them long before he had even realized it himself. This transition from gang life to political activism was supported through discourses that,

in one way or another, made political action seem heroic and admirable. Much of this he gained from reading stories about revolutionaries like Malcolm X and examples from the black resistance movement, which composed the **supportive discourse** that enabled him to consider leaving: *“Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous.”*

The transformation appeared to happen smoothly and easily, likely because the new discourses built off his pre-existing latent discourse around **intellect** that had been suppressed and deprived for so long through a dominant discourse that rejected any possibility of an intellectual pursuit. In addition to the re-emergence of his old latent discourse around **intellect** (*“Expressing oneself through writing and arts brings happiness”*), he was exposed to and embraced a new discourse that said: *“Even a Mexican American can find success as a poet, artist, and author in America.”*

Discourse theory tells us that dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology and hence come with a deep emotional commitment (Burr 1995, 152). However, Rodriguez did not seem to be too attached to the gang related discourses—perhaps because they failed to provide any means of satisfying his desire for intellectual pursuits—and so they were easily replaced by something that did. Discourse theory also tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). However, for Rodriguez it appeared to be less of an issue because he had steadily replaced his old gang friends with new friends from the Chicano movement, who now became his new allies. Furthermore, he became close with

a girlfriend who was to be an important source of emotional support and counter to the gang social network.

He was finally able to pursue intellectual activities by becoming educated and then launching a career as a writer and poet. He augmented this by pursuing other creative endeavors such as mural painting. This exposed him to a new discourse around **recognition** that stated: “*A way to gain respect and status was through the arts and education.*” He was now able to meet this value through the attention and respect he gained from these endeavors, to include many literary awards. Another new discourse that was related to his education activities redefined his value of **belonging**, which became defined as: “*Getting educated and finding his voice is a way to feel a part of the greater society, and part of the intellectual scene.*”

He also was exposed to and embraced a new discourse around **strength** that was modeled after revolutionaries who fought for their community, and he followed in their footsteps by becoming an advocate and community organizer for the Mexican American community. This discourse was: “*The Chicano movement and political activism provides a way to fight against oppression.*” This also was augmented by the emergence of his prior latent discourse (“*There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances*”). His value of **strength** was also defined by a new discourse about encouraging his current versions of strength to be adopted by youth rather than the version he held onto before. This discourse said: “*The young generation needs to understand that violence and gangs are not sources of strength.*” His role as an activist and leader also allowed him to redefine **belonging** with another discourse that said:

“Getting involved with the Chicano movement and the community is a way to gain belonging.”

Regarding his reformulation of the **Other**, he stopped framing whites as Other and instead embraced a discourse that positioned injustice as the enemy, a discourse that was the opposite of the polarized relationship between Self and Other he had adopted before. This new discourse stated: *“All people, regardless of race, who struggle with injustice in America are victims and compatriots.”*

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Rodriguez’s transformation. Firstly, it appears that Rodriguez’s initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk of disruption. These trends made him particularly vulnerable to the increasingly violent nature of gang life, which triggered his already existing latent discourse that challenged the legitimacy of such violence. Concurrently as he grew more disillusioned, he was exposed to the wider world and new people, which introduced him to new opportunities and discourses that were key in the disruption of his old narrative identity. Specifically, the role of reading and writing, which exposed him to alternative and competing discourses, allowed him to feel empowered enough to follow his doubts by pursuing new **alternative identity discourses**. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Rodriguez

to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave gang life was made possible by his increased involvement with political activism, which was influenced by examples of real life revolutionaries who had left behind old criminal pasts. The discourses around these revolutionaries, and his own increasing involvement in activism, composed the **supporting discourse** that eventually enabled him to leave behind gang life. Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with **alternate identity discourses**, some of which were old latent ones, while others were brand new. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his old gang colleagues, as well as form a new social system through the Chicano movement and his girlfriend and child, both of whom also provided emotional support. It also appears he gained emotional support from his creative pursuits, which he passionately pursued. Hence, his transition from gang member to author and community organizer was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as a new identity.

Lastly, Rodriguez became heavily involved and passionate about anti-violence and anti-gang advocacy, but did not appear to demonize gang members in his reformulation of the **Other**. Quite the opposite; in fact, he even appeared to be sympathetic and understanding towards gang members. His new construction of the **Other** positioned injustice as a universal enemy that all peoples, regardless of race or ethnicity, were oppressed by. Whereas prior to his transformation, his construction was

highly polarized between Us and Them, after his transformation, this new construction was more grounded in interdependence.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 21.

Table 21: Rodriguez - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 1: Luis Rodriguez
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Repressive dominant discourse Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection during school Support of writing and reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

4.1.2 Sanyika Shakur

Orientation: Sanyika Shakur, a.k.a. Monster Kody Scott, joined the L.A. gang the Eight Tray Gangster Crips when he was 11 years of age. After going in and out of prison, he eventually ended up with a six-year sentence in maximum-security prison. There, he transformed into a black nationalist and joined the Republic of New Afrika movement, and wrote his autobiography. He has since written extensively and spoken out on the relationship of prisons and white supremacy to the struggle for New Afrikan Independence (“Kody Scott Biography” 2013).

Table 22 depicts the context and conditions that led Shakur to write his memoir.

Table 22: Shakur - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member</i> (Shakur 2004)
Description	Written in solitary confinement, Kody Scott’s memoir chronicles his transformation from a "gangbanging ghetto star" to an evangelical proponent of black nationalism and crusader against the causes of gangsterism. ⁸
Author	Kody Scott was born in 1963 and grew up in South Central Los Angeles. In sixth grade he joined the Crips and soon earned the nom de guerre “Monster” for his many acts of depravity. He transformed himself into black nationalist Sanyika Shakur while in a California maximum-security prison. ⁹
Date of publication	1993
Approximate date of renunciation	Mid-1980s
Stated motive for writing	“It is not for the glory that I write this. It is out of desperation for the survival of the youths and civilians who are directly and indirectly involved in the fighting. I will attempt to draw seriously analytical conclusions designed to bring about a better, more in-depth overstanding [sic] of this malady, so as to help reach workable solutions for all concerned” (Shakur 2004).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	In the early 90s, he participated in the writing of journalist Leon Bing's book <i>Do Or Die</i> , which was published in 1992 and was the first insider account of teenage gangs (D. Brumble 2010). In 1991, after journalist William Broyles Jr. visited Shakur in jail for an interview, he began encouraging him to write about his experiences. He sent him supplies and reading materials on writing. Within a year, he received from Shakur the first chapter for what was to become his memoir (D. Brumble 2010).

What follows next is my analysis of Sanyika Shakur’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Sanyika Shakur’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Shakur had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout

⁸ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

⁹ Taken from book jacket since no author bio was provided on Amazon.com

his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Shakur’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values found in Table 17 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **devotion, strength, recognition, and belonging**, which I define in Table 23.

Table 23: Shakur - Values

Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Belonging	Acceptance as a natural member or part; a sense of inclusion, affiliation

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Shakur as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.” All this is depicted in Table 24.

Table 24: Shakur - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value:	The gang was the only	--His relationship with his family greatly decreased as he

Devotion	thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort (DOMINANT)	<p>became more and more invested and involved in the gang life. --“this was my career, my calling” (40) --“I felt nothing but a sense of duty”.....”and I was a hard worker” (52) --“‘Bangin’ aint no part-time thang, its full-time, it’s a career (12) --“I took things, they said, ‘too serious’ (14) --“My life was totally consumed by all aspects of gang life”...”all reflected my love for and allegiance to my set.”... Nobody was more important than my homeboys--nobody.” (69) --“Life meant very little to me. I felt that my purpose was to bang” (102)</p>
	Family is most important, and your wife and child deserve your loyalty and dedication (LATENT)	<p>--Even after he meets his future wife Tamu and mother of his children, he doesn’t put her or them first until much later in his life. Instead, he continues to fight for his set, often being captured and sent to jail. (44) --However, when he learned Tamu was pregnant, he had a thought that he needed to devote himself to his new child, but later chose not to attend the birth and instead start a gang fight. Tamu broke up with him and moved away.</p>
Value: Strength	Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs (DOMINANT)	<p>--“Early on I saw and felt both sides of the game being played where I lived. It was during my time in elementary school that I chose to never be a victim again, if I could help it. There was no gray area, no middle ground. You banged or held strong association with the gang, or else you were a victim, period.” (100) --“To me....to be unconnected meant to be a victim. And I couldn’t imagine that” (100) “I just couldn’t imagine living the life of a ‘hook’, those seemingly spineless nerds who were always victims” (100) --believed he is a warrior fighting to make his home safer --“total lawlessness was alluring, and that the sense of importance, self worth, and raw power was exciting, stimulating, and intoxicating beyond any other high on this planet” (70) --“I had no idea of peace and tranquility. From my earliest recollections there has been struggle, strife, and the ubiquity of violence” (103)</p>
	There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances (LATENT)	<p>--“The seriousness of what I had done that evening did not dawn on me until I was alone at home that night....It did little to me then, because it was all about survival. But as I lay awake in my bed, safe, alive, I felt guilty and ashamed of myself.”(13) --“I deadened my conscience with PCP, alcohol, and friends” (100) --“I didn’t believe there was a God”.....”All my life I had seen the power of life and death in the hands of men and boys” (227)</p>
Value: Recognition	The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, was through gang life and	<p>--rushed onto his path of gaining his sets’ respect and gaining a reputation; for him, the ultimate prize is the title of O.G., Original Gangster. “I had escalated from little homie to homie, and was putting in much work and dropping many bodies...For</p>

	reputation (DOMINANT)	I had learned early that there were three stages of reputation to go through before the title of O.G.—Original gangster—would apply righteously.” (14) --”my thirst for a reputation” (14) --“In 1977, when I was thirteen, while robbing a man I turned my head and was hit in the face. The man tried to run, but was tripped by Tray Ball, who then held him for me. I stomped him for twenty minutes before leaving him unconscious in an ally...The police told by standers the person responsible for this was a ‘monster.’ The name stuck and I took that as a moniker over my birth name.” (13) --To live up to his new nickname “Monster,” Shakur became progressively more violent and vicious. He began to develop the reputation and respect he worked so hard for. (13)
	It is possible to be accepted without earning it through a gang reputation, just by being yourself (LATENT)	--He liked hanging out with his girlfriend Tamu because she didn’t care about his reputation but liked him for who he was as a person, accepted him for himself; he found he could be normal around her; “She was not with me because of my reputation or clout, but for me as an individual” (43)
Value: Belonging	To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang (DOMINANT)	--His childhood was also full of hardship, violence and instability, something for which the gang world offered a new kind of family and a refuge. (103) --Shakur was the fifth of six children and conceived during an adulterous affair his mother was having; her husband physically and emotionally abused Shakur for this, routinely beating him and showing deliberate favoritism towards his other children --Since he was neglected at home, he began hanging around his neighbor Stanley Tookie Williams, leader of the West Side Crips street gang; According to William’s memoir, Shakur was always present at the house and would watch in awe as the gang members would lift weights and tell stories about gang fights and shootings that they had committed. (In his book, Williams also expressed his regret regarding his behavior around the impressionable young Shakur, and held himself personally responsible for exposing Shakur to drugs) --relations with mother soured continuously....”my homeboys became my family”; “I was congratulated by my older homeboys” (25)
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Rival gangs	Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first. (DOMINANT)	--Was told during his initiation that “‘Bangin’... is love for your set and hate for the enemy;” that night he gunned down a rival gang with a 12 gauge shotgun sawed off (12) --his life in the Crips was a whirlwind of battles against rival gangs and against rival sets, believed he is a warrior fighting to make his home safer --was deeply involved in this gang war and was responsible for shooting and assaulting dozens of members of the Rollin’ 60’s --he made a pact with his friend to “never stop until we have killed all of our enemies.”.....”I pledge my life to the Sixties’

		total destruction” (30) --”I had no interest in storing names in my memory bank”....”Gang members became recognizable as streets or sets. Further recognition fell into “enemy” or “friend” categories, which of course meant kill or let live” (77)
Everyone outside of gangs	Anyone outside of gangs (‘civilian’) is not to be trusted. (DOMINANT)	--”I could trust no one, especially a civilian” (109) --”The intruding parent becomes enemy like in thought, and is to be avoided” (118)

One of Shakur’s main values appeared to be **strength**. He was driven by a refusal to be victimized, like so many he saw around him, and this overran any moral qualms he had about the use of violence. He was drawn into gang life primarily because it offered him a way to embody **strength** through a discourse that stated: “*Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs.*” However, he did have a latent discourse that questioned the violent nature of gang life, which stated: “*There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances.*” The existence of a latent, albeit suppressed, alternate discourse signaled vulnerability in the power of the dominant one, and this latent discourse was to surface later on as the violence escalated. In the meantime, however, his pervasive use of drugs and alcohol numbed him against the effects of violence and repressed any doubts he may have had.

Shakur’s value of **devotion** drove him to find a cause, which he was able to find through gang life. The dominant discourse that defined this value for him became: “*The gang was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort.*” He also had a latent discourse about devotion, however, connected to his wife and kids that stated: “*Family is most important, and your wife and child deserve your loyalty and dedication.*”

However, this latent discourse was repressed since gang life dominated all the discourses of his values, making it difficult to challenge. **Recognition** was a value that was defined through a discourse around gang reputation that stated: *“The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, was through gang life and reputation.”* But this was also associated with a latent discourse that stated: *“It is possible to be accepted without earning it through a gang reputation, just by being yourself.”* This was not strong since it failed to be supported through many experiences except for a couple, but its presence would later challenge his dominant discourse and compete for defining his value of **recognition**.

Shakur was also drawn to gang life so strongly because it presented him a strong discourse that defined his value of **belonging**. He was never able to find alternative identity discourses around this value at home since his family—especially his father—never accepted him. Instead, he found from an early age that the gang formed a natural family for him, and the dominant discourse that defined for him this value stated: *“To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang.”* Of all the discourses that formed his initial identity, this discourse around **belonging** was the only one without a latent discourse, and hence very strong.

Aside from the discourse around **belonging**, which had no competitors, the other dominant discourses were vulnerable to competing, latent discourses. Additionally, Shakur’s dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone.

Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Shakur’s identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

Shakur’s construction of **Other** was also absolutist, defined by the discourse: “*Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first.*” This polarizing and demonizing discourse was grounded in the reality of gang warfare, so in order to survive he had to frame everyone outside his gang as the enemy. His mistrust, and even hatred, of those outside his gang even extended to civilians, who simply could not be trusted and hence were just as bad as rival gang members. This added a second dominant discourse to his construction of the Other, which stated: “*Anyone outside of gangs (‘civilian’) is not to be trusted.*” Meanwhile, he developed idealistic notions about his fellow gang members. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self—which referred to members of his gang—and an evil Other who was deemed as aggressive and antagonistic at best, and the enemy at worst. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if Shakur encountered people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. However, Shakur purposefully took certain measures to segregate him from the Other, so this made exposure less likely.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Shakur’s writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 25: Shakur - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Devotion: The gang was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort</p>	<p>--"my life was falling into the gutter, and I thought --for the first time--about my daughter" (92) --"I knew I had to do something to generate revenue for Keonda" his daughter (251) "I felt awkward, because applying for a job just wasn't the gangsterish thing to do....Working was considered weak" (251) --"She was so pure, so clean, so honest....I hoped then she'd never know her father was a monster, a hunter" (269) --"What had initially seemed like an extended family but had turned into a war machine, I was tired and disgusted with its insatiable appetite for destruction" (355) --slowly started reconnecting with his mother, feeling "genuine love and affection" towards her; "I've missed you" (359) --"Once I overstood the New Afrikan ideology and pledged my allegiance to the Republic of new Afrika's independence, I began to see Crippling in a different light..." (352) --I pledged my allegiance then to the independence of the nation, to the New Afrikan ideology, the theory and philosophy of Spear and Shield Collective, and I continued to transform through study and struggle my mentality from criminality to revolutionary nationalism</p>
<p>Strength: Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs</p>	<p>--After being shot by rival gang members when 17, Shakur reported having hallucinations of seeing the faces of all of the gang members he had shot since joining the Crips as well as seeing the infant daughter that he had with his girlfriend. --After many deaths of his gang members he "cried like a baby for hours.....the 'hood was dying didn't people see it like that? Our symbols were falling" (217) --"It was my conscience struggling under the weight of constant wrongdoing. Not wrongdoing in any religious sense, but doing things that were morally wrong based on the human code of ethics" (277) --Shakur dropped out of school after sixth grade, so jail provided a way for him to educate himself. He became literate, and some of the jails even had trade schools that the prisoners could participate in. Yet, it wasn't until much later that Shakur began to use the education he had gained from jail to question the ways of his life. Through education, he saw there were other ways to be strong than just through violence --By learning about the New Afrikan ideology, he began to see that the people</p>

	<p>victimizing him and other blacks weren't rival gang members but whites, and that he had been targeting the wrong people</p> <p>--While in jail he was introduced to Muhammad Abdullah, who introduced Shakur to the Muslim world and gave him pamphlets to read such as Message to the Oppressed. (213) He told Shakur that what they were doing was self-destructive; they were killing each other when their "real enemy" (white people) is out killing them. They are less of a threat when they are turned in upon themselves, he explained (219)</p> <p>--"I received the ideological formulation material and it redeemed me. It gave me answers to all the questions I had about myself in relation to this society...the science was strong and precise...once I overstood the New Afrikan ideology and pledged my allegiance to the Republic of new Afrika's independence, I began to see Crippling in a different light..." (352)</p> <p>--he liked what he learned about jihad, and that Muhammed "didn't seek to make us passive or weak" (220) "My interest here was drawn by the militancy of Malcom X and Muhammad, not by the spirituality of Islam" (227)</p> <p>--"I needed to do something that would be as satisfying as banging once was. Banging had taught me that I liked the feeling of fighting for something. My greatest enjoyment from banging came from the sense of power it gave me" (278)</p> <p>--"Working was not as bad as I had thought it would be" (368)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, was through gang life and reputation</p>	<p>--"I'm tired of living. Tired of killing. Tired of acting like people want me to act." (275)</p> <p>--He was enchanted by the Afrikan ideology and wanted to become "a revolutionary symbol for my people" (372)</p>
<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang</p>	<p>--"What had initially seemed like an extended family but had turned into a war machine, I was tired and disgusted with its insatiable appetite for destruction" (355)</p> <p>--Muhammed "never talked down to us"....."He didn't like what we were doing, but he respected us as young warriors" (220)</p> <p>--"Once I overstood the New Afrikan ideology and pledged my allegiance to the Republic of new Afrika's independence, I began to see crippling in a different light..." (352)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first. Anyone outside of gangs ('civilian') is not to be trusted.</p>	<p>--While Shakur was in the hospital, a nurse helped save him from the rival gang members who came to kill him; this surprised him because he didn't expect a "civilian" to be trustworthy up until that point</p> <p>--"I received the New Afrikan ideological formation material and it redeemed me. It gave me answers to all the questions I had about myself in relation to this society. I learned about how our situation in this country was that of an oppressed nation, colonized by capitalist-imperialists" (351)</p> <p>--By learning about the New Afrikan ideology, he began to see that the people victimizing him and other blacks weren't rival gang members but whites</p> <p>--While in jail he was introduced to Muhammad Abdullah, who told Shakur that what they were doing was self-destructive; they were killing each other when their "real enemy" (white people) is out killing them. (219)</p>

The complicating actions were initiated by the increasing toll of the violent life of a gang member. This included both the cost of killing and hurting people, as well as watching so many of his close friends get killed. He had dealt with the shock of violence by numbing through alcohol and drugs but this became increasingly difficult to sustain, and he started to question his discourse around **strength** (*“Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs”*). He started to feel guilty about the acts he committed and questioned their morality. Also, years of arrests and deaths of his comrades made him realize the devastating cost of the life he had chosen. He got burned out, he writes.

This questioning led him to doubt the validity of his discourse around **devotion** (*“The gang was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort”*) as he started to view his gang family as a “war machine” and became “disgusted with its insatiable appetite for destruction.” He started thinking seriously for the first time, he admits, about his daughter and feeling increasingly guilty about neglecting her and his girlfriend. He also began missing his mother, all of which strengthened his latent discourse around devotion to family (*“Family is most important, and your wife and child deserve your loyalty and dedication”*). His doubts about the gang culture and life also caused him to question his discourse around **belonging** (*“To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang”*) since he became increasingly disillusioned with being a part of the gang.

Concurrently as his dominant discourses around gang life were being challenged through exhaustion with violence, he was introduced to new opportunities and

alternative identity discourses that fit better. This happened during the many times he was in prison, which turned out to be pivotal times in his transformation given that he was ripe for serious exploration and questioning. In jail, he got an education for the first time since he had been repeatedly thrown out of school or quit in his youth. During his many periods of incarceration, he would read profusely—he actually first became literate while in jail—and engage in a process of self-discovery. These started making him feel empowered to reconsider his latent discourses and challenge the dominant discourses he had adopted.

It appears that during this time he started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had looked to outside authority—gang peers and culture—for guidance and definition of his values, during this time he started becoming comfortable with the idea of being his own authority. During this time of questioning, it appears being able to write and express himself in words allowed him to organize his own thoughts and find his own voice. It appears writing helped him engage in a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

During his time in prison, he was introduced to the Afrikan Independence Movement, which presented for him a source of **alternative identity discourses** for all his values. Through his reading, he also came across role models like Malcolm X who presented to him alternative ways of meeting the values of **strength** and **recognition**.

Additionally, the Afrikan ideology introduced him to a new way of framing the **Other**, not as rival gang members but rather as whites who were oppressing African Americans.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Shakur’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 26: Shakur - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supportive Discourses	References	
Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous	--Examples of revolutionary figures like Malcolm X who changed and became heroes for the civil rights of their people (138) --“Brother Malcolm X went to prison a common criminal and transformed his mentality while he was in prison and came out a new man of whom we know today as El Hajj Malik el Shabazz or Malcolm X. Prisoners have the capacity, the ability, like anyone else, to transform themselves to become productive, conscious revolutionaries who, by any means necessary, will struggle to the death like any other person. And this is what the state fears.”	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
Devotion: The gang was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort	The New Afrikan movement deserved his loyalty (NEW)	--I pledged my allegiance then to the independence of the nation, to the New Afrikan ideology, the theory and philosophy of Spear and Shield Collective, and I continued to transform through study and struggle my mentality from criminality

		to revolutionary nationalism --"Islam is a way of life, just like banging" (220)
	Family is most important, and your wife and child deserve your loyalty and dedication (Re-emerging LATENT)	--After being released from prison in 1988, Shakur married his longtime girlfriend, Tamu --He went from only caring about his Crip family to realizing the importance of his wife and children and putting them first. --"To continue banging would be a betrayal first of my children, who now depend on me for guidance, morals, and strength" (357) --His life now revolved around "taking care of home, bills, and two children" (368) --"My motivation was grounded in being an upright father to my children, a proper husband to Tamu....and a revolutionary symbol for my people" (372)
Strength: Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs	Strength can be achieved by becoming a politically active person who agitates, educates and organizes, and the New Afrikan movement is a vehicle to do so (NEW)	--In addition to his autobiography, he has also written extensively on the relationship of prisons and white supremacy to the struggle for New Afrikan Independence --He wanted to share his story to ensure other youths who are directly and indirectly involved gain a better understanding (xiv) --Now, preventing victimhood mean stopping "repressive tactics like racist repression and genocidal violence"
	There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances (Re-emerging LATENT)	
Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, was through gang life and reputation	Becoming active and popularizing the New Afrikan Independence movement, and telling his story of conversion, would bring him recognition (NEW)	--In addition to his autobiography, he has also written extensively on the relationship of prisons and white supremacy to the struggle for New Afrikan Independence --"It was exciting to see my thoughts in print" (356) --His autobiography, Monster, detailing gang life in LA, was on many bestseller lists for several months
	It is possible to be accepted without earning it through a gang reputation, just by being yourself (Re-emerging LATENT)	--Being honest about himself and telling his story, through writing a memoir and publicly speaking about his experiences, would allow him to gain recognition

<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining a gang</p>	<p>Getting involved in the New Afrikan Independence movement is a way to gain belonging (NEW)</p>	<p>--He felt he was a part of something heroic and important, and making a difference</p>
<p>Language of Other: Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first. Moreover, anyone outside of gangs ('civilian') is not to be trusted</p>	<p>Whites, the state, and institutionalized racism are actively oppressing African Americans (NEW)</p>	<p>--Negative stereotypes of blacks caused by American racism led to self hatred that manifested as violence</p>

In Shakur's case, there did not appear to be a definitive, conscious decision to leave gang life. Instead, it happened gradually as he became more involved in the New Afrikan ideology. Although the escalating violence and growing guilt over neglecting his family did cause him doubt, it wasn't until he was introduced to the New Afrikan movement that he decided to leave gang life. This transition from gang life to political revolutionary activism was supported through discourses that, in one way or another, made political and social action seem heroic and admirable. Much of this he gained from reading inspirational examples of revolutionaries like Malcolm X and examples from the black resistance movement, which composed the **supporting discourse** that enabled him to consider leaving, which stated: "*Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous.*"

Discourse theory asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual's psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from

which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. This is confirmed by the case of Shakur, who explains in his memoir that he needed something that “would be as satisfying as banging” in that it would give him the “feeling of fighting for something.” This drive for **devotion** to a cause could not be adequately met simply by dedicating himself to his family, but it could be met by dedicating himself to the Afrikan movement and Islam. Shakur’s transformation appeared to happen smoothly and easily, likely because he found a strong discourse for **devotion** (“*The New Afrikan movement deserved his loyalty*”), as well as for all his other values, within the New Afrikan movement to replaced his old ones. Furthermore, the new discourses built off his pre-existing latent discourses.

Furthermore, role models like Malcolm X and leaders from the black resistance movement also exposed him to **alternative identity discourses** around **strength**—through revolutionary actions not gang life—and **recognition**. The dominant discourse that he embraced for **strength** became: “*Strength can be achieved by becoming a politically active person who agitates, educates and organizes, and the New Afrikan movement is a vehicle to do so,*” supplemented by his old latent discourse that now resonated (“*There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances*”). The dominant discourse that he embraced for **recognition** became: “*Becoming active and popularizing the New Afrikan Independence movement, and telling his story of conversion, would bring him recognition,*” likewise supplemented by the re-emerging latent discourse: “*It is possible to be accepted without earning it through a gang reputation, just by being yourself.*” Lastly, becoming a part of this political movement

exposed him to a new discourse for his value of **belonging**, which stated: “*Getting involved in the New Afrikan Independence movement is a way to gain belonging.*”

Discourse theory tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). However, for Shakur it appeared to be less of an issue because he had steadily replaced his old gang friends with new comrades from the Afrikaner movement, who now became his new allies. Furthermore, he became close again with his girlfriend and mother, both of whom became important sources of emotional support.

Regarding his reformulation of the **Other**, he was informed by New Afrikan ideology and stopped framing rival gang members as Other and instead embraced a discourse that positioned whites, the state, and institutionalized racism as the enemy. This new discourse stated: “*Whites, the state, and institutionalized racism are actively oppressing African Americans.*”

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Shakur’s transformation. Firstly, it appears that Shakur’s initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk to disruption. These trends made him particularly vulnerable to the increasingly violent nature of gang life, which triggered his already existing latent discourse that challenged the legitimacy of such violence. Concurrently as he grew more disillusioned, he was

exposed to **alternative identity discourses** during his time in prison, a pivotal time that was key in the disruption of his old narrative identity. Specifically, he learned to read and write while in prison, which allowed him to feel empowered enough to follow his doubts by pursuing new **alternative identity discourses**. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Shakur to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave gang life was made possible by his increased involvement with political and social activism, which was influenced by examples of real life revolutionaries who had left behind old criminal pasts. The discourses around these revolutionaries, and his own increasing involvement in activism, composed the **supporting discourse** that eventually enabled him to leave behind gang life. Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with **alternate identity discourses**, some of which were old latent ones, while others were brand new. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his old gang colleagues, as well as form a new social system through the New Afrikan movement and family, girlfriend, and child, who provided emotional support. Hence, his transition from gang member to activist was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as new narrative identity.

Lastly, Shakur did not appear to reverse his reformulation of the **Other** by demonizing gang members after he left gang life. Instead, he blamed whites and the systemic injustices they inflicted upon African Americans as part of the driving forces

behind gang involvement. His construction of the Other remained as highly polarized as it had been before his transformation, but now the evil Other was whites and the perfect Self was African Americans.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 27.

Table 27: Shakur - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 2: Sanyika Shakur
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in prison Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Highly polarized Self/Other

4.1.3 Stanley “Tookie” Williams

Orientation: Stanley “Tookie” Williams was one of the co-founders of the Crips gang of South Central L.A. Williams was convicted of murdering four people and given a death penalty sentence in 1981. While on death row, Williams converted from gang member to outspoken anti-gang activist in the early 1990s. He renounced his gang affiliation and apologized for his role in founding the Crips. In the years after that, he authored a series of anti-gang children’s books that resulted in several nominations for

the Nobel Prize and participated in efforts intended to prevent youths from joining gangs before his execution in 2005 (“Stanley Tookie Williams Biography” 2013).

Table 28 depicts the context and conditions that led Williams to write his memoir.

Table 28: Williams - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>Blue Rage, Black Redemption: A Memoir</i> (Williams 2007)
Description	A gripping memoir of personal revolution by a man who went from Crips co-founder to Nobel Peace Prize nominee, author, and antigang activist. ¹⁰
Author	Stanley Tookie Williams , activist and author, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times and the Nobel Prize in literature four times. He is the only man in history to be nominated while imprisoned. He was executed in 2005. ¹¹
Date of publication	2004
Approximate date of renunciation	1993
Stated motive for writing	“These memoirs of my evolution will, I hope, connect the reader to a deeper awareness of a social epidemic that is the unending nightmare of racial minorities in America and abroad as well” (Williams 2007)
Writing experiences prior to memoir	In 1996 he published his first book, with the help of co-author Barbara Cottman Becnel, which was the first of eight <i>Tookie Speaks Out Against Gang Violence</i> anti-gang books aimed at children (“Stanley Tookie Williams Biography” 2013). In 1998, also with the help of Barbara Cottman Becnel, he wrote <i>Life in Prison</i> , a short non-fiction work explaining the horrors of jail (“Stanley Tookie Williams Biography” 2013).

What follows next is my analysis of Stanley “Tookie” Williams’ memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

¹⁰ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

¹¹ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Stanley “Tookie” Williams’ memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Williams had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Williams’ memoir, I identified the four categories of values found in Table 29 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **intellect, strength, recognition, and devotion**, which I define in Table 29.

Table 29: Williams - Values

Intellect	Using one’s capacity for understanding, thinking, and reasoning; imagination, creativity, contribution of new ideas
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty

Then, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Williams as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 30: Williams - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Intellect	It is impossible for African Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits (DOMINANT)	<p>--Refused to listen to mom; truancy at school (55); “when I did stay in school, I usually ended up arguing with a teacher or getting into a fight with someone” (59)</p> <p>--“I would literally get up and leave the room if the subject matter was weak or the teacher was incapable of stimulating my mind” (57)</p> <p>--“I became a slave to dys-education, nihilism, drugs, black on black violence, self-hate” (xvii); “I coined the term ‘dys-education’ to depict the abnormal, impaired, and diseased knowledge I received in life and from the public school system” (29)</p> <p>--When he first started Elementary School, he was eager to learn; “I braved the surroundings with a great deal of curiosity and eagerness to learn” (29); “All I wanted was to become educated” (31)</p> <p>--However this was obliterated by his teacher Miss Atkins – “Perhaps because she sensed my potential, she was driven to hinder or obliterate my intentions” (31)</p> <p>--Forshay Junior High had terrible teachers who treated blacks as mentally retarded (40); “I really wasn’t interested in going to Forshay. I felt that the teachers were insipid...it was assumed I was a slow student, stupid, or had special needs.” (41)</p> <p>--He began to ditch school, and “Downtown LA had become our institution of higher learning; its curriculum of thievery, deceit, and robbery promised a diploma in criminality” (41)</p> <p>--“School had failed me, and I had failed it” (63)</p> <p>--“Foolishly sacrificing an education for the forbidden fruits of drugs, unprotected sex, fighting, strong arming, and gambling” (69)</p> <p>--Later on, his gangbanger lifestyle started to take a mental toll on him, especially the copious amounts of drugs he was taking to deal with the stress; the drugs were making him mentally dull</p>
	It is possible to get an education and do something other than thuggery (LATENT)	<p>--He always just wanted an education; “All I wanted was to become educated” (31)</p> <p>--In elementary school, he enjoyed reading; “I was a darn good reader for my age....Reading was a pastime I truly enjoyed and a way of escaping” (31)</p> <p>--Later in 6th grade, he had a teacher who believed in him; “Back at school, my skills were growing, thanks to Miss Johnson....she talked about black greatness and the need for me to carry the torch” (39)</p> <p>--While he was living at the youth home, Bob helped him</p>

		<p>and some friends enroll in a local high school and start playing on their football team; “Crips, playing team football, attending classes, and actually doing schoolwork. I was attending school and enjoying playing on the football team, without pretext or profit. For the first time in my chaotic life there appeared a chance to uplift myself” (121); however, there was pressure placed on the high school and they were kicked out</p> <p>--Then the youth home, Factor Brookins, was forced to shut down, he went to full-time Crippen</p> <p>--He started working for Bob soon thereafter, as a youth counselor and leader of youth homes, but mostly did so for the paycheck, and still continued his life as a gang leader (153)</p> <p>--Bob convinced him to enroll at Compton College (153) but only lasted a short time because he was already overstretched balancing a dual life as a gang leader and counselor; “I was trying to balance an educational impossibility” (154)</p>
<p>Value: Strength</p>	<p>Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“I learned from street culture that criminal activity was an economic necessity and violence a means to a desired end; in my neighborhood, if you wanted something, you had to take it--and then fight to keep it” (5)</p> <p>--“aggression served as a poor man’s merit for manhood...to die as a street martyr was seen as a noble thing” (xvii)</p> <p>--“I became a slave to dys-eduction, nihilim, drugs, black on black violence, self-hate” (xvii)</p> <p>--“I absorbed a distorted sense of self-preservation” (14)</p> <p>--“as a member of the black species living in a ghetto microcosm, circumstances dictated that I be either prey or predator” (21)</p> <p>--“for me, fighting wasn’t done for fun; it was a survival necessity” (35)</p> <p>--as a child, he would hang out in abandoned houses and vacant lots where he would watch adults get drunk, abuse drugs, gamble and engage in pit bull fights, then make the children fight each other. He participated and adults would bet on him and give him part of the proceeds for winning his fights.</p> <p>--Williams was often the target of older bullies in his neighborhood and, by the age of twelve, he began carrying a switchblade in order to defend himself against older street thugs.</p> <p>--Because of his viciousness and willingness to fight older youths, many of whom belonged to small-time street gangs, Williams earned the respect of many neighborhood toughs on the West Side who were leaders of their own small-time cliques.</p> <p>--he founded the Crips not with the intention of eliminating other gangs, but to create a force powerful enough to protect local black people from racism, corruption and brutality at the hands of the police.</p> <p>--“survival based on the principles of accumulated wealth,</p>

		<p>force, and violence” (157)</p> <p>--“I internalized the defeatist rhetoric propagated as street wisdom in my ‘hood, that there were only three ways out of South Central: migration, death, or incarceration” (218)</p> <p>--“the truth is, I didn’t care what happened to me or anyone else” (226);“indifferent to societal or mundane affairs, I lumbered through life fueled by brute strength and bent on intimidation” (217)</p>
	<p>There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances (LATENT)</p>	<p>--“My mother tried to instill in me the fundamentals of right and wrong” (4); “when I was young, her gospel sermons of fire and brimstone held my attention for hours” (6)</p> <p>--“Though I loved my mother, I wouldn’t listen to her; she was in total conflict with the environment I saw around me and its stringent requirements for survival” (14)</p> <p>--“My mother adhered religiously to the Judeo-Christian bible” (4); however, he never felt an affinity to religious stories or literature because they never depicted black people (6)</p> <p>--New sister took his mother’s attention away from him and so her influence on his life weakened (20)</p>
<p>Value: Recognition</p>	<p>The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, is through gang life and reputation (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“I envisioned our being not a gang in the customary sense, but an unstoppable force that no gang in LA or the world could ever defeat. The thought appealed to my growing megalomania.” (86)</p> <p>--after being released from juvenile hall at 17, the review board asked him what he planned to do and replied that he planned on "being the leader of the biggest gang in the world." (78)</p> <p>--Incredibly muscular as a result of his intense bodybuilding regimen and never missed an opportunity to display his physique, either in street fights or at social events</p> <p>--“I relished the thug recognition” (139)</p> <p>--Crips would lay out a carpet when he showed up; “I was greeted as though I wore an imaginary crown. The respect I received inflated my head to the size of a watermelon” (140)</p> <p>--“Being viewed as maniacal or wacked out fed my ego...I felt unstoppable, unbeatable, lawless, fearless of God” (207)</p>
	<p>A way to gain respect was by being a social counselor to youth (LATENT)</p>	<p>--Bob made him in charge of youth homes, and although he wasn’t interested in the counseling part, he did it because it made him look good within the community (140)</p> <p>--“motions of play-acting the role of counselor, which made me look good” (159)</p> <p>--later he was set-up by a youth from one of his homes and Bob fired him (181)</p>
<p>Value: Devotion</p>	<p>The Crips, Crippen, and your homeboys are the only things worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--I held no allegiance to anything other than Crippen (217)</p> <p>--He claims he founded the Crips not with the intention of eliminating other gangs, but to create a force powerful enough to protect local black people from racism, corruption and brutality at the hands of the police. (61)</p> <p>--“It was my determination to retaliate and protect us from</p>

		<p>street gangs.....I could not turn the other cheek to expose myself—or my friends—to further harm. So I fought and fought hard.” (61)</p> <p>--“I would have defended any diehard Crip to the death” (157)</p>
	<p>Family deserved your loyalty and dedication (LATENT)</p>	<p>--As a young boy, he felt incredibly protective of his mother and since there was no father around, he tried to claim the role of dominant male figure (43)</p> <p>--Later, he had children with two women but wasn’t interested in rearing them; in fact, he refused to let them claim him as the father so he wouldn’t have to pay child support</p> <p>--“Being callow and unpolished, I didn’t take the marriage seriously even though Bonnie was devoted and loving. I was loyal to Crippen and nothing else” (123)</p> <p>--When Bonnie got pregnant, he agreed to help Bob run youth homes and work as a counselor for the paycheck to help support his child (140)</p>
	<p>At-risk youth deserved your loyalty and dedication (LATENT)</p>	<p>--He spent much of his young adult life watching Bob tirelessly work with at-risk youth and attempt to negotiate truces among gangs</p> <p>--Later when he was in charge of a youth house, Slater home, he took on a fatherly role with the boys living there – something he wasn’t even doing with his own kids; “There was still something inside me that wanted better for them than I had for myself” (155)</p>
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Cops	<p>Cops would do everything in their power to lock you up or even kill you (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“Black people have known for many, many years that some white cops are racist” (110); “the Sheriff’s uniform itself symbolized racism and ruthlessness” (219)</p> <p>--“The ‘hood cops were pledged to protect and serve, but for us they were not there to help but to exploit us” (145)</p> <p>--He writes that he was spoon fed negative stereotypes that covertly positioned black people as genetic criminals</p> <p>--He claims he founded the Crips not with the intention of eliminating other gangs, but to create a force powerful enough to protect local black people from racism, corruption and brutality at the hands of the police.</p> <p>--“My rage was nourished by the hate I saw and felt from mainstream society and white people, a hate based on my black skin and my historical place at the nadir of America’s social caste”(217)</p> <p>--In prison, he was treated as an animal; “my size and seemingly antiestablishment posture quickly drew the attention of sheriffs of a Gestapo mentality.....in an effort to camouflage their fears, they sought to emasculate me and to destroy my sanity” (220)</p>
Rival gangs	<p>Rival gangs are the enemy</p>	<p>--“I thought the black images we saw over the barricades</p>

	<p>and out to get you, so you have to get them first (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>were seen as the enemy, we had no notion that our true adversaries were the squalid living conditions, the vortex of powers confining us to those conditions, and our own unwitting perpetuation of those conditions”; like countless other black gang members and criminals, we were unconscious accomplices in our own subjugation--our own worst foes” (80) --“Conditioned and brainwashed to hate myself and my own race, other black people became my prey and the Crips my sword.” (217)</p>
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Williams was at first influenced by his religious mother towards defining his value of **strength** through a discourse grounded in morality: *“There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances.”* However, this quickly became latent since he was fully immersed in a street culture that forced him to embrace violence for self-defense, although he initially was not drawn towards gangs. However, after a period of incarceration in juvenile hall, his relationship to violence shifted after he started weight lifting intensely and was exposed to new discourses around violence. Once he emerged from juvenile hall, he felt empowered by his newfound muscular strength, which led him to shift from a defensive attitude towards one that was fully offensive. His dominant discourse around **strength**, then, became: *“Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right.”*

Furthermore, though he initially felt strong **devotion** to his mother, this shifted to a latent discourse (*“Family deserved your loyalty and dedication “*) and was replaced by a dominant one that elevated his homeboys and the Crips gang that he created as the most worthy of **devotion** (*“The Crips, Crippen, and your homeboys are the only things worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort”*). The street culture also imposed on him a

dominant discourse around **recognition** that stated: *“The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, is through gang life and reputation.”* After he was released from juvenile hall, he vowed to become the leader of the biggest gang to ever exist, feeding into this discourse.

The one thing that the gang lifestyle never fulfilled was a discourse that met his value of **intellect**. Instead, his experiences exposed him to a discourse that negated even the possibility of pursuing an education, a repressive dominant discourse that stated: *“It is impossible for African Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits.”* Growing up, he mostly experienced teachers who stereotyped him as a criminal and never gave him a chance to study. The one adult role model who influenced him positively was Bob, a youth leader who was involved in trying to solve the gang problem. For a period of time, Williams even stayed with Bob and attended high school and then college. During this period, he was exposed to an alternative identity discourse around **intellect** that stated: *“It is possible to get an education and do something other than thuggery.”* However, he was eventually thrown out of high school and then dropped out of college due to the increasing demands of his role as gang leader.

Despite dropping out of school, he also worked as a counselor for Bob for a period of time. He engaged with at-risk youth and even took on a fatherly-role at times. Although Williams later explained he only did it for reputation and a paycheck, this experience seemed to have influenced certain latent discourses, such as one around **recognition** that stated: *“A way to gain respect was by being a social counselor to youth,”* and one around **devotion** that stated: *“At-risk youth deserved your loyalty and*

dedication.” These latent discourses around at-risk youth would later resurface and effect his transformation.

Overall, Williams had latent discourses influencing all the values that composed his narrative identity, which weakened the power of his dominant discourses and created vulnerabilities that would be tested once complicating actions were introduced. Additionally, Williams’ dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Williams’ identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

Williams’ construction of **Other** was largely grounded in the reality of being a black youth in South Central L.A., which meant cops and rival gangs were the natural enemy. Due to ongoing gang warfare, rival gangs were automatically the enemy because they were constantly threatening all the other competing gangs. They became the **Other** in a demonizing discourse that stated: “*Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first.*” Meanwhile, in his memoir he writes extensively about how whites imposed a stereotype upon black youth like him that positioned them as aggressive criminals, no matter what the reality was. This positioning then resulted in blacks acting out this stereotype and, in turn, positioning cops as the enemy in a discourse

that stated: “Cops would do everything in their power to lock you up or even kill you.” During his time in prison, the image of the cops as the enemy worsened, and he even labeled them as terrorists for the way they treated him. Meanwhile, he developed idealistic notions about his own gang and fellow gang members. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self – which referred to his gang brothers – and an evil **Other** who was deemed as aggressive and antagonistic at best, and the enemy at worst. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if Williams encountered people from the category of **Other** who exhibited morally good traits. However, Williams never associated by choice with members from the **Other**, so this made exposure less likely.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Williams’ writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 31: Williams - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Intellect: It is impossible for African Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits</p>	<p>--After he was drugged by the prison guards for some time, he then resolved not to ever take drugs again and instead turned towards educating himself --“The prison cage was transformed into a study laboratory”; “without conscience I’d remain an educated fool doomed to repeat his mistakes” (256) --“Studying was becoming a noble reality for me” (256) --Friend Treach in prison told him to start writing, and he inspired him to write his first essay Black Unrest (256) --“studying was becoming a noble reality for me”; “seeking to reeducate myself was the first step toward reasoning” (256)</p>

	<p>--"in the midst of all the distractions, I still possessed the enthusiasm to reinvent myself" (271)</p> <p>--from 1988 until 1994, while in solitary confinement, he underwent years of education, soul-searching, edification, spiritual cultivation, and "fighting to transcend my inner demons" (xix)</p> <p>--"For me, it was both a spiritual blessing and therapy for my soul to meditate on the teachings of the Qur'an, Metu Neter, the Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible and other uplifting literature."</p> <p>--I became culturally conscious through the literary instructions of Cheikh Diop, Dr. Yosef S. Jochanna, Ivan V. Sertima, John H. Clarke, Jacob Carruthers and other Black historians</p> <p>--"though I had no academic degree, I had created my own curriculum through years of study, extrospection, and hard knock experiences" (285)</p> <p>--"It was routine studying and questioning that prompted my soul searching. I began to develop a sense of critical reasoning from which sprang the first stirrings of conscience." (301)</p>
<p>Strength: Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right</p>	<p>--Death of his best friend Buddha devastated him and made him realize for the first time that he was not invincible; "Buddha's death devastated me...it scared the feeling of invincibility out of me." (137) However, this didn't stop him but he repressed this new doubt and instead became more aggressive</p> <p>--After he was shot, he again felt a blow to his illusion of invincibility but also repressed this and came back stronger; "I had been knocked out of my imaginary throne.....I was horrified" (167); "I pondered whether Crippen was worth all the deaths, suffering, or the tears" (171)</p> <p>--"It was routine studying and questioning that prompted my soul searching. I began to develop a sense of critical reasoning from which sprang the first stirrings of conscience." (301)</p> <p>--"For the first time I was concerned not just for myself.....but also for the welfare of other people's children; I found myself unable to eat after watching scenes of children suffering in Africa"; "maturation was occurring; I was becoming a person with a heart" (291)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, is through gang life and reputation</p>	<p>--He was forgotten about while in prison; his friends rarely visited and his girlfriend left him</p>
<p>Devotion: The Crips, Crippen, and your homeboys are the only things worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort</p>	<p>--After he was shot and while recuperating in the hospital, he experienced the first doubt about whether the Crips were worth it. "I pondered whether Crippen was worth all the deaths, suffering, or the tears." (171) But this didn't last, and wouldn't be until prison that he withdrew his allegiance.</p> <p>--While in prison, he would talk with his friend Evil, another Crip, and they came to realize the Crips had turned into something they weren't proud of; "eventually, our gang morphed into the monster we were addressing"; "it was a stunning realization to witness Raymond's and my brainchild becoming a caricature of what it once was." (263)</p> <p>--"I lay there thinking about how, most of my life, I lived it for Crip, but the Crip god had abandoned me" (279)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Cops would do everything in their power to lock you</p>	<p>--He started looking beyond cops and instead blaming the entire system of white supremacy and injustice</p>

up or even kill you.	
Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first.	--He started to see how all blacks were victims of an oppressive, unjust system

Despite having many latent discourses to challenge his dominant ones, he did not experience any disruption to his identity structure because of the power of the dominant discourse around **strength**—and the reality of life on the streets. It wasn't until he was imprisoned and on death row that his narrative identity started to become challenged. Even then, however, it took awhile, as he admits in his memoir.

In prison, he was forced to become sober after having used drugs and alcohol to numb himself for most of his life. He chose to disavow drugs after he claims he was forcibly drugged by prison guards, to the point of cognitive confusion, something he never wanted to experience again. After that experience, he decided to focus on gaining intellectual reasoning, which was made possible by the self-education he guided himself through while in prison. As he says, “My decision to repudiate drugs was the beginning of my redemption that would bear fruit, for children, nearly a decade later.” From that moment on, he taught himself vocabulary by memorizing the dictionary, which then allowed him to teach himself to read. Then, he started to read extensively and engaged in intellectual conversations with other friends in prison doing the same. His own intellectual efforts, combined with reading about the intellectual pursuits of prominent African Americans, combined to sow doubt about his dominant discourse around **intellect** (“*It is impossible for African Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits*”).

This time in prison also allowed him to engage in a form of critical historical reflection. Soon thereafter, he also started to write, which allowed him to explore his thoughts and himself – which he even termed himself as “critical historical reflection,” reminiscent of Foucault’s name for this process. This education and resulting reflection forced him to see through his dominant discourse around **strength** (“*Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right*”), exposing it to be “a litany of fiascos, scandals, mayhem, nihilism, and deaths of my homeboys, ending with the Crips entity fading into obscurity.” Once he had this realization, not only did the dominant discourse around strength shatter, but the ones around **devotion** (“*The Crips, Crippen, and your homeboys are the only things worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort*”) and **recognition** (“*The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, is through gang life and reputation*”) also collapsed. “At that moment I knew that my life as a Crip had come to an end,” he writes. (279)

Meanwhile, his reading exposed him to African culture and history that made him question his construction of **Other** as rival gang members or even cops. Instead, he started learning more about the systemic causes of injustice wreaked upon African Americans, largely due to white supremacy. He began to see how all blacks were victims of this and there was no logic in viewing rival gangs as enemy, but they should all unite as black brothers together.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Williams’ memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made

meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 32: Williams - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution	
Part 1: Choosing to Leave	
Supportive Discourses	References
The most wretched in society can be redeemed, find peace, and reach out to others to lift them up	--“God choose to redeem, not the laws of government, the media, the sanctimonious, or the vindictive” (xix) --“I discovered the means to control my ego, which enabled me to reunite with God, to reclaim my humanity, to discover inner peace (xix) --I developed a conscience that empowered me to think beyond the selfish ‘I’ principle” (xix) --He admits the idea of redemption – while on death row- was hard to fathom but that it was made easier to believe in due to his close friends who were likewise attempting the same; “we wanted to set a standard others could follow, create a natural transition from criminal to black man of learning” (270) --“I discovered time and time again while reading black history that regardless of a person’s background, when one’s mind, behavior, circumstances, and spirit are aligned with destiny, the impossible can be achieved.” (295) --“Death row became my Gethsemane” (317)
Individuals with sordid pasts have successfully changed themselves and become inspirational heroes who did great things for society	--inspirational stories about revolutionaries and figures who redeemed themselves after a sordid past. --“People tend to forget the transitions of Saul, who became Paul, Moses, King David and Saint Aurelius Augustine, who was not always saintly, given the boy he sired by a mistress.” --“I studied the lives of numerous imprisoned men who professed to be revolutionaries--Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Rastafarian, ex-drug addict, or former gang member” (271) --“A few black men—one in particular, Malcolm X—who underwent a miraculous change from a seemingly permanent criminal to a reborn black man.”
Black activists are more admirable than black gang members	--learned about Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X, and “gained new insight and respect for both slain black activists” (255)

Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative Identity Discourses	References
<p>Intellect: It is impossible for African Americans to engage in intellectual pursuits</p>	It is possible to get an education and do something other than thuggery (Re-emerging LATENT)	<p>“we wanted to set a standard others could follow, create a natural transition from criminal to black man of learning” (270)</p> <p>--“I discovered time and time again while reading black history that regardless of a person’s background, when one’s mind, behavior, circumstances, and spirit are aligned with destiny, the impossible can be achieved.” (295)</p>
	Redemption could come from applying his intellect to help prevent youth from following in his footsteps (NEW)	--Barbara Becnel was writing a book and helped him with his idea to write children’s books
<p>Strength: Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs</p>	Compassion, spirituality, and education represent true strength (NEW)	<p>--Williams would teach other black inmates who thanked him, they would “acknowledge our scholastic teachings as a sign of strength” (281)</p> <p>--“By 1993, I had rediscovered my humanity through the knowledge of God, culture and self, which became the ‘natural elements’ for reshaping my life. I had become a man of principle and accountability, and a servant of God.”</p> <p>--“If not for the spiritual cultivation that provided me with a principled edge, I would have succumbed to outside distractions” (293)</p> <p>--“Now I’m a fighter of another kind. I fight for the poor and wretched among us, of all ethnicities.” (337)</p> <p>--“Though I was trained on violence, I’ve discovered that strength can be found in the might of the intellect, in spirituality, in creativity, and in constructive progress.” (316)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition, as a black man, is through gang life and reputation</p>	He could gain recognition by telling his story, which would also help prevent youth from following in his footsteps (NEW)	<p>--“we wanted to set a standard others could follow, create a natural transition from criminal to black man of learning” (270)</p> <p>--He and his friends collaborated on a book of poems and were excited about the possibility of seeing it in print and bearing the fruits of their wisdom (277)</p> <p>--He finds comfort in knowing his example will influence others not to follow in his footsteps (337)</p> <p>--“It was in my hostile past that I strove for</p>

		thug greatness; but now I am intent on helping children discover their inner potential” (317)
<p>Devotion: The Crips, Crippen, and your homeboys are the only things worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort</p>	At-risk youth deserved your loyalty and dedication (Re-emerging LATENT)	<p>--“I wanted to do something positive with my life, to help children stay out of this filthy hellhole and out of gangs” (284)</p> <p>--“though a role model I could never be, I could act as an African griot or Paul Revere, warning youths about what is coming down the crooked path” (285)</p> <p>--“ability to influence young people to stay out of gangs was reason enough to want to live.” (xv)</p> <p>--“Back in the day, I was devoted to building a Crip nation at the expense of other Black people. Today, my life is dedicated to building unity among youths, to promoting youth programs, computer literacy and youth empowerment, and to developing an initiative for a broad-based progressive agenda for youth throughout the world.”</p> <p>--“writing the book had a sublime effect on me. It seemed to melt away the years of being desensitized and callous. I felt a sense of genuine purpose: to create a book that might tap into the social pathology affecting black children.” (285)</p> <p>--“There was a fire kindling in my mind, a fire that drove me to write books for children. Its name I coined Moto Ndani.” (291)</p> <p>--“Maturation was occurring. I was becoming a person of heart.” (291)</p> <p>--“It was in my hostile past that I strove for thug greatness; but now I am intent on helping children discover their inner potential.” (317)</p>
	Family deserved your loyalty and dedication (Re-emerging LATENT)	--Started reconnecting with his sons, who would visit him in prison. One was involved in gangs, so Williams continuously talked with him until he left the gang life too.
<p>Language of Other: Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first. Cops would do everything in their power to lock you up or even kill you.</p>	Hating others was not worth it because it might disturb inner peace (NEW)	<p>--“Maturation was occurring. I was becoming a person of heart.” (291)</p> <p>--He would never allow himself to go back to that place of anger...nor would he ever again isolate his heart (343)</p> <p>--At his execution, he even smiled and thanked a guard for giving him a little privacy to shower beforehand (343)</p>

As mentioned earlier, his transformation was the result of a slow process of education and reflection. This transition from gang life to peace activist was supported through **supporting discourses** that, in one way or another, allowed him to forgive himself for his past deeds and to pursue political and social action. He was able to forgive himself through a discourse around redemption that stated: *“The most wretched in society can be redeemed, find peace, and reach out to others to lift them up.”* Meanwhile, stories of controversial transitions of converts like St. Paul, St. Augustine, Malcolm X, and others exposed him to the supporting discourse about change that stated: *“Individuals with sordid pasts have successfully changed themselves and become inspirational heroes who did great things for society.”* Lastly, learning about the lives and examples of black activists like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X exposed him to the supporting discourse that stated: *“Black activists are more admirable than black gang members.”*

However, discourse theory asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. For him, he found this in education, spirituality, black culture and history, and a desire to help at-risk youth. Williams’ transformation appeared to happen smoothly and easily, likely because the new discourses built off his pre-existing latent discourses that had been suppressed and deprived for so long.

First and foremost, he returned to his latent discourse around **intellect** that stated: *“It is possible to get an education and do something other than thuggery.”* It was made possible through the time and resources available to him in prison. Through his study, the stories he learned about converts and redemption inspired him to change himself, and to work towards getting other imprisoned blacks to embrace education instead of gangs. Thus, a second dominant discourse around **intellect** became *“Redemption could come from applying his intellect to help prevent youth from following in his footsteps.”* He began to believe that “any Crip armed with correct knowledge about himself, culture, spirituality, and the world would see the light and begin to change.”

This new focus on influencing others to follow his example introduced a new discourse for his value of **recognition**, which stated: *“He could gain recognition by telling his story, which would also help prevent youth from following in his footsteps.”* It also caused the re-emergence of his latent discourse concerning at-risk youth (*“At-risk youth deserved your loyalty and dedication”*) to emerge and define his value of **devotion**. Since his family supported him and visited him while he was imprisoned, his value of **devotion** was also augmented by his re-emerging latent discourse that stated: *“Family deserved your loyalty and dedication.”* Lastly, his study and reflection—especially spiritual reflection—also exposed him to a new discourse around **strength** that stated: *“Compassion, spirituality, and education represent true strength.”*

Discourse theory also tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). However, for

Williams it did not appear to be an issue because he was imprisoned and mostly kept to himself, away from other Crips. Those he did befriend and trust, only a handful, were likewise seeking a similar transition as him, and hence were actually sources of emotional support and counter to the gang social network.

Regarding his reformulation of the **Other**, towards the end of his life—before his execution—he stopped creating enemies even out of whites, who he had previously blamed for their role in perpetuating injustices against African Americans. He writes that such anger and resentment would disturb his inner peace, and that peace was more important to him than anything else. His new discourse lacked any polarizing features and did not demonize or position anyone as the **Other**. Instead, based on a framework of interdependence and tolerance, it stated: “*Hating others was not worth it because it might disturb inner peace.*”

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Williams’ transformation. Firstly, it appears that Williams’ initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk of disruption. However, it wasn’t until he was imprisoned for life and chose to stop taking drugs that he started to doubt his dominant discourses. In prison, he was able to educate himself and foster self-reflection, which allowed him to feel empowered enough to follow his doubts by pursuing new **alternative identity discourses**. Reading and interacting with prison inmates exposed him to these new discourses. Overall, his time in

prison represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Williams to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave behind gang life was made possible by his increasing interest in spirituality, which was influenced by examples of inspirational figures that were redeemed by God. Such figures also inspired him to pursue ways to serve society, rather than exploit it, as gang activity tends to do. The discourses around these role models, to include black activists, and his own increasing involvement in anti-gang advocacy, composed the **supporting discourse** that eventually enabled him to leave behind gang life. After leaving, he rebuilt his narrative identity with alternate discourses, some of which were old latent ones, while others were brand new. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his old gang colleagues, as well as form a new social system through the new friends he made in prison and his family, which served as sources of emotional support. It also appears he gained emotional and psychological support from his spirituality and anti-gang activism, both of which he passionately delved into. Hence, his transition from gang member to author and activist was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as a new identity.

Lastly, Williams became heavily involved and passionate about anti-violence and anti-gang advocacy, but did not appear to demonize gang members in his reformulation of the **Other**. Quite the opposite; in fact, he even appeared to be sympathetic and understanding towards gang members. His former demonization of whites, especially cops, as the source of injustice towards African Americans also dissipated, and he no

longer viewed them as the Other either. Whereas prior to his transformation, his construction was highly polarized between Us and Them, after his construction was more grounded in interdependence, and he no longer viewed any category of people as falling into the label of Other.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 33.

Table 33: Williams - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 5: Stanley “Tookie” Williams
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Repressive dominant discourse Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in prison Support of writing and reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of spiritual figures who went through transformations Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

4.2 Former Right-Wing Extremists

4.2.1 Ed Husain

Orientation: Ed Husain was a member of the radical right-wing Islamist organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), which calls for the overthrow of British society and establishment of an Islamic state. He was actively involved, and took on leadership roles, for about five years. During his time in college, however, he became increasingly

exposed to the spiritual side of Islam and influenced by Sufi scholars, which caused him to question and eventually leave HT behind. Soon thereafter, he co-founded the first counter-extremism think tank former by former radical Islamists, *Quilliam Foundation*, which works to prevent future extremists from joining radical Islamist movements. In addition to being an outspoken activist, he has also worked for the British Council and is currently a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (Perlez 2007; Husain 2010).

Table 34 depicts the context and conditions that led Husain to write his memoir.

Table 34: Husain - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left</i> (Husain 2007)
Author	Ed Husain was an Islamist radical for five years in his late teens and early twenties. Having rejected extremism he travelled widely in the Middle East and worked for the British Council in Syria and Saudi Arabia. Husain received wide and various acclaim for <i>The Islamist</i> , which was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize for political writing and the PEN/Ackerley Prize for literary autobiography, amongst others. He is a co-founder of the Quilliam Foundation, Britain's first Muslim counter extremism think tank. He lives in London with his wife and daughter. ¹²
Date of publication	2007
Approximate time of renunciation	Mid-1990s
Stated motive for writing	After the terrorist attacks on the London transport system on July 7, 2005, he was inspired to do something against the threat of Islamist groups (Husain 2010). “This book is a protest against political Islam, based on my own experience as a British Muslim who grew up in London, became an extremist—an Islamist—and saw the error of his ways. Having undertaken this journey, I feel it is my human duty to speak out against what I see as masquerading in Britain as ‘Islam’” (Husain 2007).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	Wrote while a member of the radical group Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and then wrote during college (Husain 2007).

¹² Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

What follows next is my analysis of Ed Husain’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Ed Husain’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Husain had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Husain’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values in Table 35 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **spirituality, strength, recognition, and belonging**, which I define in Table 35.

Table 35: Husain - Values

Spirituality	Being dedicated and faithful to God, religion, or spiritual things, especially as contrasted with material or temporal ones
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Belonging	Acceptance as a natural member or part; a sense of inclusion, affiliation

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Husain as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones—and one value was attached to two dominant discourses. Lastly, I followed in the tradition

of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 36: Husain - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Sprituality	A “true Muslim” is politically engaged in an Islamist movement to establish a sharia state (DOMINANT)	--“wanted to be a true muslim, completely enmeshed in Islam, not a partial muslim like my parents” (39) --started studying books about Islam that spoke of politics (20) and Islamic state --stories of atrocities in Bosnia were a call to defend fellow Muslims (80) --“at the time, being a young muslim could only mean being an Islamist. all other options were considered to be a throwback to a colonized form of Islam” (178) --Islam’s political superiority over west (34)
	A “true Muslim” is mystical and erudite (LATENT)	--Grandpa instilled a way of being gentle and God-revering (15-16) --father fervent disciple of mystical Islam (8) --grandpa was a noble guide “true mastery of spirituality required being at the service of a noble guide” (10) --practiced reciting Koran for grandpa (11) -- “silence, his focus, respect, and love for the Koran” (11) --taught peace and humility (15) --“observing Grandpa....gave me a better understanding of who God, Allah, was” (15) -- moderate Muslim ethos rooted in eastern Muslim tradition of seeking guidance from elderly sage (15)
Value: Strength	Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate— which can then wage jihad— is the only way to protect against the threat of the West (DOMINANT)	--father’s “concern with current affairs” left an “indelible mark” on him (8) --It was important to do more than talk but take action to create change --“Islam was the solution for all the world’s ills. As Islamists, our contention was that the world had been failed by capitalism and communism.....Islam’s era had arrived. But we knew it would not come to pass peacefully.” (54) --“we had to gain popular support of the Muslims to remove these regimes.....However, seizing political power by the ballot box was not our only option.....our counterparts in the Muslim world would take power by force.” (50-51) --“We had to regain the upper hand in Muslim countries and reject the culture of the West.....a total jihad was the only way to remove the disbelieving presidents and

		princes of the Arab world.” (49) --“we believed that the army of the Islamic state would conquer Britain and that ‘the flag of Islam will fly over Downing Street’” (168)
Value: Recognition	To be seen as special meant asserting his own version of what it meant to be a Muslim, different from his parents (DOMINANT)	--“I wanted to ‘assert a new identity’ as being young, Muslim, studious, and London-born, not old tradition of parents” (23) --At the Brick Lane mosque he was looked down upon by elders, but at the Islamist East London mosque people were interested in him and he felt special (28)
	Being a leader of the Islamist group meant people would listen and respect you (DOMINANT)	--“transformation from school misfit to powerful student leader with hordes of adoring followers” (59) --later elected president of Islamic society (47)
Value: Belonging	True belonging and acceptance comes from being engaged and loyal to the Islamist movement, which trumps even family as source of belonging (DOMINANT)	--Grew up as Pakistani in Britain in 80s and was exposed to insults and discrimination (2) --felt loved by Siraj Salekin who treated him as a brother (30); found a friend and a cause to which he belonged (33) --“made friends he did not want to lose” (31) --Friends in the Islamist movement pointed out to him how Abraham rejected his family because they were an obstacle to his commitment to God’s work (41) --parents felt defeated and gave up (47)
	Participating in his grandfather and family’s tradition of Islam brought a sense of belonging (LATENT)	--traveling with his grandpa and being able to recite the Quran brought him praise among the community of his family
	Being a British citizen brought a sense of belonging and acceptance. (LATENT)	--“color-blind humanity of most of my teachers...taught us lessons for the rest of our lives. Britain was our home, we were children of this soil, and no amount of intimidation would change that-we belonged here.” (2) --”later in life, when I doubted my affinity with Britain, those memories came rushing back.” (5)
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other: Non-Muslims, partial Muslims	Non-Muslims were the enemy and partial Muslims were an obstacle (DOMINANT)	--Islamist scholars like Mawdudi introduced him to the concept of non-Muslims as kuffar meant to be fought against (36) --Islamist scholars demonized partial Muslims like his parents and said they were obstacles to his commitment to God’s work (41) --stopped having white friends (59)
	To be British meant treating all individuals with equal respect regardless of race or religion (LATENT)	--”experience of Cherie, a white non Muslim teacher, and the commitment of Ms Powles and her staff to me and others stayed in my mind. It helped me form a belief about Britain, an unspoken appreciation of its values of fairness

		and equality” (5)
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Husain’s value of **spirituality** was defined by the dominant discourse introduced to him through his involvement with the Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT) movement, which stated: “A ‘true Muslim’ is politically engaged in an Islamist movement to establish a sharia state.” His involvement with HT also introduced him to the discourses that defined his other values of **strength** (“Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate—which can then wage jihad—is the only way to protect against the threat of the West”), **belonging** (“True belonging and acceptance comes from being engaged and loyal to the Islamist movement, which trumps even family as source of belonging”), and **recognition** (“Being a leader of the Islamist group meant people would listen and respect you” and “To be seen as special meant asserting his own version of what it meant to be a Muslim, different from his parents”).

All these dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Husain’s identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

Additionally, both the values of **spirituality** and **belonging** had strong latent discourses associated with them, indicating a degree of vulnerability to their dominance. Husain's grandfather, a respected and well-known Sufi teacher, introduced him to more mystical traditions within Islam, establishing the latent discourse around **spirituality** that said: "A 'true Muslim' is mystical and erudite." His exposure to Sufism also introduced him to an alternative identity discourse around **belonging**, which stated: "*Participating in his grandfather and family's tradition of Islam brought a sense of belonging.*" Furthermore, certain positive experiences in school with teachers introduced him to a discourse around **belonging** that stated: "*Being a British citizen brought a sense of belonging and acceptance.*"

Regarding Husain's construction of **Other**, there was a sharp dichotomy between Self—which referred to himself but also other Muslims who fit into his view of what it meant to be a "true Muslim"—and all the rest who were deemed as morally depraved. The discourse stated that: "*Non-Muslims were the enemy and partial Muslims were an obstacle.*" This absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, should Husain encounter people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits and did not fit being characterized as the enemy. However, Husain purposefully took certain measures to segregate him from the Other, so this made exposure less likely. Yet, he would likely be forced to have some degree of contact, regardless, with his family, who he now placed into the category of Other since they represented "partial Muslims." It is likely this Othering would be most difficult and vulnerable when in contact with them due to residual affective bonds that could be hard

to repress. Lastly, the presence of a latent discourse inserted vulnerability into the dominance of his current construction of **Other**. Due to learning about British values in school as well as certain positive experiences with peers and teachers, he was exposed to a latent discourse that said, *“To be British meant treating all individuals with equal respect regardless of race or religion.”*

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Husain’s writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 37: Husain - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Spirituality: A “true Muslim” is politically engaged in an Islamist movement to establish a sharia state</p>	<p>--relationship to God deteriorated (146) --outward piety but no longer observant, missed inner consciousness of God (146) --In an act of shocking violence, friend Zachary attacked a fellow Muslim, which to Ed was haram. (127) after this he started to ask himself, “What sort of human being was the Hizb creating?”...he writes that “This experience sowed the very first seed of doubt.” (128) --Peers in HT knew little about the faith; “Hizb suddenly seemed like pretentious, counterfeit intellectualism” (146) --“the presence of God in my life, a gift from my parents to me, was lost.” (146) --murder “was a wake up call for me”...felt nauseous (153); credo that led to violence and murder whereas before it seemed abstract (154); started wondering about Islamism --seeing the hypocrisy of “ninja” females made him question the perfection of an Islamic state governed by shariah (69) --using the new critical thinking skills he gained in college, he intellectually attacked Islamism and saw it was contrived (161) --search of spiritual solace, meaning (186); disillusioned with fanaticism; deep down there was a spiritual craving (187) --he was influenced by a tape of Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson (172) about the heart not intellect as most important; but was still not ready to view Islam as only spiritual without the political aspects</p>

	<p>--went on spiritual retreat after feeling spiritual longing (187); returned to Hanson whose take on religious left him dumbfounded and seemed to present a new religion entirely (188); turn inside to purify heart (189); led to other Sufi scholars</p> <p>--He was influenced by Sufis to return to Islam as path of moderation (212)</p>
<p>Strength: Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate— which can then wage jihad—is the only way to protect against the threat of the West</p>	<p>--in University, opened up worldview and independently questioned some of the concepts once held dear (157)</p> <p>--taught by Professor Judd critical thinking, academic rigor, fresh interpretation (157)</p> <p>--started to think that education provided him with strength, not Islamism</p> <p>--was introduced to other Muslim groups that worked to reconcile the West and Islam; “at ISB...most are British and want to make Britain more of an Islamic country, to introduce Islam in Britain” (168); “the ISB was proudly British” (169)</p> <p>--“the energy and drive I had previously deployed in Islamism activities, I now used to advance my career and improve my life” (180)</p>
<p>Recognition: To be seen as special meant asserting his own version of what it meant to be a Muslim, different from his parents Being a leader of the Islamist group meant people would listen and respect you</p>	<p>--He started questioning his chosen version of Islam after viewing his peers act with violence and becoming disgusted</p> <p>--In an act of shocking violence, friend Zachary attacked a fellow Muslim, which to Ed was haram. (127) After this he started to ask himself, “What sort of human being was the Hizb creating?”...he writes that “This experience sowed the very first seed of doubt.” (128)</p> <p>--Started doubting that HT, including his role as a leader, was worthy of respect; “Hizb suddenly seemed like pretentious, counterfeit intellectualism” (146)</p>
<p>Belonging: True belonging and acceptance comes from being engaged and loyal to the Islamist movement, which trumps even family as source of belonging</p>	<p>--“My friend Faye was close to God and viewed him as close, loving, caring (149)</p> <p>In my heart, I knew that time inside Islamism had ruined me and my relationship with those around me, particularly my parents. It was time to stand back and think again” (156)</p> <p>--“Faye’s view of God and importance of respecting parents influenced me” (155)</p> <p>--College experience showed him the road to career success and among these educated students and professors he felt accepted as British (158)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Non-Muslims were the enemy and partial Muslims were an obstacle</p>	<p>--“Kuffar” stereotype was pierced by Professor Judd and those he introduced him to in Labour movement (158)</p> <p>--in college, he started associating with non-Muslims and found they were not hateful towards Muslims after all</p> <p>--College Professor Judd was very friendly and kind, and despite being non-Muslim didn’t express enmity or animosity towards Muslims and Islam (158)</p>

As Husain became more involved in the Islamist movement, a variety of factors—ranging from becoming disillusioned by the lack of faith among his colleagues, the shock

of violence being committed in the name of Islam, and a growing spiritual void—led him to doubt the veracity of the dominant discourse defining **spirituality**. His deepening involvement with the Islamist cause brought him into continued and sustained contact with his peers, and their actions did not live up to the ideal of purity he had expected and associated with **spirituality**. The key flaw that upset him most was their superficial understanding of Islam, seconded by their immoral—sometimes even violent—actions that were difficult to reconcile with Islamic faith. Meanwhile, this dominant discourse around **spirituality** was the one around which others were organized, so once certain complicating actions started occurring that challenged it, all the rest started to unravel.

The second main source of challenge to his adopted discourses occurred through Husain's steadily advancing exposure to non-Muslims people and the wider world in general, which his discourses about the **Other** claimed were "evil" but which he found to be likeable and even admirable. Much of this was due to the fact he left his hometown and went off to college, which exposed him to a completely new environment, new people, and new ideas. He was surprised and impressed by the non-Muslims in college who were tolerant and accepting of Muslims. He also formed close relationships with some of his non-Muslim professors who he respected highly. His time in college also represented for him a period of reflection, supported by the stance of openness and curiosity inherent within academia.

It also appears that during this time he also started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Before he had looked to outside authority—such as Islamist theology, clerical teachings, and Islamist texts—for guidance

and definition of his values, but when he went to school he started becoming comfortable with the idea of being his own authority. Much of this was due to his exposure to the new discourse of critical thinking, which advocated independent thought and reasoning and supported transformation grounded in one's own conclusions. During this time of questioning, Husain also began to write profusely, both for school as well as for personal reasons. He found writing helped clarify his thinking. It appears this helped him engage in critical historical reflection. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of "actively chosen moral values and convictions" (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

Concurrently as his dominant discourses were being challenged, he was introduced to new, alternate discourses that fit better. In his classes, he became exposed to other examples of discourses—including from non-Muslim sources—that countered and competed with his adopted ones. His deepening doubt led him to start exploring his latent discourse of **spirituality** he had from childhood, of erudite, mystical Islam taught to him by his grandpa and family ("*A 'true Muslim' is mystical and erudite*"). A key influence that supported his questioning was his new girlfriend, who had a liberal understanding of being Muslim and who was extremely critical of Islamism. She also instilled upon him a discourse of respecting one's family over and beyond ideology, which made him more open to the more spiritual faith of his grandfather and father. This discourse of mystical Islam as a source of strength was bolstered by exposure to American Sufi clerics—completely new sources of spiritual authority—who were extremely committed to Islam, acted with conviction on their beliefs, and yet denounced

a political version of Islam. What enabled this exploration was his growing doubt about his discourse of the **Other**, which seemed to be in flux and developing but grounded in a new openness and identification with partial Muslims, such as his parents and his girlfriend and even the Sufi clerics.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Husain’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 38: Husain - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution	
Part 1: Choosing to Leave	
Supportive Discourses	Discursive Resources
It is a sign of moral courage and strength to transition from radical to spiritual Islam	--Stories about Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, someone Husain highly regarded, who openly talked about his own journey from radical to spiritual Islam --Seeing Sheikh Yusuf as a happy, successful, and very spiritual man after he had left presented him with a concrete example of someone who left and was better off
Criticizing established norms and beliefs to the point of rejection is admirable and a mark of a mature man	--Teachings in college, influence of his philosophy teachers --Basic message in his favorite philosophical readings
Leaving an Islamist group like HT is an honorable choice and should be done as soon as possible	--Opinion of family and his girlfriend
Part 2: The Formation of New Identity	

Rejected Discourse	Newly Adopted Discourses	Discursive Resources
Spirituality: A “true Muslim” is politically engaged in an Islamist movement to establish a sharia state	A “true Muslim” is mystical and erudite (Re-emerging LATENT)	--Returning back to the spirituality taught to him by his grandpa
	Being a faithful Muslim means following a Sufi version of Islam (NEW)	--embracing the spirituality of American Sufi clerics like Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson (172)
Strength: Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate—which can then wage jihad—is the only way to protect against the threat of the West	An education and working towards reconciling the Islamic faith with the West are true sources of strength (NEW)	--“I now wanted a job where I could learn more about economics and how the world of business worked” (179) --“I wanted to study more” (180) --connecting with Maajid Nawaz and other former British extremists to form a group together
Recognition: To be seen as special meant asserting his own version of what it meant to be a Muslim, different from his parents Being a leader of the Islamist group meant people would listen and respect you	To be seen as special means establishing the first ever counter extremism think tank (NEW)	--When Quilliam was established, it received wide attention and press coverage
	Being a co-founder of Quilliam Foundation meant government officials and others in power would listen to your advice and opinions (NEW)	--In the first years of its existence, Quilliam received huge sums of grants from the UK government, was called upon as advisors, and became popular among think tanks and academic programs
Belonging: True belonging and acceptance comes from being engaged and loyal to the Islamist movement, which trumps even family as source of belonging	Family was more important than ideological movements and deserves respect and loyalty (NEW)	--He grew into a serious relationship with his girlfriend and became close again with his family
	Being successful brings acceptance and belonging among British society, and Western society as a whole (NEW)	--Being invited to high level government talks and meeting with important power brokers showed he was accepted amongst the powerful elites of Western society
Language of Other: Non-Muslims were the enemy and partial Muslims were an obstacle	To be British meant treating all individuals with equal respect regardless of race or religion (Re-emerging LATENT)	--Embraced values of liberalism and tolerance he learned about it college and that were fundamental to the ethos of British society
	Islamists are the “enemy” because they are perverting Islam and risk endangering the liberal values of British and Western society (NEW)	--Focus of Quilliam was to convince UK government to cease working with Islamists, even those who didn’t go so far as to advocate violence, because doing so would enable their virulent message of intolerance

In Husain's case, there did not appear to be a definitive, conscious decision to leave Islamism but happened gradually as he started exploring a more mystical strain of Islam. It appears that it was only after he returned to his latent discourse ("*A 'true Muslim' is mystical and erudite*") and adopted a new discourse ("*Being a faithful Muslim means following a Sufi version of Islam*") around the value of **spirituality** that he decided to leave HT. His evaluative point therefore solidified into a definitive choice to leave the group.

This choice was supported through discourses that, in one way or another, made leaving seem admirable and courageous. The most important source of this were stories about Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, who himself was previously radical but had since changed, and spoke openly—and advocated—this change from radical to spiritual. This introduced him to the **supporting discourse** that stated: "*It is a sign of moral courage and strength to transition from radical to spiritual Islam.*" Husain greatly admired Yusuf for his scholarly knowledge, moral standing, and esteem, so having him as an example of someone who left was highly impactful. Secondly, another impactful **supporting discourse** was on the concept of critical thinking, which he picked up during his studies in college and from relationships with professors he admired. This discourse, which stated: "*Criticizing established norms and beliefs to the point of rejection is admirable and a mark of a mature man,*" advocated establishing one's own norms regardless of the crowd, making leaving a group that no longer fit seem like an act of maturity. Lastly, his family and girlfriend were constantly suggesting leaving as a great course of action,

which introduced him to his third **supporting discourse**: *“Leaving an Islamist group like HT is an honorable choice and should be done as soon as possible.”*

However, even with these influences, discourse theory tells us it is still difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). Thankfully for Husain, by this time he was largely immune from much of this pressure since he had moved away and was not associating with his old HT colleagues. Yet it is likely he gained strength from his newly established ties with his family, new friends, and girlfriend, all of which likely served as valuable allies and sources of emotional and logistical support.

Discourse theory also asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. Thus, in addition to new discourses around **spirituality**, Husain reformulated his identity with other **alternative identity discourses**, some of which were completely new and others that were resurfacing latent discourses. His value of **strength** was influenced by his experiences at school and he applied his education to focus on becoming an advocate against Islamism, which he saw as having a growing influence. This influenced his value of **strength** to be defined by the new discourse that stated: *“An education and working towards reconciling the Islamic faith with the West are true sources of strength.”*

This new discourse that positioned him as a reconciler between the West and Islam also positioned him as against Islamism, since Islamist ideology militantly advocated for a polarization of the two. Therefore, it also introduced him to a new discourse around **recognition** that stated: *“To be seen as special means establishing the first ever counter extremism think tank.”* His role also brought him exposure to high-powered British and Western powerbrokers that influenced his value of recognition to be defined also by a new discourse that stated: *“Being a co-founder of Quilliam Foundation meant government officials and others in power would listen to your advice and opinions.”* His increasing activism also led him to adopt a new discourse around **belonging** that stated: *“Being successful brings acceptance and belonging among British society, and Western society as a whole.”* Lastly, his close relations with his girlfriend and reconciliation with his family led him to define belonging with the new discourse: *“Family was more important than ideological movements and deserves respect and loyalty.”*

Regarding his reformulation of the **Other**, he reverted to his earlier, latent discourse about British equality and tolerance (*“To be British meant treating all individuals with equal respect regardless of race or religion“*) that was the opposite of the highly polarized relationship between Self and Other he had previously adopted. He did, however, adopt a new discourse that positioned Islamists as the **Other** that was highly polarized. This discourse stated: *“Islamists are the ‘enemy’ because they are perverting Islam and risk endangering the liberal values of British and Western society.”*

He saw Islamists as threats to the British society he now felt a part of, and engaging in a campaign against them became the grounding of his new identity.

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Husain's transformation. Firstly, Husain's initial narrative identity system was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence vulnerable. This made him particularly vulnerable to the increasing hypocrisy and violence within Islamist circles, which triggered his already existing latent discourse around **spirituality** that challenged the legitimacy of Islamism.

Concurrently as he grew more disillusioned, he was exposed to the wider world and new people, which introduced him to new opportunities and **alternative identity discourses** that were key in the disruption of his old narrative identity. Another key complicating action appears to have been a transition from a passive to a more active model of selfhood, allowing Husain to engage in a Foucaultian form of critical historical reflection. Writing appeared to help Husain sort through growing doubts and solidify insights, and reading other sources of information exposed him to alternative and competing discourses. Another element was Husain's growing exposure to non-Muslims and the wider world when he left for college, challenging his discourses around the **Other**.

The most influential factor that led him to leave—the evaluative point—were stories about someone who left, someone he deeply admired and looked up to. Other

supporting discourses that made leaving and change seem admirable and mature, also helped in this process. Meanwhile, the presence of alternative identity discourses to rebuild his identity was the most important enabling factor in his transformation. Many of these were re-emerging latent ones from his childhood. What is interesting is that Husain partially rebuilt his identity first, at a safe distance from old HT colleagues, and then made the decision to leave HT. Leaving was aided by the support, emotional and logistic, of close friends and family. After he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with alternate discourses, some of which were old latent ones, while others were brand new.

Lastly, he adopted a new construction of the **Other** that was still highly polarized between a perfect Self and evil Other, but now positioned Islamists as the “enemy,” demonizing his former colleagues, his HT members, and Islamists in general.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in.

Table 39: Husain - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 4: Ed Husain
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection during college Support of writing and reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of someone who left radical Islam Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with

4.2.2 Arno Michaels

Orientation: Arno Michaels was one of the leaders of the Milwaukee white power movement for seven years from the age of 17. He also helped found many race-metal bands and was the lead singer of one of the biggest ones called Centurion, whose lyrics advocate racial war. Now, he works with other former US white supremacists and former gang members to produce a monthly online magazine called *Life After Hate* (LAH), and developed a character development movement called *Kindness Not Weakness* (KNW) that addresses bullying (Allen 2012).

Table 40 depicts the context and conditions that led Michaels to write his memoir.

Table 40: Michaels - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>My Life After Hate</i> (Michaels 2010)
Description	A former racist skinhead examines aspects of his past in this memoir that scrubs scabs off the festering wound of racism, then soothes with the essential wisdom of forgiveness and compassion. ¹³
Author	Arno Michaels – Currently majoring in Sport & Rec and Perpetual Major-Changing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Enjoys climbing things and warm saltwater. Cold saltwater is kinda nice too. You just read the rest. . . or did you? ¹⁴
Date of publication	2010
Approximate time of renunciation	Mid-1990s
Stated motive for writing	To deal with his past, he used meditation and began writing his book (Allen 2012). In his preface, Michaels writes a couple of reasons for why he chose to write the memoir, including: “I need people to listen to me . . . To help people learn to set aside their prejudices and embrace differences . . . I need to learn how to best tell my story . . . Most of all, though, <i>My Life After Hate</i> is my apology to the world” (Michaels 2010).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	Essays during college, followed by article for <i>Life After Hate</i> (LAH) (Michaels 2010).

¹³ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

¹⁴ Taken from the inside cover of his book since there was no author bio provided on Amazon.com

What follows next is my analysis of Arno Michaels’ memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Arno Michaels’ memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Michaels had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Michaels’ memoir, I identified the four categories of values by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **heroism, strength, belonging, and devotion**, which I define in Table 41.

Table 41: Michaels - Values

Heroism	Acting with guts and daring; enduring suffering and sacrifice for a cause
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Belonging	Acceptance as a natural member or part; a sense of inclusion, affiliation
Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty

Then, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Michaels as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others just had dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an

archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 42: Michaels - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Heroism	Becoming involved in the white power movement would make one a heroic warrior (DOMINANT)	<p>--“How did I come to be such an asshole for years? Maybe because I was good at it. Because people followed me and approved of me.” (36)</p> <p>--“I was a cocky jerk who knew he was exceptional.” (36)</p> <p>--“Maybe I was looking for something to believe in.....I was drawn to racist ideology because I felt like white people were getting shafted. We were the underdogs. It was us against the world in an epic battle for forever. Such romance!” (36)</p> <p>--often referred to themselves as “Aryan Warriors” (65)</p> <p>--“burned a searing love for my race into my soul, amplifying the torrid romance with exponential violence. I spun recollections of the senseless brawls and beatings that bloodstained my hands, until they became glorious acts of heroism. Just like the Bruder Shcweigen, I was a valiant warrior defending my race against the Jews, who tirelessly sought to bury my people under a stinking tide of mud-races.” (72)</p> <p>--“...level of dedication we expected of nascent race warriors.” (81)</p> <p>--‘sense of destiny befitting an epic struggle against fearsome odds” (129)</p>
Value: Strength	Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out (DOMINANT)	<p>--“Between benders I immersed myself in racist dogma, taking in only information that supported the tenuous premise that the white race was at once mighty and fragile, and in dire need of conservation by any means necessary.” (31)</p> <p>--“Beloved fights happened when we were walking down the street sporting white power t-shirts.” (45)</p> <p>--“Blind-drunk on 150-proof hostility, we had finally found the ultimate expression of our hate for society, and we strove to inspire a like hatred in all who would listen.” (45)</p> <p>--“There was no pain, just delicious rage and the feeling of omnipotence as I exacted revenge.” (52)</p> <p>--“We had the guts to stand up. To fight back.” (70)</p> <p>--“intense regimen of streetfighting, studying racist ideology, and obscene alcohol consumption.” (70)</p> <p>--“...evoked an overwhelming need to avenge him.” (72)</p> <p>--“...Tales of Glory evoked a primal vibe of vengeance and righteousness.” (81)</p> <p>--“Because we were at war, there was no such thing as a fair</p>

		<p>fight...For that reason we felt that any sort of beating was justified.” (81-82)</p> <p>--“The Church of the Creator (COTC) was as violent and ruthless as any racial group there was, promoting a vehemently anti-Christian, pro-white agenda that advocated genocide against all non-whites and white race-traitors along the way to a “Whiter and Brighter World.” (83)</p> <p>--“The people who were afraid of violence—the people who we felt were cowards—would ultimately be weeded out.” (83)</p> <p>--“A core tenet of white racialism is the fact that whites are being out-bred by ‘non-white’ people at exponentially imposing odds. The idea that there will be none of us left.....” (93)</p> <p>--“I was.....trying to empower myself via physical violence.” (171)</p>
	It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause (LATENT)	<p>--The shock of the violent acts he was doing was tempered by alcohol; “Did I ever pause for one second then to think that someday I would vomit once I knew what I was doing? That I would cry? I faintly recall whispers of don’t do this...don’t hurt them...coming from somewhere long ago in my soul. But each plea was literally drowned in suds of Huber and Miller and Old Style until the junk thrill of combat thundered once again.” (31)</p> <p>--“If I spent any time with them...then I would have trouble being mean to them. Hating them. So I would go back to my blinders and close my world off, limiting my experience to pro-white whites only, and input to racist information only.” (35)</p>
Value: Belonging	To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement (DOMINANT)	<p>--Left home and dropped out of school, ended up living at the house with his punk friends which became his family and gave him a sense of belonging (189)</p> <p>--“he and I were closer to each other than we were to our actual siblings” (52)</p> <p>--“bold brotherhood of skinheads” (64)</p>
	To find belonging and be accepted meant being a part of the hip hop scene (LATENT)	--He was active in hip hop when in high school and enjoyed it immensely, until one incident that involved him being beaten up by jocks that led him to leave the scene and search out other sources of belonging (158)
	To find belonging and be accepted meant being a part of the punk scene (LATENT)	--His natural stubbornness and rebelliousness led him to the punk scene, after leaving the hip hop scene, and here he found a great outlet for his inner anger. After a while, however, it wasn’t violent enough and he left it to join the white power movement. (166)
Value: Devotion	The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort (DOMINANT)	<p>--“You would die for your brothers and sisters” (37)</p> <p>--“Swore an oath to protect...all white children from the horrors of the mud races.” (71)</p> <p>--“burned a searing love for my race into my soul” (72)</p> <p>--“...level of dedication we expected of nascent race warriors.” (81)</p> <p>--“my priorities remained drinking and fighting” (97)</p> <p>--He was devoted to his race metal band, Centurion (97)</p>

Language of Other	Discourse	References
Non-whites	<p>Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“the idea of an epic brawl with Jews, communists, queers, and all manner of non-white filth.” (63) --“Swore an oath to protect...all white children from the horrors of the mud races.” (71) -- Just like the Bruder Sheweigen, I was a valiant warrior defending my race against the Jews, who tirelessly sought to bury my people under a stinking tide of mud-races.” (72) --“We were at war with non-whites.” (81) --“The Church of the Creator (COTC) was as violent and ruthless as any racial group there was, promoting a vehemently anti-Christian, pro-white agenda that advocated genocide against all non-whites and white race-traitors along the way to a “Whiter and Brighter World.” (83) --“A core tenet of white racialism is the fact that whites are being out-bred by ‘non-white’ people at exponentially imposing odds. The idea that there will be none of us left is one that preys upon the already raging paranoia that prevails among racists.” (93)</p>
Complacent whites, including hippie peaceniks	<p>Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“We were at war with complacent white race-traitors who failed to recognize the gravity of our mission. (81) --“The Church of the Creator (COTC) was as violent and ruthless as any racial group there was, promoting a vehemently anti-Christian, pro-white agenda that advocated genocide against all non-whites and white race-traitors along the way to a “Whiter and Brighter World.” (83) --left-oriented “peace punks” really irritated him and he came to despise them and their politics (166)</p>
Authority figures	<p>The United States government and all the authorities affiliated with it – including local cops –were bought over by the Jewish conspiracy and working against the white race (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--“The Order...declared war against the United States government in the name of the white race.” (71) --cops were “agents of the Zionist Occupational Government” (177) --“the United States Government is merely the puppet regime for some world-wide Jewish network that really calls the shots.” (177)</p>

Michaels’ main values appeared to be **heroism** and **strength**, but he did not have access to many discourses to define these values except for those associated with the white supremacist movement, which were characterized by violence and “might makes right” paradigms. Above all, the value of **strength** seemed central to his narrative

identity, and this became defined as: *“Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out.”* Although he mentions having slight qualms of conscience, these did not seem well formed but latent and easily discarded. They were associated with a latent discourse that stated: *“It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause.”* This discourse was successfully repressed with the help of extensive drugs and alcohol. However, the existence of this latent discourse signaled vulnerability in the power of the dominant one.

As mentioned earlier, the white supremacist movement also provided him a discourse to define **heroism**, which stated: *“Becoming involved in the white power movement would make one a heroic warrior.”* For this value, there was no alternative latent discourse, making this a powerfully established one. Additionally, Michaels seemed driven to dedicate himself to a meaningful cause, representing his value of **devotion**. Again, he did not have alternative identity sources to define devotion, so for him it became another powerfully established one. It stated: *“The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort.”*

Lastly, he was also driven by the value of **belonging**, something he did not find at home or at school, although he did explore the hip-hop scene and punk scene for a while. These forays influenced him to adopt latent discourses that stated: *“To find belonging and be accepted meant being a part of the hip hop scene,”* and *“To find belonging and be accepted meant being a part of the punk scene.”* However, he eventually left both scenes, dissatisfied because they failed to provide him associated discourses around **strength** and

heroism. He writes about how they were too pacifist and did not provide him ways to vent his anger. Thus, when he was introduced to the white supremacy movement, it fit very well because it's associated discourses allowed him to fulfill his value of **strength** through violent paradigms, as well as both **heroism** and **belonging**.

Additionally, Michaels' dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Michaels' identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system. This was evidenced by how they would later unravel quickly upon the initial inklings of doubt. Michaels in his memoir even acknowledges the brittle nature of these absolutist beliefs, explaining that he “never analyzed the idea in too much depth, because doing so exposed not just one, but a host of fatal flaws.”

Therefore, Michaels' narrative identity was in an extremely vulnerable place in which it needed to protect itself through denial and isolation from new information, experiences, and people. Once he started to become exposed to new people and new ideas, it was inevitable that his identity would crack, as it eventually did. Additionally, alcohol was a big factor that sustained the dominant ideology because it prevented any deep reflection, something he even admitted.

Michaels' construction of **Other** was likewise an absolutist discourse that labeled all Others as fully and completely evil. This category of **Other** included non-whites, who were generalized into one grouping whose only intention was to destroy the white race. The discourse stated: "*Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions.*" The **Other** also included those who were allegedly working with non-whites, who were deemed as traitors, without any consideration of why they were aiding the "enemy." This discourse stated: "Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too." Lastly, he also viewed authority figures as traitors as well, in a discourse that stated: "*The United States government and all the authorities affiliated with it –including local cops –were bought over by the Jewish conspiracy and working against the white race.*"

He admits such stark claims were shaky constructions that would not stand up to scrutiny, which is why he was careful never to see the **Other** as human and not engage with them. He writes, ". . . if I spent any time with them . . . then I would have trouble being mean to them. Hating them. So I would go back to my blinders and close my world off, limiting my experience to pro-white whites only, and input to racist information only." This segregation allowed the discourse around the **Other** to perpetuate, but it was vulnerable to unraveling should Michaels encounter people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Michaels’ writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 43: Michaels - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Heroism: Becoming involved in the white power movement would make one a heroic warrior</p>	<p>--“As the effects of daily street violence wore off, terrifying questions squirmed from my indomitable human core—a part of me that had been suppressed for years.” (88) --“Before I had fully shed my racist ideology, I called-off the race war with the realization that my daughter needed me. We were all each other had. Being a Racial Holy Warrior wasn’t going to save my daughter; it would take me from her via death or prison. The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.” (98)</p>
<p>Strength: Violence was the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews to wipe all whites out</p>	<p>--A new leader of the COTC led them towards a more strategic vision than simply street brawls, one that he claimed would lead to real change for the movement; “We began thinking more along the lines of the big picture” (85); He and his friends stopped being hooligans and started growing into “a more intellectual exercise of our racists beliefs”; “we tried to concentrate on refining our message and increasing our level of sophistication” (86) --This strategic move involved moving out and integrating into the wider mainstream white society (86) --“As the effects of daily street violence wore off, terrifying questions squirmed from my indomitable human core—a part of me that had been suppressed for years.” (88) --“There was also a palpable wet blanket of exhaustion that weighed upon us elder members. Impending lofty epiphanies or not, we were all simply burning out.” (89) --“Before I had fully shed my racist ideology, I called-off the race war with the realization that my daughter needed me. We were all each other had. Being a Racial Holy Warrior wasn’t going to save my daughter; it would take me from her via death or prison. The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.” (98)</p>
<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement</p>	<p>--infighting; “this isn’t a game you assholes! This is the future of the WHITE RACE we’re fighting for; and you’re jeopardizing our whole fucking crew over some homeless nigger at a bus stop!” (91) --“Before I had fully shed my racist ideology, I called-off the race war with the realization that my daughter needed me. We were all each other had. Being a Racial Holy Warrior wasn’t going to save my daughter; it would take me from</p>

	<p>her via death or prison. The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.” (98)</p>
<p>Devotion: The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort</p>	<p>--“As the effects of daily street violence wore off, terrifying questions squirmed from my indomitable human core—a part of me that had been suppressed for years.....What would really happen when the Whiter and Brighter World came to fruition?” (88)</p> <p>--At first, having a daughter did not inspire him to change his priorities, but later it became the most important thing in his life (97)</p> <p>--When his girlfriend left him, he realized how much he loved and wanted his daughter, so he won custody of her and became a single father at the age of 23. “It wasn’t until faced with the prospect of being physically separated from my child that I realized my attachment to her.” (97-98)</p> <p>--“...record-label drama with my band and the rapidly-increasing pace of our crew’s self-destruction had deteriorated my faith in the white power movement.” (98)</p> <p>--“I began to spend much less time fretting over securing the existence of my race and a future for white children and much more time with my child.” (98)</p> <p>--“Before I had fully shed my racist ideology, I called-off the race war with the realization that my daughter needed me. We were all each other had. Being a Racial Holy Warrior wasn’t going to save my daughter; it would take me from her via death or prison. The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.” (98)</p> <p>--“My band-mates, who were the last remnants of the skinhead crew that had been my family for the past 7 years, all had families of their own in the works and were moved to cede to their exhaustion as I had.” (98-99)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too The United States government and all the authorities affiliated with it –including local cops –were bought over by the Jewish conspiracy and working against the white race</p>	<p>--When he would engage with the kids at his daughter’s school, he was struck by the wide range of ethnicity and it struck him how all of them were beautiful – even non-whites. (100)</p> <p>--“Love for my child thawed a dormant empathy for humanity that I was never aware of.” (100)</p>

For Michaels, the complicating action was initiated by the influence of an older mentor from the white supremacist movement who became close to Michaels and his friends and advised them on becoming more strategic in their activities. By this time,

Michaels was already primed for such a shift since he had become increasingly exhausted with the toll of violence. This mentor echoed such sentiments, encouraging Michaels and his friends to stop engaging in senseless violence—like “hooligans”—and instead blend into society with the aim of changing society from within. With his influence, they stopped pursuing the daily violent acts that had consumed their lives for the past years. During this lull, he realized just how exhausted he was from all the stress and heaviness of violence. This initiated a period of questioning for Williams, during which he started doubting his discourse around **strength** (“*Violence was the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews to wipe all whites out*”) and reconsidering his latent discourse (“*It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause*”).

At the same time, this change in tactics led to infighting among the group between those who still adhered to street fighting, the “hoodlums,” and those like Michaels that wanted to become more sophisticated and strategy. Clashes erupted, and the constant in fighting caused him to start questioning his discourse on **belonging** (“*To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement*”), which was already weak because of the presence of latent discourses. It also caused him to question his discourse around **devotion** (“*The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort*”).

This change in tactics led to a decrease in violence that opened up a space for self-reflection. He writes, “The welcome blossom of thought and consciousness first sprouted during those times, even though I wouldn’t realize it until I began the self-discovery of writing over a decade later.” It is during this period that he began to engage in critical

historical reflection. In a revealing statement, he addresses others who are in similar situations, saying “You will find what you’re looking for, so think deeply about what it is you seek.” It also appears that during this time he started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had looked to outside authority—white supremacy ideology and leaders—for guidance and definition of his values, during this time he started becoming comfortable with the idea of being his own authority.

At the same time the space for more self-reflection opened up, he had a daughter and won custody of her. He found this to be a huge turning point that influenced him to change his priorities completely, including questioning his discourse around **devotion** (“*The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort*”). It was a gradual process, however, of refocusing energy and time from the movement towards his daughter. And at first, he still kept his beliefs in the white supremacist ideology, but after time these faded as he became more exposed to new ideas, and non-whites, by the role of being a father. Concurrently, he was having fights with his comrades in the band that further fractured the discourses around **belonging** (“*To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement*”). Additionally, his band members were engaging in self-destructive behavior, and he writes that this deteriorated his faith in the white power movement, which also caused him to doubt his discourse around **heroism** (“*Becoming involved in the white power movement would make one a heroic warrior*”). All this built up until there came a point when his full focus was redirected to his daughter.

Meanwhile, as mentioned, being a father exposed him to other children of different races, children whom he saw, despite their being non-white, as pure and good and innocent. This started to cause him to doubt his previous framing of **Other**. His love for his daughter also opened him to feelings of compassion, love, and empathy, which made the previous demonization of **Others** much harder to sustain.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Michaels’ memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 44: Michaels - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution	
Part 1: Choosing to Leave	
Supportive Discourses	References
It is understandable to move on and start focusing on one’s own family after having been involved with the white power movement for so long	--“My band-mates, who were the last remnants of the skinhead crew that had been my family for the past 7 years, all had families of their own in the works and were moved to cede to their exhaustion as I had.” (98-99)
There are people who would forgive and accept you despite what you’ve done	--“...the notion of people of all sorts not only living together peacefully, but thriving in cooperation was completely foreign to me. Until I was schooled by the Beastie Boys that is.” (104) --“The sheer but very welcome strangeness of being around people who accepted me without a blood toll provided a sorely needed spiritual healing. I ached so badly to be away from my past, and Paul, who had already buried his skinhead demons, served as a beacon

		<p>lighting the way to salvation.” (104)</p> <p>--The raves that Paul, a former supremacist, took him to exposed him to people of all races with the common purpose of being “open, embracing and nebulous. And in a weirdly passive but irresistible way, so much more powerful than any fist, boot, blade or bullet could ever be.” (108)</p> <p>--“All celebrated the rave mantra of peace, love, unity, and respect” (110)</p> <p>--“...feeling of oneness kept amazing me over and over again as I danced. We were all cells in the same organism.” (112)</p>
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
<p>Heroism: Becoming involved in the white power movement would make one a heroic warrior</p>	<p>Becoming a peace activist and responding nonviolently with gentleness is a true mark of courage and warriorship (NEW)</p>	<p>--“It is too easy to acquiesce to outrage. True honor lies not in obliging aggression but in finding the wisdom to fend it off peacefully.” (135)</p> <p>--“I realize basic human goodness every day when I think well of and for others, especially if they offend me. It’s not easy. The practice takes the utmost bravery.” (137)</p>
	<p>Great men of spiritual strength are the models to emulate (NEW)</p>	<p>--“But I’m not Gandhi by any stretch! But by learning about great men like him, and trying to follow in their footsteps, I’ll live a happier life and make the world around me a little better place every day.” (143)</p> <p>--“Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth, the Prophet Muhammad, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were all examples of people who made their own rules and who had a positive impact on society.” (207)</p>
<p>Strength: Violence was the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews to wipe all whites out</p>	<p>Love, kindness, and compassion are sources of real strength (NEW)</p>	<p>--“That’s one of the many crucial lessons that are finally starting to take root for me. When we are hurt by whatever, we should be patient and thoughtful and learn from the experience instead of simply making other people hurt.” (28)</p> <p>--The raves that Paul, a former supremacist, took him to exposed him to people of all races with the common purpose of being “open, embracing and nebulous. And in a weirdly passive but irresistible way, so much more powerful than any fist, boot, blade or bullet could ever be.” (108)</p> <p>--“It is too easy to acquiesce to outrage. True honor lies not in obliging aggression but in finding the wisdom to fend it off</p>

		peacefully.” (135)
Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement	It is possible to find belonging just by the virtue of being human and being a member of the collective human race (NEW)	--His friend and former white supremacist helped him get over his past by taking him to raves where Michaels interacted with people of all races in an impactful experience of unity (106) --“The sheer but very welcome strangeness of being around people who accepted me without a blood toll provided a sorely needed spiritual healing.” (104) --“...feeling of oneness kept amazing me over and over again as I danced. We were all cells in the same organism.” (112)
	Being a part of a nonprofit Life After Hate (LAH) of former gang-members that helped prevent others from following down that path is a source of belonging (NEW)	--“All of these things are super heavy and I feel like if I didn’t get LAH off the ground they may have ultimately dragged me to my grave.” (141)
Devotion: The white power movement and the white race was the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort	Your child is worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort (NEW)	--“...envision a more positive reality: one where I’m able to help those who are in danger of falling victim to fear before they make the same mistakes I did.” (136)
	Humanity is worthy of loyalty and working towards peace deserves your entire effort (NEW)	--When he explained in his memoir why he wrote this book, he said it was “to help people learn to set aside their prejudices and embrace differences.” (29) --“I made a decision to cast aside the fear that masquered as love, and to live my life in wonderful affection for diversity instead of scorn for it.” (131) --“...I nurture the warmth of compassion, growing the feeling until it graces more and more of my day, where it will meet other beings and share. And heal. And comfort.” (138)
Language of Other: Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too The United States government and all the	One must try to understand others who are different, and this also leads to healing (NEW)	--“I have so much to learn in order to heal. I need people to listen to me. I need to listen to them to facilitate such learning, and damn the scabs if tearing them off is part of the healing process.” (27) --“I sought out experiences that involved interaction with people I had once harbored a vicious hatred for.” (99) --“I’ll never truly understand what its like to be anyone but a white man....but I still try to understand—by studying the history that

<p>authorities affiliated with it –including local cops – were bought over by the Jewish conspiracy and working against the white race</p>		<p>the victors didn't write, and interacting with my fellow human beings....Discovering the person." (30) --"Hate takes a terrible toll on life." (33) --"Race was simply a convenient excuse to brutalize people....disturbed, outcast kids who had a ton of hate and hurt within them." (86) --"Within all human beings exists a core of common needs and hopes." (116) --"Us' being everyone. There doesn't have to be a 'them' anymore" (126) --"I like to hope that somehow people who are succumbing to fear today will come to their senses as I did." (132)</p>
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In his Michael's case, the redirected focus on his daughter drove his departure from the white supremacy movement. This transition was supported through discourses that, in one way or another, made leaving the movement to focus on his family seem accepted and even admirable. First and foremost, stories about many of his friends who had also left the movement to focus on their families were influential in exposing him to the discourse that leaving was an acceptable option, especially for him and his friends who had been a part of the movement for so long. These examples composed the **supporting discourse** that enabled him to consider leaving, which stated: "*It is understandable to move on and start focusing on one's own family after having been involved with the white power movement for so long.*"

For Michaels, however, he also needed a way to forgive himself of the violent acts he had done, the things he was ashamed of having done, and trust that others would too. This happened through his friendship with someone who had left the movement and had become involved in the rave scene, into which he drew Michaels. These raves

exposed Michaels to the discourse that all of humanity was one—no matter what race or gender or difference—and that it was possible to live together in a spirit of cooperation. Concurrently, and importantly, he learned that he would be accepted for whom he was, without having to prove himself. This discourse about forgiveness and acceptance made the transition much easier to fathom. Therefore, the **supporting discourse** around forgiveness and acceptance, which stated “*There are people who would forgive and accept you despite what you’ve done,*” was also instrumental in helping him leave, because it also provided him a sense of hope about beginning anew.

Discourse theory asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. For Michaels, he found alternative identity discourses as he became more exposed to new events, information, and people. This exposure was initially driven by becoming a father, which caused him to distance himself from his former friends, focus, and activities. Instead, he found himself meeting new people, doing new activities, and reading new things—all of which introduced him to alternative identity discourses. He explains, “As time passed I began to allow myself more and more contact with things that were once absolutely prohibited. Packers games. Seinfeld. Books about subjects other than race.”

A second driver of this expanding exposure was his decision to enroll in a community college to earn an associate degree. He enjoyed being in an academic

environment and learning new things, and he says this environment complemented his ongoing process of reintegrating into a multicultural society. He relays that the experience of all different students from various ethnicities learning together really shattered his prior beliefs about the **Other**. Within this time, he made a complete, clean break with the movement, both behaviorally and also psychologically. “By 1996 I was completely finished with the white power movement,” he writes. To strengthen this decision, he even wrote a paper for one of his classes about who he used to be and how he came to leave the movement, which ended up to be a cathartic exercise for him that reinforced his decision.

Discourse theory also tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). However, for Michaels it appeared to be less of an issue because some of his other colleagues likewise had families and started to move away from the movement. He writes, “My band-mates, who were the last remnants of the skinhead crew that had been my family for the past 7 years, all had families of their own in the works and were moved to cede to their exhaustion as I had.” Meanwhile, his other band-mates who were still into the movement were “not very happy” with him, he says, but the extent of this simply translated into not wanting to associate with him. This was fine, though, because he was making new friends. This new network of close friends supported him during his transition, and their role in his life was a big part of his healing. New non-movement friends gave him forgiveness and healing that he says was a huge part of his turnaround. “I had lost my

mind for a good long stretch. Compassion brought me back as it was given to me and as I learned to give it back.”

Eventually, he deepened the process of critical self-reflection that had begun back with the change in tactics, to the point where he began to assert his new thoughts and ideas, and identity, to others through writing. This began when he wrote that paper for school, but ultimately blossomed after he gave up drinking. This was a big turning point for him since alcohol had always been a way he deadened his ability to reflect and cognize. The way he now sees it, Michaels believes substance abuse was necessary in order for white supremacists to preserve their fixed and flawed ideology, which would fall apart upon any close reflection. Arno even hypothesizes that the reason white supremacists aren't allowed to smoke marijuana or do hallucinogenic drugs is because they might cause one to “mellow out” and reflect too closely on their beliefs. So, he explains that it wasn't until he stopped drinking that he started to seriously think about writing. At that point, he became fully self-authoring and self-aware. “My past is a demonstration of the human ability to frame reality . . . the lens through which reality exists,” he writes.

This empowered sense of self drove him to explore and embrace **alternative identity discourses** to reformulate his narrative identity. Being a father, and the insights he gained from attending raves, exposed him to a new discourse around **devotion**, which stated: “*Your child is worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort,*” and “*Humanity is worthy of loyalty and working towards peace deserves your entire effort.*” Fatherhood, raves, and his experiences in school also influenced his value of **belonging** to be defined

by a discourse that stated: *“It is possible to find belonging just by the virtue of being human and being a member of the collective human race.”* Lastly, he reevaluated his discourse around **strength**, and eventually replaced it with one that stated: *“Love, kindness, and compassion are sources of real strength.”*

Lastly, he found new discourses to define his values of **belonging**, **devotion**, and **heroism** when he started actively working to prevent other children from following in his footsteps. He befriended others who had left white supremacist movements and joined a nonprofit of formers, *Life After Hate* (LAH). These activities led him to embrace a second discourse around **belonging**, which stated: *“Being a part of a nonprofit (LAH) of former gang-members that helped prevent others from following down that path is a source of belonging.”* He was inspired by the other formers he met, and this admiration caused him to redefine the discourses around **heroism** to now state: *“Great men of spiritual strength are the models to emulate,”* and *“Becoming a peace activist and responding nonviolently with gentleness is a true mark of courage and warriorship.”*

Regarding his reformulation of the **Other**, he likewise saw how important substance abuse had been in maintain the Othering process. He says that he needed to deaden himself regularly, through the alcohol and drugs—but also through music—in order to keep himself from empathizing with the **Other** that he demonized. This started changing through increased exposure, but the big influence that caused a shift was when he started smoking pot and going to raves, where he found himself relaxing and mingling with people from other races—and liking them. This was deepened through the relationships he formed at school with classmates from across the spectrum. Finally, it

was solidified once he totally gave up drugs and alcohol. At this point, he started actively exposing himself to the exact people he used to demonize with the aim of humanizing them through understanding. To his amazement, they regularly forgave, accepted and even embraced him. This helped his new formulation of the **Other** to be grounded in compassion and empathy, as well as provide a deep source of healing. The discourse now stated: *“One must try to understand others who are different, and this also leads to healing.”*

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Michaels’ transformation. Firstly, it appears that Michaels’ initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk of disruption. These trends made him particularly vulnerable to the violent nature of white supremacy, which triggered his already existing latent discourse that challenged the legitimacy of such violence. This was enhanced by a change in tactics away from day-to-day violence, which provided him with some space to reflect on exactly how exhausted he was.

Concurrently as he grew more disillusioned, he gained custody of his daughter and shifted his focus from white supremacy to fatherhood. Both fatherhood and going back to school exposed him new people, opportunities, and discourses that were key in the disruption of his old narrative identity. Specifically, going back to school exposed him to alternative and competing discourses, and made him feel empowered enough to

follow his doubts by pursuing new alternative identity discourses. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Michaels to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave gang life was made possible by being influenced by stories of others who had left behind white supremacy for their family. The discourses around these individuals, and his increasing involvement in raves, composed the **supporting discourse** that eventually enabled him to leave behind white supremacy. Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with **alternate identity discourses**, most of which were brand new. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his old colleagues, as well as form a new social system through becoming involved with other former members of white supremacy. It also appears he gained emotional support from his anti-hate advocacy, including becoming involved with *Life After Hate* (LAH), which he passionately delved into. Hence, his transition from white supremacy was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as new narrative identity.

Lastly, Michaels became heavily involved and passionate about anti-hate advocacy, but did not appear to demonize white supremacists in his reformulation of the **Other**. Quite the opposite; in fact, he even appeared to be sympathetic and understanding towards them. Whereas prior to his transformation, his construction was highly polarized between Us and Them, after his construction was more grounded in interdependence, and he no longer viewed any category of people as falling into the label of Other.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 45.

Table 45: Michaels - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 5. Arno Michaels
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Becoming a father Self-reflection during college Support of writing and reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of others who left the Skinhead movement Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

4.2.3 Frank Meeink

Orientation: Frank Meeink became a Skinhead at the age of 13 and by the time he was 18, he was a Skinhead leader and neo-Nazi recruiter. He was eventually arrested and convicted of kidnapping and beating a member of a rival Skinhead gang. While in prison, he was exposed to people of all ethnicities, which caused him to start questioning his beliefs. After his release, he didn't return to the movement. Soon thereafter, the Oklahoma bombing made Meeink realize he had to do something against hate groups, so he founded *Harmony Through Hockey* as a way to use sports to bring youths of all races together. He also travels around the world as a noted speaker (Meeink 2013).

Table 46 depicts the context and conditions that led Meeink to write his memoir.

Table 46: Meeink - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead: The Frank Meeink Story as Told to Jody M. Roy, Ph.D.</i> (Meeink and Roy 2010)
Description	In this profound memoir, reformed skinhead Meeink, with assistance from academic and activist Roy (<i>Love to Hate: America's Obsession with Hatred and Violence</i>), recounts his former life as a Neo-Nazi. ¹⁵
Author	In recent years, Frank Meeink has worked in a support position for professional hockey teams. He has been on the national lecture circuit for nearly a decade, speaking to various groups on the topic of racial diversity and acceptance. This is his first book. ¹⁶
Author	Jody M. Roy , Ph.D., is an award-winning professor of communication and assistant dean of faculty at Ripon College. Since 2008, she has also served as chair of the board of directors for the National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere. Roy's past publications include <i>Love to Hate: America's Obsession with Hatred and Violence</i> . ¹⁷
Date of publication	2010
Approximate time of renunciation	Early 1990s
Stated motive for writing	The Oklahoma City tragedy troubled him to the point of going to the FBI, which led him to the Anti-Defamation League and to Jody M. Roy, Ph. D., a chair on the board of directors for SAVE (The National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere). Their friendship led to the collaboration that resulted in his memoir (Meeink 2011).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	No writing experience In 1995, however, he started working with the ADL and doing speaking engagements at schools and community centers (Meeink and Roy 2010).

What follows next is my analysis of Frank Meeink's memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Frank Meeink's memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Meeink had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Meeink's memoir, I identified the four categories of values by attending

¹⁵ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

¹⁶ Taken from jacket of book since there was no bio provided on Amazon.com

¹⁷ Taken from jacket of book since there was no bio provided on Amazon.com

to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **devotion, strength, recognition, and belonging**, which I define in Table 47.

Table 47: Meeink - Values

Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Belonging	Acceptance as a natural member or part; a sense of inclusion, affiliation

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Meeink as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others just had dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 48: Meeink - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Devotion	The white power movement and the white race is the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort (DOMINANT)	--He was introduced to the white power movement by his cousin who had a new charisma now that he had found a calling in this. “I couldn’t get over how different, how good, Shawn looked. Something in Shawn’s eyes looked different. He had this intensity I’d never before seen in him.” (50) ----“Whenever the skinheads talked about Identity, I felt like I

		<p>was being called to join God’s army. It was my duty as an Aryan, as a child of God, to fight against the forces of Satan.” (54)</p> <p>--“The harder I believed, the more I wanted to follow the skinheads into battle.” (55)</p> <p>--“I assured him I would be proud to give my life to protect the survival of the Aryan race.” (60)</p> <p>--“.....the movement was everything to me.” (64)</p> <p>--“Security breeds loyalty, and loyalty is everything. By the end of summer 1989, my loyalties were clear: Louie Lacinzi was my brother, and the white supremacy movement was my family.” (66)</p> <p>--“Nothing mattered to me as much as being a skinhead” (84)</p>
<p>Value: Strength</p>	<p>Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--His dad taught him “the martial arts of beer bottles, pool cues, and lead pipes.....knives and also guns.” (29)</p> <p>--“My dad was a badass dude” (32)</p> <p>--When he met his cousin’s friends who introduced him to the white power movement, his “only real desire was never to feel like a fucking victim again.” (52)</p> <p>--“The Lancaster County white supremacists.....told me I could become a warrior.” (52)</p> <p>--“The harder I believed, the more I wanted to follow the skinheads into battle.” (55)</p> <p>--“one of the local Axis leaders had told me I was a hell of a fighter....I don’t think I could have been more proud....” (90)</p> <p>--“we were Nazi commandos. We were Aryan warriors.” (96)</p> <p>--“We are footsoldiers in God’s army.....We are the enforcers of God’s law.” (97)</p> <p>--“...for years, for five fucking years, I believed I was fighting a holy war. I was raining down God’s justice on an evil world.” (21)</p> <p>--“I truly believed I had a permission slip from God to kick anybody’s ass if they disagreed with me, looked at me funny, didn’t look at me at all. I thought I was doing God’s will by raining down ‘justice’ on those who violated the ‘commandments.’” (99)</p> <p>--He started his own terror squad group called Strike Force....”I craved the power I felt surging through my veins every time I slammed my boot into some dude’s face.” (130)</p>
	<p>It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause (LATENT)</p>	<p>--One of the first times he denied another human his humanity was in school when he had to choose between his friends and the kid they were beating up; “I glanced down at the kid on the cold tile floor...his eyes begged me to do something....I looked back up at DeShawn. “I’m cool,” I said.” This traumatic memory caused him to never return to that school. “As the hot water rained down on my body, I knew I’d never be able to scrub off the stink of how rotten I felt for leaving that kid.....I couldn’t (go get help), or I’d have been lying in a pool of my own blood, too.” (48)</p> <p>--“Once, when I had glanced down at the bloody face of a college student, I had been seized by a horrible realization: “He could be my Uncle Dave,” my childhood hero.....But I’d</p>

		<p>shaken that thought off the second it flashed across my mind, and I kicked that poor college kid more, harder. I laughed at his suffering.” (21)</p> <p>--His grandfather kept warning him, “If you hate everybody you’ll end up hating yourself” (84)</p> <p>--“I still had my boot on the kid’s throat when I finally saw him. I mean I really saw him. Underneath the blood and the gore, beneath the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) theory and the Identity theology, he was just a college kid.....I almost puked.” (98)</p> <p>--“Somewhere between Terre Haute and Springfield, any shred of conscience I still had left withered up and died.” (154)</p>
Value: Recognition	The only way to gain respect and recognition is through the white power movement (DOMINANT)	<p>--“The Lancaster County white supremacists talked to me like they cared about what I thought and what I could become. Then they told me I had a destiny. They told me I could become a warrior.” (52)</p> <p>--“I was fourteen, and I was a neo-Nazi skinhead. For the first time in my life, I felt like I mattered.” (58)</p> <p>--started his own group called Strike Force, which was the only Nazi youth gang of its kind at the time, bringing him recognition</p> <p>--“We were going to form our own crew, and our crew was going to blow The Uprise the hell out of the record books. It was our silent pact.” (65)</p> <p>--“Everybody came to think of Louie and Jimmy and me as the leaders of the skinhead scene on South Street” (73)</p> <p>--“one of the local Axis leaders had told me I was a hell of a fighter...I don’t think I could have been more proud...” (90)</p> <p>--“He was the ideal, the hero, the fantasy, and he was shaking my hand and talking to me, telling me he was proud to know that guys like me had been keeping his dream alive while he’d been gone.” (107-8)</p> <p>--“...in the glow of Scott Windham’s approving smile, I felt proud, truly proud, for the first time.” (111)</p> <p>--After he did an interview, a leader of one of the big adult Aryan nationalist groups wrote him a letter, saying “he was proud of the work I was doing and wanted to help me out however he could.” (152)</p> <p>--Meeink started his own radio show called The Reich (152)</p>
	It is possible to gain respect and recognition through sports (LATENT)	--Later after he was thrown out of his mom and John’s home, he started playing softball.....”I was a pretty good player” (47)
Value: Belonging	To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement (DOMINANT)	<p>--When he met his cousin’s friends who introduced him to the white power movement, he was taken by how they listened and respected him. “They gave a shit about me. These three guys who looked too cool to even talk to a kid like me actually cared about me.” (52)</p> <p>--“The Lancaster County white supremacists talked to me like they cared about what I thought and what I could become. Then they told me I had a destiny. They told me I could become a warrior.” (52)</p>

		<p>--“Of course, I didn’t realize then that I’d just survived my first night of indoctrination into the white supremacy movement. I just knew I liked hanging out with those guys and hoped they’d show up again.” (53)</p> <p>--“They spent hours explaining complicated theories to me. They were patient. Even when I got stuff turned around, not once that summer did anybody call me a ‘retard.’” (54)</p> <p>--“We were going to form our own crew, and our crew was going to blow The Uprise the hell out of the record books. It was our silent pact.” (65)</p> <p>--“Security breeds loyalty, and loyalty is everything. By the end of summer 1989, my loyalties were clear: Louie Lacinzi was my brother, and the white supremacy movement was my family.” (66)</p>
	To find belonging and be accepted meant being involved with sports (LATENT)	<p>--He always enjoyed and was good at sports. In school, before being thrown out, he played hockey and really loved it- but then his stepfather John made him stop, mostly out of spite. And when he was kicked out of school, he didn’t have much opportunity to play sports anymore. (38)</p> <p>--Later after he was thrown out of his mom and John’s home, he started playing softball. “The only place I actually felt comfortable was on the softball field.” (47)</p>
	You could find belonging and be accepted by one’s family and friends (LATENT)	<p>--“I’d felt really alone at home, even sitting across the kitchen table from my mom.” (33)</p> <p>--His stepfather John beat him and told him repeatedly he was worthless; “John beat me like a man beats another man in a bar.” (40)</p> <p>--He was kicked out of home; “I kept thinking to myself....You just got kicked out of your own house. Your own fucking mom hates you.” (43)</p> <p>--His grandparents always accepted and supported him, partly out of guilt for how his father (their son) turned out. For certain periods of time, they’d let him live at their home and despite not supporting his neo-Nazi stance, they never rejected him for it. (49, 84)</p> <p>--“Nanny and Pop did everything they could to make me feel at home...” (102)</p> <p>--“Once Amy started talking to me like I was actually a human being, I fell at least a little bit in love with her.” (79)</p> <p>--“Amy really listened to what I had to say.....Nobody else had done that....” (79)</p>
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Non-whites	Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions (DOMINANT)	<p>--“black, Asian, and Hispanic ‘mud’ were taking over the world.....the Jews who threatened Aryan survival.” (54)</p> <p>--“I just gave myself over to them, and the minute I did, everything started making sense...ZOG had all but destroyed the white working class in America, stealing our jobs.....ZOG had forced working-class whites to live amid ‘mud,’ who brought gangs and drugs into what had been moral</p>

		neighborhoods. ZOG had humiliated men like my father so much that they turned to dope to escape their pain, and men like my stepfather so much that they unleashed their rage on innocent children.” (55)
Complacent whites	Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too (DOMINANT)	--“You’re full of shit! I screamed at my uncle. “You and al the rest of the fucking dupes laying down in front of ZOG. You make me sick.” (60)

Michaels was driven by the values of **belonging** and **recognition** but his childhood situation—parents who didn’t want him, were abusive towards him, and who were alcoholics and drug addicts—restricted his access to alternate discourses in defining these values. Instead, his father, who defined **strength** as violence and aggression, shaped his initial discourse around the value of **strength**, and his abusive stepfather forced him to turn towards aggression as a means of self-defense and survival. This primed him for the dominant discourse around strength he’d ultimately adopt from the white supremacy movement, one which stated: *“Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out.”*

Although he mentions having slight qualms of conscience in the beginning, these did not seem well formed but rather latent and quickly discarded once the violence escalated and his involvement in the movement grew. Although he had been raised Catholic, his faith did not seem strong enough to elevate his latent discourse around treating all humans well, which stated: *“It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause.”* Instead, the white power ideology reinterpreted religion and made it seem as though the violence he committed was God’s work. However, the existence of a

latent, albeit suppressed, alternate discourse signaled a vulnerability in the power of the dominant one.

He did not find **belonging** at home, knowing from an early age that he wasn't wanted by either his mother or his father. This was made even worse by his stepfather's abusive attitude and then behavior toward him, making it clear he was not just unwanted, but worthless and degenerate. He felt some semblance of **belonging** from his grandparents, who always accepted and supported him, partly out of guilt for how his father (their son) turned out. For certain periods of time, they'd let him live at their home and despite not supporting his neo-Nazi stance, they never rejected him for it. Also, a girlfriend of his made him feel accepted regardless of his reputation, but simply as a human being. Both these experiences influenced him to adopt another latent discourse, this time around the value of **belonging**, which stated: "*You could find belonging and be accepted by one's family and friends.*" However, it was not a strong discourse because he felt so different from his grandparents and girlfriend.

He had always enjoyed and was good at sports, which also served as a latent discourse for **belonging** ("*To find belonging and be accepted meant being involved with sports*") as well as recognition ("*It is possible to gain respect and recognition through sports*"). In school, before being thrown out, he played hockey and really loved it. He was also good at it, so it allowed him some semblance of feeling respected and recognized. However, his stepfather eventually made him stop playing, mostly out of spite. And then when he was kicked out of school, he didn't have much opportunity to play sports anymore, nor to find **belonging** or **recognition** at school.

Thus, when he was introduced to the white supremacy movement, it fit extremely well because its associated discourses allowed him to fulfill the values of **recognition** (“*The only way to gain respect and recognition is through the white power movement*”), **belonging** (“*To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement*”), and **strength** (“*Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out*”). Additionally, Michaels seemed driven to dedicate himself to a meaningful cause, and the commitment toward the white supremacy movement allowed him to enact this value of **devotion** in a discourse that stated: “*The white power movement and the white race is the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort.*” There was no alternative latent discourse for this value of **devotion**, which made it a powerfully established one.

Additionally, Meeink’s dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. Therefore, Meeink’s narrative identity was in a vulnerable place in which it needed to protect itself through denial and isolation from new information, experiences, and people. Once he started to become exposed to new people and new ideas, it was inevitable that

his identity would crack, as it eventually did. Additionally, alcohol was likely a big factor that sustained the dominant ideology because it prevented any deep reflection.

Meeink's construction of **Other** was likewise an absolutist discourse that labeled all **Others** as fully and completely evil. This category of **Other** included non-whites, who were generalized into one grouping whose only intention was to destroy the white race. This discourse stated: "*Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions.*" The **Other** also included those whites who were complacent, in a discourse that stated: "*Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too.*" This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self—which referred to members of the white supremacy movement—and an evil Other who was deemed as aggressive and antagonistic at best, and the enemy at worst. However, a type of self-imposed segregation allowed the discourse around the **Other** to perpetuate, but it was vulnerable to unraveling should Michaels encounter people from the category of **Other** whom he was able to like, even empathize with. And when he did, this is what happened.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Meeink's writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 49: Meeink - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Devotion: The white power movement and the white race is the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort</p>	<p>--When he found out his girlfriend was pregnant, he started thinking about his role as a future father, although by this time he was in jail. "Thinking about what kind of father I'd make occupied my mind" (161) --"I never wanted to put her back down...Everything about Riley was sacred to me..." (203-4)</p>
<p>Strength: Violence, especially preemptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out</p>	<p>--For perhaps the first time, in prison he started to open his heart instead of working from the paradigm of might makes right. He would pray in his cell. "All I did was open my heart." (164) --"Facing fatherhood and fifteen years in prison had re-opened my heart to God" (166) --"...this other thought flashed across my mind: they think I belong here because I almost killed that kid. It took a few seconds for the full effect to slam into me. When it did, it felt like a bomb exploded inside my chest, I thought I was having a heart attack. "Oh my God," I thought. "I almost fucking killed that kid."" (188) "As the guards led me toward my cell, I realized, "I belong here."" (188) --"I listened to someone tell a racist joke, and I thought, "That ain't funny." For the first time in five years, I heard people flinging around theories about 'mud' and I thought, "That ain't true." (219)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition is through the white power movement</p>	<p>--When imprisoned, and especially during his trial, he started to realize that being a skinhead was not a positive way to gain a reputation. "Oh my God," I thought. "I almost fucking killed that kid."" (188) "As the guards led me toward my cell, I realized, "I belong here."" (188)</p>
<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement</p>	<p>--"But the bigger our group got, the more the core crumbled, the more I crumbled. Bullshit bickering I would've ignored back in Philly felt like an earthquake in Illinois. Jessica and the skinheads were all I had. Even with them, I felt so damn alone." (153) --He started attending a Bible study group in prison with "mud," black inmates. "Before I started going to Abel's Bible study, only the Spades players treated me like a human." (167) "I went because the hour I spent there every night was the only hour of every day when I didn't feel like I was dying." (167) --He joined a football team composed of Vice Lords, all black inmates, and they accepted him. When he had his child, they congratulated him. "All those guys asked me how the baby was doing every time they saw me. If they hadn't made such a fuss over Riley, I'm not sure I would've noticed how little my fellow Aryans seemed to care." (197) --After prison, he was heartbroken because his ex-girlfriend and the mother of his daughter had moved on, and so did his old friends. "Jessica and Riley had found a new family amid the rubble of my Nazi crew." He realized Jessica didn't love him anymore and none of his old crew cared about him. (204) --"Sitting in the middle of that party, surrounded by dozens of drunk skinheads spewing the same old stereotypes. I wanted to scream, 'That's such fucking bullshit!'" (220)</p>

<p>Language of Other: Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too</p>	<p>--In juvenile, he started playing football on the team with Puerto Ricans since there weren't enough whites to make their own team. He started to like them. "I kept playing for the Puerto Ricans. I liked some of them better than most of the white guys." (118) --While in prison, "some of the Latin Kings, Vice Lords, and Bloods did come to me, in spite of the fact that I was a Nazi. And I came to like some of them, too, in spite of the fact they were 'mud' by Identity's standards." (192) --"Sitting in the middle of that party, surrounded by dozens of drunk skinheads spewing the same old stereotypes. I wanted to scream, 'That's such fucking bullshit!" (220) --"The Second and Porter boys were the first people to notice I was changing. One night, somebody made a racist comment and looked to me for backup. I just shook my head and said, 'I don't know. Maybe we're not that different. I'd dropped a couple of bombshells like that on the corner when one of the guys finally asked, 'What's up, Frankie? First you hate everybody, now you love everybody?" (222) --His new Jewish boss shattered his last stereotypes; "Part of me wanted to scream, "Stop being fucking nice to me!" (224) --"I realized something about the Jews: until Keith, I'd never met one....Then I met Keith, and the fact was he disproved every theory I had. He was about the nicest, coolest dude I'd ever met." (224)</p>
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The complicating actions unfolded only once he landed in prison. Up until then, he kept repressing guilt and doubt whenever a semblance of a conscience would emerge after he identified with his victim, influenced by his latent discourse around **strength** (*"It is wrong to hurt other human beings, no matter how just the cause"*). The most effective way he did this was through alcohol. But he also attempted suicide two times, an indication that this was weighing on him more than he could handle. He also went on a "tattoo binge" probably serving in a way to reinforce his ideology and inoculate himself from growing doubt and weariness.

However, he was eventually arrested and charged with kidnapping and torture. During his trial, the full reality of his actions hit him and he felt remorse, perhaps openly and deeply for the first time. He referred to this as a mini-breakdown. It challenged his discourses around **strength**, **recognition**, and **devotion** because he felt ashamed of his

actions and associated them with the white supremacy movement. And then while in prison, the fact that he was facing a fifteen-year sentence and fatherhood—he had just learned his girlfriend was pregnant right before getting arrested—made him surrender, he says. He started praying and even joined, under some pressure, a Bible study group of black inmates. This became a particular refuge for him and challenged his discourse around **belonging** (*“To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement”*). He became close with black inmates on whose football team he played, the Vice Lords. He even realized that they paid him more attention and care when he daughter was born than his so-called Aryan friends. Overall, however, throughout his time in prison, he befriended people of all different ethnicities. This influenced him to rethink his discourses about the **Other**, and later when he rejoined his friends, he would no longer be able to accept their racist ideology or stance.

After prison, he really wanted to be a father for his daughter, but her mother had since left him and hated him. His old friends had also moved on, as well, and so he turned to drinking. He ultimately left his daughter and ex-girlfriend and reconnected with friends from the Strike Force, who were still engaged in the Skinhead scene. However, he experienced them as infantile and no longer could partake in their racist remarks. So once again, he felt alone and alienated. However, they left him alone. In the space he was afforded by his friends, who sensed something was off about him, he started questioning the Identity ideology. He started coming across things, from all sorts of places, which refuted the ideological claims. For example, he was moved by a story about how the genetic makeup of humans is practically identical, no matter what race. Another story

that affected him was about how a black stranger donated his organ to save a white person. He was also moved by the generosity and kindness granted him by a Jewish furniture storeowner who hired him for work and treated him with respect despite the tattoos that blatantly revealed his Skinhead association. All this served to deepen his doubt and pushed him away from his old identity, friends, and beliefs.

It appears that during this time he started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had looked to outside authority—white supremacy ideology and members—for guidance and definition of his values, during this time he started becoming comfortable with the idea of being his own authority. During this time of questioning, he was able to engage in critical historical reflection. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Meeink’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 50: Meeink - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supportive Discourses	References	
God forgives you even when you can't.	--"God has taken mercy I don't deserve on me, mercy I never showed my victims. Their eyes still haunt me.....I pray to God every day to give them peace. And I pray to God never to erase their pain from my memory. I can't make direct amends to most of the people I so brutally attacked during my skinhead years because I never knew their names. But they are in my heart now when I speak out against hatred. They are the reason I will never stop speaking out against hatred." (313)	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
Devotion: The white power movement and the white race is the only thing worthy of loyalty and deserved your entire effort	It is a duty he owes to his victims to work against racial hatred and keep others from falling down that path (NEW)	--After Oklahoma City bombing, he was shaken by the images of the casualties and devastation. "One image seared itself into my mind: a firefighter carrying a bleeding baby girl out of the rubble. Every time I saw that picture, I thought of my little girl.....and I wept." This devastation caused him to desire to do something against racial hatred. (21) --"As the body count mounted, I felt so fucking evil. For the first time ever, my victims haunted me." (21) --"...I believed I was fighting a holy war. I was raining down God's justice on an evil world. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols believed that, too. That belief killed 168 people.....nineteen of them were innocent little kids, like my baby girl. I couldn't shake that. I couldn't bear that." (21) --ADL got him started on the speaking circuit by first bringing him to speak in front of a 7 th grader class, which was very powerful for him – he cried entirely through the whole thing. Afterwards, he got letters from the students thanking him, which really touched him and made him want to continue. (248) --"I could take a difference sharing my story." (257) --"I can't make direct amends to most of the people I so brutally attacked during my skinhead years because I never knew their names. But they are in my heart now when I speak out against hatred. They are the

		reason I will never stop speaking out against hatred.” (313)
<p>Strength: Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out</p>	<p>Being honest, facing yourself, and surrendering to God are sources of real strength (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Staying clean meant dealing with me, the me who disappeared when I was high or drunk. Staying clean meant living with the memories, confronting the monsters, wallowing in the fucking misery. Staying clean meant being me, unprotected, forever.” He later admits the hardest part for him was the AA fourth step, the ‘searching and fearless moral inventory.’ He was overburdened with so much guilt from his life that he couldn’t face it all. (300) --It wasn’t until he almost killed himself that he got to the point of full surrender. “I am an alcoholic-addict. I am powerless over alcohol and drugs. I cannot stay clean and sober my own way because my way IS using and drinking. It is who I am.” (311) --It wasn’t until Meeink accepted this discourse that he was able to enter rehab sincerely for the first time. “For the first time, I let go of the lie that I could do it my way, on my own. I handed my life over to God.” (312) --This surrender allowed him to face himself, fully and honestly for the first time. He did the full fourth step, the moral inventory. “I did my fourth step for real. I didn’t just flash through my memory, picking and choosing the parts I could deal with. I actually revisited my past, all of it.” (312) --This allowed him to write his memoir. “I started working on this book a month later.” (312) --“I realized something: I’d spent my life trying to escape my problems. I’d tried to escape by hiding, by running, by leaving. I’d tried to escape by denying, by lying, by conniving. I’d tried to escape by hating, by drinking, by drugging. And every fucking time I tried to escape from my problems, all I’d done was add a new one to the list.” (313)</p>
<p>Recognition: The only way to gain respect and recognition was through the white power movement</p>	<p>Being a associated with the ADL and Harmony Through Hockey is a way of obtaining recognition and respect (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Some of those kids had actually heard me through all the crying. My words had made a difference.” (248) --He gained respect and recognition from the ADL, especially his closest contact Barry, for the speaking tours. “When I looked up from the stack of notes, I was</p>

		<p>crying again. Barry was beaming like a proud papa. "I told you your story could help people," he said. "A lot of people want to hear you speak, Frank." (248)</p> <p>--"I could make a difference sharing my story." (257)</p> <p>--The ADL loved his idea of creating Harmony Through Hockey and so did the Philadelphia Flyers, including the owner. The Flyers also asked for him to be coach. "That moment may be the closest to heaven I ever get." (258)</p> <p>--He started getting interviewed by radio and television and became a mini celebrity. These interviews were even watched by his father and friends in South Philly. "The crowd at my dad's bar.....mobbed me with praise." (263)</p> <p>--"Then my dad shoved through the crowd. He threw his arm around my shoulder and said something I'd been waiting my whole life to hear: "I'm proud of you, son." (263)</p> <p>--When he was granted a prize for his efforts, his mother and stepfather and little stepsisters even attended the award ceremony. (263)</p>
<p>Belonging: To find belonging and be accepted meant joining the white power movement</p>	<p>Being associated with the ADL and Harmony Through Hockey brings belonging (NEW)</p>	<p>--He started to feel like he was being accepted by the ADL, as well as the greater society to whom he was speaking about his past, which brought him a sense of belonging. "When I looked up from the stack of notes, I was crying again. Barry was beaming like a proud papa. "I told you your story could help people," he said. "A lot of people want to hear you speak, Frank." (248)</p> <p>--"I could make a difference sharing my story." (257)</p> <p>--"Mike [from the ADL] felt like a brother to me....That a guy like Mike Broni seemed to think I was worth talking to gave me hope that maybe I could make good one day." (257)</p> <p>--"Then my dad shoved through the crowd. He threw his arm around my shoulder and said something I'd been waiting my whole life to hear: "I'm proud of you, son." (263)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions</p>	<p>All humans are equal, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc (NEW)</p>	<p>--"I can't make direct amends to most of the people I so brutally attacked during my skinhead years because I never knew their names. But they are in my heart now when I speak out against hatred. They are the</p>

Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too		reason I will never stop speaking out against hatred.” (313)
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For Meeink, it was never a conscious choice to leave but rather something that happened, and he realized it only afterwards. At one point after he'd been working for his Jewish boss, he had a sudden realization that he was no longer a Skinhead. It happened as he got out of the shower, and he looked at himself in the mirror—"I looked deep into my own eyes, the hate was gone. I never officially resigned my position as head of the Strike Force; I just disappeared." However, after he had this realization it was hard for him to forgive himself and he became haunted by the memories of what he had done. Therefore, an important element in his transition was the **supporting discourse** around forgiveness that stated: "*God forgives you even when you can't.*" This allowed him to leave behind everything he had known up until that point in life, and try to rebuild himself anew.

However, discourse theory tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152-3). The former friends from the Strike Force did not let him go easily. He was invited one evening to a party, which turned out to be a set up. He was violently and brutally assaulted for being a traitor, by a group that even included his own cousin. "You're fucking dead to us, you fucking traitor!" they shouted as they punched and kicked him. He writes, "As I lay there, bloody and broken, it hit me. It's over. It's finally fucking over."

At the same time, perhaps his involvement in the movement was over but he still had a lot of problems. He now felt incredible alone and abandoned. He eventually went back to his old crew from South Philly, who got him involved in drugs, both using and selling. Additionally, he continued to have trouble with his ex-girlfriends and the babies he'd fathered, all of which triggered emotions that motivated him to heavily abuse drugs and alcohol. This was to be expected, since discourse theory asserts that personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual's psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Now, Meeink was in a limbo space where he no longer identified with the old discourses but had not yet adopted new, alternative ones to replace them. Therefore, he numbed himself in various substances.

It wasn't until the Oklahoma City bombing that he got out of this self-destructive phase, and was exposed to new, **alternative identity discourses** from which he could construct a new narrative identity system. The shock of this attack caused him to seek out the police, and he told his story to them. It was incredibly cathartic, he realized afterwards. "It was the first time I'd ever told my story to anybody. It was the first time I'd ever tried to make sense in my own mind out of the insane experience called my life." It also opened up a new discourse around **devotion** that stated: "*It is a duty he owes to his victims to work against racial hatred and keep others from falling down that path.*"

The police referred him to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), where he found a new role and identity for himself—working against the very ideology he once believed in. The ADL sponsored him as a speaker for talks, and eventually funded his idea about a

sports group that would bring kids together from all different races and backgrounds in an effort to overcome biases. He called it *Harmony Through Hockey*, and the ADL was able to fund it in conjunction with the Philadelphia Flyers — which was a source of great pride for Meeink, who had worshipped the Flyers ever since he was little. His father, stepfather, and mother supported him and acknowledged to him — for the first time — that they were proud. He also felt like people in the ADL became family to him, and he felt accepted for being just who he was. His new role as a speaker sharing his sordid past in an effort to prevent others from following in the same footsteps brought him **recognition** (“*Being associated with the ADL and Harmony Through Hockey is a way of obtaining recognition and respect*”) and a new sense of **belonging** (“*Being associated with the ADL and Harmony Through Hockey brings belonging*”).

However, he continued to be heavily involved in alcohol and drugs, hiding this from everyone. At one point, his friend from the ADL helped him get into a rehab clinic, and then into a halfway house. But he kept relapsing. It appears he didn’t have strong enough discourses around forgiveness to get him through the guilt that kept haunting him. He explains that the reason he kept going back to drugs was that, “Staying clean meant dealing with me, the me who disappeared when I was high or drunk. Staying clean meant living with the memories, confronting the monsters, wallowing in the fucking misery. Staying clean meant being me, unprotected, forever.” He later admitted the hardest part for him was the AA fourth step, the “searching and fearless moral inventory.” He was overburdened with so much guilt from his life that he couldn’t face it all, he explains. It wasn’t until he almost killed himself that he got to the point of full surrender. Then, he

gave himself over to God, he writes, and admitted to being an addict who couldn't help himself. He then had the courage to face himself and forgive his past. This then opened the way for him to write his memoir. Becoming fully open and honest about his past, and his addictions, influenced him to embrace a new discourse around **strength** that stated: *"Being honest, facing yourself, and surrendering to God are sources of real strength."*

Meanwhile, his experiences interacting with people of all backgrounds and ethnicities, starting back in prison, influenced him to reformulate his discourse around the **Other** to state: *"All humans are equal, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc."*

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Meeink's transformation. Firstly, it appears that Meeink's initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk to disruption. The toll of violence was something that kept haunting him, but he continued to repress this through drugs and alcohol. However, when he was imprisoned, he was forced to face the reality of the violent acts he had done, which caused him to doubt his dominant discourses and become ashamed of his actions. In prison, he was also exposed to African Americans who treated him with openness and acceptance, which caused him uncertainty about his construction of the **Other**. Once he emerged from prison, he started questioning the white supremacist ideology and finding irregularities that did not make sense to him.

This period after prison fostered a time of self-reflection, which represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Meeink to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. Overall, it appears that choosing to leave white supremacy was made possible by a **supporting discourse** on forgiveness. However, he was not exposed to **alternative identity discourses** to rebuild his identity. Thus, for a period of time, he engaged in self-destructive behavior and became heavily addicted to drugs. It wasn't until the Oklahoma City bombing that he was able to snap out of his downward spiral. The horror of this devastation caused him to aspire to work in anti-hate advocacy and he became involved with the ADL. This new role and activities introduced him to new opportunities and **alternative identity discourses**.

He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his colleagues, as well as form a new social system through the ADL, his family, and his fiancée, all of which also provided emotional support. However, it wasn't until he became completely clean from drugs and alcohol that he was able to find a stable source of **strength**.

Lastly, Meeink became heavily involved and passionate about anti-hate advocacy, but did not appear to demonize white supremacists in his reformulation of the **Other**. Quite the opposite; in fact, he even appeared to be sympathetic and understanding towards them. Whereas prior to his transformation, his construction was highly polarized between Us and Them, after his construction was more grounded in interdependence, and he no longer viewed any category of people as falling into the label of Other.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 51.

Table 51: Meeink - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 6: Frank Meeink
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in prison Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of forgiveness Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

4.3 Former Terrorists

4.3.1 Shane Paul O’Doherty

Orientation: Shane Paul O’Doherty proactively sought after and successfully joined the IRA—and planted his first bomb—at the age of 15. He became the most wanted man in Britain for his leading role in a letter-bomb campaign before being arrested and imprisoned for over 14 years, many of which were spent in solitary confinement. In prison, he came to denounce violence, became a pacifist, cut off ties with IRA, and publicly called for a full engagement with the democratic process. After being released, he continues to actively call for a peaceful solution through public engagements and writings (Cullen 2005; O’Doherty 2013).

Table 52 depicts the context and conditions that led O’Doherty to write his memoir.

Table 52: O’Doherty - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>The Volunteer: A Former IRA Man's True Story</i> (O’Doherty 2011)
Description	This is a graphic account of Shane O’Doherty ‘s life in the IRA and explains why ordinary people might turn to terrorism. ¹⁸
Author	Shane Paul O’Doherty joined the IRA at 15 and was one of the first prisoners to work his way past the negativity of the philosophy of armed struggle and recommend publicly an end to violence and a full engagement with the democratic process. ¹⁹
Date of publication	1993
Approximate time of renunciation	Late 1970s
Stated motive for writing	“I offer my story to you in the hope that some young person might, in reading it, avoid the choices I made when I was but 15 years of age, and their horrible consequences” (O’Doherty 2011).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	In 1989, after he was released from prison, he enrolled at Trinity College in Dublin and pursued a degree in English. At this time, he also started writing his autobiography. He also volunteered by editing a magazine sold by the homeless (Cullen 2005).

What follows next is my analysis of Shane Paul O’Doherty’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Shane Paul O’Doherty’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity.

O’Doherty had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From O’Doherty’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values

¹⁸ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

¹⁹ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

in Table 53 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **heroism, strength, public service, and devotion**, which I define in Table 53.

Table 53: O'Doherty - Values

Heroism	Acting with guts and daring; enduring suffering and sacrifice for a cause
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Public service	Making a difference; working against injustice for the benefit of the public
Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values and their implications for O’Doherty as a moral actor. Some of the values were associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Heroism	Becoming involved in the IRA, to the point of sacrificing one’s life, would make one a hero who would be immortalized (DOMINANT)	--When 10, he offered himself up for martyrdom and wrote a pledge: "When I grow up, I, Shane Paul O'Doherty, want to fight and, if necessary, die for Ireland's freedom" (viii) --After reading about romantic tales of IRA’s heroism, he began to idealize self-sacrifice; “ I was spellbound reading about the Easter Rising of 1916, when a quixotic band of patriots staged a rebellion they knew was doomed,

		<p>determined to ignite a wider revolution.” (ix) --He was captivated by reading the writings, poems, and last words of the executed patriots; “these writings ignited in me a passionate patriotism and an equally passionate desire to emulate the heroic deeds” (16-17) --Once he joined, he “was no longer an insignificant teenager...I became heroic overnight. I felt almost drunk with power." --When 16, he'd throw nail bombs at British soldiers and hope he'd be shot dead, “fantasizing that his sacrifice would inspire a mural or, better yet, a song, ensuring his immortality.” (ix) --“The bravest of the brave and the local heroes were those who put themselves at considerable risk in the front line of violence. They were already being mythologized in tales and song. I wanted to be one of the heroes”; “I was enchanted by the vision of these heroes putting their lives at risk to defend other people” (40) --“I was also in line to be a martyr and hero among my people....and I would achieve an immortality among the faithful remnant of the sacred tradition of Republicanism” (47)</p>
<p>Value: Strength</p>	<p>Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression (DOMINANT)</p>	<p>--Bloody Sunday in 1972, when British paratroopers shot and killed 14 civil rights demonstrators, proved to him British brutality could only be stopped by violent resistance --Although his family never spoke of this, two of his uncles fought the British in Ireland's war of independence in the 1920s, which seemed to him representative of true action against injustice (5) --As Irish resistance escalated, British responses became more brutal and O'Doherty was disillusioned and never trusted police again (32) --Once he joined, he “was no longer an insignificant teenager...I became heroic overnight. I felt almost drunk with power.” --He recalled the experience of his first bomb throwing as “an intoxicating power to exercise over a hated enemy and I wanted more” (36) --“I was no longer just plain insignificant teenage Shane Paul O'Doherty—I was a soldier” (47); “I was an operator, not a talker” (53) --When someone from Sinn Fein tried to convert to politics, he rejected them outright; “I could not be in a shirt and tie with a political folder in my hand, while my friends were fighting, and maybe dying in the streets” he told him (67) --He described British reaction as instituting a “reign of repression’ and ‘humiliating treatment” (73) --He was scarred when he saw police and soldiers laugh and joke about the Bloody Sunday shootings; “I now definitely viewed the British forces as terrorists in my country, murdering my people, and violence directed</p>

		against them as a moral imperative.” (87)
	Using violence, even for a just cause, was immoral because it would always endanger innocent human life (LATENT)	-- family that wasn't especially political and opposed violence as a means -- He told the priest he was in the IRA and wanted to talk about the morality of violence in a liberation struggle. But the priest was in no mood to debate.” Murder and violence are always wrong,” the cleric told him. O’Doherty left that church a more tormented 19-year-old than when he entered but continued fighting.
Value: Public Service	The injustices forced upon Ireland and the Irish people need to be resisted and the IRA was the only true vehicle to do so (DOMINANT)	--As a child, he would sit alone in his family’s well-stocked library, reading about Irish history. “There was something about the tragedy of British rule in Ireland against the wishes of the Irish people” (ix) --He was convinced politics offered no options for the Irish cause and the only true hope lie in the newly formed Provisional IRA; he went on a desperate search for them so he could join (ix) --From the age of 10, he dreamed of fighting in the IRA to end the injustice of British occupation, which seemed to him “the most heroic and patriotic service I could render my country” (1) --“My attraction to the IRA was not initially based on the sight or experience of any particular social injustice....it was the discovery of the tragedies of Irish history which first caused my desire to give myself to the IRA” (14) --He was outraged at the “pure political injustice and tragedy of British rule in Ireland against the wishes of the Irish people...the Famine and mass emigration.” (14) --He was drawn to the IRA as the only outlet for his patriotic dedication (23) --He adored the patriots whose writings he read and regarded their lives as having had such profound effect on the Irish nation (48)
Value: Devotion	The IRA and the Irish cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including one’s own life (DOMINANT)	--He felt thrilled that “we Irish Catholics had a cause, the cause of seeing Ireland united and the British occupation and border removed for ever” (13) --“My attraction to the IRA was not initially based on the sight or experience of any particular social injustice....it was the discovery of the tragedies of Irish history which first caused my desire to give myself to the IRA” (14) --When engaging in Civil Rights marches before his entrance into the IRA, he would sense an “almost mystical, religious unity and cause” (27) --“I was enchanted by the vision of these heroes putting their lives at risk to defend other people” (40) --“I was also in line to be a martyr and hero among my people....and I would achieve an immortality among the faithful remnant of the sacred tradition of Republicanism” (47) --“Everything that I might do in the future, I would be doing for the IRA and for Ireland’s freedom” (47)

		--"It only remained for me to be so assiduous in prosecuting my persona war that my superiors should have to notice my total dedication" (48) --He became a full time volunteer, "I was now going to amass as many attacks as I possibly could against the Army before the Army got an opportunity to kill me. This was my sole raison d'etre." (99)
	One's family and occupation deserve devotion (LATENT)	--His father devoted himself to his wife and family and teaching
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other: British and Protestant authorities	The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities (DOMINANT)	--He was scarred when he saw police and soldiers laugh and joke about the Bloody Sunday shootings; "I now definitely viewed the British forces as terrorists in my country, murdering my people, and violence directed against them as a moral imperative." (87) --He described British reaction as instituting a 'reign of repression' and 'humiliating treatment' (73) --He regarded British authorities as deserving of death in return for their oppressive actions against the Irish; "the idea was to have those in high places in British military and political circles face the consequences of occupying Ireland."
	British and Protestant civilians were innocent and should not be targeted under any circumstance (DOMINANT)	--British and Protestant authorities in politics and military were righteous targets but the civilians from both sides were innocent. --He grew up in an area where "relations between Protestants and Catholic were friendly and extremely courteous" and there was never discrimination against Protestants in his home (9) --He even dated a Protestant girl for a while after he was already in the IRA (9)

One of O'Doherty's main values appeared to be **heroism**. From an early age, he became entranced after hearing stories and reading romantic tales of martyred patriots who sacrificed themselves for the IRA. He began to idealize such acts and romanticize self-sacrifice, dreaming he would become a hero too, one day. Thus, the dominant discourse that defined what **heroism** meant for him meant getting involved in the IRA, and it stated: "*Becoming involved in the IRA, to the point of sacrificing one's life, would*

make one a hero who would be immortalized.” This discourse had no latent discourses to weaken it, making it a powerfully established one.

Also as a child, he read in his parent’s library books on the history of Ireland and became enraged about the injustices forced upon the Irish by Britain. Through his reading, he became convinced that a political solution was bound to fail, and only armed resistance could succeed. This only solidified his desire to work for the IRA. The rage he felt about the injustices towards his people also fueled a discourse around **public service** that stated: *“The injustices forced upon Ireland and the Irish people need to be resisted and the IRA was the only true vehicle to do so.”* This discourse also had no competing latent ones, making it another powerfully established one.

The IRA and the Irish cause also influenced his dominant discourse around **devotion**, which stated: *“The IRA and the Irish cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including one’s own life.”* However, unlike the others, this value did have a competing, latent discourse associated with it, which he got from seeing the example of his father who was dedicated to his wife, family, and job. This latent discourse around devotion stated: *“One’s family and occupation deserve devotion.”* However, for O’Doherty, this type of devotion was not heroic enough and so it wasn’t an influential discourse. But the mere existence of a latent, albeit suppressed, alternate discourse signaled a vulnerability in the power of the dominant one.

The strong latent discourse that would later become instrumental in his transformation was around the value of **strength**, which was dominantly defined through a discourse of armed resistance, but there was a competing discourse around the proper

use of violence that would cause doubt in his mind. The dominant discourse was associated with the IRA, and stated: “*Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression.*” The latent discourse, partly influenced by his Catholic upbringing and exposure to morals, stated: “*Using violence, even for a just cause, was immoral because it would always endanger innocent human life.*” However, in a memorable incident, which he retells in his memoirs, he visited a priest during one of his bouts of conscience to explore this latent discourse, but the priest’s inability to relate to O’Doherty turned him off completely.

Overall, O’Doherty’s dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, O’Doherty’s identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

O’Doherty’s construction of **Other** demonized the British authorities, who he viewed as inhumane in their treatment of the Irish. As the British escalated their tactics in response to the escalating Irish resistance, O’Doherty became disgusted by the stories of inhumane treatment of civilians, torture of prisoners, and disregard for innocent casualties. This convinced him that British authorities were deserving of punishment, even death, and rightfully could be targeted. Meanwhile, Protestant authorities were

routinely religiously discriminating against Catholics, and colluding with the British, which made them the enemy as well. Thus, the demonizing discourse he adopted stated: *“The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities.”* Meanwhile, he developed romantic, idealistic notions about the Irish, and especially about the IRA. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self and an evil Other who was deemed as aggressive and antagonistic at best, or the enemy at worst. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if O’Doherty encountered people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. However, O’Doherty had little human contact with the Other, so this made exposure less likely.

At the same time, O’Doherty felt strongly from the beginning that innocent civilians—from all sides—should not be targeted and must be protected from the start. He distinguished between the authorities, those in politics and military, and the civilians on both sides whom he viewed as innocent. This created a competing discourse around the **Other** that was strong and would prove instrumental in his transformation. It stated: *“British and Protestant civilians were innocent and should not be targeted under any circumstance.”*

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed O’Doherty’s writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 54: O'Doherty - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Heroism: Becoming involved in the IRA, to the point of sacrificing one's life, would make one a hero who would be immortalized</p>	<p>--As the IRA became more popular and attracted more recruits, O'Doherty found himself less important and less in the limelight, which limited his opportunities for heroism; "I was in no way central to anything" --After he was arrested, he felt a sense of freedom at being released from the dedication to the IRA; he felt "a strange relaxation stemming from the end of it all, the end of tension, fear, effort, superconsciousness, anticipation of death, injury, arrest" (144)</p>
<p>Strength: Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression</p>	<p>--His bomb failed to detonate in one case and he panicked, fearing he'd hurt civilians; "I would not be able to live with the guilt of blowing up innocent people." (55) --"I was glad that he was not seriously wounded, because I had looked into his eyes and seen a human being behind the visor, rifle and uniform" (72) --"I still recall the agonizing I did that night over the shooting...feeling really sick at the thought of the woman and children being shot....prayers for the life of the little girl and the recovery of the woman and her boy...I prayed for hours on my knees before my bed because I did not want an innocent child to die for my act against the British army" (81) --For more than a year, he was isolated in a cell, where he read books on the theory of a just war; "I was trying to justify the violence I had used" --"As he prepared for his trial, he read the reports that chronicled in shocking detail the extent of the injuries he had inflicted on 12 people." (xi) --"I wanted to fight these soldiers...but in my heart of hearts, I would not wish the individual to die, because in the moment that he was hit, he ceased to be a uniformed soldier, and became a human dreading death and wanting to hold on to life." (101) --After he was arrested, he felt a sense of freedom at being released from the dedication to the IRA; he felt "a strange relaxation stemming from the end of it all, the end of tension, fear, effort, superconsciousness, anticipation of death, injury, arrest" (144) --"Now that I was out of the game, I allowed myself the luxury and the freedom of reading whatever I wanted. I was interested in morality" (155)</p>
<p>Public Service: The injustices forced upon Ireland and the Irish people need to be resisted, and the IRA was the only true vehicle to do so</p>	<p>--He became angry with the IRA's campaign of Big Push, which led to many civilian casualties. "This made me doubt whether the IRA was helping the Irish cause at all." (139) --During the ceasefire, he gathered his IRA colleagues and had them re-direct their electrical knowledge to help the community with their electrical problems. He viewed this as truly helping the public rather than their old explosives work. (142)</p>
<p>Devotion: The IRA and the Irish cause deserve complete dedication,</p>	<p>--"I was embarrassed at the thought of being associated with a deliberate anti-civilian bombing... I found that I had no sense of an existence independent of the IRA, primarily because I had given my life to it" (137)</p>

<p>at the expense of all else-- including one's own life</p>	<p>--"The discovery that I had sold my soul to the organization was repellent to me, and made me thirst for a life apart from the IRA" (137) --After he was arrested, he felt a sense of freedom at being released from the dedication to the IRA; he felt "a strange relaxation stemming from the end of it all, the end of tension, fear, effort, superconsciousness, anticipation of death, injury, arrest" (144) --"Now that I was out of the game, I allowed myself the luxury and the freedom of reading whatever I wanted." (155) --"I had paid my dues to the IRA, and to the British, and now began to feel the need for a sense of freedom, to be myself, to think for myself and to express my own views, not those of others. I had a sense that it was inevitable that I would leave the IRA, if for no other reason than to once more have individuality and an existence wherein I could be myself, something I had not experienced for years" (163) --He realized he had never taken account of the toll his actions took on his family, and how they were so dedicated to him while he was imprisoned and they deserved his devotion in return (164) --"I had a strong sense that the debt of gratitude I owed my family might include a decision to leave the organization with which I had a long affair, to return, like the prodigal son, to my home"</p>
<p>Language of Other: The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities British and Protestant civilians were innocent and should not be targeted under any circumstance</p>	<p>--He began to see the humanity in even the police and military; "I was glad that he was not seriously wounded, because I had looked into his eyes and seen a human being behind the visor, rifle and uniform" (72) --After solitary confinement, and at great personal risk, he left the security of the IRA, associating with English prisoners (xii) --He experienced touching kindness by English guards, including one who had been praying for him with his wife, a gesture that brought "tears in his eyes, moved by an Englishman's unsolicited kindness." (xii) --"I still recall the agonizing I did that night over the shooting...feeling really sick at the thought of the woman and children being shot....prayers for the life of the little girl and the recovery of the woman and her boy...I prayed for hours on my knees before my bed because I did not want an innocent child to die for my act against the British army" (81) --"I wanted to fight these soldiers...but in my heart of hearts, I would not wish the individual to die, because in the moment that he was hit, he ceased to be a uniformed soldier, and became a human dreading death and wanting to hold on to life." (101) --British MPs from the Labor party petitioned for his cause of repatriation; "I learned that in any society there should be people willing and brave enough to reach out to enemies of that society" (165) --In prison he became friends with former UDA and UVP Protestant paramilitary members; "we had discovered in prison that we were so similar. We learned to trust each other, to become friends" (190)</p>

For him, the decision to leave IRA had been building for quite some time, stoked by his ever-present latent discourse around **strength** that opposed the violent nature of the IRA (*"Using violence, even for a just cause, was immoral because it would always*

endanger innocent human life"). From his initial involvement in the group, he had been exposed to many incidents in which civilians were injured, which caused him to doubt the legitimacy of his actions. After one specific incident, in which his actions caused serious injury to a woman and little girl, he even fell away from the IRA for a brief time. However, the brutality of Bloody Sunday attacks by the British re-ignited his belief that armed resistance was the only option, bolstering his dominant discourse around **strength** (*"Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression"*). As he got back into action, he started to repress these doubts and it wasn't until he landed in prison that he fully opened himself to the possibility that the IRA's violent actions might not be justified.

His decision to leave, albeit only for a brief time, was also motivated by a growing criticism he felt towards the IRA itself. It started back when he was still involved, but feeling undervalued due to the overabundance of other volunteers. He found little opportunity for **heroism**, and this supported his decision to take time away from the IRA after the first shooting incident that caused him some consternation. Without adequate ways to fulfill his value of heroism in the IRA, he started to question the dominant discourse that stated: *"Becoming involved in the IRA, to the point of sacrificing one's life, would make one a hero who would be immortalized."*

While in prison, these doubts were allowed to fully unfold and he engaged in an honest and critical investigation about the morality of violence. In effect, he was engaging in a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. He pursued this investigation with the same vigor and passion he had dedicated to the IRA, now

channeling it into this quest. He read many books, connected with pacifist organizations, and communicated with Catholic clergy. O’Doherty also wrote many letters to the public. It is likely that in writing these letters, he was able to sort through his thoughts and clarify his stance. Additionally, once he got out of solitary, he was exposed to British guards and Protestant prisoners, some of whom he befriended. This influenced him to reformulate his construction of the **Other**.

It appears that during this time of questioning while in prison—much of which was in solitary confinement—he started to transition from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had looked to outside authority—such as the IRA and Republican nationalist ideology—for guidance and definition of his values, while in prison he started becoming his own authority. Much of this was due to the sense of freedom he felt being imprisoned and finally “out of the game,” a freedom he viewed as a luxury that afforded him the opportunity to think for himself. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

During this time of questioning, his critique of the IRA increased and increasingly revolved around their disregard for innocent lives. As he learned of operations that caused civilian casualties, he became disgusted and disheartened. This caused him to also question his **devotion** to a group that was violating human rights, making him doubt the discourse around **devotion** that stated: “*The IRA and the Irish cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including one’s own life.*” He also started

doubting whether the IRA was even advancing the public interest at all, damaging his dominant discourse around **public service** that stated: “*The injustices forced upon Ireland and the Irish people need to be resisted and the IRA was the only true vehicle to do so.*” A key turning point occurred when he read the dispositions for his case, which included detailed descriptions of his victims and the effects of his attacks. This caused him to definitively decide against any legitimacy for violence, effectively rejecting his dominant discourse around **strength** (“*Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression*”).

Meanwhile, he began to see the humanity in even the British police and military, much of this due to acts of kindness by prison guards. He also became close with British politicians who helped him petition for repatriation. Thus, he started to question his previous positioning of them as **Other** through the discourse that stated: “*The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities.*”

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed O’Doherty’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 55: O'Doherty - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supportive Discourses	References	
It is possible in Catholicism to be redeemed and forgiven of past sins if one repents and works for reconciliation	--Core Catholic teachings that everyone is a sinner and can be forgiven through redemption --Defining characteristic of Catholicism and long tradition of conversions, starting the with story of the good thief who repented on the cross --Example of the conversion of St. Paul who O'Doherty saw as being a "terrorist" who converted and was forgiven for his past deeds after repenting --"I remember reading Paul VI's Paenitemini about the concept of conversion and repentance" (195)	
It is common and understood that some volunteers will decide to leave the IRA	--There was a long tradition of people leaving the IRA for a variety of reasons, including burnout, wanting a normal life, and focusing on family, among others --"It was not unusual for IRA volunteers to cease to volunteer for whatever reason. I was one such former member" (183)	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
Heroism: Becoming involved in the IRA, to the point of sacrificing one's life, would make one a hero who would be immortalized	Being an IRA soldier was a dirty job that involved committing human rights abuses (NEW)	--"The discovery that I had sold my soul to the organization was repellent to me, and made me thirst for a life apart from the IRA" (137) --"I, as a young, idealistic justice-seeker employed violence in support of my noble cause, I became a serious human rights' violator and brought dishonor and shame on my cause and myself. A cause so served becomes drenched in blood and is no longer noble" (197)
	Becoming a committed Catholic and attempting to emulate the example of Jesus was heroic (NEW)	--"Only pacifism was truly moral, truly Christ-like" (xii) --"I was extraordinarily taken by how the personality of the man, Jesus Christ, came across...by his radical views and activities, opposition to hypocrisy, dedication to the poor, and by his constant revolutionary references to the love of enemies" (156-7) --The Gospel of Matthew spoke of the importance of reconciliation, which challenged him to apologize to his victims, something that took a lot of

		courage but he saw as heroic and following the teachings of Jesus (169)
<p>Strength: Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression</p>	<p>True courage and strength lay in engaging the democratic process and pursuing talks and reconciliation (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Only pacifism was truly moral, truly Christ-like” (xii) --He wrote letters to newspapers recommending all parties “recognize the problems associated with using violence...disregard it as a tactic...and embrace the political process” (168) --“I have tried to encourage parties to talk for peace, and have written articles for the press or made radio and television programs with the same end in mind” (192) --“I have constantly expressed the view on television and radio that there is a path to peace in Northern Ireland.” (192)</p>
	<p>Using violence, even for a just cause, was immoral because it would always endanger innocent human life (Re-emerging LATENT)</p>	<p>--Catholic pacifist teachings --example of Jesus Christ and writings in the Gospels --“Only pacifism was truly moral, truly Christ-like” (xii)</p>
<p>Public service: The injustices forced upon Ireland and the Irish people need to be resisted, and the IRA was the only true vehicle to do so</p>	<p>The IRA was making things worse for the Irish cause (NEW)</p>	<p>--“The discovery that I had sold my soul to the organization was repellent to me, and made me thirst for a life apart from the IRA” (137) --“I, as a young, idealistic justice-seeker employed violence in support of my noble cause, I became a serious human rights’ violator and brought dishonor and shame on my cause and myself. A cause so served becomes drenched in blood and is no longer noble” (197)</p>
	<p>The justice and rights of ALL humans, regardless of their nationality, should be fought for (NEW)</p>	<p>--“I was extraordinarily taken by how the personality of the man, Jesus Christ, came across...by his constant revolutionary references to the love of enemies” (156-7) --He engaged in campaigns to help prisoners who were wrongfully accused and held beyond bars, even those who were Protestant (173) --After getting out, he edited a weekly magazine by the homeless, volunteered to help Bosnian Muslim refugees, taught computer skills to children from itinerant families (xiii)</p>
<p>Devotion: The IRA and the Irish cause deserve complete dedication, at</p>	<p>The IRA committed egregious acts of violence against civilians and did not deserve his loyalty</p>	<p>--“The discovery that I had sold my soul to the organization was repellent to me, and made me thirst for a life apart from</p>

<p>the expense of all else— including one’s own life</p>	<p>(NEW)</p>	<p>the IRA” (137) --“I, as a young, idealistic justice-seeker employed violence in support of my noble cause, I became a serious human rights’ violator and brought dishonor and shame on my cause and myself. A cause so served becomes drenched in blood and is no longer noble” (197)</p>
	<p>A peaceful solution for the Irish cause deserves complete dedication (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Only pacifism was truly moral, truly Christ-like” (xii) --“I am committed to trying to encourage a peaceful settlement of the conflict surrounding British/Irish relations” (191) --“I have tried to encourage parties to talk for peace, and have written articles for the press or made radio and television programs with the same end in mind” (192) --“I have constantly expressed the view on television and radio that there is a path to peace in Northern Ireland.” (192) --“The only political ideology that is worthy of association with a noble cause is one which offers unconditional respect for the rights and life of every human person.” (197)</p>
	<p>One’s family and occupation deserve devotion (Re-emerging LATENT)</p>	<p>--“I had a strong sense that the debt of gratitude I owed my family might include a decision to leave the organization with which I had a long affair, to return, like the prodigal son, to my home”</p>
<p>Language of the Other: The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities British and Protestant civilians were innocent and should not be targeted under any circumstance</p>	<p>All are victims, regardless of which side they found themselves on, and deserve respect and understanding (NEW)</p>	<p>--“I was extraordinarily taken by how the personality of the man, Jesus Christ, came across...by his constant revolutionary references to the love of enemies” (156-7) --“I could see everyone as having been victimized by the situation, and I do not discriminate between Protestant or Catholic, British or Irish victims” (191)</p>

In O’Doherty’s case, his decision to leave the IRA was gradual, and there were periods where he left for a while, only to return. His ultimate and definitive break with the IRA was finally made possible through discourses that, in one way or another, made

leaving permanently seem acceptable. The most important **supporting discourse** was a discourse of conversion, forgiveness, and redemption from Catholicism, which stated: “*It is possible in Catholicism to be redeemed and forgiven of past sins if one repents and works for reconciliation.*” The Catholic Church had a long history of converts, the strongest being that of St. Paul—whom O’Doherty was named after. St. Paul had himself been previously radical, some would call him a murderer and terrorist, but had converted on the road to Damascus, and then spoke openly—and advocated—this change from radical to spiritual. Such stories about these individuals also strengthened O’Doherty’s resolve to leave by giving him the conviction that he could be forgiven for his past evil sins by repenting. According to his readings and interpretation, such redemption would only be possible if he sought reconciliation, which ignited his lifelong quest to apologize to his victims, beginning from behind bars.

Another **supporting discourse** came from a longstanding precedent of volunteers leaving the IRA. He wrote in his memoirs that the idea that one couldn’t leave the IRA was a myth and lie, and the reality was that it was quite common for volunteers to leave, for a variety of reasons, and this was accepted. Stories about other IRA members who had left provided the **supporting discourse** that enabled him to leave, which stated: “*It is common and understood that some volunteers will decide to leave the IRA.*” His evaluative point therefore solidified into a definitive choice to leave the group. Upon this decision, he embraced a new discourse around **devotion** (“*The IRA committed egregious acts of violence against civilians and did not deserve his loyalty*”), **heroism** (“*Being an IRA soldier was a dirty job that involved committing human rights abuses*”), and **public**

service (“The IRA was making things worse for the Irish cause”) that made his split with the IRA complete. He made his decision to leave and reasoning public by writing letters to newspapers opposing the IRA tactics.

However, discourse theory tells us it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). So, despite having a long tradition of volunteers leaving the IRA, once O’Doherty decided to renounce his involvement publicly, he lost many friends and was faced with hostility from his old colleagues. However, his family, which never supported his decision to enter the IRA, now embraced him and provided him emotional and logistical support after he left. He was touched by the way his family supported him in prison, and felt guilty for the toll his imprisonment took on their lives. This influenced him to return to his latent discourse around **devotion** that re-emerged, which stated: “*One’s family and occupation deserve devotion.*”

Discourse theory asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. O’Doherty was able to derive new **alternative identity discourses** to use in rebuilding his narrative identity from Catholicism, as well as include certain latent discourses that re-emerged. He was first introduced to discourses from Catholicism while still in prison, generated by his renewed

interest in the Bible and especially the Gospels. He started to view Jesus as heroic, and embraced a new discourse around **heroism** that stated: *“Becoming a committed Catholic and attempting to emulate the example of Jesus was heroic.”*

His faith influenced him to embrace pacifism as a true source of **strength**, influencing his discourse defining **strength** to now state: *“True courage and strength lay in engaging the democratic process and pursuing talks and reconciliation.”* Above all, he became devoted to his faith. He was still devoted to the Irish cause, but now regarded peace talks and reconciliation as the only way to get there, embracing a discourse around **devotion** that stated: *“A peaceful solution for the Irish cause deserves complete dedication.”* His discourse around **public service** also changed, and he now viewed injustices against all humans as worthy of effort, in a discourse that stated: *“The justice and rights of ALL humans, regardless of their nationality, should be fought for.”*

Regarding his views about the **Other**, he embraced Catholic teachings and viewed all humans as equal. He found understanding and sympathy for all sides, including his former IRA colleagues, and believed all were victims of circumstances beyond their control. This new discourse stated: *“All are victims, regardless of which side they found themselves on, and deserve respect and understanding.”*

Summary

In sum, certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of O’Doherty’s transformation. Firstly, it appears that O’Doherty’s initial identity was vulnerable due to the existence of latent discourses that served as competitors to his dominant discourses. Also, the absolutist nature of these dominant discourses made them

rigid and hence at risk of disruption. These trends made him particularly vulnerable to the violent nature of the IRA tactics, which triggered his already existing latent discourse that challenged the legitimacy of such violence.

Concurrently as he grew more disillusioned, he was forced into a period of reflection during his imprisonment, which included long bouts of solitary confinement. During this time, through study and reflection, he was exposed to new discourses that were key in the disruption of his old narrative identity. He read profusely about the morality of violence and found new discourses about pacifism, and wrote articles and letters to the public. Specifically, the role of reading and writing, which exposed him to alternative and competing discourses, allowed him to feel empowered enough to follow his doubts by pursuing new **alternative identity discourses**. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed O'Doherty to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection.

O'Doherty was aided in his transformation by **supporting discourses** that made it acceptable to leave the IRA. One major source was stories of conversion and redemption found within Catholic doctrine, specifically the example of St. Paul who O'Doherty saw as being a "terrorist" who converted and was forgiven for his past deeds after repenting. St. Paul and other converts became a guiding model and a source of a **supporting discourse** for him to follow. Furthermore, the precedent of volunteers leaving the IRA formed another **supporting discourse** for him.

When he made the decision to leave the IRA, he was safely separated from his old colleagues since he was imprisoned, so had less social pressure about his decision to leave. However, after publicly revealing his decision in newspapers, he received backlash from members of the IRA in the form of hate letters. To counteract this negative social pressure and backlash, he reconnected with his family, which became a source of emotional and logistical support for him. Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with alternate discourses, some of which were old latent ones, while others were brand new. It also appears he gained emotional support from his peace advocacy, which he passionately delved into. Hence, his transition from IRA terrorist was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as new narrative identity.

Lastly, O'Doherty became heavily involved and passionate about peace advocacy, but did not appear to demonize the IRA in his reformulation of the **Other**. Quite the opposite, in fact; he even appeared to be sympathetic and understanding since he still felt devotion towards the cause of Irish independence. Whereas prior to his transformation, his construction was highly polarized between Us and Them, after his construction was more grounded in interdependence, and he no longer viewed any category of people as falling into the label of Other. Instead, his newly adopted discourse advocated a love for all humans, which included for him the IRA but also British and Protestants.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 56.

Table 56: O'Doherty - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 7: Shane Paul O'Doherty
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses
Stage 2: Disruption	Exposure to violence Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in prison Support of writing and reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity Stories of other IRA volunteers who left Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

4.3.2 Whalid Shoebat

Orientation: Whalid Shoebat was a Muslim Palestinian terrorist who committed various acts of violence in the 1980s for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) before moving to America, where he started doubting his actions. After undergoing an extensive period of examination, Shoebat came to reject the tenets of jihad he had been taught, left Islam, and converted to Christianity in 1994. He now refers to himself as a peace activist and travels worldwide for speaking engagements (Shoebat 2013).

Table 57 depicts the context and conditions that led Shoebat to write his memoir.

Table 57: Shoebat - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	Why I Left Jihad: The Root of Terrorism and the Return of Radical Islam (Shoebat 2005)
Description	Written from an autobiographical perspective, this book describes in considerable detail the personal experiences and faith of the author, together

	with an often disturbing insight into the ongoing situation in the Middle East. ²⁰
Author	Walid Shoebat was born in Bethlehem of Judea, Israel. As a young man, he became a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and participated in acts of terror and violence against Israel, and was later imprisoned in the Russian Compound, Jerusalem's central prison for incitement and violence against Israel. After moving to the United States, Walid studied the Bible in a challenge to convert his wife to Islam in 1993. Instead, Walid became the convert... to Christianity. ²¹
Date of publication	2005
Approximate time of renunciation	1994
Stated motive for writing	He wrote this autobiography to share his story and uncover the inaccuracies of his former beliefs, as well as to advocate his opinions about how to implement a peaceful solution to the Middle East tensions. "This book was a work of love. After living with hate for so many years, I now dedicate my life to bringing truth and love to all who will hear me . . . Had the conspiracy of silence [regarding Islamists] been broken, had there been no 'miasma of words' to perpetuate fraud, had the world spoken, I would not have to" (Shoebat 2005).
Writing experiences prior to memoir	Published articles for various media outlets worldwide (Shoebat 2013).

What follows next is my analysis of Whalid Shoebat’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Whalid Shoebat’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Shoebat had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Shoebat’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values in Table 58 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses

²⁰ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

²¹ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

(Polanyi 1989). His values were **spirituality, strength, public service, and devotion**, which I define in Table 58.

Table 58: Shoebat - Values

Spirituality	Being dedicated and faithful to God, religion, or spiritual things, especially as contrasted with material or temporal ones
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Public service	Making a difference; working against injustice for the benefit of the public
Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty

Next, I searched for clues to discern the discourses that characterized these values for Shoebat and their implications for him as a moral actor. What was unique about Shoebat is that his values were associated with only dominant discourses, and lacked any latent ones. Next, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 59: Shoebat - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Spirituality	Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad (DOMINANT)	--“Hatred of Jews was my education, what I was taught each day by teachers and parents and the entire community. I knew nothing else, so I believed it was a righteous thing to grow up and kill Jews.” (13) --“I felt I had to be a martyr, to kill Jews in order to go to heaven and meet the 72 virgins.” (16) --“I vowed to fight my Jewish enemy, believing that I was doing God’s will on earth. I remained true to my word and

		<p>tried to inflict harm by any means I could devise.” (16)</p> <p>--“The irony was that while terrorizing others, I terrorized myself with my beliefs that required me to gain enough merit and good deeds to go to heaven. But I never was sure if my good deeds would outweigh the bad when Allah judged me. Of course, to die fighting the Jews would ease Allah’s anger towards my sins and I would be assured of a good spot in heaven with beautiful wide-eyed women to fulfill my most intimate desires. Either way I won, as long as I terrorized my enemies.” (17)</p> <p>--“I remained a good Muslim and full of hate.” (34)</p>
Value: Strength	Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression (DOMINANT)	<p>--He was trained by the PLO on how to incite riots, demonstrate, and perpetrate acts of terror and violence</p> <p>--“I would participate in any riot. All through high school I would be one of the first to provoke a riot. We used terror tactics, bombs and armed assaults against Jews in an attempt to force them to leave Israel.” (16)</p>
Value: Public Service	The injustices forced upon the Palestinian people needed to be resisted and the jihad was the only true and most righteous vehicle to do so (DOMINANT)	<p>--“I vowed to fight my Jewish enemy, believing that I was doing God’s will on earth. I remained true to my word and tried to inflict harm by any means I could devise.” (16)</p>
Value: Devotion	Jihad and the Palestinian cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including arrest and even one’s own life (DOMINANT)	<p>--“I didn’t enjoy what I had done, but I felt compelled to do it because it was my duty.” (16)</p> <p>--“I remained true to my word and tried to inflict harm by any means I could devise.” (16)</p>
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other: Jews and Westerners	All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against (DOMINANT)	<p>--“I vowed to fight my Jewish enemy, believing that I was doing God’s will on earth.” (16)</p> <p>--“Abdul-Hamid Kishk from Egypt who gave me my weekly dose of the hate drug through tapes recorded in Egypt, calling for America’s destruction.” (16)</p>

Shoebat’s four values of **spirituality, strength, public service, and devotion** were all fulfilled for him through engaging in Palestinian terrorism against the Israelis. Being immersed in these discourses and affected by the society around him, he quickly adopted these dominant ways of defining his values from an early age. First and foremost, he adopted the dominant discourse around **spirituality** from the time he was

little. Everyone in his family, community, and school taught him to hate the Jews and to view their annihilation as justified and heroic. This influenced his dominant discourse to become: *“Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad.”* He was driven to be a good Muslim and so this discourse affected how he viewed **devotion**, another of his values. Thus, the dominant discourse around **devotion** became: *“Jihad and the Palestinian cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including arrest and even one’s own life.”*

This devotion drove him to fulfill this duty of jihad by joining the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a youth. There, he received multiple types of training and participated in various actions. He also solidified his discourse on **strength** to state: *“Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression.”* As a member of the PLO, he believed he was serving his people and God, driven by the discourse which defined his value of **public service** that stated: *“The injustices forced upon the Palestinian people needed to be resisted and the jihad was the only true and most righteous vehicle to do so.”*

Eventually, Shoebat escalated his involvement and became directly involved in an attack against an Israeli bank, an action that got him caught by the authorities. For this action, he was sent to Israeli prison but soon thereafter released. He claims he was let go because his mother was an American, which gave him special status. After being released, however, he continued his anti-Israeli activities and had no change of heart. This resoluteness was likely due to the lack of any latent discourses around his values, which made them all powerfully entrenched.

However, Shoebat's dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Shoebat's identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system.

Shoebat's construction of **Other** was defined by the discourse: "*All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against.*" This polarizing discourse demonized all Jews and Westerners, who he viewed as inherently evil and driven to destroy all Muslims and Islam. This construction was based in a militant Islamic philosophy that he was indoctrinated into from the time he was a child, which convinced him that Israelis and all non-Muslims were deserving of punishment, even death, and rightfully could be targeted. Meanwhile, he developed romantic, idealistic notions about Palestinians, Muslims, and the PLO. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self and an evil Other. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if Shoebat encountered people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. However, Shoebat purposefully took certain measures to segregate him from the Other, making such exposure less likely.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Shoebat’s writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 60: Shoebat - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Spirituality: Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad</p>	<p>--“Raed’s mother, my aunt Fatima, passed out sweets to everyone, since in this resurrected Islamic tradition, the martyr’s death was treated like a wedding celebration.....But why then, at night, when Aunt Fatima was all alone, did she cry as though her heart would break?” (22)</p> <p>--“I believed it was a righteous thing to grow up and kill Jews. That’s what I would have done with my life except that events brought me to the United States and to my study of Christianity and Judaism.” (13)</p> <p>--“What gave birth to my profound change of heart and mind? ...The answer is through a self-detoxification program. It started in America, with a question my wife asked me in the process of my attempting to convert her to Islam. She would not accept my hatred of Jews. “Show me in the Bible the bad things Jews did,” she demanded.” (19)</p> <p>--“By accepting her challenge, I walked into a new world. For the first time, I studied factual history, the Christian Bible, the Jewish Bible, Jewish history and Jewish songs and art, but I couldn’t find anything about the murderous, terrible Jews that had been in my mind for so long.” (19)</p> <p>--“Is this my sin? That I began to love Jews? As well as Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims? To love life is a sin? To want to protect both Jewish and Arab children is a sin? To Islamists, yes.” (21)</p>
<p>Strength: Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression</p>	<p>--“My hand was ready to pitch the bomb forward when I saw some Palestinian children walking near the bank. Instead, I threw the bomb on the bank’s rooftop.</p> <p>--“I was reading something very new, a Jewish Bible, and saw that the Jews have suffered the true refugee problem, not the Palestinians.” (21)</p> <p>--“What is amazing is that when I was a terrorist, I was a ‘freedom fighter,’ but for loving the Jewish people and their culture and religion, I was called a racist.” (21)</p> <p>--“Is this my sin? That I began to love Jews? As well as Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims? To love life is a sin? To want to protect both Jewish and Arab children is a sin? To Islamists, yes.” (21)</p>
<p>Public Service: The injustices forced upon the Palestinian people needed to be resisted and the jihad</p>	<p>--“I was reading something very new, a Jewish Bible, and saw that the Jews have suffered the true refugee problem, not the Palestinians.” (21)</p> <p>--“I found myself in love with the Jewish people.” (21)</p> <p>--“Is this my sin? That I began to love Jews? As well as Hindus, Buddhists, and</p>

<p>was the only true and most righteous vehicle to do so</p>	<p>Muslims? To love life is a sin? To want to protect both Jewish and Arab children is a sin? To Islamists, yes.” (21)</p>
<p>Devotion: Jihad and the Palestinian cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else—including arrest and even one’s own life</p>	<p>--“I was reading something very new, a Jewish Bible, and saw that the Jews have suffered the true refugee problem, not the Palestinians.” (21) --“I found myself in love with the Jewish people.” (21)</p>
<p>Language of Other: All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against</p>	<p>--“A Jew jumped in to save his life. Ibrahim was not grateful. In fact, he would never talk about the episode” (22) --“A Jewish doctor in Jerusalem saved my father.” (22) --“It started in America, with a question my wife asked me in the process of my attempting to convert her to Islam. She would not accept my hatred of Jews. ‘Show me in the Bible the bad things Jews did,’ she demanded.” (19) --“My life was turned upside down when I discovered that everything I had been taught about the Jews was a lie.” (13) --“By accepting her challenge, I walked into a new world. For the first time, I studied factual history, the Christian Bible, the Jewish Bible, Jewish history and Jewish songs and art, but I couldn’t find anything about the murderous, terrible Jews that had been in my mind for so long.” (19) --“And I discovered that Jews did not start wars, did not take over other nations, did not commit genocide....On the contrary, it was all about following God’s Commandments” (20) --“I found myself in love with the Jewish people.” (21) --“What is amazing is that when I was a terrorist, I was a ‘freedom fighter,’ but for loving the Jewish people and their culture and religion, I was called a racist.” (21) --“Is this my sin? That I began to love Jews? As well as Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims? To love life is a sin? To want to protect both Jewish and Arab children is a sin? To Islamists, yes.” (21)</p>

For Shoebat, the decision to leave terrorism never even occurred to him until he traveled to the United States. Until that time, immersed in dominant discourses that defined rigidly all these values, he continued his anti-Israeli activism, which included acts of violence. The dominance of these discourses was supported by a lack of alternatives and lack of exposure to other people, both non-Muslims but even Muslims who thought differently.

There were some exceptions, however, that caused a tiny bit of doubt, although these never lasted. In one instance, Shoebat recalls a time he was supposed to set a bomb

to blow up a bank. However, as he was about to do so, he saw some Palestinian children walking near the bank and he couldn't do it, instead threw the bomb off to the side where it couldn't hurt anyone. Afterwards, he was distraught and depressed and couldn't sleep for days. This caused him some doubt about his discourse around **strength** ("*Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression*"). However, he still strongly felt it was his Islamic duty, so after the week passed, continued on to do this work.

In another instance, he recalls how his aunt cried secretly at night after her son, his cousin, died as a martyr, which was in contrast to the beliefs that this should be a joyous occasion of a heroic deed. This caused some confusion over his discourse around **spirituality** ("*Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad*") that included teachings on how dying as martyr should be treated as a wedding celebration. Lastly, he recalls a time when a Jew jumped in to save his friend who was drowning, and another instance when a Jewish man saved the life of his father. Both these instances sowed some doubt about his discourse around the **Other** ("*All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against*").

When Shoebat moved to study in America, he connected with his American relatives who were Christian and this initiated strong doubt that would not go away and a series of unfolding complication actions. He claims as he began to get exposed to their Judeo-Christian beliefs, he started questioning his own fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. He was struck by how his Christian relatives loved their fellow man, regardless of race, creed, color or religion; this contrasted sharply with his stance of hatred towards all non-

Muslims who were the **Other** (“*All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against*”). Meanwhile, while still in America, he met and married an American. When he attempted to get his wife to convert to Islam, she challenged him to prove that the Judeo-Christian Bible was as corrupt as he claimed. He accepted her challenge and began to read the Old Testament and study Judeo-Christian culture and Jewish history.

It appears that while in America, the exposure to new people and discourses spurred doubts that had not been allowed before while in Bethlehem. Here, they were allowed to fully unfold and he engaged in an honest and critical investigation about the veracity of his Islamic jihadist beliefs. In effect, he was engaging in a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. It was especially important to him since this questioning was important to his new wife, so he pursued this investigation with intense vigor and passion. This was a crucial period for Shoebat in which he transitioned from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had simply believed the discourses he had been indoctrinated into, while in America he started becoming his own authority and thinking for himself. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

He claims he was not yet convinced at this point, but was drawn to the appeal of universal love that Christianity advocates. This perspective caused him to question his previous construction of the **Other** and start loosening the hatred previously felt towards

Jews and Westerners. This challenging of discourses around the **Other** caused problems for him when he returned back to Bethlehem, however. There, he was once again exposed to the old dominant discourses, steeped in hate that he says he could no longer allow. He started to question certain beliefs and vocalize these to his Arab family—who reacted with anger, aggression, and even violence against him. His family turned against him, calling him a Zionist, his life was threatened by his brother, his property was seized and sold, and his family shunned him. In 1993, he returned to America and back to his American Christian family from whom he felt love and acceptance.

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Shoebat’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 61: Shoebat - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution	
Part 1: Choosing to Leave	
Supportive Discourses	References
Questioning Islam meant you could no longer be trusted and you had no choice but to leave	--Questioning Islam ostracized him from his Arab family and since apostasy was punishable by death, he had no choice but to flee
Christians would accept him, even as an ex-Muslim and ex-terrorist, and he	--After losing his Arab identity and home, he felt abandoned and looking for acceptance and belonging, which he found with his

could find redemption in Jesus Christ	<p>Christian relatives</p> <p>--He could redeem his past evil misconduct and beliefs by turning towards the truth, which was found in Christianity and especially in the figure of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>-- The Christian theology advocates forgiveness and redemption</p>	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
<p>Spirituality: Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad</p>	<p>Islam is a false religion that advocates violence and hatred (NEW)</p>	<p>--“What Muslims should do is show by example how Allah is great not by committing acts of violence and cheering for death and martyrdom. But that is who Islamists are.” (17-18)</p> <p>--“The Western world has been duped to believe that secular Arabs or moderate Islam will make a difference. They won’t even be players.” (18)</p> <p>--“...in response to what has become a mantra since September 11,—that ‘true Islam is a religion of peace,’ I say no.....They taught me only the destruction of the Jews and hatred of the West.” (35)</p> <p>--“Adhering to the text means acting out violence and hate.” (41)</p> <p>--“I saw that God is indeed a God of peace and that the God of Islam is bent on destroying the Jew.” (47)</p>
	<p>Being faithful as a Christian means telling the truth about anti-Semitism and Islamists, and working to protect Israel (NEW)</p>	<p>--“I am no longer a terrorist. I am a Christian. I am a man who is dedicated to peace and truth.” (19)</p> <p>--“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right—no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14)</p> <p>--“The Bible taught me that to be a good Christian is also to be a ‘spiritual’ Jew” (47)</p>
<p>Strength: Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression</p>	<p>True courage and strength lay in being a Christian and fervent supporter of Israel (NEW)</p>	<p>--“My deep Christian faith is my driving force” (11)</p> <p>--“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right—no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14)</p>
	<p>True strength comes from publicly uncovering the lies and deception of Islamists, none of whom can be trusted since being</p>	<p>--“Yet the world will not confront the truth, will not call out, “These Islamists are terrorists.”...Instead, most of the world cowers.” (11)</p>

	<p>a true Muslim means committing jihad (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Words are important. Everything decent in the universe calls out for us to speak the truth.” (12) --“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right—no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14)</p>
<p>Public service: The injustices forced upon the Palestinian people needed to be resisted and the jihad is the only true and most righteous vehicle to do so</p>	<p>Anti-Semitism is the real injustice and must be fought against by exposing it in the Muslim world and even among Christians (NEW)</p>	<p>--“My life was turned upside down when I discovered everything I had been taught about the Jews was a lie. The shock, like a powerful earthquake under my feet, was followed by a powerful drive, urging me to tell the world the truth. Tell what it is really like in the Middle East and what the Jews in Israel truly face.” (13) --“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right—no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14) --“It’s a myth that the Palestinians are the underdogs in this conflict. Its not an Israeli-Palestinian war, but an Arab-Islamofascist war. The issue is not land or a Palestinian state. It is the destruction of Israel.” (23) --“Today I love the Jews and Israel, and I am ready to fight for her right to exist as long as there is still a breath left in me.” (48)</p>
	<p>The truth about Islamists being terrorists must be told to the world (NEW)</p>	<p>--“Yet the world will not confront the truth, will not call out, “These Islamists are terrorists.”...Instead, most of the world cowers.” (11) --“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right—no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14) --“I set out on a path of reconciliation, experiencing agonizing regret for my past actions as well as anger towards the ‘drug pushers’ who indoctrinated me to carry out their acts of hatred. This pathology needs to be exposed for what it is: Nazi style mind control and the corruption of children’s souls.” (35) --“There is no solution unless we liberate the children from an evil and growing menace and stop the cycle.” (40) --“Adhering to the text means acting out violence and hate. Peace starts when we make it illegal to follow the text and ultimately de-fang Islamism and jihad</p>

		and their government.” (41) --“People fear to say anything critical about Islam” (51)
Devotion: Jihad and the Palestinian cause deserve complete dedication, at the expense of all else— including arrest and even one’s own life	Christianity, supporting the Israeli state, and defending America deserves complete dedication (NEW)	--“I love America. I love the Jewish people, who have suffered so much and who are trying to hold onto this tiny spot of land called Israel as a homeland after thousands of years of persecution. And I love my fellow Christians to whom I bring the truth as I have witnessed it.” (11) --“My goal is to show the world the truth about Islamism and the Biblical right— no—God’s promise, for the Jews to live in Israel as their home.” (14) --“I vowed, as a way of repentance, to fight the hate-drug pushers as long as I live.” (35) --“Today I love the Jews and Israel, and I am ready to fight for her right to exist as long as there is still a breath left in me.” (48)
Language of the Other: All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against	Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win (NEW)	--“The truth is that the Israelis face an enemy with whom they cannot negotiate, because the enemy’s primary goal isn’t the land. That’s secondary. The enemy wants all Jews dead and Israel eliminated from the face of the earth.” (13) --“The fighting that Jews engaged in was always self-defense.” (22) --“A rabbi taught me to think further, to ‘love your enemy.’” (22) --“It’s a myth that the Palestinians are the underdogs in this conflict. Its not an Israeli-Palestinian war, but an Arab-Islamofascist war. The issue is not land or a Palestinian state. It is the destruction of Israel.” (23) --“Today I love the Jews and Israel, and I am ready to fight for her right to exist as long as there is still a breath left in me.” (48)

In Shoebat’s case, his decision to leave terrorism happened gradually as he became more interested in Christianity and increasingly questioned his version of Islam. However, his decision to leave was solidified after he returned to his hometown and

shared his misgivings and doubts. Upon doing so, he was immediately rejected by his Arab family and being tainted with allegations of apostasy. Thus, his leaving was aided by a **supporting discourse** from Islamic beliefs about apostasy being unacceptable and punishable even by death. Since he had started down this path, it made it almost impossible for him to stay and survive. This discourse stated: *“Questioning Islam meant you could no longer be trusted and you had no choice but to leave.”* His leaving was also enabled by another **supporting discourse** around forgiveness, acceptance, and redemption found within Christianity that stated: *“Christians would accept him, even as an ex-Muslim and ex-terrorist, and he could find redemption in Jesus Christ.”* By converting to Christianity, which he interpreted as the “truth,” and facing probable death threats from Muslims, he also interpreted this as an act of courage and conviction.

Upon his decision, he left his home, identity, and religion and fled to America. Discourse theory asserts that it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). However, because Shoebat left his home country, he was not exposed to the pressures of his old social networks. Furthermore, once in America, he found emotional and logistical support through the new friends he made in Christianity.

Discourse theory also asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual’s psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative

sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. In American, Shoebat did so by adopting Christianity and a new set of discourses for the all the values previously defined by militant Islam. Spirituality now meant joining in support of the Jews and fighting for the safety of Israel, in addition to exposing the evilness of Islam. His value of **spirituality** was defined by a discourse that rejected Islam, which stated: *“Islam is a false religion that advocates violence and hatred,”* and by another that embraced Christianity, which stated: *“Being faithful as a Christian means telling the truth about anti-Semitism and Islamists, and working to protect Israel.”*

He viewed advocating against Islam and working to expose them to the West as the highest act of **public service**, influenced by a discourse that stated: *“The truth about Islamists being terrorists must be told to the world.”* This was augmented by a discourse that acknowledged Jews as the real victims of the ongoing battles in the Middle East, something he picked up from his version of Christianity. This discourse stated: *“Anti-Semitism is the real injustice and must be fought against by exposing it in the Muslim world and even among Christians.”* Thus, he came to believe that working for the support of Israel was something that was a part of being a good Christian, a sign of **public service** for the greater good of humanity and for God, and the most important thing to be dedicated to since it supported God’s plan.

This became a cause to which he became wholeheartedly dedicated to and derived strength from, which fed into a new discourse that defined his value of **devotion**, which stated: *“Christianity, supporting the Israeli state, and defending America deserves complete dedication.”* **Strength**, which had previously been defined as militant

resistance, now became defined for him as engaging in acts against Islamists and acts for Israel through talks, writings, and media campaigns. This discourse stated: *“True strength comes from publicly uncovering the lies and deception of Islamists, none of whom can be trusted since being a true Muslim means committing jihad.”* It was similarly augmented by a discourse that viewed protecting Israel and Jews as a sign of **strength**, a discourse that stated: *“True courage and strength lay in being a Christian and fervent supporter of Israel.”*

Regarding his views about the **Other**, he reversed his earlier construction and now placed Islamists in the category of the evil Other and embraced Christians, Jews, and Westerners in the category of the perfect Selves. He became passionately engaged against anti-Semitism and exposing this Othering process that he once succumbed to, although he continued to engage in such an Othering towards Islamists. This new discourse around the **Other** now stated: *“Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win.”*

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Shoebat’s transformation. Firstly, it appears that Shoebat’s initial identity was strongly entrenched due to the lack of latent discourses to serve as competitors to his dominant discourses. However, the absolutist nature of his dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk of disruption. Yet, it wasn’t until he left his home country to study in America that he had enough space to start doubting his beliefs. The influence of his American Christian relatives influenced him deeply since their kindness and compassion called into question

his construction of Other. This started him down a path of questioning his Islamic beliefs and comparing it to the Christian faith.

During this time, as he was exposed to the wider world and new people, the role of reflection and study was pivotal in empowering him to follow his doubts by pursuing new **alternative identity discourses**. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Shoebat to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave terrorism was made possible by a **supporting discourse** in Islam that made apostasy unacceptable and dangerous. His uncertainty triggered hatred by his family and he was forced to flee for his own safety. Meanwhile, **supporting discourses** around acceptance and forgiveness in Christianity helped him feel that he could leave behind his old faith, country, and identity and start anew. Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with alternate identity discourses, all of which were brand new and connected to his newly adopted conservative Christianity. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his family and old associates, as well as form a new social system through his Christian brothers and sisters, who provided emotional and logistical support. It also appears he gained emotional support from his anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism advocacy. Hence, his transition from terrorist to speaker and anti-Islamist advocate was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as new narrative identity.

Lastly, Shoebat reversed his reformulation of the **Other** by demonizing Islamic terrorists and all Islamists after he left the PLO and left Islam. He now blamed them for injustices suffered by Jews and Christians, and feared for the safety of America at the hands of Islamists. Thus, his construction of the **Other** remained as highly polarized as it had been before his transformation, but now the evil **Other** were Islamists and the perfect Selves were Westerners, Christians, and Jews.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 62.

Table 62: Shoebat - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 8: Walid Shoebat
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Absolutist dominant discourses
Stage 2: Disruption	Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in new country Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of redemption found in Christianity Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with

4.3.3 Kamal Saleem

Orientation: Kamal Saleem was born in Lebanon and exposed to radical Islamic ideas first by his parents. He was recruited into the Muslim Brotherhood at age seven and conducted his first militant attack in Israel for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that same year. For over the next decade, he conducted operations under the

guidance of the PLO and Fatah, and with Yassir Arafat, Muammar Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Hafez al Assad, and Saudi sheikhs and princes. At age twenty-three he traveled to America intent on conducting “cultural jihad” by recruiting as many jihadists as possible. A car accident forced him into home care by a Christian family, which exposed him to their beliefs and ultimately inspired him to leave behind jihad, Islam, and convert to Christianity. After the attacks of 911, he was inspired to share his story, so he wrote his memoir and become actively involved in speaking engagements to alert the American public about the threat of Islamism (Saleem 2013).

Table 63 depicts the context and conditions that led Saleem to write his memoir.

Table 63: Saleem - Memoir Writing Context/Conditions

Memoir Writing – Context & Conditions	
Memoir Title	<i>The Blood of Lambs: A Former Terrorist’s Memoir of Death and Redemption</i> (Saleem 2009)
Description	This memoir reveals the true inside story of the life and mindset of a radical Muslim terrorist who finally came to renounce his murderous mission and embrace freedom. ²²
Author	Kamal Saleem is now an American citizen. He has appeared on various news programs and has spoken at Stanford University, the University of California, and other institutions nationwide. ²³
Contributor	Lynn Vincent is a features editor at <i>World</i> magazine and the collaborative writer of four books, including the <i>New York Times</i> bestselling and critically acclaimed memoir, <i>Same Kind of Different as Me</i> . She is a U.S. Navy veteran. ²⁴
Date of publication	2009
Approximate time of renunciation	1985
Stated motive for writing	After the attacks of 911, he was inspired to share his story, so he decided to write his memoir. “I am not one of America’s great patriots, scientists, innovators, or soldiers . . . But I can tell my story. It includes a lot of my failures, a lot of my wickedness. But when bin Laden hit the World Trade Center, it turned out that my story also had a purpose: to say, ‘Wake up, America! You have a good heart towards foreigners, but it will be your death if you do not recognize your enemies and face them head-on’ (Saleem 2009).”

²² Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

²³ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

²⁴ Taken from Amazon.com website of the book.

Writing experiences prior to memoir	None
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What follows next is my analysis of Kamal Saleem’s memoir using the hermeneutical framework of renunciation I constructed for my sample set.

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity

For the first part of this framework, I analyzed Kamal Saleem’s memoir attending to language that would indicate the values that composed his identity. Saleem had certain values that defined his initial identity and which stayed constant throughout his transformation, but the discourses he embraced to define those values changed drastically. From Saleem’s memoir, I identified the four categories of values in Table 64 by attending to the circumstances, events, and states that inferred the evaluative clauses (Polanyi 1989). His values were **spirituality, strength, public service, and devotion**, which I define in Table 64.

Table 64: Saleem - Values

Spirituality	Being dedicated and faithful to God, religion, or spiritual things, especially as contrasted with material or temporal ones
Strength	Ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power
Recognition	Acknowledgment of achievement, service, merit; appreciation
Devotion	Single-minded commitment to a cause, purpose, or activity; allegiance, duty

Next, I searched for clues to discern the central discourses that characterized these values and their implications for Saleem as a moral actor. Some of the values were

associated with both dominant as well as latent discourses, while others had just dominant ones. Lastly, I followed in the tradition of Foucault by attempting a simplistic version of an archeology of knowledge by tracing the discourses back to possible sources, which I referred to as “References.”

Table 65: Saleem - Initial Identity Formation

Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity		
Value	Discourse	References
Value: Spirituality	Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad (DOMINANT)	<p>--“I came to have this new power, the ‘power of two’ — the Koran in one hand and the gun in the other. One equipped me spiritually and one physically. One spoke into my life, and one spoke into the lives of others.” (preface)</p> <p>--“Mother would read to us about the glory of Islam, about the good Muslims, and about what the Jews did to us. As a four-year-old boy, my favorite parts were the stories of war.” (10)</p> <p>--His mother told him stories about wars for Allah; “The bandit decided to join the fight for the cause of Allah. He charged in on a great, black horse, sweeping his heavy sword left and right, cutting down the infidel warriors.....The bandit fought bravely for Allah, killing several of the enemy until the sword of an infidel pierced his heart. He tumbled from his horse and died on the battlefield... After the bandit died, his mother had a dream.....she saw her son sitting on the shore of an endless crystal river, surrounded by a multitude of women who were feeding and tending to him... Her son answered, ‘I died for the glory of Allah and when I woke up, He welcomed me into jannah’.....My mother swept her eyes around the kitchen table, ‘So you see, my sons, even the most sinful man is able to redeem himself with one drop of an infidel’s blood.’” (10-11)</p> <p>--He learned about Sura 99, “The Earthquake,” about the day of judgment, which made Saleem intensely fearful that he would be judged badly by God and sent to hell. (19)</p> <p>--“Father had talked to us several times about the flames of hell and the tormenting giants who would use meat hooks to rip you apart. We had already learned that, according to the Koran, every Muslim, except for al-shaheed, has to pass through hell. There Allah purifies you through burning.” (20-21)</p> <p>--“My breath came short and quick as I thought about the demons with the meat hooks. Leaning back against a sugar sack, I thought, <i>My deeds will have to make a place for me.</i>” (20)</p>

		<p>--And I remembered what Father had told us: “The first drop of infidel’s blood you shed, you can provide atonement for seventy of your loved ones.” <i>No matter how bad and evil I am now, I thought, one day I can save myself and my family.</i>” (20)</p> <p>--“Killing infidels is one of the ways Allah would open heaven for us, she told us. The more infidels we killed, the better our chances to move quickly from punishment to paradise. ‘It is your duty,’ she said. ‘It is the duty of the faithful to punish and harass the Jews and Christians, who are thieves and traitors to Islam. They are cursed as monkeys and pigs, and their spirits unclean. It is in the Book.’” (22)</p> <p>--“Reading from the Koran, Father taught us more about jannah. I learned it was a wondrous place.” (34)</p>
Value: Strength	Acts of terrorism against all of Islam’s enemies are the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire (DOMINANT)	<p>--“Father told us a story from the hadith about a man who charged into a Jewish army all alone, sacrificing himself for Allah.” (16)</p> <p>--“I looked up at the rafters and meditated on legendary Islamic warriors.....I imagined myself as the great Muslim general, Khalid ibn Walid, or as Omer ibn al-Khatb, the second caliph.....<i>I could be a warrior like that ...</i>” (20)</p> <p>--“In madrassa, Mother loved to talk about how her ancestor warriors, Arabs and Turks, had used their thick and heavy swords to lop off the heads of Jews. They were men of courage, she said. Muslim warriors were clever and strong.” (27)</p> <p>--“I pictured myself on a white horse slicing through enemy armies with my mighty Muslim sword. As a child of six, when your mother loves you so much and is nourishing you, you believe her with every part of your being. Among my brothers and sisters, I was the one who believed the most.” (27)</p> <p>--“Basically, he said, the martyrs became like Superman.” (34)</p> <p>--After being rescued by the Muslim Brotherhood, they taught him to face the bullies and use aggression; “Kamal, if you do not face your enemies, your enemies will chase you forever.” (60)</p> <p>--“As a young boy rescued from ethnic street violence, I drank in this teaching in all its simple, childlike clarity. The teachings of the Brotherhood gave me power, authority, and ultimately, a gun.” (70)</p> <p>--“True Muslims, the imams said, were to complete the conquest Muhammad had begun, to establish a global caliph, or world dominance.” (83)</p> <p>--“I am a warrior!.....At that moment, my childhood slipped through my hands into the rifle’s hot steel. Everything I knew had changed.” (91)</p>
Value: Recognition	The best way to gain respect and recognition was by undertaking jihad	<p>--“We are the Muslim Brotherhood. If you touch this boy, you touch us.”....I saw the baker freeze and the insolence melt away from his face. Behind me, the diners fell silent.</p>

	(DOMINANT)	<p>Around us, the whole shop suddenly seemed still. Charged.” (61-62)</p> <p>--“My own heart screamed inside me. One part of me was glad for vengeance, but the savage assault horrified me. Part of me was proud to have champions.” (64)</p> <p>--“I felt very important zipping through the streets, the cool wind lifting my hair.” (75)</p> <p>--“My father had turned his back on me. I had become my mother’s milking cow, dispensing money instead of milk. I felt dirty and unworthy, left with only one hope... Allah! Allah! If you are not for me, who will be?” (81)</p> <p>--“I sensed a moment, an opportunity to leave behind my powerlessness, worthlessness, and fear and become someone who would make a difference in the world.” (90)</p>
	Going to school and being a good son could earn you recognition (LATENT)	<p>--“Please, Father! Please! I want to go to school! I want to make you proud!” However, Saleem’s pleas fell on deaf ears and his father forced him to drop out and instead work in manual jobs to make money for the family. (39)</p> <p>--“I was now among the street people. Before, I had been poor but educated. Now I was only poor.” (39)</p> <p>--“As I washed, I wondered why these men were being so nice to me. No one had been nice to me in a very long time, it seemed. For months, I had felt like a burden to my family. Like fat or a tumor. Sometimes I thought it would be better for them if I were dead.” (56)</p> <p>--“So many times I had asked my father to help me, and he had said no. He was too busy. He thought the beatings were my fault.” (58)</p> <p>--“Often Abdul Rahman took me aside for individual instruction. I felt singled out, special.” (82)</p> <p>--“For me the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood and, even more so, their protection and acceptances quenched the thirst caused by my family’s rejection. I had become part of something important. I belonged. These men had vision, passion, power. Perhaps most importantly of all, they seemed to care about me in a way my father did not.” (83)</p> <p>--“After a few months, he began treating me as a leader of the ‘young brothers,’ the boy recruits, and seemed to trust me.” (93)</p> <p>--“Never once did I think of leaving Fatah. Perhaps this was because Abu Yusef and others mothered me....praising my performance in the invasion training and telling me I was a warrior prodigy.” (97)</p> <p>--“You are doing a great service to occupied Palestine,” he announced. “When you return to Lebanon, you will be hailed as heroes.” (101)</p> <p>--“I felt like James Bond.” (102)</p> <p>--“Glory to you, Allah!” I prayed....”Finally, I am making a difference!” (159)</p>
Value: Devotion	Jihad as the will of Allah deserves complete dedication, at the expense of	--“Killing infidels is one of the ways Allah would open heaven for us, she told us. The more infidels we killed, the better our chances to move quickly from punishment to

	all else—even one’s own life (DOMINANT)	paradise. ‘It is your duty,’ she said. ‘It is the duty of the faithful to punish and harass the Jews and Christians.’” (22) --“the Western world is evil and must be destroyed.” (70) --“The imams taught us that the life call of the devout Muslim is to become a missionary zealot. To do the world a favor and rip it from its sin and lust and idolatry, whether by conversion or by death.” (82) --“I had found my calling.” (92) --“Abu Yousef chuckled. “You will make the difference someday, Kamal. You are loyal. Whomever you serve, you will make him successful.” (94) --“In Fatah, we had found a cause to rally to and an enemy to rise against.” (94-95)
Language of Other	Discourse	References
Other: Jews, Westerners, Shiah	Jews, Westerners, and Shia are denying or perverting Islam and seeking to destroy it; they need to be fought against in the name of Allah (DOMINANT)	--“Mother would read to us about the glory of Islam, about the good Muslims, and about what the Jews did to us.” (10) --“These people bring evil with them,” Mother told me. “When the flesh is exposed, the devil gets loose.” (18) --“One afternoon during madrassa, my mother taught us something amazing.....She was reading the Sura 9.5, which teaches that infidels do not deserve to live. “Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them,” Mother read. She then looked up to expound. “My sons, if you kill a Jew, on the day of judgment your right hand will light up before the throne of Allah, and all his heavenly host will celebrate.” (20-21) --“Killing infidels is one of the ways Allah would open heaven for us, she told us. The more infidels we killed, the better our chances to move quickly from punishment to paradise. “It is your duty,” she said. “It is the duty of the faithful to punish and harass the Jews and Christians, who are thieves and traitors to Islam. They are cursed as monkeys and pigs, and their spirits unclean. It is in the Book.” (22) --“And it was Abdul Rahman who taught me that hatred itself is important. “Allah examines the heart of the true believer,” he told me once....”In order to be pleasing to Allah, we must hate our enemies with our whole heart.” (82) --“That is the truth of jihad: It is a war in which no territory need be taken, no strategic objective seized. To shed the blood of the infidels—even children—is reason enough to party in the streets.” (132) --“The fedayeen told them the Jews were animals and showed them gory pictures of murdered women and children to prove it.” (157)

Saleem’s four values of **spirituality, strength, recognition, and devotion** were all fulfilled for him through engaging in Palestinian terrorism against the Israelis. Being

immersed in these discourses and affected by the society around him, he quickly adopted these dominant ways of defining his values from an early age. His parents, especially his mother, indoctrinated him into radical Islamist views from the beginning, cementing strong attachment to discourses defining **spirituality** through Islamic militancy and jihad. This influenced his dominant discourse to become: *“Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad.”* He was fearful about the teachings of God’s judgment upon death and convinced he would burn in hell—leaving the only recourse to become a martyr, someone the teachings claimed was guaranteed to go straight to paradise. Tales of martyrs also impregnated his imagination with models that defined for him **strength** as becoming a warrior for Allah. This influenced his discourse around **strength** to become: *“Acts of terrorism against all of Islam’s enemies are the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire.”*

As a young boy, he enjoyed school and tried hard to be a good son. This was driven by a latent discourse that defined his value of **recognition**, which stated: *“Going to school and being a good son could earn you recognition.”* However, he was often ignored or worse yet, sharply criticized, by his father, which repressed his latent discourse about finding **recognition** by being a good son. Worse yet, his father forced him to drop out of school in order to make money, making him feel like an unwanted burden to his family. However, existence of a latent, albeit suppressed, alternate discourse around **recognition** signaled a vulnerability in the power of the dominant one.

During this time, in the midst of his despair, members of the Muslim Brotherhood came to his rescue during an attack by street bullies. They started to take care of him in a

way he had never experienced from his father or family. They protected him, showered him with attention, and provided for his needs. This motivated him to join their ranks, which he did at the age of seven. By involving himself with them, he quickly found his new affiliation to be a source of instant recognition from his family and the entire community. Thus, his new dominant discourse around **recognition** became: *“The best way to gain respect and recognition was by undertaking jihad.”* He became active once he joined the Muslim Brotherhood. After a period of training, he started engaging right away in terrorist acts, despite being such a young boy. He was highly successful at it, as well, and this only brought him more **recognition**. He later went on to work for the PLO. His actions also met his discourses around **spirituality** and **strength**, deepening and entrenching them. Also, his value of **devotion** became defined by a discourse about following Allah’s will through fighting his enemies, which stated: *“Jihad as the will of Allah deserves complete dedication, at the expense of all else—even one’s own life.”*

Saleem’s dominant discourses were absolutist in their claims of conclusive, complete truth, which left little room for flexibility. This meant that should any evidence surface that called into question their unqualified claims of truth, they could easily come undone. Narrative theory suggests that such rigid stories can be easily disrupted once one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—comes into question, since this starts to unravel the entire structure, leading to its eventual collapse. According to narrative theory, then, Saleem’s identity was vulnerable to evidence of hypocrisy that might shatter his rigidly constructed narrative identity system. Thus, Saleem’s narrative identity was in a vulnerable place in which it needed to protect itself through denial and

isolation from new information, experiences, and people. Once he started to become exposed to new people and new ideas, it was inevitable that his identity would crack, as it eventually did. However, this would not happen until decades later, and not until he found himself in America.

Saleem's construction of **Other** was defined by the discourse: "*Jews, Westerners, and Shia are denying or perverting Islam and seeking to destroy it; they need to be fought against in the name of Allah.*" This category of Other included Jews and Westerners, who were generalized into one grouping whose only intention was to destroy Islam and Muslims. The Other also included Shia, who were deemed as traitors who perverted the Islamic faith. Meanwhile, he developed romantic, idealistic notions about Muslims, especially those undertaking jihad in the name of God. This dynamic created a sharp dichotomy between a perfect Self and an evil Other. Such an absolutist discourse could easily be called into question, according to narrative theory, if Saleem encountered people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. Saleem's self-imposed strict segregation allowed these discourses around the Other to perpetuate, but they were vulnerable to unraveling should Saleem interact and closely engage people from the category of Other who exhibited morally good traits. And when he did that, this is what happened.

Stage 2: Disruption

For the second part of the framework, I analyzed Saleem's writing attending to language that would symbolize the complicating actions, or the parts of his story that described events that spurred doubt about the discourses he had adopted.

Table 66: Saleem - Disruption

Stage 2: Disruption	
Discourse Being Challenged	Complicating Actions
<p>Spirituality: Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad</p>	<p>--“I saw criminal gangs becoming powerful.....as the situation deteriorated...I grew confused about a lot of things. I did not see myself as a soldier; I was a jihadist.....This dirty war of treacherous nations had ceased to be about Islam and had become only about survival.” (181)</p> <p>--“I wanted to start fresh, to establish an Islamist movement somewhere else.”</p> <p>--“Slowly I realized I could no longer feel my arms and legs. What could I have done to make Allah so angry with me? <i>I am your great warrior! I have done mighty works for you!</i>” (260)</p> <p>--“<i>Why would they do this?</i> When Dr. James spoke next, it was as if he had read my mind. ‘Kamal, there’s no catch here. No catch at all. We just want to show you the love of God.’” (265)</p> <p>--“Sitting in the Davids’ living room night after night, I questioned for the first time in my life the teaching I heard sitting at my mother’s kitchen table.” (270)</p> <p>--“After I left the Davids’ house, a spiritual earthquake shook the depths of my soul. It was like the collapsing hotel roof times one thousand, the walls and ceilings of my faith crashing down on my head. I wanted with every particle of my soul to believe Islam. I did not want to believe that I had committed my whole life to a lie. That I had killed for a lie.” (279)</p>
<p>Strength: Acts of terrorism against all of Islam’s enemies are the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire</p>	<p>--“Still, disquiet bit at my insides. I could not define it because my child’s mind did not have the words for what my belly knew. Later, though, I understood. Later, I saw that the adult fedayeen taught us a theory they themselves were not willing to practice. They wanted to liberate Palestine, but they did not want to die doing it, even for paradise.....Abu Yousef and his men poured their hate into our hearts in hopes we would do the work they could not fulfill.” (111)</p> <p>--“...and realized I was among those lighting the fuse of unrest, shaking the world of these grieving women I saw around me, whose children were now in danger. A glimmer of guilt flickered in my heart. But the spark did not catch, and the moment passed.” (168)</p> <p>--“I wondered if my life would always be filled with blood and death. Again, though, I closed off my heart, like an emotional tourniquet.” (169)</p> <p>--“In those children’s faces, I saw that boy I used to be and, for a moment, mourned. That boy was gone. The man who had replaced him was trained only to deceive, to fight, to kill. But now, through the hands of the innocent, a force washed over me that I had not been trained to resist: love. This love was huge and overpowering, but it did not require of me my blood or strength or my hatred. It required only my surrender. And from the mouths of these little children, I heard that this love had a name: Jesus.” (268-269)</p>
<p>Recognition: The best way to gain respect and recognition was by undertaking jihad</p>	<p>--“I had much time to think about what Abu Fox had said. That there was a life in America for someone like me.” (238)</p> <p>--“I decided to go to America as Abu Fox had suggested—but no to work for her. Instead, I was going to infiltrate, to poison, to destroy.” (238)</p> <p>--“I realized with a sudden pang how alone I really was.....I had many ‘brothers’ in jihad, but no friends. To make a friend would mean letting someone get close, and I had learned long before that close friends die.” (266)</p>
<p>Devotion: Jihad as the will of Allah</p>	<p>--“My faith was all I knew, and I also knew I was naked without it. A hundred sura now exploded through my mind, filling every secret niche of doubt, cutting</p>

<p>deserves complete dedication, at the expense of all else—even one’s own life</p>	<p>off my shameful desire.” (234) --“In the Davids’ living room, I began to accept that what I had learned about Christians and Americans was a lie. And if that was a lie, founded in the teachings of radical Islam, what else had I learned that was untrue? I had devoted my life to Allah, spilled my blood for him, killed for him.” (279) --“I wanted with every particle of my soul to believe Islam. I did not want to believe that I had committed my whole life to a lie. That I had killed for a lie.” (279)</p>
<p>Language of Other: Jews, Westerners, and Shia are denying or perverting Islam and seeking to destroy it; they need to be fought against in the name of Allah</p>	<p>--“I had been raised to hate America and had hated her all my life. But I had also seen the freedom Americans enjoyed and now burned to taste it.” (234) --“My wife, Theresa, is a registered nurse, but she’s a stay-at-home mom right now. She and I would like to open our home to you. We have a comfortable room you could have to yourself.” (263) --“All three children bowed their heads, closed their eyes, and began to pray that Uncle Kamal would be healed.” (268) --“All the while, I watched them, calculating. And I became very confused. All my life, I had been taught that Christians were thieving dogs. But these people had not stolen from me; they had taken me in and cared for me.” (270) --“This Christian family did not match the picture my childhood tutors had painted of sinners and whoremongers, of greedy zealots interested only in the conquest of Muslim lands....In fact, the more I was with the Davids, the more I came to see that Abdul Rahman and Abu Yousef fit the enemy image burned in my brain more than these people did.” (270) --“In the Davids’ living room, I began to accept that what I had learned about Christians and Americans was a lie. And if that was a lie, founded in the teachings of radical Islam, what else had I learned that was untrue? I had devoted my life to Allah, spilled my blood for him, killed for him.” (279)</p>

Saleem experienced no doubt until he later traveled to the United States. Up until that time, he was deeply entrenched in the dominant discourses that he had embraced from childhood, most of which had no competing, latent discourses. It appears he strongly adhered to the discourses about Islam, jihad, and hell taught to him by his parents, whom he trusted completely. A key driver was his fear of being sent to hell, a crucial component of the discourse that defined for him **spirituality**, which went on to claim that the only way to ensure avoiding the torturous experiences of hell would be to undertake jihad. Until he went to the United States, he had no exposure to alternative identity discourses or people that challenged the discourses he had adopted due to the

secluded radical Islamist networks he immersed himself in, so they continued to remain dominant.

Even certain key events, such as the death of his boyhood friend or seeing the massive number of victims—especially women and children—who suffered due to his actions, did not shake his faith in his discourses. Instead, they emboldened him even more. Using the rage they incited, he went to more trainings, more missions, and undertook more assignments. It also appears that since he had no alternative identity discourses to turn to, he could not risk entertaining doubts that might disrupt the only thing he knew. So, instead, he admits he deadened himself to his emotions and distracted himself by engaging in more and more ambitious and risky terrorist acts.

He did experience a type of disillusionment, however, but not one strong enough to deter him from his discourses. During the Lebanese civil war, he saw pervasive corruption break out, and ethnic power struggles overtook the primacy Islam had once had in that fight. His frustration over this motivated him to leave Lebanon for Europe, where he spent time raising money from Saudi sheikhs for the PLO. This was a way for him to continue supporting the cause of the PLO, but no longer being centrally involved in Lebanon. He always intended to return, however, once things had settled down. After spending some quiet time in Europe, he wanted to return to fighting, so traveled to Afghanistan to fight with the mujahedeen. There, he encountered Americans who were supporting the mujahedeen in their battle against the Communist Soviets. He was approached by one American and offered an opportunity to become a source for them, and although the offer was tempting—he pictured the freedoms he could have in

America—he quickly repressed his temptations and refused. He felt slightly ashamed at having even considered it, though, so to cover up his guilt, decided to go to America regardless, but on his terms. His plan was not to become a source for the US, but instead to wage “cultural jihad.”

At the age of 23 he arrived in America and quickly embarked on a recruiting spree, content in the belief he was pleasing Allah. In the midst of this, one day he got into a serious car accident that forced him to doubt his faith in God. He couldn't understand why God had allowed him to become so injured when all he had ever done was obey his will. This started doubt to form, for the first time, around his discourse defining **spirituality**. At the same time, he did not have health insurance and so was overwhelmed with exorbitant hospital bills. However, a Christian doctor at the hospital took mercy on him and brought him into his home, where he was taken care of by the doctor, his wife, and children. At first, Saleem was enraged about this, but did not want to draw attention to himself and his past, so reluctantly went along. While there, his heart softened through interactions with the children, who prayed for him and accepted him wholeheartedly. He was also moved by the compassion and generosity of the doctor and his wife, who nursed him back to health. Their acceptance of him and loving care caused him to doubt the discourses he had embraced about Christians being evil, and he became uncertain about his construction of the **Other**. Soon, this doubt escalated and grew to include everything, including all of his discourses defining all his values. Meanwhile, while there, he was exposed to **alternative identity discourses** in the teachings of Christianity, which he learned through a men's faith group that was held weekly at the doctor's house. The men

in that faith group also raised money for him that enabled him to pay his hospital bills, a gesture that moved him deeply.

It appears that while in America, the exposure to new people and discourses spurred doubts that had not been allowed before. Then, in the safety of this Christian home, these doubts were allowed to present themselves and he engaged in an honest and critical investigation about the veracity of his Islamic jihadist beliefs. In effect, he was engaging in a form of Foucaultian critical historical reflection. This was a crucial period for Saleem in which he transitioned from a more passive model of selfhood towards a more active model. Whereas before he had simply believed the discourses he had been indoctrinated into, now he started becoming his own authority and thinking for himself. In this way, he started becoming someone who acted in terms of “actively chosen moral values and convictions” (Gullestad 1996, 176) and started to formulate an explicit life project of his own (Gullestad 1996, 208).

Stage 3: Resolution

For the third and final part of my framework, I analyzed Shoebat’s memoir attending to language that would signal the evaluative point of his story, or how he made meaning out of the complicating actions (Labov and Waletzky 2003). This formed *Part 1: Choosing to Leave*. Secondly, for *Part 2: The Formation of New Identity*, I analyzed his writing to determine the new discourses he adopted that redefined the values of his new narrative identity.

Table 67: Saleem - Resolution

Stage 3: Resolution		
Part 1: Choosing to Leave		
Supportive Discourses	References	
You can be forgiven of your past sins and find redemption and healing in Jesus Christ	<p>--He could redeem his past evil misconduct and beliefs by turning towards the truth, which was found in Christianity and especially in the figure of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>-- The Christian theology advocates forgiveness and redemption</p> <p>--“My Lord, I will live and die for you!’ I said. ‘Do not die for me,’ the voice said. ‘I died for you that you may live.’” (281)</p> <p>--“[I knew] that he [Christ] had made recompense before a holy God for every sin of every man who would simply declare faith in Him. Even my sins, which were worse than those of any man I knew.” (281)</p>	
Part 2: Formation of New Identity		
Discourse Being Challenged	Alternative identity Discourses	References
Spirituality: Being faithful as a Muslim to God means taking part in jihad	Islam is a false religion that advocates violence and hatred (NEW)	--“I want to hear your voice!’ I cried. ‘Allah, I want to hear that you love me. If you are real, speak to me.’ I poured all my hope and faith into my prayer. But there was only silence. Stillness. Not one dust particle moved. A deep sadness engulfed me. My whole life had been a vain masquerade, I decided. Empty and void.” (280)
	Being faithful means embracing Jesus Christ as savior (NEW)	--“But as I bent to lift the edge of the carpet, I heard a voice. ‘Kamal, the Muslims believe in the God of Father Abraham, and so do the Jews and Christians. Why don’t you call on the God of Father Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?’ ...I cried out in a loud voice, with every fiber within me, ‘God of Father Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if you are real, speak to me!’Then, for the first time in my life, a miracle happened...the window brightened until its frame disappeared...My heart lept within me because I knew it was the light of God.” (281)
Strength:	True courage and strength	--“My Lord, I will live and die for you!’ I said.

<p>Acts of terrorism against all of Islam’s enemies are the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire</p>	<p>lay in being a Christian and having faith in Christ bringing about peace on earth (NEW)</p>	<p>‘Do not die for me,’ the voice said. ‘I died for you that you may live.’” (281) --“The truth burned in the center of my soul like a sacred fire and rinsed my heart clean like a holy rain.” (281)</p>
<p>Recognition: The best way to gain respect and recognition is by undertaking jihad</p>	<p>True love and acceptance come from Jesus Christ (NEW)</p>	<p>--“I knew God had accepted me.” (281) --His wife would tell him, “There’s something extraordinary about you, Kamal. I can’t put my finger on It yet, but God has something special planned for your future.” (286)</p>
<p>Devotion: Jihad as the will of Allah deserves complete dedication, at the expense of all else—even one’s own life</p>	<p>Protecting America by telling his story and exposing the intent of Islamists to dominate the US deserves complete dedication (NEW)</p>	<p>--“The opportunity to (perhaps in some small way) redeem some of the evil I had committed against this people was of great meaning to me.” (23) --After the 911 attacks, he was wracked with intense guilt. “I wanted to call the FBI, the CIA, even the White House, and tell them what I knew. Where to look for sleeper cells. How to spot a network. The conferences, the literature, the video boot camps. The money, the weapons, the training.” (298) --“When Bin Laden hit the World Trade Center, it turned out my story also had a purpose: To say, ‘Wake up, America! You have a good heart toward foreigners, but it will be your death if you do not recognize your enemies and face them head-on.’” (308) --“Now I am standing on the walls and shouting, “Wake up, America!”” (73)</p>
	<p>Christianity, his wife and family deserve complete dedication (NEW)</p>	<p>--“At that moment, I knew I met the Christian God. I knew I had met my Creator. There was no turning back.” (281) --“And yet she was the one who kept me going forward with my message. “It’s the right thing to do, Kamal,” Victoria often said.” (8)</p>
<p>Language of the Other: Jews, Westerners, and Shia are denying or perverting Islam and seeking to destroy it; they need to be fought against in the name of Allah</p>	<p>Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win (NEW)</p>	<p>--“When Bin Laden hit the World Trade Center, it turned out my story also had a purpose: To say, ‘Wake up, America! You have a good heart toward foreigners, but it will be your death if you do not recognize your enemies and face them head-on.’” (308)</p>
	<p>People of all faiths and ethnicities are equal before the eyes of God (NEW)</p>	<p>--“After leaving Islam, I had embraced the teaching that people ‘of every nation’ were the same in God’s eyes.” (23) --“My new life was like a school where I learned about Americans. They were a rowdy, friendly group of many colors, I found...I began to appreciate their embrace of all cultures as a strength that had made this country great.” (282)</p>

In Saleem's case, his decision to leave terrorism happened gradually as he became more interested in Christianity and increasingly questioned his version of Islam. However, his decision to leave was solidified after an experience he had that caused him to embrace Christianity and reject Islam. One evening, while he was still residing in the doctor's home, his growing doubts brought him to the brink of confusion. As he recounts, in a last-chance effort, he cried out to Allah to show him a sign that He existed. However, none came. At that decisive moment, he realized that all he had believed was a lie. He claims that in the midst of his despair, he heard a voice that directed him to call out to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and this time, he saw light and believed it to be a sign of this Judeo-Christian God's existence. Right then and there, he fully embraced Christ. Along with embracing Christianity, he embraced a discourse around forgiveness, acceptance, and redemption that made it possible for him to leave because it assured him he would be forgiven for his past and fully accepted by new people. This discourse, which stated: "*You can be forgiven of your past sins and find redemption and healing in Jesus Christ,*" served as an important **supporting discourse** that enabled him to make this transformation.

Upon his decision, he abandoned his home, family, identity, and religion and embraced Christianity. Discourse theory asserts that it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social arrangements and practices that support status quo and maintain positions of the powerful groups (Burr 1995, 152–3). For Saleem, however, he was largely immune from much of this pressure since he had been living relatively isolated in America overall, and especially not associating with his

old Islamist colleagues while he was sick. After he recovered and left the doctor's home, he made sure to stay far away from any place Islamists might appear, and even took a job in a restaurant that served pork and alcohol for that purpose. Meanwhile, since Saleem was in America, he was not exposed to the pressures of his old social networks or family back in Lebanon. At the same time, he gained emotional and logistical support from the new friends and acquaintances he made in the Church he joined. He also met and married an American Christian, and with her help applied for and received American citizenship.

Discourse theory also asserts that overall, personal change is quite difficult because the dominant discourses become part of an individual's psychology, providing a sense of self, and a deep emotional commitment to and investment in our subject positions (Burr 1995, 152). Therefore, new discourses need to be available as alternative sources from which to reconstruct a new narrative identity system. In American, Saleem did so by adopting Christianity and a new set of **alternative identity discourses** for the all the values previously defined by militant Islam. **Spirituality** now meant being a faithful and committed Christian. His value of **spirituality** became defined by a discourse that rejected Islam, which stated: "*Islam is a false religion that advocates violence and hatred,*" and by another that embraced Christianity, which stated: "*Being faithful means embracing Jesus Christ as savior.*" His value of **strength** became defined by a new discourse that stated: "*True courage and strength lay in being a Christian and having faith in Christ bringing about peace on earth.*" His value of **recognition** became defined by another new discourse, one that stated: "*True love and acceptance come from Jesus Christ.*" His value of devotion was replaced by a new discourse around his faith, wife,

and family, which stated: “*Christianity, his wife and family deserve complete dedication.*”

He was largely content living as an American and Christian, being devoted to his wife and children. However, when the 911 attacks occurred, he felt compelled to do something in order to help, and decided to do so by sharing his story. His value of **devotion** became defined by another discourse, which stated: “*Protecting America by telling his story and exposing the intent of Islamists to dominate the US deserves complete dedication.*” He started by writing his memoir, and then went on to give frequent talks, writings, and media campaigns to share his experiences and insights—despite death threats and character slights. Since he started, Saleem has appeared on media and talk shows around the world, visited countless schools and religious institutions, and advised US military leaders, security agents, private contractors, and law enforcement specialists.

Regarding his views about the **Other**, he reversed his earlier beliefs and now placed Muslims—specifically Islamists—in the category of the evil Other and embraced Christians, Jews, and Westerners in the category of the perfect Selves. He now sees himself as a proud and patriotic American Christian, a new narrative identity system with a discourse around the **Other** that states: “*People of all faiths and ethnicities are equal before the eyes of God,*” but also another discourse—that is polarizing and demonizing—that states: “*Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win.*”

Summary

Certain trends and patterns emerged throughout the process of Saleem's transformation. Firstly, it appears that Saleem's initial identity was strongly entrenched due to the lack of latent discourses—except for one—to serve as competitors to his dominant discourses. However, the absolutist nature of his dominant discourses made them rigid and hence at risk of disruption. Yet, it wasn't until he left his home country for America and was forced through his car accident to engage with American Christians, that he started doubting his discourses. The kindness and compassion of the American Christians who took care of him and nursed him back to health triggered a process of doubt that started with questioning his discourse around the **Other**, then **spirituality**, and then all of his values.

During this time, he was exposed to the wider world and new people, especially Christians and the Christian faith. The role of reading, study, and reflection was pivotal in empowering him to follow his doubts by pursuing new alternative identity discourses. This represented a type of transition from a passive model of self to a more active model cited by Gullestad that allowed Saleem to become more proactive in critically analyzing and choosing his discourses, a form of Foucaultian historical reflection.

Overall, it appears that choosing to leave terrorism was made possible for Saleem by a **supporting discourse** in Christianity about forgiveness, acceptances, and redemption that helped him feel that he could leave behind his old faith, country, and identity and start anew.

Once he left, he rebuilt his narrative identity with **alternate identity discourses**, all of which were brand new and connected to his newly adopted Christianity. He was able to adopt these at a safe distance away from his family and old associates, as well as form a new social system through his Christian brothers and sisters, who provided emotional and logistical support. It also appears he came to gain emotional support from his anti-Islamism advocacy. Hence, his transition from terrorist to speaker and anti-Islamist advocate was greatly aided by a rapid establishment of a new support structure, as well as new narrative identity.

Lastly, Saleem reversed his reformulation of the **Other** by demonizing Islamic terrorists and all Islamists after he left terrorism and left Islam. He viewed them as an enemy who was intent on dominating and overtaking America. Thus, his construction of the **Other** remained as highly polarized as it had been before his transformation, but now the evil **Other** were Islamists and the perfect Selves were all others.

In sum, the transformation stages appeared as depicted in Table 68.

Table 68: Saleem - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Case Study 9: Kamal Saleem
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Absolutist dominant discourses Presence of latent discourse
Stage 2: Disruption	Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection during stay with Christian family Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	Stories of redemption found in Christianity Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those

	formerly identified with
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4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I purposefully explored in-depth the cases of my research subjects in order to fully present their voices and stories. Next, in order to undertake a morphological analysis that compares across cases to identify patterns within narratives, I will close this chapter by comparing the main features of each former’s narrative description of their renunciation. I first compare within categories, comparing the three former gang members, then the three former right-wing extremists, and conclude by comparing the three former terrorists. Then I end by comparing across all the formers to highlight some of the major patterns found within the narratives of all nine. Given this comparison represents a morphology, a certain amount of redundancy and repetition was expected across all the cases, and this indeed emerged, as indicated in the tables below.

Table 69: Former Gang Members - Transformation Stages

Former Gang Members			
Transformation Stages	Luis Rodriguez	Sanyika Shakur	Stanley “Tookie” Williams
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	-Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -Repressive dominant discourse -Extensive drug/alcohol use	-Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -- -Extensive drug/alcohol use	-Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -Repressive dominant discourse -Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	-Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other	-Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other	-- -Questioning discourse about the Other

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-reflection during school -Support of writing and reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Self-reflection in prison -Support of reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Self-reflection in prison -Support of writing and reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Highly polarized Self/Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of spiritual figures who went through transformations -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence

Table 70: Former Right-Wing Extremists - Transformation Stages

Former Right-Wing Extremists			
Transformation Stages	Ed Husain	Arno Michaels	Frank Meeink
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -Extensive drug/alcohol use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses -Extensive drug/alcohol use
Stage 2: Disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection in college -- -Support of writing and reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection in college -Becoming a father -Support of reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection in prison -- -Support of reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of someone who left radical Islam -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of others who left the Skinhead movement -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stories of forgiveness -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical

	support from friends/family -Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with	support from friends/family -Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence	support from friends/family -Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence
--	--	--	--

Table 71: Former Terrorists - Transformation Stages

Former Terrorists			
Transformation Stages	Shane Paul O’Doherty	Walid Shoebat	Kamal Saleem
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	-Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses	-- -Absolutist dominant discourses	-Presence of latent discourses -Absolutist dominant discourses
Stage 2: Disruption	-Exposure to violence -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection in prison -Support of writing and reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas	-- -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection in new country -Support of reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas	-- -Questioning discourse about the Other -Self-reflection during stay with Christian family -Support of reading -Shift to active model of selfhood -Exposure to new people and ideas
Stage 3: Resolution	-Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity -Stories of other IRA volunteers who left -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence	-Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity -- -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with	-Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity -- -Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity -Safe distance from old colleagues -Emotional and logistical support from friends/family -Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with

There were commonalities among all the formers, and some specific to the categories, but overall their narratives described the process as unfolding in a similar

way. Table 72 depicts all the patterns found in the formers' memoirs and outlines the major elements of the process of renunciation as it unfolded within the narratives of the research subjects. The elements that are bolded represent those that occurred for all nine, while the percentages represent the frequency of occurrences.

Table 72: All Research Subjects - Transformation Stages

Transformation Stages	Elements found in Case Studies	Frequency
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses Absolutist dominant discourses Repressive dominant discourse Extensive drug/alcohol use	88% 100% 22% 55%
Stage 2: Disruption	Questioning discourse about the Other Exposure to violence (Self-reflection in some new setting) Self-reflection during school/college Self-reflection in prison Self-reflection in new country Self-reflection during stay with Christian family Support of writing/reading Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas	100% 66% 100% 33% 44% 11% 11% 44% 100% 100% 100%
Stage 3: Resolution	(Stories of some type that aided in deciding to change) Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations Stories of spiritual figures who went through transformations Stories of others who left their organization Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity Stories of forgiveness Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence Highly polarized Self/Other Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with	100% 22% 11% 22% 33% 11% 100% 100% 100% 55% 11% 33%

Despite the similarities that surfaced, this process of renunciation as it unfolded for my research subjects is not meant to represent a definitive model of how this process occurs for others but rather as an interpretation of how it occurred for my sample. Given

this study is grounded in a post-positivist paradigm, the intention of the research was not to discover a categorical answer of how the process occurs among all formers. In fact, some of the similarities that resulted were likely influenced by the nature of the relationships amongst my sample. Well into my research, it became clear that certain research subjects knew of one another, others appear to have been close friends, and yet others were involved in the same nonprofit organizations. This was reflected by their mutual references in the prefaces or acknowledgement sections of their respective memoirs, for example, as well as their social media and speaking engagement activities. Future research might explore the impact of the influence between research subjects driven by the social networks they created and drew upon.

In the next chapter, I break down these findings and discuss them one by one. Before that, however, I close this chapter by exploring some of the trends that surfaced regarding the context and conditions of the memoir writing for each of my research subjects. As a caveat, these conclusions are contingent on the data I was able to collect, which was insufficient in some cases. I attempted to understand the motivations of my research subjects by using their own words about why they chose to write their story, often included in the preface or afterward of their memoir. I was successful in all but one of the cases. Based on this data, most of the research subjects described their reasons for writing their story as being driven by a desire to prevent others from following down the same path. Their story was meant to represent a type of warning, primarily geared towards youth as the main audience. This was most evident, and personal, in the case of

Rodriguez who specifically wanted to publish his story in order to dissuade his son from continuing his involvement in a gang.

Another common reason mentioned was a desire to educate the public about a certain injustice by exposing certain truths the former had realized. This was evident in the case of Shakur and Williams; both wanted to inform the wider public about the continuing racial inequality in American society. A slightly different variation of this was a desire to warn the public about a dangerous “enemy,” such as in the case of Husain, Shoebat, and Saleem, all of who wanted to warn America about the danger posed by Islamists. Yet another desired outcome was to spread a worldview, such as in the case of Michaels who wanted to spread the message of tolerance and compassion. Lastly, for Meeink, his story represented an apology he felt he needed to express publicly in order to heal. In all these instances, the main audience was the wider public.

In terms of conditions, for some it appeared to be self-initiated, such as in the case of Rodriguez who initially started writing when he was fifteen and then became determined to finish and publish his story when his son joined a gang. For others, like Shakur and Meeink, they were approached by an outsider and asked to share their story. Alternatively, some were spurred on by events that made them feel it was their duty to share their story, such as with Saleem, Husain, and Meeink who were devastated by the attacks of 911, the London subway bombings, and the Oklahoma City bombings, respectively. Lastly, most had prior writing experience, some more than others, but some also had none, so there was no pattern.

In sum, it appears an aspiration for most of them for writing their memoirs was to warn youth from following in the same path. However, for many of them, this motive was augmented by a desire to influence the wider public through the example of their lives that could be beneficial in some way to society at-large.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings presented in the previous chapter represent the patterns found within the narratives of my research subjects about their transformation. This morphological analysis was undertaken in order to explore what their personal interpretations of this process—as depicted in their memoirs—can tell us about the overall process of renunciation as a discursive phenomenon. This application of the narrative patterns found in the formers’ memoirs to the overall process of renunciation assumes their narratives are an expression, at least to a degree that has relevancy, of their actual experiences. Given this, in this chapter, I explore what these narrative patterns tell us about renunciation and how it operates as a process of narrative identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction. I also compare these findings to those from the positivist studies on disengagement. I conclude this chapter by laying out the implications of these findings by recommending certain policies and practices that could enable and support an evolution towards renunciation.

5.1 The Discursive Dynamics of Renunciation

In the following section, I examine the implications of the findings highlighted by the hermeneutical framework of renunciation that I applied to the memoirs of my research subjects. I divide the framework into the three stages of initial identity

formation, disruption, and resolution and examine what the narratives can tell us about the dynamics of these processes that inform our understanding about renunciation.

5.1.1 Formation of Initial Identity

Certain trends emerged within the narratives of my research subjects about their formulation of initial identity, depicted in Table 73, with those shared by all shown in bold. The trends are also depicted graphically to emphasize their frequency in Figure 1.

Table 73: Trends in Initial Identity Formation

Transformation Stages	Elements found in Case Studies	Frequency
Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity	Presence of latent discourses	88%
	Absolutist dominant discourses	100%
	Repressive dominant discourse	22%
	Extensive drug/alcohol use	55%

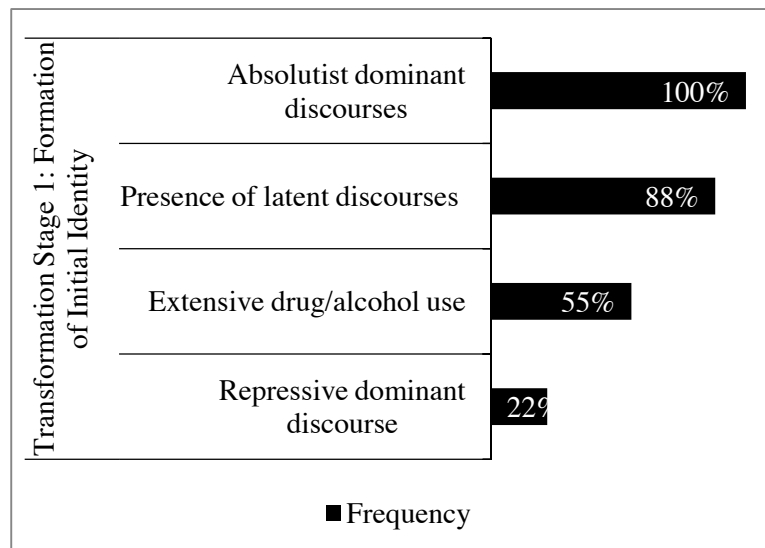


Figure 1: Frequency of Trends in Stage 1

All my research subjects had an initial identity composed of absolutist dominant discourses. According to how narratives change, such discourses are strong but brittle, and hence vulnerable to disruption should one piece of their storyline—no matter how small of a detail—come into question. As seen in the cases of my subjects, their absolutist discourses were indeed destabilized coinciding with the nonlinearity of narrative change dynamics, in which added complexity led to curiosity, then doubt, and then an unraveling of the entire structure. For example, in the case of Husain, once certain complicating actions started occurring that challenged his dominant discourse around spirituality, all the rest of the discourses started to unravel. It also appears the presence of latent discourses in some of the research subjects led this unraveling to occur more easily. Such discourses seem to have indeed operated as I suggested earlier, as “hidden transcripts” of hidden, oppressed potentialities that engaged in resistance when the opportunity arose. This also confirms the Foucaultian notion that change becomes possible through the opening up of marginalized discourses, which serve as important sources of resistance (Burr 1995, 90).

Furthermore, two research subjects—Rodriguez and Shakur—had what I call repressive dominant discourses that defined value negatively in a way that did not allow its unfolding. For both, in fact, this related to their value of intellect, and the dominant discourses they adopted asserted there was no possibility for developing intellectually as a Mexican and African America man, respectively. Lederach’s concept of “broken narratives” seems to explain how such repressive dominant discourses operated. Lederach compares a protracted conflict as a narrative broken, in which a people’s story

is marginalized or even destroyed by the dominant culture (Lederach 2010, 146–147). This destruction creates a loss of meaning, identity, and place in the world. When applied to the personal examples of Rodriguez and Shakur, this implies that both individuals' desired identity as intellectuals was repressed by their social conditions that made such expression impossible. With this option obstructed, both turned instead to gang activities and a gang identity as a means of compensating. However, once exposed to alternative identity discourses that empowered their value of intellect, they started doubting their entire identity system. This suggests that repressive dominant discourses, in addition to absolutist characteristics and the presence of latent discourses, may make the initial narrative identity system more vulnerable to disruption.

Meanwhile, the former gang members—Rodriguez, Shakur, and Williams—all had a strong influence of drugs and alcohol associated with their initial identity. They recounted in their memoirs they used such substances to cope because their involvement with the gang life was extremely violent, and this allowed them to suppress doubts and misgivings that might have otherwise arisen. They also expressed such substances were used to repress the guilt and shame they sometimes felt. This suggests that the use of drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms could empower or at least prolong the existence of an absolutist identity system. The right-wing extremists—specifically former Neo-Nazis Meeink and Michaels—also fell into this category, which is not unusual since their lives were likewise violent. Husain, however, did not succumb to drugs and alcohol despite also being a right-wing extremist like Meeink and Michaels, likely because the group he was affiliated with was not heavily involved with violence but predominantly

organized around political activism, which was viewed as preparation for a violent overthrow of the government in the future. All of these individuals—except for Williams—were destabilized by violence when it reached a point that surpassed even the numbing effects of drugs and alcohol. This suggests that dominant discourses justifying violence can be disrupted when violence reaches a high enough level and when there are underlying latent discourses, as was the case for these subjects.

The former terrorists were not associated with drugs and alcohol, perhaps because all three were raised in cultures—Palestine, Lebanon, and Ireland—where their terrorist actions were sanctioned by mainstream society, unlike gang activity and Neo-Nazi activity that was deemed immoral by wider American society. This may have inoculated them against doubts and qualms in a similar way that drugs and alcohol did to the others. This suggests that dominant discourses around violence may be more deeply entrenched when held by the majority of society. In such cases, then, removing individuals from that environment would be an important step in disrupting the dominant discourses.

Next, the values that structured their initial narrative identity system were different for almost all of them, except for former Neo-Nazi Meeink and former gang member Shakur who both held all four of the same values. The values are depicted below in Table 74, as well as which formers held them and the frequency with which they were found across all formers. These values are also depicted graphically in Figure 2. I did not find parallel trends within the categories—in which all former gang members shared an initial identity, composed of the same categories of values—as I had initially expected. Indeed, the two who did share common values—Meeink and Shakur—were from

different categories. This suggests that the individual's personal characteristics and situation are unique and not necessarily tied to their violent affiliation. This reinforces the earlier assertion that such categories themselves are false constructs.

Table 74: Values of All Research Subjects

Value	Frequency among all formers	Former Gang Member	Former Right-wing Extremist	Former Terrorist
Intellect	22%	Rodriguez Williams	--	--
Heroism	22%	--	Michaels	O'Doherty
Public Service	22%	--	--	O'Doherty Shoebat
Spirituality	33%	--	Husain	Shoebat Kamal
Belonging	55%	Rodriguez Shakur	Husain Michaels Meeink	--
Recognition	66%	Rodriguez Shakur Williams	Husain Meeink	Kamal
Devotion	77%	Shakur Williams	Michaels Meeink	O'Doherty Shoebat Kamal
Strength	100%	Rodriguez Shakur Williams	Husain Michaels Meeink	O'Doherty Shoebat Kamal

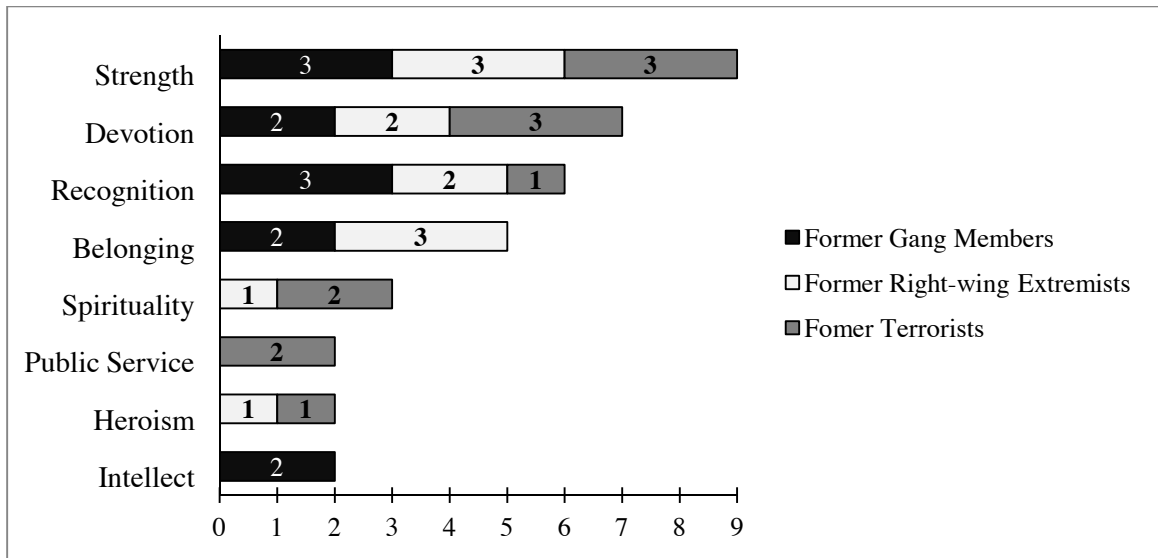


Figure 2: Frequency of Values for Research Subjects

However, all the research subjects did share the value of strength, which I defined earlier as: *the ability to act potently and with moral power, firmness, and courage; power*. Upon investigation, I came to conclude this value of strength is the most important foci of meaning making related to their prior violent acts and their transformation to nonviolence. For all of them, as shown in Table 75, strength was defined through discourses that justified violence as necessary for self-defense and survival, often to protect against an evil Other. Thus, it appears their violent acts were directly tied to their language of the Other. This suggests that transforming the discourse around the Other may disrupt the discourse around strength that justifies violence.

Table 75: Initial "Strength" Discourses

Former	Initial discourse around "strength"
Rodriguez	Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican,

	and trump any moral rules
Shakur	Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs
Williams	Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right
Husain	Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate—which can then wage jihad—is the only way to protect against the threat of the West
Michaels	Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out
Meeink	Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out
O’Doherty	Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression
Shoebat	Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression
Saleem	Acts of terrorism against all of Islam’s enemies is the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire

These findings coincide with the literature reviewed earlier on the association between language of the Other and violence. In her work on conflict narratives, Cobb explores violence through what anthropologist Allen Feldman calls an “origin myth,” which accounts for the violence of the present as a function of the acts of the Other (Cobb 2003b). As such, it externalizes responsibility onto that Other and justifies actions of preemptive violence as self-defense (Cobb 2003b). Cobb suggests that narratives in the form of origin myths provide the basis for identity, making violence a function of the efforts to protect and consolidate that identity (Cobb 2003b). In the case of formers, their “origin myth” about the Other was indeed directly tied to their identity through the value

of strength, a key component of their identity. Their discourses around the Other also reflected some of the characteristics Cobb identifies as predictive of authorizing violence towards an Other, summarized below (Cobb 2003b):

- **Time** – focused on past and not likely to contain description of future;
- **Characters** – few roles or characters, either victims or victimizers;
- **Causality** – linear logic that attributes responsibility to the acts of the Other and passive reactive positions for the speaker;
- **Values/themes** – hopelessness, suffering, justice, rights, vengeance, in-group loyalty.

These elements are clearly visible in the discourse around the Other held by the formers, as shown in Table 76.

Table 76: Initial "Other" Discourses

Former	Initial Language of the Other
Rodriguez	Whites were hostile and would never accept or respect Mexicans.
Shakur	Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first. Anyone outside of gangs (“civilian”) is not to be trusted.
Williams	Cops would do everything in their power to lock you up or even kill you. Rival gangs are the enemy and out to get you, so you have to get them first.
Husain	Non-Muslims were the enemy and partial Muslims were an obstacle.
Michaels	Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic; Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too; The United States government and all the authorities affiliated with it –including local cops –were bought over by the Jewish conspiracy and working against the white race.
Meeink	Non-whites are plotting to exterminate the white race in a vast conspiracy of epic genocidal proportions.

	Whites who did not help in the race war were traitors and considered the enemy too.
O'Doherty	The British authorities were monstrous and repressive, and their terrorist actions against Ireland were supported by Protestant authorities. British and Protestant civilians were innocent and should not be targeted under no circumstance.
Shoebat	All Jews and Westerners are the enemy because they are seeking to destroy Islam and need to be fought against.
Saleem	Jews, Westerners, and Shia are denying or perverting Islam and seeking to destroy it; they need to be fought against in the name of Allah.

Other values popularly held among my research subjects, although not uniformly, included devotion (held by seven of the nine), recognition (held by six of the nine) and belonging (held by five of the nine). The research subjects' affiliation with a violent organization provided the discourses to define these values, suggesting a new group affiliation may be necessary to replace the benefits being granted by the violent group. This coincides with the understanding that personal identity is constituted out of social identity; "we think of ourselves, first, within a social interactive context, as member of some social group, before coming to think of ourselves as unique individuals within those groups" (Barresi 2006, 203). The formers who shared the value of spirituality—Husain, Shoebat, and Saleem—were all involved in violent organizations that professed to be religious. For these three formers, this value of spirituality was an important value around which others organized. Therefore, once the discourses defining this value came into question—which happened through exposure to violence, hypocrisy, alternative religious beliefs, and positive experiences with the Other—it quickly led to a questioning of all the

other discourses. This suggests the discourse around spirituality is an important one to disrupt when dealing with individuals affiliated with religious violent organizations.

5.1.2 Disruption

During the disruption stage, common themes emerged among my research subjects; these patterns are depicted in Table 77, with those shared by all shown in bold.

The trends are also depicted graphically to emphasize their frequency in Figure 3.

Table 77: Trends in Disruption

Transformation Stages	Elements found in Case Studies	Frequency
Stage 2: Disruption	Questioning discourse about the Other	100%
	Exposure to violence	66%
	(Self-reflection in some new setting)	100%
	Self-reflection during school/college	33%
	Self-reflection in prison	44%
	Self-reflection in new country	11%
	Self-reflection during stay with Christian family	11%
	Support of writing/reading	44%
	Support of reading	100%
	Shift to active model of selfhood	100%
	Exposure to new people and ideas	100%

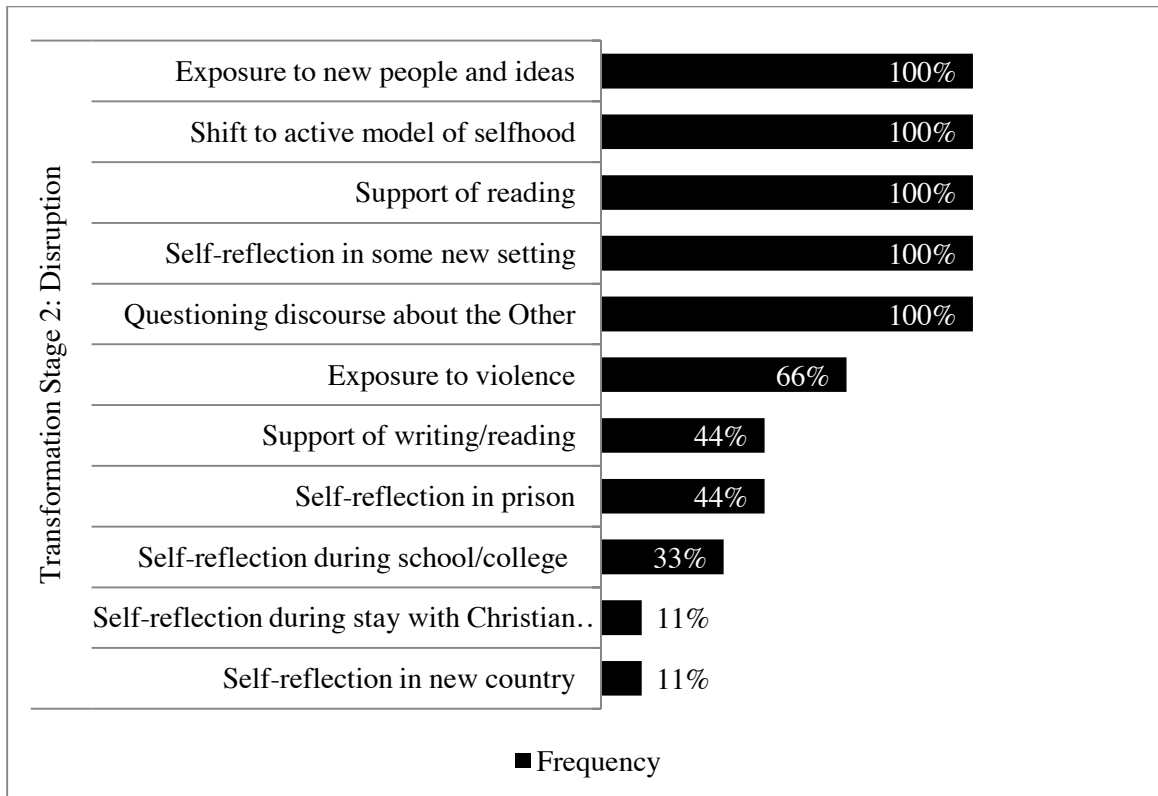


Figure 3: Frequency of Trends in Stage 2

The stage of disruption can be understood through the aforementioned literature on counter narratives that asserts openings are created when experiences do not match the master narratives that have been assimilated (Andrews 2002). At this juncture, questioning results in order to finding meaning outside of the emplotments that are ordinarily available (Andrews 2002). For my research subjects, a few common elements led to this disparity. For example, all of the research subjects engaged with individuals or were exposed to new discourses that challenged their dominant discourse about the Other. Often this occurred by interacting with a person from that category in a way that left a positive impression. This included even surprising circumstances such as when

Williams started to like some of the prison guards and cops while he was in prison, despite his strong discourse positioning them as the evil Other. Other times their doubt grew after being exposed to discourses that framed the Other in a different way, such as when Saleem learned from Christian doctrine that all humans were of equal value and loved by God. This suggests that a key focus for disruptive efforts should be discourses around the Other.

The next most common source of disruption was a growing exposure to violence, which led six of the nine to question their discourses around strength that justified such actions. The effect of violence leading to such disruption was described as exhaustion, psychic toll, burnout, and guilt. As noted earlier, this suggests that dominant discourses justifying violence can be disrupted when violence reaches a high enough level. Other complicating actions that occurred on an individual basis included hypocrisy, becoming a father, infighting among group members, and feelings of being devalued by the group, among others. It appears each research subject had a variety of different influences that served as complicating factors, all of which seemed to work together and reinforce a growing sense of doubt.

While the research subjects were questioning their discourses, they were also placed into a new environment or situation that provided them with new circumstances. These conditions included copious free time, exposure to diverse and new sources of information, and exposure to new people and thinking. For many of them, this new situation was prison, where they had a lot of free time and a growing, newfound interest in learning. All of those who found themselves in prison, in fact, ended up reading and

studying voraciously. Reading was another common theme held by them all. For others who found themselves in school or college, they likewise used the conditions of that situation to delve into books and explore new ideas. Shoebat was unique; his new situation was America, where he became exposed to Christians and Christian theology, first through his American family and then through friends. Similarly, Saleem found himself in America but his particular unique situation was his stay with a Christian family during his recovery from a car accident. He recounts how that period of healing was a time of reflective exploration.

All these examples point to the importance of liminal space, a concept highlighted earlier by the literature on narrative change dynamics. This literature points out how extremely difficult it is to break out of stories, so often there need to be certain conditions to allow this to happen that are made available through a liminal space. Turner explains that within this space “reversals” occur, referring to a reversing of markers people normally use to identify themselves (Turner 1987). This occurred for my research subjects in reference to their evolving formulations of the Other, driven by new interactions and understandings granted them in their liminal space. For example, when Husain went off to college, he was forced to associate with non-Muslims—including professors he admired—and found they were not hateful towards Muslims as his discourse had asserted, which triggered doubt that continued throughout his college years. While Meeink was in prison, Hispanic and African American gang members reached out to him despite knowing he was a Neo-Nazi, and he admits that he started to

befriend and like them. This suggests that a key focus for disruptive efforts should be creating conditions to foster these types of liminal spaces.

In addition to reversals concerning the Other, what also occurred in this liminal space was intensive self-reflection, sometimes accompanied by prolific writing. This element appears to be key in their eventual transformation and it is likely that without it, they would have found ways to suppress or deny their growing doubts. Instead, they undertook critical historical reflection, thereby critically analyzing their discourses (Burr 1995, 90). By doing so, they were able to understand the meta-narratives and claims of universal truth they had embraced, interrogate these orthodoxies, and eventually resist their hegemony (Richmond 2008). This coincides with Gullestad's assertion that such a move represents a transition from a passive model of selfhood—that looks to outside authority—to an active model that looks within for authority (Gullestad 1996, 176) Such a transition is akin to what Bruner calls a “turning point,” which represents a point in which an individual frees themselves in their self-consciousness from a previous belief, conviction, or thought (Bruner 2001, 32). Bruner believes these turning points represent a movement towards “narratorial consciousness” (Bruner 2001, 33).

Harvard developmental psychologist Robert Kegan has done studies on the transformation of consciousness that could shed more light onto this type of transition (Kegan 1982). Whereas traditional developmental models of growth have focused on childhood and adolescence—given the traditional assumption that it is much more difficult and rare for adults to change—Kegan posits a continuous evolving upward movement of consciousness throughout the entire life span, into and throughout adult

development (Debold 2002). This process is enabled through the subject-object relationship, the “crux of the transformation of consciousness,” which describes what we identify with as subject and what we consider to be object (Debold 2002). According to him, the more our consciousness evolves, the more we become truly objective (Debold 2002). In this light, critical historical reflection can be understood as an act of becoming more objective about oneself and what we otherwise experience subjectively—including and specifically the discourses one has adopted. This suggests that providing individuals with ways to evolve their consciousness towards a more assertive, critical, and self-reflection “narratorial” kind could possibly support the process of renunciation.

In the cases of my research subjects, their evolution was prompted through the availability of a liminal space that enabled them to open to alternative identity discourses. Simultaneously, they became exposed to new ideas by engaging with diverse people and through reading. In addition to reading, some also deepened their self-reflection through writing. Most often this consisted of journaling but sometimes also included letters to others and essays. Rodriguez even wrote poetry and started writing a book during this period in his life. It is likely writing added more creativity into their reflective pursuits, something Haynes has singled out as being central to the process of resistance. “The working of the imagination on the discursive and experiential resources available to the individual becomes a form of micro-political action and a potential subversion of dominant discursive formations,” he says (Haynes 2006).

Reading, talking, reflecting, and writing all worked to expose the research subjects to new ideas, and hence new discourses. The new information started to

challenge the dominant discourses within which they were embedded, and to provide them with alternative ones. In fact, in studying the epistemology of extremism, political scientist Russell Hardin (2002) found an individual’s knowledge becomes massively distorted by being a member of an extremist group. One’s skewed epistemology comes from lack of contact with and hence lack of accurate knowledge of relevant others (Hardin 2002). The group purposefully orchestrates such isolation since such ignorance requires the isolation that allows spurious beliefs to escape challenge. The group also works to protect its members from the intrusions of the broader society since it knows their ideas can prevail only by keeping people ignorant of alternatives (Hardin 2002). Suppressing knowledge is the route to power since “questioning could be the death of fanatical beliefs” (Hardin 2002). This suggests that enhancing knowledge and exposing individuals to broader society can support the process of renunciation.

5.1.3 Resolution

Certain patterns became apparent among my research subjects in their resolution stage; these patterns are depicted in Table 78, with those shared by all shown in bold. The trends are also depicted graphically to emphasize their frequency in Figure 4.

Table 78: Trends in Resolution

Transformation Stages	Elements found in Case Studies	Frequency
Stage 3: Resolution	(Stories of some type that aided in deciding to change)	100%
	Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations	22%
	Stories of spiritual figures who went through transformations	11%
	Stories of others who left their organization	22%
	Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity	33%
	Stories of forgiveness	11%

	Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity	100%
	Safe distance from old colleagues	100%
	Emotional and logistical support from friends/family	100%
	Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence	55%
	Highly polarized Self/Other	11%
	Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with	33%

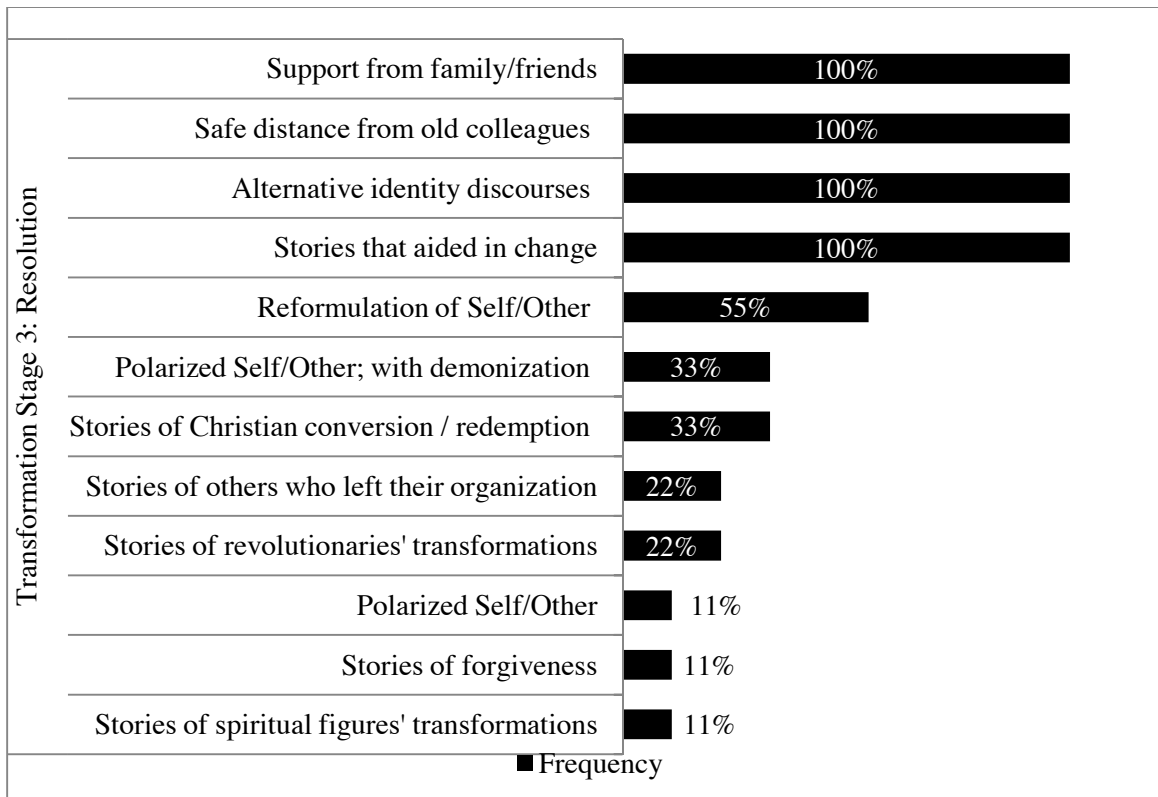


Figure 4: Frequency of Trends in Stage 3

After being exposed to the complicating actions outlined in the disruption stage, my research subjects could have chosen a variety of different ways to make meaning out of the doubts that arose. In fact, they actively repressed these doubts for a while and could have conceivably never acted upon them. However, at some point, they were

prompted to make a decision to leave. As expressed earlier, a post-structuralist approach would argue that this decision was grounded in discursive dynamics (Freeman 2001). It was the exposure to discourses around change—supporting discourses—that transmuted their doubts into a decision to leave their group. There were remarkable similarities among these supporting discourses, which are outlined in Table 79.

Table 79: Supporting Discourses

Former	Supporting Discourses	References
Rodriguez	Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous	Revolutionary figures like Malcolm X
Shakur	Leaving behind criminal life to engage in political and social activism was heroic and courageous	Revolutionary figures like Malcolm X
Williams	The most wretched in society can be redeemed, find peace, and reach out to others to lift them up	God
	Individuals with sordid pasts have successfully changed themselves and become inspirational heroes who did great things for society	St. Paul, Moses, King David and Saint Augustine; imprisoned men who professed to be revolutionaries (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Rastafarian, ex-drug addict, or former gang member); black men, especially Malcolm X
	Black activists are more admirable than black gang members	Revolutionary figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X
Husain	It is a sign of moral courage and strength to transition from radical to spiritual Islam	Sheikh Hamza Yusuf
	Criticizing established norms and beliefs to the point of rejection is admirable and a mark of a mature man	Philosophy teachers

Michaels	It is understandable to move on and start focusing on one's own family after having been involved with the white power movement for so long	Band-mates who left
	There are people who would forgive and accept you despite what you've done	People he met at raves; his friend Paul
Meeink	God forgives you even when you can't.	God
O'Doherty	It is possible in Catholicism to be redeemed and forgiven of past sins if one repents and works for reconciliation	Catholic tradition of conversions, starting the with story of the good thief who repented on the cross; St. Paul; Paul VI's Paenitemini about the concept of conversion and repentance
	It is common and understood that some volunteers will decide to leave the IRA	Long tradition of people leaving the IRA
Shoebat	Questioning Islam meant you could no longer be trusted and you had no choice but to leave	His Arab family's stance against apostasy
	Christians would accept him, even as an ex-Muslim and ex-terrorist, and he could find redemption in Jesus Christ	Christian relatives, Christian theology, new Christian friends
Saleem	You can be forgiven of your past sins and find redemption and healing in Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ; Christian theology of forgiveness and redemption

Common themes emerge that suggest the qualities of discourses that can enable such a decision to renounce violence and one's group affiliation. The concept of replacing violence with political activism—present for Rodriguez, Shakur, and Williams—appears compelling. The concept of converting to new beliefs—present for Husain, Michaels, and O'Doherty—emerges as powerful. The assurance of forgiveness, acceptance, and redemption—present for Williams, Michaels, Meeink, O'Doherty,

Shoebat, and Saleem—is particularly resonant. Meanwhile, exemplars and role models, both real and historical, seem to have a huge impact in communicating these discourses through an embodiment of their message. Certain key role models are commonly referenced, such as Malcolm X, St. Augustine, and St. Paul. Other powerful role models are friends or associates. This suggests that discourses, especially when packaged through the examples of real people, around political activism, changes in beliefs, and redemption are powerful means of prompting renunciation.

This concept of supporting discourses as prompting renunciation of violence is new. Maruna, who studied the life narratives of ex-convicts to understand how they make sense of their lives and “go straight” after years of offending, found prevalent in his studies the process of “relinquishing an old self” and “finding a meaning for going straight” (Maruna 2001; Maruna and Dwyer 2011; Maruna and King 2009; Maruna 1997a; Maruna and Ramsden 2004; Maruna 1997b). These two elements appear to speak to the functioning of supporting discourses as I have outlined them.

The presence of supporting discourses was not enough to fully enable the decision to change for my research subjects, however. After all, this change was specifically in reference to renouncing violence and so a discourse tailored to this end was needed. Since the value of strength was the foci of meaning making related to violence, this was accomplished through a replacement discourse defining strength as something nonviolent. This replacement discourse—a type of alternative identity discourse—was composed of both latent discourses that re-emerged, as well as completely new ones. Common themes involved the concept of nonviolence, social justice, political activism,

compassion, education, morality, surrender, and faith, as depicted in Table 80. The most common sources of these alternative identity discourses around strength were religious theology (such as Christianity and Sufi Islam) and political ideology (such as the Chicano movement and the New Afrikan movement). This suggests that discourses around these themes can be compelling substitutes for discourse driving violence.

Table 80: Alternative "Strength" Discourses

Former	Old Discourse around "Strength"	Alternative Discourse/s around "Strength"
Rodriguez	Violence and aggression through gang life are the only way to survive as a Mexican, and trump any moral rules	The Chicano movement and political activism provides a way to fight against oppression The young generation needs to understand that violence and gangs are not sources of strength There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances
Shakur	Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; otherwise you become victimized by other gangs	Strength can be achieved by becoming a politically active person who agitates, educates and organizes, and the New Afrikan movement is a vehicle to do so There are established moral rules regardless of the difficult circumstances
Williams	Violence and aggression are the only way to survive, and trump any moral rules; might makes right	Compassion, spirituality, and education represent true strength
Husain	Subversion leading to a violent military coup to establish a Caliphate—which can then wage jihad—is the only way to protect against the threat of the West	An education and working towards reconciling the Islamic faith with the West are true sources of strength
Michaels	Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the	Love, kindness, and compassion are sources of real strength

	genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out	
Meeink	Violence, especially pre-emptive aggression, is the only way to protect the white race from the genocidal plans of Jews and other non-whites to wipe all whites out	Being honest, facing yourself, and surrendering to God are sources of real strength
O'Doherty	Armed resistance is the only way to fight for the Irish cause and defend against British terrorist aggression	True courage and strength lay in engaging the democratic process and pursuing talks and reconciliation Using violence, even for a just cause, was immoral because it would always endanger innocent human life
Shoebat	Armed resistance against Israel is the only way to fight for the Palestinian cause and defend against Jewish terrorist aggression	True courage and strength lay in being a Christian and fervent supporter of Israel True strength comes from publicly uncovering the lies and deception of Islamists, none of whom can be trusted since being a true Muslim means committing jihad
Saleem	Acts of terrorism against all of Islam's enemies is the only way to bring about a worldwide Islamic empire	True courage and strength lay in being a Christian and having faith in Christ bringing about peace on earth

In addition to new discourses around strength, the formers embraced alternative identity discourses for the rest of their values. Since the discourses defining their values that constituted their old identity were all linked together, replacing one naturally called for the replacement of the rest. For Husain, Shoebat, and Saleem, the replacing of discourses around strength occurred simultaneously with the embracing of new discourses around spirituality since both values were interconnected for them. For the others, this replacement process proceeded more gradually. All of them eventually embraced a new group affiliation that exposed them to alternative identity discourses that

aided them in this process. As mentioned earlier, my research subjects had derived discourses around their values from their previous violent group affiliation, so it made sense that they would embrace a new group for new values.

The groups my research subjects turned to were all involved in some sort of service work, often related to advocacy and social justice. All the formers also expressed the desire to prevent others from following the same path as they had gone. Rodriguez has become a speaker on issues of violence and gangs and visits prisons, juvenile facilities, schools, and homeless shelters throughout the world (L. J. Rodriguez 2013). Shakur has written extensively and spoken out against gangs (“Kody Scott Biography” 2013). Williams authored a series of anti-gang children’s books and facilitation gang truces before his execution in 2005 (“Stanley Tookie Williams Biography” 2013). Husein co-founded the first counter-extremism think tank *Quilliam Foundation*, which works to prevent future extremists from joining radical Islamist movements (Husain 2010). Michaels works with other former US white supremacists and former gang members to produce a monthly online magazine called *Life After Hate* (LAH), and developed a character development movement called *Kindness Not Weakness* (KNW) that addresses bullying (Allen 2012). Meeink founded *Harmony Through Hockey* as a way to use sports to bring youths of all races together (Meeink 2013). O’Doherty has continued to actively call for a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland through public engagements and writings (O’Doherty 2013). Shoebat has become a speaker against Islamism and travels worldwide advocating how to implement a peaceful solution to the Middle East tensions

(Shoebat 2013). Saleem has become actively involved in speaking engagements about the threat of Islamism (Saleem 2013).

The importance of alternative identity discourses for formers to rebuild their identity has been supported by literature on desistance. In Maruna's studies, the aforementioned processes of "relinquishing an old self" and "finding a meaning for going straight" were followed by the process of "finding a meaning for going straight" and "accepting conventional values and generating new goals and plans" (Maruna 2001). These concepts point to the need for a new self, complete with new values, goals, and plans. Studies in criminology have long established that long-term desistance involves changes at the level of personal identity (Maruna and Dwyer 2011). Lofland refers to one of the biggest challenges for reformed ex-offenders as the "horrors of identity nakedness" in which being completely stripped of one's identity is a "fate worse than death" (J. Lofland 1969, 288). Maruna found that to successfully maintain abstinence from crime, ex-offenders needed to *make sense* of their lives (Maruna 2001, 7). Each needed a "logical, believable, and respectable story" about who he or she was, and why they were going straight (Maruna 2001, 86). Such a story creates a new identity for ex-offenders. This appears to be how alternative identity discourses function. In the case of my research subjects, these created for them a new identity steeped in conventional values, provided meaning for them through new goals, and gave them new plans for the future.

Studies have also shown a new identity based in generative pursuits to be important in maintaining desistance from crime (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1998). Such activities refer to what psychologist Erik Erikson has called "generativity," or "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” (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1998). Becoming a counselor, volunteer, or youth worker exposed ex-offenders to a range of benefits. Taking on the “helper role” relieved some of the stigma commonly associated with ex-offenders by framing themselves as valuable contributors to society (Maruna and Dwyer 2011). These activities provided “a sense of purpose and meaning, allowing them to redeem themselves from their past mistakes, and legitimizing the person’s claim to have changed” (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2004, 133). In such roles, ex-offenders were more driven to remain “clean” in order to convince others they have changed.

The overall literature on desistance echoes such findings. Toch has referred to this type of activity as “altruistic activity” that is “designed not for profit or gain but to assist some underprivileged people who stand in manifest need of assistance” (Toch 2000, 270). Lofland argues that this type of pursuit “serves to make acceptable, explicable and even meritorious the guilt-laden, ‘wasted’ portions of an actor’s life” (J. Lofland 1969, 287). LeBel notes this orientation can transform individuals from being part of the “problem” into part of the “solution” by giving their time in the service of helping others who are less far along in the recovery and redemption process (LeBel 2008).

Maruna found that in some cases, ex-offenders moved beyond personal service work and embraced activism (Maruna and Dwyer 2011). By doing so, they turned their personal stories into social action. Scholars found benefits specific to this type of advocacy work, to include providing individuals with meaning, purpose, and significance

(Maruna and Dwyer 2011). Wahl found that “involvement in advocacy and speaking out are self-enhancing, and the courage and effectiveness shown by such participation help to restore self-esteem damaged by stigma” (Wahl 1999, 476). In his study of ex-prisoners, LeBel found that an activist or advocacy orientation is positively correlated with one’s psychological well-being (LeBel 2008). Lastly, Maruna also found the desire among ex-offenders to convert their life stories into a book to be common (Maruna 2001, 104). This suggests that writing a memoir could serve the function of a generative pursuit, which brings with it all the aforementioned benefits.

The research subjects in this study also adopted generative pursuits; all became involved with some form of personal service work and/or advocacy. The example of Meeink, however, highlights the consequences of not undertaking such activities. After Meeink’s renunciation, he was the only one of all the formers that did not immediately embrace generative pursuits. He embraced a new discourse around strength, but otherwise was without alternatives for defining his other values. During this limbo period, he felt incredibly alone and abandoned and eventually got involved in using and selling drugs. It was only after the Oklahoma City bombing that he got out of this self-destructive phase, and was exposed to new, alternative identity discourses from which he could construct a new narrative identity system. The shock of this attack caused him to seek out ways to help. Eventually, he became involved in advocacy work with the ADL, and through them and his work he embraced new discourses around his values of devotion, recognition, and belonging. With that, he found meaning and purpose and happiness in his life. This suggests that alternative identity discourses that involve

generative pursuits may help formers reinforce their new identity, and in doing so may also prevent recidivism.

Another element of their new identity was a new discourse around the Other. In the previous section on initial identity formation, I highlighted certain features Cobb (2003) identifies as predictive of violence toward an Other, features that were present in the discourses of my research subjects. Cobb also identified characteristics of stories about the Other that foster coexistence, which can be summarized as follows (Cobb 2003b):

- **Time** – accounts of the present and future, which are more richly described and figure more prominently;
- **Characters** – diverse array of characters in the narrator’s accounts
 - Blurred boundaries between victims and victimizers; “victims” transform themselves into “survivors” and transform victimizers into characters to be pitied for a host of historical, moral, and social reasons;
 - Characters exhibit care for others.
- **Causality** – circular logic connects actions of the narrator to the actions of others such that responsibility and agency are not externalized;
- **Values/themes** – overarching themes include hope, charity, justice, growth and development, participation, learning (Cobb 2003b).

As a result of their renunciation, the discourses of the research subjects transformed, so theoretically their new discourses around the Other should have reflected these characteristics highlighted by Cobb. Not all did, however. Those who did certainly

had the elements identified by Cobb, as shown below. Rodriguez, Williams, Michaels, Meeink, and O’Doherty all embraced new language of the Other that was built on interdependence and tolerance, in which no category of persons was demonized and victimizers were pitied. The theme of justice was strong in the case of Rodriguez, who positioned injustice as a universal enemy that oppresses all peoples, regardless of race or ethnicity. The theme of growth and learning was strong in the case of Michaels, whose discourse revolved around learning about those who are different and healing. The elements of care and blurred boundaries between characters were most evident in the cases of Meeink and O’Doherty, whose discourses were about how all humans are equal and deserving of respect and understanding.

Table 81: Alternative "Other" Discourses

Former	New Language of the Other
Rodriguez	All people, regardless of race, who struggle with injustice in America are victims and compatriots.
Shakur	Whites, the state, and institutionalized racism are actively oppressing African Americans.
Williams	Hating others was not worth it because it might disturb inner peace.
Husain	To be British meant treating all individuals with equal respect regardless of race or religion. Islamists are the “enemy” because they are perverting Islam and risk endangering the liberal values of British and Western society.
Michaels	One must try to understand others who are different, and this also leads to healing.
Meeink	All humans are equal, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc.
O’Doherty	All are victims, regardless of which side they found themselves on, and deserve respect and understanding.

Shoebat	Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win.
Saleem	Islamists are the enemy because they seek to destroy Israel, hate Jews and Christians, and will wage violent jihad until they win. People of all faiths and ethnicities are equal before the eyes of God

Husain, Shakur, Saleem, and Shoebat, however, all embraced new but still polarizing discourses about the Other. Moreover, Husain, Saleem, and Shoebat positioned Islamists and Islamic terrorists as the “enemy,” demonizing their former colleagues and former association in general. The demonization may have helped them strengthen and solidify their separation from their old group affiliation, although it did not appear to have been done with that intention in mind. Unlike these four, Shakur did not demonize his old group after he left gang life but instead shifted the blame onto whites and the systemic injustices he believed they inflicted upon African Americans. For all five, their language of the Other changed in content but in form remained highly polarized, absolutist, and grounded in victimization. However, since their value of strength was redefined through new discourses that did not involve violence, their efforts against the new Other remained in the realm of nonviolent actions. This suggests that evolving discourses around the Other away from demonization and victimization is highly difficult, and perhaps the focus should be on first evolving discourses related to violence.

Lastly, the two other elements that supported and strengthened the new identity of my research subjects were the availability of emotional and logistical support from friends and family, and being a safe distance away from old colleagues. Since it is difficult to break out of dominant discourses because of how they are tied to social

arrangements and practices of powerful groups, these factors likely mitigated potential costs such as retribution (Burr 1995, 152–3). Furthermore, leaving such groups meant the loss of benefits naturally granted by a group, such as a sense of community, belonging, and both emotional and logistical support. Therefore, having these replaced through friends and family appeared to be an important enabling factor. Maruna also found the existence of intimate or valued connections outside of criminal subcultures to be an important element in successful reform stories (Maruna 1997a, 84).

5.1.4 Summary

These findings represent trends and patterns identified in the narratives of nine formers. Overall, these narratives describe them as individuals affiliated with violent organizations who have constructed their identity through absolutist discourses that are both strong in their simplicity, but also fragile and vulnerable to disruption. Their narratives also highlight the presence of both repressive dominant discourses and latent discourses that make the initial narrative identity system more vulnerable to destabilization. Meanwhile, this process of disruption appears to occur in a nonlinear fashion as described by narrative change dynamics, in which added complexity can be regarded as a perturbation that disrupts the coherence of the current narrative system, and could lead to a new formulation.

At the same time, this study does not assume such a pattern is exclusive to those with violent affiliations. Narratives associated with formers of other types of rigid identity systems that are nonviolent, such as fundamentalist religious identities, may also

follow this pattern. Therefore, further research of other examples would be necessary to determine if this pattern applies to other types of identity formulations.

The findings in this study also highlight that discourses around the value of strength appear to be the most important foci of meaning making related to the formers' prior violent acts and their transformation to nonviolence. The prevalent use of drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms highlights how such substances could empower or at least prolong the existence of dominant discourses justifying violence. However, the narratives also show that such discourses can be disrupted when violence reaches a high enough level and when there are underlying latent discourses. Meanwhile, discourses around strength that emphasize themes of nonviolence, social justice, political activism, compassion, education, morality, surrender, and faith—grounded in either religious theology or political ideology—may be compelling substitutes for discourses on strength that drive violence. At the same time, the narratives of some formers suggest discourses driving violence are more deeply entrenched, and hence difficult to disrupt, when held by the majority of society. A circuitous way to disrupt discourses driving violence may be to first transform the discourse around the Other, which is directly tied to it. But, as the cases of the research subjects show, evolving discourses around the Other away from demonization and victimization is also highly difficult. In addition to discourses around strength that drive violence and discourses about the Other, discourses around spirituality appear important when dealing with individuals affiliated with religious violent organizations who renounce.

These findings around the role of strength as a focus of meaning making related to violence and nonviolence may be exclusive to those renouncing violence, unlike the previous findings that could be reflective in other types of identity change. However, it remains unclear whether this pattern is exclusive to formers as defined in this study—former gang members, former right-wing extremists, and former terrorists—or whether it could also apply to former criminals. Again, more research would be necessary to determine this.

Meanwhile, the type of critical historical reflection that leads to questioning appears more likely to occur in a liminal space conducive to reading, reflection, and writing. Otherwise, individuals with growing doubts may simply suppress or deny them rather than allow them to unfold. Critical historical reflection also appears to entail an evolution of consciousness towards a more assertive, critical, and self-reflective “narratorial” consciousness. This suggests that enhancing knowledge and critical thinking skills may support the process of renunciation. At the same time, it remains possible that such a change could also occur without these aforementioned conditions. It is plausible that these conditions were specific to the type of research individuals I examined, all of whom were more prone towards reflection, reading, and writing—intellectual pursuits—by their nature, and as evidenced by the fact they choose to write their memoirs. More research would need to be done on other formers—especially those who did not write memoirs and are less intellectually inclined—to see if their transformation coincided with such conditions.

Most importantly, discourses — which I have termed supporting discourses — around political activism, belief conversion, and redemption packaged through the examples of real people may provide individuals a way to translate their doubts into an actual choice to change. Meanwhile, discourses — which I have termed alternative identity discourses — to rebuild identity that involve generative pursuits are also important in that they appear to allow formers to reinforce their new identity, find new meaning and values, and prevent recidivism. Often these replacement discourses are found in new groups of affiliation. Lastly, the act of writing a memoir appears to represent a form of generative activity that allows formers to emphasize their new identity to themselves and to the wider community and society, a topic I will explore in the following chapter.

5.2 Comparing “Disengagement” to “Renunciation”

The purpose of my research was to look at the relationship of discourse to this process that I termed renunciation; however, I also want to highlight how some of these findings are reminiscent of the literature from the positivist traditions around disengagement outlined in the literature review. My intention in doing so is to possibly show a corollary perspective on how this process may unfold and overlay some of the social constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives onto what the findings from the positivist traditions have shown. Table 82 depicts a comparison of how the two see this process as unfolding.

Table 82: Comparison of "Disengagement" to "Renunciation"

Disengagement of Terrorists, Right-Wing Extremists, and Gang Members	Narrative Identity Construction, Disruption, and Reconstruction
	<u>Stage 1: Formation of Initial Identity</u> Absolutist dominant discourses <i>Presence of latent discourses</i> <i>Repressive dominant discourse</i> <i>Extensive drug/alcohol use</i>
Stage 1: Trigger	<u>Stage 2: Disruption</u> Questioning discourse about the Other Self-reflection in some new setting
Stage 2: Cost-Benefit Analysis	Support of reading Shift to active model of selfhood Exposure to new people and ideas <i>Exposure to violence</i>
Stage 3: Turning Point	<i>Self-reflection in new country</i> <i>Self-reflection in school/library</i> <i>Self-reflection in prison</i> <i>Support of writing/reading</i>
Stage 4: Disengagement	<u>Stage 3: Resolution</u> Stories of some type that aided in deciding to change Alternative identity discourses to rebuild narrative identity
Stage 5: New Identity	Safe distance from old colleagues Emotional and logistical support from friends/family <i>Stories of revolutionaries who went through transformations</i>
Stage 6: Likelihood of recidivism	<i>Stories of spiritual figures who went through transformations</i> <i>Stories of others who left their organization</i> <i>Stories of conversion and redemption found in Christianity</i> <i>Stories of forgiveness</i> <i>Reformulation of Self/Other around interdependence</i> <i>Highly polarized Self/Other</i> <i>Highly polarized Self/Other, with demonization of those formerly identified with</i>

The positivist studies on disengagement outlined earlier in the review of literature view disengagement as a process spurred on by some trigger that precipitates a cognitive opening by highlighting an inconsistency in the person's current worldview. Meanwhile,

the initial findings of this study that represent the discursive view of renunciation frame this through the dynamics of narrative change, viewing the “trigger” as an insertion of complexity that acts as a perturbation to an absolutist narrative. Both views agree that this can open the individual to doubt and receptivity to new and different ideas. Both also view the exposure to escalating violence as a common source of this occurrence. Additionally, both point out that experiencing kindness and compassion by the Other can serve as a trigger or perturbation. In another similarity, both views highlight the importance of setting as a factor and point to the experience of moving to a new place or going to prison as an influential factor driving this process.

Regarding the actual decision making process, the positivist view sees individuals as undergoing a period of questioning and reflection. They frame this as a process of strategic calculation, in which the individual embarks on a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether they should stay or go. This view is based on rational choice theory and predicts that if the individual believes that increased participation and commitment will not produce the continued desirable outcomes in the future, they will likely abandon the group. The discursive view of renunciation, however, sees this period as a time of critical historical reflection, very different from a cost-benefit analysis. Instead of strategically calculating what course of action provides the most benefits, this view sees the individual as interrogating their assumptions and exploring alternative identity discourses. This study has also highlighted the importance of a liminal space in enabling such reflection. Such exploring will likely continue without a definitive choice to leave, however, unless the individual comes across supporting discourses around political

activism, belief conversion, and/or redemption that enable a definitive decision to leave to be made.

Meanwhile, the presence of alternative identity discourses further supports a decision to change since they enable the individual to embrace a new identity, which is essential for functioning in society. Furthermore, compelling alternative identity discourses can be seen to be powerful factors mitigating what the positivists view as the “exit costs” of leaving. Such “exit costs” include the loss of meaning, purpose, identity, and community previously granted by one’s association with the violent group. The discursive view has found that discourses around generative pursuits are especially powerful in replacing a sense of purpose and meaning, and often come with a new community and role.

In short, there are certain similarities between both perspectives in how the process unfolds, but key differences around how the decision is ultimately made. Both perspectives have something to add, I would argue. My intention in this study was not to discount or override the important work done by positivists in this area. Such a stance would do disservice to this important topic. I echo the sentiments of Bruner about the importance of both the positivist perspective, which he refers to as the paradigmatic mode, and the post-structuralist perspective, which he refers to as the narrative mode (Bruner 2003, 101). In his earlier years, he spoke against the paradigmatic and emphasized the narrative, only to now reverse his stance and honor both. Echoing his sentiments, “surely we can live with the two . . . Indeed, it is when we lose sight of the two in league that our lives narrow” (Bruner 2003, 102). Therefore, in the spirit of Bruner

and others of his mindset, I submit the discursive view of renunciation only to add to the existing knowledge, not to isolate or pit one perspective against the other.

5.3 Implications

These findings highlight certain points of leverage that could be developed by practitioners looking to enable renunciation, as well as by policymakers looking to formulate strategies for intervention programs. In the next section, I explore some of the ways these findings could be implemented by both parties.

5.3.1 Fostering Conditions for Narrative Change

The findings in this study highlight the importance of supporting discourses in enabling the decision to renounce, as well as the importance of alternative identity discourses in providing formers with a new identity. Both are essential components of the renunciation process. Therefore, when looking for practical ways to translate these findings into steps that would prompt renunciation, the main recommendations of this study center on the encouragement and proliferation of both supporting and alternative identity discourses. The findings show that supporting discourses with themes of political activism, belief conversion, and redemption are particularly persuasive. Operationalizing this finding could entail supporting the development and availability of stories with themes of political activism, belief conversion, and redemption, presented in a variety of forms to maximize receptivity, to include films, books, theatre, spoken word, music, and other media. In addition to exposing individuals affiliated with violent organizations to these stories, another recommendation would be to expose them to formers, perhaps via NGOs, who in their own life example embody such themes. Another recommendation

would entail introducing these individuals to sources of alternative identity discourses, which could also be found through interaction with actual formers themselves, as well as stories of those who have renounced and are successful, and perhaps more practical approaches like skills training sessions.

Making alternative identity discourses available around the value of strength to replace violent interpretations with nonviolent and pro-social interpretations could also serve as a helpful aid in encouraging renunciation. These alternatives would include stories that emphasize themes of nonviolence, social justice, political activism, compassion, education, morality, surrender, and faith drawn from political ideology or religious theology. Once again, they could be presented in a variety of media forms to maximize receptivity and delivered via formers who have the best credibility among this audience. Also, providing exposure to the Other in a non-threatening context that highlights their compassion and humanity may, in certain circumstances, disrupt discourses driving violence. This could be done through something like sports activities, the arts, or schooling, which is how some of my research subjects came to know and befriend people formerly known as Other.

Another recommendation would entail creating conditions conducive for critical historical reflection. First and foremost, this would involve the availability of a liminal space conducive to reflection. The types of liminal spaces my research subjects were exposed to included prison, school, college, and a foreign country. It seems beyond the realm of possibility to provide liminal spaces per se, but what is possible is to make supporting and alternative identity discourses available within certain conducive

environments that could function as liminal spaces, such as schools/colleges and prisons. Perhaps the most obvious target for these resources would be prisons, where individuals have the time and space to think, read, and reflect. Many of my research subjects first learned to read while in prison, and many of them came across the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which became a strong influence and ultimately served as a supporting discourse for them. Similarly, such resources could be introduced into schools and colleges, especially since younger individuals may still be testing out their identities. These resources and such engagement could be done by formers themselves, which would likely serve as the most convincing for audiences and also represent a form of generative activity for the formers that would be beneficial for them as well.

In addition to a liminal space, critical historical reflection requires an evolution towards a narratorial consciousness. This entails a type of consciousness that is open to alternative identity discourses and able to critically judge discourses that have become embedded. Such an evolution could be encouraged through the enhancement of narrative competence, specifically the development of strong narrative autonomy. Narrative competence is a concept that refers to the innate human capacity to tell and understand narratives. Psychologists who have studied the development of narrative competence in children have found that by ten, children have mastered the ability to tell causally well-formed stories (Eakin 2008, 27). However, studies have also found that the development of narrative autonomy, or “to have one’s own view and to express it,” emerges differently based on the social models one is exposed to. For example, one model of narrative competence from a middle class community gave children narrative autonomy as a gift

from the adults around them, sending the message that expressing one's view is a natural right. Another model from a working class community withheld narrative autonomy from children, communicating it was something to be earned or defended. The studies found that those from the middle class were much more likely to be comfortable with self-narration (Eakin 2008, 27).

Therefore, the aim here would be to encourage the development of narrative autonomy in order to enable individuals to exercise critical historical reflection. This could include workshops and activities that encourage participants to reflect on and express their views. Specific skills taught could include critical thinking and reading, journaling and other forms of writing, and creative self-expression. Social psychologist James Pennebaker has found that one way to get people to redirect their own narratives is through writing (Pennebaker and Baddeley 2009). He developed what is called the Pennebaker writing technique, in which people wait until they have some distance from a problem, then write about it (Pennebaker and Baddeley 2009). Tested in dozens of experiments, writing exercise helped people redirect interpretations in healthier ways. This and other writing technique could foster reflection for individuals (Griffith 2005). Alternatively, the arts could be a great alternative to more intellectual forms of reflection. Rodriguez found mural painting and poetry writing to be helpful in getting him to reflect about who he was versus who he wanted to be. The arts are likely to be more accessible to certain populations with lower levels of education, and they tend to be more appealing and attractive activities.

More specific ways of encouraging narrative competence and narrative autonomy are areas I highlight for future research. However, I do want to conclude by presenting an interesting area of research related to this topic. Specifically, certain researchers have built systems that support human narrative intelligence, including interactive storytelling systems that are designed to help children think about their own identity (Mateas and Sengers 1999). Marina Umaschi Bers at the MIT Media Laboratory has created a “Narrative Construction Kit,” a computational environment that allows children to put together different elements of their lives through story telling (Bers 1999). Bers sees them as powerful tools to help children and teenagers explore identity and values as dynamic complex constructions (Bers 1999). “My work on narrative construction kits aims at helping people develop a type of intelligence or knowledge that asks and responds to questions such as who am I? What are the values I hold and cherish? What are my roots? Which is my place in the world? Where am I going (Bers 1999)?” This type of resource would likely be particularly useful towards encouraging individuals to critically examine themselves in a way that might lead to renunciation.

5.3.2 Training Formers in Narrative Skills

A more innovative use of formers would entail training them in narrative skills that would empower them to work more effectively with individuals to disrupt their violent narratives, as well as to help construct alternative identities. Formers could be trained in narrative-based conflict resolution skills that would empower them to disrupt entrenched narratives and evolve them towards pro-social narratives of coexistence. Formers with such skills could apply them toward individuals still involved in violence as

an intervention, as well as apply them to individuals who have already renounced violence to aid them in reconstructing their identities.

In working with those still engaged in violence, formers could use externalizing conversations to break down some of the victimization narratives that are foundational in their discourses legitimizing violence. This technique of externalizing conversions, which originates in narrative therapy, involves seeking to separate the person from the problem in order to break down narratives of victimhood (L. White and Taket 2000). Another technique they could employ is story prompting, which involves redirecting people down a particular narrative path with subtle prompts (Wilson 2011b). These skills could also help with healing the “broken narratives” represented by repressive dominant discourses highlighted earlier.

For example, externalizing conversations have been used in the narrative therapy treatment of eating disorders. In this technique, therapists frame the eating disorder as something that has taken over the body of the patient in order to separate the problem from the individual. They refer to it as a “discursive parasite,” something that has possessed a person’s voice to use it for its own purpose (Lock, Epston, and Miasel 2005). To externalize it, therapists work with the patient to objectify the problem and enable them to stop viewing it as “the truth” but see it as constructed in nature (Lock, Epston, and Miasel 2005). The problem is often “personified” in a discursive move of “animating” the problem as agentive (Lock, Epston, and Miasel 2002). By separating anorexia from the person, it becomes possible to ask about anorexia’s tactics of voice, about its rhetorical strategies, the moves it makes, its attempts to cover its tracks in order

to deny its effects (Lock, Epston, and Maisel 2002). In this way, they guide the patient through a Foucaultian analysis of the eating disorder's constitutive nature in order to mobilize resistance to it. In doing so, they hope to encourage the patient to "stop unwittingly reproducing the voice of it, but instead critique, contest and repudiate it" (Lock, Epston, and Miasel 2005).

Anorexia and bulimia may then be regarded as having "voices" of their own, which act as discursive parasites that draw a deal of their sustenance from the dominant discourses in society that are subscribed to by those they attack. Once the problem is divorced from the person, then those attacked by these parasites can, through therapeutic conversations, be helped to find alternative discourse resources that assist them in gaining power to resist these parasitic voices. (Lock, Epston, and Maisel 2002)

This model could be applied to the situation of gang members, right-wing extremists, and terrorists by framing violence as a discursive parasite. The focus of externalizing conversations would be to engage the individuals in examining the effects of violence in their personal lives. As presented in the previous chapter, the experience of violence is traumatic even for hardened individuals, and so this line of questioning could be met with a willingness to listen and explore.

There is currently no intervention program applying narrative therapy skills such as those mentioned above. One model that comes close in that it engages in dialogue is the organization *CeaseFire*, which employs former gang members as "violence interrupters" (Main 2013). Their role is to mediate conflicts and prevent them from escalating into violence ("Cure Violence" 2013). They are not trained in any formal narrative practices, however; moreover, their role is solely focused on immediate disruption rather than lasting change. A more long-term approach would involve

sustained conversations over a period of time, a challenging requirement but not necessarily impossible. *CeaseFire* has found that many of the gang members they work with have doubts and are interested in exploring the option of leaving (“Cure Violence” 2013). However, the way the program model is set up, the workers simply have no ability to focus on individuals in any sort of sustained way.

A better example is the *Violence Prevention Network* in Germany. This program does not employ formers but has been involved in sustained, long-term conversations. It works exclusively with those incarcerated and span across categories to engage young skinheads, Neo-Nazis, and Muslim extremists (Glader 2012). The trainers learn debate-style skills in which they let the offenders talk and then ask them questions that reveal the lack of knowledge or logic on which their views are based (Glader 2012). “It’s like talking to a five-year-old boy and training their vocabulary,” explains the founder of the group (Glader 2012). One technique they use is to talk with the offender about the crime that put them in jail, reconstructing the event in detail, and discussing their actions in a way that evokes the perspective of the victim, their responsibility for the crime, and the impact it made on society. All these elements are natural foundational skills for narrative evolution (Glader 2012). The technique appears to work—the program’s records show 30% recidivism rates, compared to 80% for all juvenile offenders in Germany (Glader 2012).

The *Violence Prevention Network* is one of the more successful models operating today. I would argue that if programs like this would employ formers and train their workers in narrative-based conflict resolution skills, they would become even more

successful. Such programs often have scarce resources, however. Here, the support of government funding could make a big impact.

As mentioned earlier, another area formers could use narrative-based conflict resolution skills is in helping individuals who have renounced violence rebuild their new identities. Some of the skills needed to do successful narrative reconstruction also come from the aforementioned tradition of narrative therapy, which has been highlighted as a powerful avenue of rehabilitation for ex-offenders. Advocates of narrative therapy have suggested correctional clients be formally taught ways to reconstruct “more liberating life narratives” (Henry and Milovanovic 1996, 224). “Narrative is not a cure, but it is a method, a path toward redemption. Redemption lies in . . . a better understanding—an improved epistemology” (O’Reilly 1997, 65). Narrative therapy has been applied to addiction programs as part of the recovery process (Maruna and Ramsden 2004, 138). White calls such programs “language laboratories” through which “addicts learn to change their future via the semantic reconstruction of past and present” (W. L. White 1996). Participants are offered opportunities for mining their own pasts for buried themes and alternative interpretations. White has referred to this process of constructing alternative territories of identity as subordinate storyline development and used it to treat children with trauma. He has found that working with children to develop what they hold precious and what they intend for their lives enables them to experience the stories of their lives anew (M. White 2006).

Although narrative therapists might seem to be those best suited for such work, having trained formers engage with one another might be more successful since they

would likely be trusted more, leading to a greater openness and engagement in the process. The benefits could be mutual, since listening to the stories of others has been found important for maintaining recovery (W. L. White 1996). The benefit for formers working in this capacity was also reflected in the study by Garfunkel of former militants, which found that their metamorphosis into an advocate of peace was a form of “positive post-traumatic growth” (Garfinkel 2007, 14). White also argues that this process of narrative reconstruction needs to occur in settings in which individuals feel part of a community, so ideally, a network of formers doing such work would be created to serve as a safe community of acceptance (W. L. White 1996).

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the trends and patterns that surfaced within the narratives of my research subjects that may point to how the process of narrative identity construction, disruption, and reconstruction functions as it relates to renunciation. The findings suggest that individuals affiliated with violent organizations construct their identity through absolutist discourses that can be disrupted through the insertion of complexity, along the lines of narrative change dynamics. Meanwhile, the presence of repressive dominant discourses and latent discourses appear to make the initial narrative identity system more vulnerable to destabilization.

The findings also highlight that discourses around the value of strength may represent the most important foci of meaning making as it relates to the formers’ prior violent acts and their transformation to nonviolence. If destabilized, these discourses defining strength as violence could be substituted with ones that emphasize strength as

nonviolence, social justice, political activism, compassion, education, morality, surrender, and faith, potentially drawn from political ideology or religious theology. Therefore, a recommendation for practitioners would entail proliferating and exposing individuals to stories with such themes. Also, training formers in narrative skills could position them to disrupt and destabilize such discourses around violence. Alternatively, the findings highlight that a circuitous way to disrupt discourses driving violence may be to first transform the discourse around the Other, which is directly tied to it. Given this, another recommendation would entail the development of activities—such as sporting and arts activities—that expose individuals to those they regard as the Other.

Meanwhile, disruption appears more likely to occur when in a liminal space conducive to reading, reflection, and writing. Additionally, individuals appear to be empowered to question their discourses through a process of critical historical reflection after evolving towards a more assertive, critical, and self-reflective “narratorial” consciousness. A recommendation would include providing conditions conducive to such activities to those in question, perhaps in prisons and schools/colleges. Stimulating questioning and doubt is not enough, however. It appears there is a need for supporting discourses in order to translate doubts into an actual choice to change; common themes include political activism, belief conversion, and redemption. Moreover, alternative identity discourses are necessary in order to rebuild identities, especially discourses around generative pursuits. Therefore, another recommendation for practitioners would include developing, proliferating, and providing discursive resources in both categories.

Next, after comparing the findings from the positivist studies on disengagement outlined in the review of literature with those in this study, a key difference emerged around how the decision to renounce or disengage was understood. The positivist studies assume a rational actor who makes strategic decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, whereas the discursive view in this study presents the decision-making as a process of critical historical reflection, in which an individual interrogates their assumptions and explores alternative identity discourses. A key element of this phase is the presence of liminal space that enables such reflection. A second component to this questioning is the actual choice to change, which is enabled through a supporting discourse. These elements—critical historical reflection, liminal space, supporting discourses—are new concepts that provide insights for understanding this process and potential nodes of influence for practitioners to leverage. Thus, the discursive view of renunciation adds to the overall understanding of this process in a way that can aid practitioners and policymakers.

CHAPTER SIX: FORMERS' MEMOIRS AS A NARRATIVE GENRE

In the previous chapter, I explored what the narrative patterns highlighted might elucidate about the process of renunciation, based on the assumption that the formers' memoirs are an expression, at least to a degree that has relevancy, of their actual experiences. In this chapter, I present another perspective on the possible meaning of their narratives based on my findings that they represent a narrative genre. This brings into question the degree to which their narratives reflect their experiences. Instead of mirroring something primordially basic to their experience, I highlight the possibility that their memoirs adhere to a genre of narrative that is overlaid onto their experiences. This implies that the differences among their experiences are likely hidden by the application of this specific type of narrative genre, which colonizes their stories toward a specific structure. From this perspective, what becomes informative is not necessarily what insights can be gained through the narratives patterns about the renunciation process itself—although these are not necessarily discounted, either—but rather what these patterns tell us about this particular form of narrative genre.

In the following section, I present the features and functionality of this genre, which I name the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*. Next, I explore the possible benefits that the act of memoir writing may have granted my research subjects. I conclude this chapter by laying out the implications of this alternative explanation and recommend

certain policies and practices to support an evolution towards renunciation given this perspective.

6.1 The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*

A question raised earlier in the chapter on methodology was whether the memoir narratives of formers represent a specific type, or genre, of narrative. The findings suggest they do. I name this sub-genre of memoir the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*. By ascribing a macro-structure to the narratives of my research subjects, I am drawing from the work of Murray (2003), whose methodology included an “interpretive” phase in which he ascribed a macro-categorical label for the type of narrative being told (Murray 2003). Using this approach, Murray found that certain accounts of personal crisis, for example, might be classifiable as “tragedy narratives” (Murray 2003). In his study of cancer patients, he identified commonalities in narrative structure across different interview participants. He found that each participant’s narrative had a similar structure, starting with a “beginning,” which described life before cancer; “middle” that included tales of diagnosis, surgery, and the reactions of friends and family; and the “end,” in which the women reflected on their story and redefined their identities as cancer survivors (Murray 2003).

Others have similarly interpreted narratives to come up with categories and types. Brumble has studied the autobiographies of former gang members, which he refers to as “gangbanger-transformation autobiographies,” and found they all follow same pattern: exciting, down-and-dirty street-gang stories, a turning point, a transformation, and finally the reformed life (D. Brumble 2010). In his studies of the autobiographies of ex-

offenders, Maruna found a prototypical reform story—which he named the salvation script—in which a life of crime is turned into a strength (Maruna 1998). He describes the salvation script as consisting of the following elements:

. . . a period of “contamination” in which a morally good protagonist is turned bad by a negative environment . . . a series of disorienting episodes [that] convince the protagonist to leave the world of crime . . . some outside force [that] empowers the person and provides him or her with a new sense of identity and social support . . . [then] the protagonist uses his or her life experiences as an ex-offender to encourage others not to follow the same course. (Maruna 1998)

Similarly, I found my research subjects’ narratives had in common a certain structure and content, which I present in the next section. Firstly, I explore the features that characterize this particular sub-genre of memoir, to include similarities with other memoir sub-genres. Secondly, I will explore the possible functionality of this particular type of genre, since all stories serve a purpose.

6.1.1 Features

How does one define a narrative genre? As Propp’s analysis of folktales found, the *form* remains unchanged within a genre even though the content changes (Propp 1968). Building off Propp, I use Denzin’s concept of the “genetics of genre” to describe the features of the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* (Denzin 1989a). Denzin defined the genetics to consist of two defining elements that are similar within a particular genre, to include an *internal structure* that arranges the sequence of events in temporal order, and *thematic organization*, the evaluative aspect of narrative that conveys the meaning the storyteller attaches to the event (Denzin 1989a). One way of examining the internal structure of a narrative is through its emplotment, or its assembly of a series of events into a plot, which I will investigate next in the context of my research subjects’ memoirs.

Each of their memoirs begins with an exploration of the former's youth and the circumstances that led him to affiliate with the violent group, followed by detailed descriptions of the violence caused by the group and the protagonist. The memoirs frame the turn towards violence as caused by external conditions, including environment, family, and society. The protagonists are framed as lacking agency, instead following an inevitable and natural progression into the violent group. Discrimination and social injustices are a common source of blame. The protagonists, however, are always portrayed as blameless, and their basic goodness is implicitly presented through small but key episodes in which they act with a certain degree of morality. I refer to this as the "Violent Victimhood" script.

Next, there comes a period of maturing in which wisdom starts to dawn. For the first time, the protagonist questions his identity and his violent actions. This is portrayed as an inevitable occurrence since their true nature is not naturally violent; implicitly, it is suggested that it was only a matter of time until they started to question their identity. During this time of questioning, they become self-aware and engage in self-reflection, as well as become exposed to new ideas and people. They no longer feel shackled to the identity they had been born into but instead start to explore alternative identities with a newfound sense of power and agency. Furthermore, they start embracing a sense of personal responsibility. I refer to this as the "Emergence of Agency" script.

Subsequently, the protagonist comes across an example of someone who experienced a radical and redemptive change, a person they either knew personally or learned about. This person had committed grave acts but was forgiven and accepted by

society after renouncing their past deeds, sometimes even admired as a hero. This message of redemption and forgiveness is also sometimes reinforced through a new religion or philosophical outlook. I refer to this as the “Prototype of Renunciation” script.

Finally, the protagonist courageously renounces their past identity and violent acts and embraces a new identity, one that represents their true self, a self that had been suppressed by the earlier circumstances that led to their violent activities. To atone for past misdeeds, the protagonist passionately and selflessly embarks on a personal mission to prevent others from following the same path. This role provides for him a place in society, along with a sense of purpose, belonging, and acceptance that he had not experienced before. In doing so, he finds a sense of peace. I refer to this as the “Redeeming Role” script.

In sum, the emplotment revolves around their transformation during the “Emergence of Agency.” By positioning their earlier period as being predetermined by causes and conditions, they alleviate themselves of responsibility for their violent deeds. However, with the emergence of agency comes a sense of morality and responsibility, which leads to their eventual renunciation. This is portrayed as a courageous act, emplotting them as heroes within their narrative. The story ends with them embarking on a personal mission to help others. These features are depicted in Figure 5.

The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* (RRM) Genre

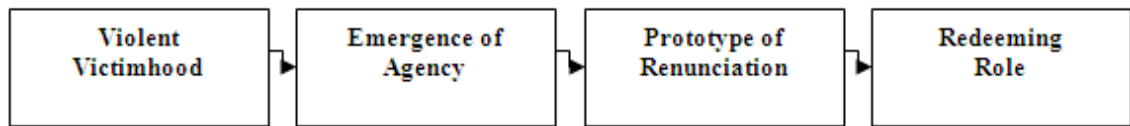


Figure 5: Components of the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*

The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* has similarities to other memoir genres, as well as types of narratives. It combines elements from the Redemption Memoir, Vocation Memoir, War Memoir, Spiritual/Philosophical Memoir, and Confession Memoir. It also mirrors witness literature, conversion narratives, and narratives of disaffiliation. Furthermore, it fits the description of a Contemporary Memoir, introduced earlier in the chapter on methodology, which is characterized through its truth telling, individual inquiry, and tales of adventure akin to the novel.

To start with, the Violent Victimhood script portrays these formers as unfortunate enough to have been born into circumstances that predetermined their violent identity. This uses the understanding that to be born is to be born into a social identity (Barresi 2006, 205) to justify their prior deeds as being beyond their control. As Husain points out in his memoir, “we are the victims of our own milieu” (Husain 2007). Maruna found this type of “denial of responsibility” among ex-offender narratives and believes it is a primary “neutralization” used to rationalize and justify behavior now considered reprehensible (Maruna 1997a, 73). In a way, this script echoes witness literature in the way it focuses on societal conditions in the protagonist’s life that drove him to violence, which were not of his doing. Witness literature takes the form of testaments to the wrongs

suffered by a group of people as told by a survivor. These stories revolve around themes of trauma and victimization caused by social conditions. This type of writing was popular in the early 1900s, when memoirs by women's rights activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1898) and African Americans like Booker T. Washington (1900) became a means to a social end (Yagoda 2010, 149). Another popular era of witness memoirs was prompted by the Nazi Holocaust, which produced a multitude of memoirs by survivors (Yagoda 2010, 221). Brumble found within gangbanger-transformation autobiographies a desire to call attention to grave social ills and to instruct the young (D. Brumble 2010). Maruna, meanwhile, found the "contamination story" told by ex-offenders—in which the protagonist is turned bad by a negative environment—a key component of their narratives. McAdams claims such themes of contamination have a long history starting with Greek mythology and drama (McAdams and Bowman 2001, 22).

This script also reflects the War Memoir by focusing on detailed depictions of the violence caused by the protagonist. Brumble highlights the predominance of warlike stories in gangbanger autobiographies and compares such accounts to narratives from warrior cultures such as Native American warriors, Vikings, African tribes, and cowboys (D. H. Brumble 2000). These stories revolve around accounts of conquests, tales of raids, and depictions of killing (D. H. Brumble 2000). Brumble believes such details are included because the narrators want us to know the awful extent of their street-gang deeds, since the greater the sins, the greater the miracle of redemption (D. H. Brumble 2000). This function also serves to provide the adventure aspect of the Contemporary Memoir, which some scholars claim has replaced the function of the novel.

The presentation of “sins” is reminiscent of the Confession Memoir whereby the narrator apologizes for past misdeeds and attempts to reaffirm communal values (Spender 1980, 121). Similarly, this may be attempt by the authors of “reverting to an unspoiled identity” (Goffman 1961). Confession Memoirs were originally addressed to God and to a human religious confessor, but now more often are addressed to human readers as a narrative explanation of sinfulness and forgiveness. The Confession Memoir was prominent in the mid-seventeenth century throughout Puritan communities both in Europe and America, and some have claimed it is a significant discourse within American public culture (Shea 1968). This confessional element also represents the elements of truth telling inherent in the Contemporary Memoir.

In the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*, the aforementioned depiction of warlike deeds is sharply contrasted with details of the protagonist’s subsequent peace work. Before the transition is made, however, there is a script around renunciation that echoes a disaffiliation narrative. The term narrative of disaffiliation was coined by Eakin to describe stories that justify the rejection of group membership (Eakin 2008, 111). Meanwhile, the memoirs describe both the violent vocation and the ensuing peaceful vocation in a way reminiscent of the Vocation Memoir, which explore a particular career or profession. The new vocation is reinforced by a detailed description of the narrator’s new worldview, which is akin to the Spiritual/Philosophical Memoir, in which a world view is demonstrated through the writer’s own story. Maruna found this element in the autobiographies of ex-offenders who described a new outlook influenced by some organization, new philosophy or religion, some special individual, or God (Maruna 2001,

96). This element represents the fruition of the individual inquiry characteristic of the Contemporary Memoir.

Overall, the transition from bad to good mirrors a Conversion Memoir, which is structured around a radical transformation from a faulty “before” self to an enlightened “after” self. The typical pattern of a Conversion Memoir involves a fall into a troubled and sensorially confused “dark night of the soul,” following by a “call for help,” a process of transformation, and a journey to a “new Jerusalem” or place of membership in an enlightened community of like believers (S. Smith and Watson 2010, 266). These types of memoirs tend to be religious, so the genre does not necessarily fit perfectly. Instead, formers’ memoirs are more akin to the traditional Redemption Memoir, but without any religious overtones. The overall arc of their plots echo themes McAdams has defined as redemption sequences, narrative devices for charting upward movement from bad to good and a way of conveying a progressive understanding of self (McAdams and Bowman 2001, 4). The redemption genre is also the most historical and traditional form of memoir, according to Yagoda (Yagoda 2010). What makes a *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* different from a Redemption Memoir, however, is specifically the importance granted to the renouncing of violent identity and violent affiliation with some sort of group. That way that happens is unique, and hence this forms its own subgenre.

On the whole, the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* is also a “good” story, according to narrative standards. It combines both regressive and progressive plot lines, forming a story with multi-directionality, an element that characterizes a compelling narrative since such a “‘turn of events’ . . . contributes to a high degree of dramatic

engagement” (K. J. Gergen and Gergen 1983). The initial phase of violence represents the regressive plot that functions to support the creation of the progressive plot, which is transition of formers into their redemptive role in society. In addition to having a compelling plot with multi-directionality, the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* has a compelling conflict, which some scholars asserted is the key part of a narrative. At its basic level, a narrative can be defined as an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation (Polkinghorne, 1995; Todorov, 1990), “a human attempt to progress to a solution, clarification, or unraveling of an incomplete situation” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7). Good stories about this journey often revolve around an unexpected change or troubling turn of events (Ochs and Capps, 1996) and are interspersed with turning points and conversions (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Hegel viewed a specific type of conflict, what he called collision, as the central feature determining a good story (Hegel, 1975, 205). He referred to the collision as the moment when a protagonist recognized his own transgression. He describes this in the following way:

But if human action is to be the ground of the collision, then the natural result produced by man . . . consists in the fact that unknowingly and unintentionally he has done something which later proves in his own eyes to have been a transgression of ethical powers essentially to be respected . . . The antagonism between his consciousness and the intention in his act and the later consciousness of what the act really was constitutes here the basis of the conflict. (Hegel, 1975, p. 213)

The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* centers on this concept of collision, in which the protagonist comes to realize—in the Emergence of Agency script—his transgressions. This pivotal moment forms the basis of the conflict, when then becomes

resolved once the protagonist renounces violence, re-integrates into society, and then takes on a heroic, redemptive role.

6.1.2 The Resonance of Redemption Narratives in American Culture

“Lives are like evolving narrative texts . . . framed through discourse, told in culture, and couched within a particular historical moment.” (Denzin 1989b)

People’s life stories are “windows into human individuality,” but they also reflect the “social and cultural worlds within which lives attain their existential meanings” (McAdams 2004, 95). Thus, life stories are as much about the social world as they are about the individual (Holstein and Gubrium 2000b). Moreover, each culture has its own definitions for what counts as an acceptable story of a meaningful life (C. G. Rosenwald 1992). Although the Confession Memoir may represent a significant discourse within America (Shea 1968), it is the Redemption Memoir that forms a foundational discourse of American public culture. McAdam’s life-narrative studies point to the salience of a particular kind of narrative identity in contemporary America, which he calls the redemptive self (McAdams 2004, 96). A key feature of these types of life narratives is the “transformation of personal suffering into positive-affective life scenes that serve to redeem and justify one’s life” (McAdams 2004, 96). McAdams claims the redemptive self reflects classic themes of America as well as new characteristics of social life characteristic of postmodernity (McAdams 2004, 96).

Firstly, the general concept of “hitting rock bottom” then rebounding “straight to the top” is a common element in Western fiction and mythology (Denzin 1989b). McAdams refers to this as the prototypical redemption sequence. In a redemption

sequence, a bad scene turns good, is salvaged by a positive outcome. The positive transformation may be the result of the protagonist's striving, or it may be the result of chance, destiny, God, or other forces beyond the protagonist's control (McAdams 2004, 107). Others have pointed out that the sequence of deprivation followed by enhancement is common in cultural myth and folklore (McAdams and Bowman 2001, 17). It is also found in religious stories, to include Christian accounts of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and Islamic portrayals of surrendering to Allah as a redeeming action (McAdams and Bowman 2001, 18).

Redemption sequences come in many forms, to include sequences of sacrifice, recovery, growth, learning, and improvement. But McAdams cautions these categories are somewhat arbitrary and that people routinely draw from a plethora of contemporary discourses to get the idea of redemption (McAdams 2004, 107). One major source is the contemporary focus on psychotherapy rhetoric—around things such as personal transformation, personal growth, fulfillment and self-actualization, and the improvement and full expression of the self—evidenced in the growing literature on self-help, contemporary talk shows, and human-interest stories in the media (McAdams 2004, 108). Another source is American religion and spirituality, which invokes concepts of atonement, sacrifice, enlightenment, transcendence, and conversion, among others (McAdams 2004, 108). Redemption often involves this sense of overcoming, which holds especially powerful meaning in the African-American community as well as being at the heart of Judeo-Christian religious traditions (McAdams 2004, 109). Yet another source are the culturally valued motifs around the Western conception of an autonomous and

independent self, as well as Americans' unbridled optimism. "It is as if Americans must hold out hope that when it comes to their own lives there is always a chance for eventual redemption," explains McAdams (McAdams 2004, 106).

McAdams refines the prototypical American redemptive theme to a form of the "commitment story," which follows the format in which the protagonist: (1) enjoys an early advantage, (2) is sensitized to others' suffering from an early age, (3) is guided by a clear and compelling personal ideology, (4) transforms or redeems bad scenes into good outcomes, (5) sets goals for the future to benefit society and the next generation (McAdams 2004, 110–111). He explains this to be an especially well-designed identity format for Americans since it captures a number of enduring ideas in American cultural history that are redemptive and progressive (McAdams 2004, 111–112). Within this context, redemption is only one out of five elements of the story.

Although the memoirs of my research subjects reflect redemptive sequences, they do not have a "commitment story." In fact, their stories represent the opposite. Instead of enjoying an early advantage, they were born into an early *disadvantage* and were *desensitized* to others' suffering. Their story simply cannot fit within this typical redemptive narrative. Perhaps this explains why their story is instead a *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*, which may function to account for their failings in the aforementioned elements—(1) and (2)—of this highly popular American identity form. This is supported by the confessional nature of their stories, making it appear as though they are apologizing and seeking forgiveness. Moreover, their current peace work may represent an attempt at atonement, as well as an attempt to fulfill the requirements of

category (5). Indeed, it appears the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* represents an alternative version of a redemption theme, one that is pandering to the mainstream American version “commitment story” in an effort to gain social acceptance and inclusion.

In addition to being influenced by the redemptive discourse within American public culture, however, there may have been other dynamics at play that contributed to the usage of redemptive themes among my research subjects. Instead of exploring what was used, it is interesting to ponder the themes that were not used. Redemptive themes have a therapeutic and spiritual connotation, drawing from the current “self-help” trends and focused on the individual in a way that reflects the modern cultural perspective mentioned previously. Missing are any political themes that confront issues of social injustice, marginalization, and structural violence. These absences are intriguing.

A way to explore these omissions is by attending to the context within which these memoirs were written. One explanation is that the redemptive themes reflect the current popular understanding of Selfhood within American public culture, as mentioned earlier. Such a Self represents a sharp contrast to the more revolutionary ideals reminiscent of memoirs of the 1960s, which reflected a more revolutionary Selfhood grounded in the radical and subversive trends of that period (Unger 1998). However, in many cases even this revolutionary ideal was circumscribed by dominant discourses. For example, in *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*, Saldana-Portillo (2003), explores how the revolutionary movements in the Americas were tamed by the discursive formations of development paradigms in the post-World

War II era. Given this, an interesting avenue for further research would be to explore how redemptive paradigms might have tamed the revolutionary potential of the former I looked at.

Another avenue of exploration regarding the lacuna of political themes among my research subjects is to attend to the type of violence being perpetrated by my research subjects, the violence they later renounced. Violence can be categorized as more than just interpersonal, but also institutional and structural, with each level drawing on different discourses (Iadicola and Shupe 2013). Violence takes place within the context of the social forms or structures in which we live. All my research subjects had previously been affiliated with groups, but they were also tied in a variety of ways to particular institutions and embedded within dominant structures of power. Although in their memoirs, they portrayed themselves as autonomous and independent actors, in fact they were subjects of certain institutional power systems (Foucault 1977). Given this connection, the fact their narratives of renunciation were blatantly missing strong political themes that addressed or even hinted at any institutional or structural grievances is concerning and should raise questions for the conflict resolution practitioner.

One possible way to explore this further is to consider how the narratives of renunciation might have been different had other forms of violence been renounced, for example state-sanctioned forms such as the violence committed by soldiers and police officers. Violence is legitimate or illegitimate depending on whether it furthers or threatens the social structures of the society. Draft dodgers or returning veterans who became pacifists represent individuals renouncing a form of violence that is defined as

legitimate and necessary because it furthers the hierarchical structures of society. In such instances, I imagine they would not use themes of redemption in their narratives about their renunciation. Quite the contrary; in fact, I would venture to guess such individuals would construct narratives grounded in critiques of the state, discourses of authoritarian oppression, and themes of the social pressure of conforming to state-organized violence. Just a quick study of the website by the Iraq Veterans Against the War reveals such themes of resistance and protest. This type of focus is starkly different from the therapeutic, spiritual connotations of redemptive themes used by my research subjects.

It is interesting to consider, then, whether my research subjects were divested in some way of revolutionary and political potential by drawing on themes of redemption. The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* genre focuses on their personal transformation and re-integration into to society, and although it mentions within the Violent Victimhood script the social injustices and discrimination that forced them into violence, overall it fails to focus—much less actually challenge—the violence they were subjected to beyond that script. Although more research is needed, it appears possible the redemptive themes reflect a form of state-owned, authorized discourse from which my research subjects were drawing upon. Thus, perhaps their transformations do not represent a kind of complete change that might have been assumed at first glance, but rather their transformations were circumscribed to some degree by drawing from hegemonic discourses. This could represent the type of self-disciplining dynamic reminiscent of Foucault and highlights a fruitful avenue for further research.

6.1.3 Functionality

“ . . . by living to tell the tale, he has in fact found a social purpose or meaning for his life: It has produced a ‘book’ that he can pass on to the next generation.”
(Maruna 2001, xvii)

In study of narratives, there is a tradition of analyzing the “work” stories do, what purposes they fulfill, and what functions they serve for storytellers, their audiences, their larger communities (Mishler 1995). In this section, I explore the possible functions and purposes the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* may have served for my research subjects. In his studies of ex-offenders, Maruna found the desire to write a book prevalent (Maruna 1997a, 87) and saw it as fulfilling the needs of fulfillment, exoneration, legitimacy, and therapy (Maruna 2001, 118–119). The benefits for formers appear to coincide. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, writing a memoir with the expressed interest to steer others away from violence serves as a form of generative activity that provides meaning and purpose. The function of their memoirs as a form of generative activity is to caution others from following and provide message of hope to those who are still involved. Additionally, the act of writing a memoir is also likely a way for formers to solidify and reinforce their new identity to themselves and to the wider public. Both generative pursuits and writing a memoir allows formers to tell redemptive stories about themselves to themselves and to society with credibility.

Moreover, writing stories with strong redemption themes in particular has been shown to provide healing benefits. McAdams found that telling one’s life story in redemptive terms is positively associated with mental health; individuals with higher levels of redemptive imagery reported higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and

lower levels of depression (McAdams 2004, 108). Writing has been found to be a useful method of atoning for the past and dealing with shame and guilt among ex-offenders, and this is likely the case for formers (Maruna 2001). The theme of redemption appears to allow the narrator to reconcile the “bad” person they were before with the person they have become. It also allows them to “unabashedly and proudly” talk about their past without shame or any need to hide it (Irwin 1980, 94). Shame is something the research subjects repeatedly brought up in their memoirs and many continue to struggle with. This makes sense since shame is “concerned with the overall issues of self-identity” and the “exposure of hidden traits which compromise the narrative of self-identity” (Giddens 1991, 67). According to this understanding, dealing with their shame is integral to the successful solidification of a new identity among formers. Meanwhile, narrative reconstruction could be a type of “shame management” that helps them overcome stigmatization according to Maruna and Ramsden, who found the management of shame to involve a social process of autobiographical reconstruction (Maruna and Ramsden 2004, 130).

Writing memoirs also fulfills the function of social accountability since individuals use narratives to give socially acceptable accounts of themselves (Gergen, 1989). In addition to convincing themselves, formers need to convince society their change is legitimate and apologize for their past; “not only must a person accept conventional society in order to go straight, but conventional society must accept the person as well” (Meisenhelder 1982). Every story implicitly seeks to persuade an audience about the evaluative character of its actors and their actions (Kearney 2001,

155–156). Since they renounced their prior affiliations—and associated social circles—and embraced new ones, their new narrative identity needs to be constructed in such a way as to be held accountable by the new social circles they become embedded in. According to Gergen, narratives of the self construct a moral identity accountable to society in which “one’s definition as a worthy and acceptable individual by the standards inhering in one’s relationships” (Gergen 2005). These narratives of the self are then “used within daily life as a means of creating or sustaining value” (Gergen 2005). The broadest standards for moral identity in mainstream western culture, according to Gergen, are “to intelligibly narrate oneself as a stable and coherent individual, who is attempting to achieve a standard of excellence (progressive narrative), and is fighting against earlier setbacks or injuries (regressive narrative)” (Gergen 2005). As highlighted earlier, the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* genre represents exactly this type of moral identity consisting of both regressive and progressive narratives. Since this western standard forms the “moral community” (Gergen 2005) formers are trying to re-integrate into, it appears their memoirs are implicitly attempting to appeal to that standard. In this sense, their *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* serves as a bridge to a new future within their newly adopted social circles, since “we create our self-defining stories to meet the situations where we will go on living” (Bruner 2003, 100).

Obtaining social accountability is not easy, however, according to Maruna’s studies of ex-offenders. Ex-offenders often needed to pass through “authenticity tests” to prove they have truly reformed (Maruna 2001, 156–157). Some did this through supporting documents to establish their credentials, but the best evidence of reform was

found to be a public or official endorsement from media outlets, community leaders, and members of the social control establishment (Maruna 2001, 156–157). Memoirs, through their public documentation and status, are likely a worthy form of evidence asserting one has reformed. But it appears the public also needs a compelling *explanation* for why such a transformation occurred. Maruna found the “present ‘good’ of the reformed ex-offender must also be explained somehow through biographical events” and if not, “audiences will simply not ‘buy’ a person’s claims to being reformed” (Maruna 2001, 85–86). He goes on to say that “until ex-offenders are formally and symbolically recognized as ‘success stories,’ their conversion may remain suspect to significant others, and most importantly to themselves” (Maruna 2001, 158). Memoirs, especially when they have been elevated to the category of genre, may work towards this end.

In other words, on a more subtle level, the generation of multiple memoirs within this category may serve to legitimize formers within society on a collective level by formalizing their violations. Bruner hypothesizes literary genres represent stylized forms of violations of the folk-psychological canon (Bruner 2001, 30). He references how Propp showed through his studies of Russian folktales how archetypal forms of violation become formalized (Propp 1968). If this is true, then once narratives become “dignified” as a genre, they are legitimized as “interpretable transgressions or mishaps or lapses in human judgment” (Bruner 2003, 90). Examples of this type of legitimized genre form would be the ungrateful child, the faithless spouse, the thieving servant (Bruner 2003, 90). Perhaps one day another example will be the “redeemed former.”

6.2 Implications

If the formers' memoirs represent a narrative genre, this implies the strategies for social change revolve around replicating the genre and offering spaces for audiences to experience its representation. These efforts would support an evolution towards renunciation because the genre itself represents a type of identity model that could serve as both a source of supporting discourses as well as alternative identity discourses for those possibly open toward renouncing violence. Additionally, enabling those who have already renounced to write their memoirs could also help them gain social accountability and aid in their healing process, which could go a long way toward aiding their re-integration with mainstream society, stabilizing their new pro-social identities, and preventing recidivism.

6.2.1 The *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* as Identity Model

Supporting the generation and distribution of memoirs by formers may enable renunciation by providing individuals affiliated with violent organizations an alternative identity model, that of a "redeemed former." In this way, the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* could itself serve as a source of an alternative identity discourse. "When circumstances ready us for change, we turn to others who have lived through one, become open to new trends and new ways of looking at ourselves in the world," says Bruner (Bruner 2003, 84). Bruner is pointing to how individuals doubting their violent affiliations look to find alternative models to follow that would show them ways to change. Coming across a memoir by a former—like any of the ones used in this study—could conceivably present a model of change for them to follow. Moreover, it could

present an alternative identity to embrace after leaving their current one. Without such a model, change is likely to be impossible since "the limits of our narrative traditions serve as limits of our identity" (Gergen 2005).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one function of a narrative genre is to formalize violations as a means of social accounting. However, it also serves as a model of identity for others to mirror since "our self-making stories accumulate over time, even pattern themselves on conventional genres" (Bruner 2003, 65). This holds important implications for practitioners looking to influence individuals toward renunciation. This suggests providing identity models of formers through the support, amplification, and distribution of their memoirs may encourage those still within violent groups to imitate them. To understand how this works, we must appreciate the socially constructed nature of life narratives which "reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible' lives that are part of one's culture" (Bruner 1987). This understanding assumes an individual constructs their identity by using the discourses that are available, mentioned earlier in the review of literature. Memoirs as models serve as "texts of identity" that shape identity and become templates for experience (Bruner 2003, 34). Increasing the availability of such memoirs could add to the "tool kit" of American culture a stock of canonical life narratives that individuals looking to leave their affiliations with violent organizations could use (Bruner 1987).

The AA Identity Model

"'Living sober,' in AA's terms, means continuously telling, retelling, hearing, and revising the story of recovery, a recovery that can exist only in and through the power of narrative." (Warhol and Michie 1996, 349)

How exactly a “text of identity” can be used to effect identity change is depicted through the example of the recovery group Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA provides an example of a “learned genre” that mediates one’s understanding of self and past (Cain 1991). AA presents a variety of resources for storying selves by providing already constructed storylines and techniques of self construction (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 121). AA philosophy, culture, and vocabulary offer what Pollner and Stein (1996) call “narrative maps” for understanding and recounting alcoholism. Denzin’s studies of self construction in AA found selves that emerge under AA’s auspices draw upon a shared stock of interpretive resources (Denzin 1987). These resources include individual accounts of alcoholism, AA pamphlets, other official publications, and public stories about alcoholics’ recoveries in the mainstream media (Warhol and Michie 1996, 331). These texts of identity enable an alcoholic to be constructed into the identity form of a “recovering alcoholic,” a new referent for “I” (Warhol and Michie 1996, 335). This is done through the creation of a “story,” a discursive form composed of a chronological narrative of substance abuse, epiphany, and recovery (Warhol and Michie 1996, 327). The details are shaped according to a “governing teleology” determined by the “Twelve Steps” which provides a structure for shaping the individual’s story (Warhol and Michie 1996, 328).

Just like the formers have a genre for their stories, recovering alcoholics have a genre of stories for narrative reconstruction within AA. “Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now,” according to the “Big Book,” *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AAWS 1976). These stories are all grounded in an

overall script of a redemption narrative. The AA genre consists of what David Rudy has called a “drunkologue,” which revolves around the experiences of drinking, and the “sobriety story” or the account of how things have changed since the decision to stop (Rudy 1986, 12). Denzin refers to the stories as the “before-story,” which conveys what it was like before one realized and “surrendered” to the fact that he or she was alcoholic, and the “after-story,” a narrative of recovery that serves to contrast to the previous tales of despair (Denzin 1987). Denzin argues the “before-story” model teaches audiences how to frame and communicate their own experiences of surrendering to the Twelve Steps, while the “after-story” affirms their decision to become sober (Denzin 1987). Furthermore, the social process of narrative reconstruction such as what occurs in AA provides a means of escape from the stigma of shame (Maruna and Ramsden 2004, 131).

These are retrospective narratives designed to reinterpret the past in the light of a more enlightened present identity, a type of conversion literature (Warhol and Michie 1996, 330). What is interesting is that the “AA template” as Melvin Pollner and Jill Stein describe it, still has certain narrative elasticity (Pollner and Stein 1996). Concepts like “hitting bottom” and “surrendering” to one’s alcoholism are widely shared and recognized as key experiences but differ in details (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 121–122). Denzin also points out that the form of the stories is the same for everyone, but the content of how, for example, one “hits bottom” is diverse. This is reminiscent of the concept of “narrative slippage” introduced in the review of literature as inherent in narratives (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 167).

I present this example because just as the AA template constitutes a new identity for individuals as “recovering alcoholics,” the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* has the potential to serve as a resource for individuals to constitute a new identity as formers. This genre of memoir can serve as a narrative map, complete with constructed storylines for renouncing violence and then storying a new self as a former. The difference between the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* and the AA model, however, is that AA includes a philosophy, vocabulary, culture, and community. A possible step to consider, then, in the case of formers is to think of ways to build on the memoir model and establish a culture and community around them.

6.2.2 Supporting the Proliferation of *Redemptive Renunciation Memoirs*

What would this mean for practitioners? First off, it would mean encouraging formers to write their memoirs through financial support and skills training. This could be done either through the government or through private NGOs. Certain governments already use former terrorists to write memoirs, such as Malaysia (Sim 2013). The Indonesian Police’s counterterrorism unit Detachment 88 has been at the forefront of using former Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) leaders to convince others to renounce violence (Sim 2013). They have encouraged them to write memoirs, to include Bali bomber Ali Imron and Nasir Abas, JI’s leader in Borneo and the southern Philippines (Sim 2013). These two individuals have also been featured in comic books designed to steer children away from extremism (Sim 2013).

Alternatively, the government could provide grants to NGOs in a position to do such work, especially since they are more likely to be trusted by formers. This sentiment

was expressed by criticisms to a proposed gang intervention program in Newark introduced by the police and city officials. Former gang members protested at the involvement of the police, saying this would discourage participation since they simply are not trusted (Adario 2011). James "Loose" White, a former Crips gang member turned peace activist, said he doesn't think the program would work because people in the streets distrust city administrators and the police, "they [gang members] would think it's a trap" (Adario 2011). But White added that the program could be successful if it recruits credible partners in the community. Such programs "need guys like me . . . [who] have enough leverage to push this" (Adario 2011). Prime candidates would be existing organizations composed or created by formers themselves, such as the program research subject Michaels helped found, *Kindness Not Weakness* (Allen 2012).

Encouraging memoirs written by formers holds promise because formers have standing among their old colleagues in a way that others never will. Those who leave these groups and then dedicate themselves to denouncing their old beliefs have powerful credibility among susceptible individuals, and even hardened extremists. Recantations written by former Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) ideologue Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, also known as Dr. Fadl, reportedly resonate among radicals because "nobody can challenge the legitimacy of this person," claims an Islamist writer and publisher (L. Wright 2008). Other lesser known individuals are also influential, as evidenced by former British terrorist Usama Hasan who explains, "I think I'm listened to by the young because I have street cred from having spent time in a jihadist training camp . . . Jihadist experience is especially important for young kids because otherwise they tend to think he is just a sell-

out who is a lot of talk” (Bergen and Cruckshank 2008). Meanwhile, Southeast Asian governments have found those who decide voluntarily to leave JI, the region’s predominant terrorist group, often make the most credible advocates against the use of violence and terrorism (Sim 2013).

The same is the case for former gang members. The Harlem-based organization Operation S.N.U.G.—which spells “guns” backwards—purposefully recruits former gang member to work with at-risk youth. The director explains the rationale by calling it a “credible messenger approach,” saying the “guys who’ve been through it make much better messengers” (Barnes 2012). Likewise, many anti Neo-Nazi programs in Europe have found former right-wing extremists to be the most effective. The program *Exit* in Sweden that was founded by former neo-Nazi Kent Lindahl has been extremely successful; between 1998 and 2001, 125 Swedes were said to have left the scene (Glader 2012).

In addition to providing support for the development and circulation of memoirs, the government and private organizations could aid in the development of the type of “learned genre” the AA model represents. As mentioned earlier, what is missing from the former scene is the full package that AA has, which includes a philosophy, vocabulary, culture, and community. The primary way to bring about such a package would be through abandoning the current designation of formers as tied to their old affiliations—for example, “former gang member,” “former neo-Nazi,” “former terrorist”, etc—and combining all into one standard identity of a “former.” This would help consolidate efforts among the different designations and also reinforce an entrenchment of a unified

identity and unified vocabulary. Initial steps towards such a consolidation were taken by the think tank Google Ideas with their launching of the YouTube channel “The Formers” in 2011 (McDuffee 2011). The concept behind this platform was to provoke a global conversation about radicalization and deradicalization that transcends the speakers’ political and geographical contexts. In its initial phase, it brought 80 former Muslim extremists, neo-Nazis, gang members, and other radicals together with over a hundred experts, activists, philanthropists and business leaders (McDuffee 2011). The project has since morphed into *The Against Violent Extremism (AVE) Network*, which its website describes in the following way:

The Against Violent Extremism (AVE) Network is a unique and powerful new global force in the ongoing struggle to tackle violent extremism. Former violent extremists (‘formers’) and survivors of violent extremism are empowered to work together to push back extremist narratives and prevent the recruitment of ‘at risk’ youths. AVE uses technology to connect, exchange, disseminate and influence all forms of violent extremism (from far right and far left to al-Qaeda-linked and inspired and gangs). It leverages the lessons, experiences and networks of individuals who have dealt first-hand with extremism. Through the website and YouTube channel, members can stay in touch, share ideas, collaborate, find investment and partners, and project their messages to wider audiences. (“About | Against Violent Extremism” 2013)

By its description, the AVE Network seems positioned to implement many of the recommendations presented in this study. It has the potential to create a shared community of formers, complete with an identity model of a former and a philosophy. At the same time, the current model could be augmented, I would argue, through an embracing of *Redemptive Renunciation Memoirs*. These could function in much the same way as the Big Book in AA functions, as a way to solidify and entrench storylines, provide universal narrative maps, and create a governing teleology.

At the same time, it is important to return to the point raised earlier about the possibility of redemptive themes potentially divesting those who renounce violence from revolutionary and political potential. Although this was highlighted as an avenue for future research and not fully explored, it is important to briefly touch on the implications it raises for conflict resolution practitioners. Most importantly, it would suggest certain potential limits on the extent to which conflict resolution practitioners would support the proliferation of such memoirs. In cases where marginalized individuals would be disempowered through the proliferation of the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*, thus deepening their marginalization within power hierarchies, perhaps the answer would be instead to un-anchor such narratives rather than attempt to find ways to fixate them. If anything, it highlights the extreme importance that must be invested in examining the context—especially the power dynamics at play and type of violence being renounced—within which the renouncing of violence takes place.

6.3 Conclusion

“By telling you who I am, I tell you my fate. To change my fate, I must redefine who I am; I must reconstruct my story.” (W. L. White 1996, 423)

This chapter explores the alternative perspective that the narratives of formers represent a genre, which I call the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*, and what that might mean for practitioners. This form of memoir consists of what I identify as a Violent Victimhood script, Emergency of Agency script, Prototype of Renunciation script, and Redeeming Role script. This genre has similarities to other memoir genres, including the Redemption Memoir, Vocation Memoir, War Memoir, Spiritual/Philosophical Memoir,

and Confession Memoir. It also mirrors witness literature, conversion narratives, and narratives of disaffiliation. Not only is this genre a “good story” since it revolves around a Hegelian collision, but its redemptive themes also play into a foundational redemptive discourse within American public culture. Meanwhile, this memoir genre appears to serve multiple functions for the formers, including providing them with a sense of purpose, atonement, healing, and finally a means towards social accountability. Finally, of particular importance for policy makers and practitioners, developing and distributing this narrative genre could potentially support an evolution towards renunciation by serving as an identity model. Supporting formers in writing their memoirs could also enable them in re-integrating into mainstream society and stabilizing their new pro-social identities.

Finally, the perspective presented in this chapter is not meant to override the explanation and exploration of findings found in Chapter 5. My intention is not to choose one account over the other, but rather to present both possibilities since I believe both highlight important insights useful for academics and practitioners alike.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this final chapter, I explain some of the limitations of this study and how they could be overcome through additional research. I conclude this chapter, and this study, by presenting the contributions to the field this study provides.

7.1 Limitations of the Study

My study, which represents a morphological analysis, relies heavily on structural narrative analysis, a type of narrative analysis that has been criticized by narrative theorists for its static and rigid nature. Structural analysis was the first type of analysis applied to narrative when the field of narratology was created, and since then has been augmented by more dynamic versions of function analysis, as well as post-structuralist versions that attend to the role of power dynamics. One primary critique of structural analysis revolves around debunking the original assumption that it would create a universal formal system of narrative (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001, 134). Scholars have pointed out that although Labov's components are regularly found in narratives, they are not always present, nor do they represent the definitive types of elements possible. Structural forms of analysis are also criticized for failing to incorporate interactional contexts, which look at how narratives get embedded and are managed in interaction rather than in the structure or story events (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001, 135). Despite these weaknesses, some scholars have pointed out the value of this type of

analysis when used in specific ways. In an essay about Labov and Waletzky, Bruner (1997) points out that Labov's system is useful for those interested in studying situated uses of narrative structures in order to understand how prototype narratives are adapted to different situations (Bruner 1997).

For my particular research, the benefits of structural analysis outweighed any drawbacks. Specifically, the components of complicating action, evaluative point, and resolution were useful ways to capture the key elements of the transformation process of the individuals I studied. These were indeed captured in a static way, but this type of snapshot allowed the complicated and dynamic process of transformation to be discretely analyzed in a way that provided in-depth insight.

Next, the type of discourse analysis I applied has also been met with certain critiques within the scholarly world. Scholars have problematized the lack of standard guidelines and rules within the analytic process of ascribing theorized labels to stretches of text (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 159). Overall, the literature is "largely silent about ways to approach long stretches of talk that [take] the form of narrative accounts" (Riessman 1993, v). Instead, the analyst's "authorial voice and interpretive commentary knit the disparate elements together and determine how readers are to understand [the informant's] experience" (Riessman 1993, 30). This makes the analysis rely on the analyst's notion of which gross, culturally familiar plotline might resonate at a particular moment (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 159).

For some scholars, like Wooffitt (2005) and Widdicombe (1995), this is unsettling; they assert attributing gross discourse labels to chunks of talk is problematic

because there is no empirical or evidential basis to that attribution (Widdicombe 1995; Wooffitt 2005). Wooffitt asks, “what value is the concept of discourses as an analytic tool if there is no clear method by which to establish the presence of any particular discourse in any specific sequence of talk-in-interaction?” (Wooffitt 2005, 183) Kiesling highlights how it is not clear why certain discourse labels are the most appropriate when analyzing a section of talk and how it is not clear at which point in the sequence of text the discourse is relevant, or when it stops being so (Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Kiesling 2006). Without such an evidential or empirical basis, these scholars allege biases can drive how analysts interpret discourses. By ascribing discourse labels, researchers can claim the relevance of things they perhaps wished the participant had said but did not, or make broader, theoretically or politically motivated claims about the data than is actually warranted, according to some scholars (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 160).

Other scholars, however, like Riessman, celebrate that the analysis proceeds this way. Riessman explains, “the analyst’s authorial voice and interpretive commentary knit the disparate elements together and determine how readers are to understand [the informant’s] experience” (Riessman 1993a, 30). The reality is there is never a single message in a text, but instead several messages decoded by different analysts with different interpretive frameworks (Franzosi, 1998). This leaves it to the responsibility of the researcher to be transparent about how they analyze and interpret the narratives (Glover 2004). This is the view I adopted in applying discourse analysis to my research. Although I acknowledge there is no evidential basis to the discourses I attributed to my individuals’ memoirs, I attempted to be as transparent about my interpretation as possible

by including elements of the discourse that prompted my labels (categorized in my analytic charts as “References”). Furthermore, in order to be as transparent as possible about any possible biases, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the period of my research that divulges the inner rationalizations, opinions, and considerations I experienced as I underwent my analysis.

Moving aside from the issues around narrative and discourse analysis, there are also certain limitations of this study due to the small sample size, although this was purposefully done in order to allow in-depth treatment of each research subject. I would argue that the strength of the study, in fact, is the in-depth examination of each individual’s process. This could be built upon by pursuing further research using the existing sample but moving beyond memoirs as the object of analysis. Follow-on research using interviews and other published material could also compensate for some of the inherent complications that come with studying autobiographical writing, alluded to earlier. Given the complexities of memory, temporality, and the impossibility of ever having a total account, the memoirs I studied represent only one story of the formers’ identity, and there are likely many more that could provide additional insights. Also, since memoirs dictate identity to unfold in individualistic terms, as mentioned earlier, follow-on research could help identify some of the more relational aspects of the renunciation process that were not captured in the memoirs.

Another limitation of this study was that two of the memoirs consisted of collaborative writing. The practice of using “ghost” writers first originated in the 1880s with a rise in memoirs by celebrities, for example the memoir of Henry Ford (Yagoda

2010, 183). It became known by a new formulation, “as told to” as the collaborators started wanting credit for their work. Most recently, collaborators are credited with a “with” or “and,” although sometimes they are not credited at all but instead granted appreciation in the preface (Yagoda 2010, 188). The complication is created by the potential power relations between the teller and the recorder/editor, which are often asymmetrical, and with the literally skilled editor controlling the disposition of the informant’s narrative material (S. Smith and Watson 2010, 265). In the cases of my research subjects, I was unable to find additional information about the details of their collaborative writing. This is commonly the case since “the details of the collaborative process and the exact nature of the collaboration of each member of the pair to the jointly created text are usually masked” (Eakin 1999, 173). Since the writing partner and/or the editors may have influenced the memoir, it creates an element of uncertainty in the story itself. Therefore, an unknown factor for my study was the extent to which the two memoirs were shaped by literary demands, making the content reflect what was “publishable” under the pressures of a corporate profit and public demand.

7.2 Further Directions for Research

Studying memoirs had its strengths, primarily that they provided the best source for the type of narrative understanding I was looking for. However, it also had its limitations, as I have outlined. Thus, further research of the sample size could enhance the findings in this study. This research could entail interviewing the same research subjects, as well as include researching other publicly available news sources, ranging from videos to websites to others books written by the formers. Focused follow-on

questions could include asking for more details regarding supporting discourses, language of other, and discourses around strength, to name a few. Below are some examples of possible question leads:

1. What made the supporting discourses you adopted particularly compelling?
2. What made the alternative identity discourses particularly compelling?
3. How did exposure to the Other start to disrupt your discourses?
4. What was it about the liminal space that made you more reflection and thoughtful?
5. Where you influenced by memoirs written by other formers in your process of writing?

Follow-on research could also include studying other memoirs the research subjects may have produced. For example, Rodriguez wrote a follow-on memoir *It Calls You Back: An Odyssey through Love, Addiction, Revolutions, and Healing*, which highlighted some of the challenges he faced after leaving the gang life (L. Rodriguez 2011). I read it for context but did not include it in this study. This new memoir is meant to give the full truth and reality of leaving gang life, which suggests implicitly that before his memoir painted more of a rosy picture. When he wrote the first memoir, he probably desired to justify his story and his actions, perhaps even inspire others not to follow gangs—particularly his son, for whom he says he wrote the book. If that is true, then it makes sense he would want the transition out of gang life to appear as easy as possible. This new version also goes more honestly in depth into his doubts after leaving, problems with drugs and alcohol, anger issues, and guilt, all of which are missing from the first

story. This new memoir was published last year, decades after the first one. By now, Rodriguez has become an acclaimed author and poet who had proven himself. I suspect he now felt confident enough in his success to write more honestly, from a more mature perspective.

Another opportunity for follow-on research would be to show the research subjects the findings of this study and allow them to provide feedback. For example, Mahmood in her methodology allowed the Sikh militants she interviewed to read her drafts and comment, and sometimes she revised her writing based on their input (Mahmood 1996, 13). This could provide additional insights, but more importantly give back to the research subjects and address the ethics of the power-knowledge relationship between researcher and research subjects. Lather refers to this as “praxis” and argues it can be a way of empowering the researched. By doing so, Lather argues, “we consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situations” (Lather 1991, 57). I assume most of the discursive dynamics I highlight in this study are hidden to my research subjects; therefore, exposing them to these dynamics may raise their consciousness of how they function as narrative identities within the constraints of discursive systems.

Next, another angle for future research would be to increase the sample size, as well as increase diversity within the sample. Importantly, this would include incorporating those who are formers but did not write memoirs. It would also include formers who are female and those who are in categories not included in this study, such as former Puerto Rican gang members or former Christian right-wing extremists. It

would also include those not necessarily falling into the category of formers as defined in this study—as former gang member, former right-wing extremist, former terrorist—but also include former violent criminals. Lastly, it would also include a larger range of ages. Alternatively, an altogether different option to consider would be to compare the findings of this study with those who did not leave their organizations.

Aside from areas of research related to the sample, other areas to pursue include topics raised in this study such as how to build narrative competence and nurture an evolution of narratorial consciousness. Other topics to explore include what conditions make an effective liminal space, how the impact of social networks amongst the research subjects influenced their narratives, and whether redemptive themes could be disempowering in certain contexts depending on the forms of violence being renounced. Lastly, further research into how this process of renunciation unfolds in instances of different types of identity change, for example conversions, would also be illuminating.

Another area of importance for future research is the topic of healing. In all the recommendations mentioned above, formers themselves play a big role and are arguably the most important actors. They are the ones writing the memoirs, acting as supports for others, and working in interventions. Therefore, their mental and emotional wellbeing is of utmost importance, both to keep them strong for such demanding work, as well as to prevent recidivism. According to the memoirs of my research subjects, however, maintaining mental and emotional health is extremely challenging. First and foremost, all of them write of the residual guilt and shame that haunts them constantly. A few also continued to struggle with drug and alcohol addictions. Lastly, some mention a spiritual

void they struggled to fill. Rodriguez exposed these difficulties in detail in his second memoir, which represented a type of confessional story (L. Rodriguez 2011). Some of the challenges he highlights were also echoed to some extent in the memoirs of the other research subjects, but not quite to the degree that Rodriguez presented. The ones he mentions that may be present for other formers can be summarized as follows (L. Rodriguez 2011):

- Rage;
- Self-doubt;
- Longing to return to the excitement of violence;
- Marital problems;
- Difficulty finding and holding down a job;
- Drug and alcohol addictions;
- PTSD;
- Loyalty to old friends from the gang;
- Tendencies towards self-destruction;
- Need for healing.

For Rodriguez, he found healing through the Mosaic Men's Conference, which allowed him to finally be honest about all the darkness he had kept secret inside himself, and where he felt listened to and healed (L. Rodriguez 2011). He went on to do this many more times, and it is likely this experience that gave him the courage to come clean in this latest memoir. This conference likely provided Rodriguez with a discourse about how confessing dark inner secrets and failings could bring healing and redemption, and

even be a source of strength. This is probably what he was thinking when he wrote this latest memoir. I believe this type of healing—emotional and spiritual—is crucial for formers. The example of Rodriguez suggests a discourse around confessing inner dark secrets and failings to bring redemption, in addition to a supportive community, could go a long way in enabling such healing. More research is needed to examine this area further.

The importance of empowering support networks for people trying to desist from offending has also been highlighted in studies (Maruna and Dwyer 2011). A study of “self-help” groups encompassing ex-criminals, as well as ex-combatants and individuals convicted of terrorist offences, found these groups provided healing and reduced stigmatization (Maruna and Dwyer 2011; Kaufmann 1996). In the case of Northern Ireland, such groups and networks have been viewed as an important element in integrating former prisoners into the community (Maruna and Dwyer 2011). They help the ex-offenders who attend such groups, as well as help those who organize and run the groups themselves. Regarding the latter, leadership in such groups has been shown to provide “opportunities for ex-offenders to develop pro-social self concepts and identity, generally in the form of rewarding work that is helpful to others” (Burnett and Maruna 2006, 101–102). Again, more research is needed around “self-help” social networks among formers as an aid in their healing.

If preparations are made to ensure healing for formers, this could lead to the positive outcome of “post-traumatic growth.” Instead of having trauma engender unpleasant psychological reactions, it could lead to positive outcomes. Tedeschi and

Calhoun defined post-traumatic growth as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996b, 1). Results seen in people who have experienced post-traumatic growth include a greater appreciation of life, changed sense of priorities, warmer, more intimate relationships, greater sense of personal strength, and recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life and spiritual development (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996b). Neimeyer found that supportive others can aid in post-traumatic growth by providing a way to craft narratives about the changes that have occurred, and by offering perspectives that can be integrated into schema change (Neimeyer 2001). These relationships help develop narratives of trauma and survival integral to post-traumatic growth (McAdams 1993). More research around the topic of healing for formers could engender such post-traumatic growth for them, aiding their work and supporting their recovery in a crucial fashion.

7.3 Contributions to the Field

. . . the great potential of narrative inquiry, especially in relation to the issue of identity, to humanize and deepen work in the various social sciences, to bring it into closer contact with human beings, seeking to give form and meaning to experience. (Freeman 2001)

This study illuminates formers by sharing their stories of renunciation using their own words, thus contributing to the field by adding more voices and diversity of perspectives into the existing body of research. Additionally, the findings provide support and confirm the literature on how narratives change according to complex dynamical systems through step jumps and turning points. The findings also provide an alternative

understanding of the disengagement process alongside the traditional positivist explanations, potentially aiding in the development of policies and interventions. Specifically, the hermeneutics of renunciation highlights the importance of supporting discourses in producing the decision to renounce violence, and the importance of alternative identity discourses in enabling a new substitute identity. These two types of discourses are new additions to the literature on discourse theory.

This study explores how generative pursuits, such as the post-renunciation social justice and advocacy work done by formers, could reinforce their recovery as well as help others from following down the same path. An important example of a generative pursuit is writing their memoir. A memoir also serves as a powerful supporting discourse that could empower others to change. Additionally, a memoir provides an identity model for others to learn from, and possibly adopt the role of a former. Such explorations of the usefulness of a memoir in relation to formers and renunciation are a new addition to the field.

Furthermore, this study presents a new form of memoir genre, that of the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir*. It explores the features of this new type of memoir, as well as the possible functions. By relating it to the redemptive themes foundational to American public culture, the study also shows how this memoir functions as an attempt by formers to re-integrate into mainstream American society. By discovering a new form and functionality of a memoir genre, this study adds to the understanding in the study of memoirs and narratives.

Lastly, this study also serves an important post-structuralist agenda of narrative remediation by aiming to alter the existing discourses around these individuals that have resulted in damaged identities, a rather underdeveloped focus for the field. It attempts to do so by developing each research subject's story in-depth to challenge and disrupt the dominant discourses about their ontological evil character. Disrupting these discourses is important, as I outline in the first chapter, because a dominant discourse around the "evilness" of gang members, right-wing extremists, and terrorists further entrenches them into their identities, preventing the possibility of change. "The sense of helplessness and hopelessness surrounding people locked into certain deviant identities may well be derived from, or fortified by, the implicit connotation that some statuses constitute essence or isness, rather than behavior and feeling," says Sagarin (Sagarin 1990, 808). Furthermore, "societies that do not believe that offenders can change will get offenders who do not believe that they can change" (Maruna 2001, 166).

Therefore, my study provides research that works toward disrupting the discourses around the irredeemability of individuals affiliated with violent organizations that create damaged identities (Nelson 2001). Maruna and King have coined the term "belief in redeemability" to refer to a belief that "even the worst" offenders can redeem themselves and turn their lives around, rather than a belief that criminality is largely fixed, "once a criminal, always a criminal" (Maruna and King 2009, 21). The same concept can be applied toward formers. Maruna and King suggest that the sharing of "success" stories—which could include the memoirs of formers—could go a long way in supporting a belief in redeemability. They say:

As “belief in redeemability” is a relatively new construct, little is known about how to change an individuals’ view on this. It may be that exposure to “success stories” of those who have been involved in crime, but have since successfully desisted, may have an impact in this regard. More research, however, is needed. (Maruna and King 2009, 21)

This study represents the kind of “more research” called for by Maruna and King. It calls for the proliferation of the *Redemptive Renunciation Memoir* genre as a model of redemption, a form of “replacement discourse” for the language of evil essentialism that may help individuals affiliated with violent organizations write redemption scripts for themselves (Maruna 2001, 167). When formers share their “success” stories, they are leading the effort to transform public discourse regarding their evil nature. Furthermore, their stories serve as a testament to human plasticity and the potential for adaptation and change (Brown 1988). They also work toward laying the groundwork for “an imagined future in which the language of redemption is in the air” (Maruna and Ramsden 2004, 129). This is important since “cultures with few models of redemption may be the cultures with more doomed deviants” (Maruna 2001, 166).

After all, as Maruna points out, the myth of the bogeyman is a cultural narrative that “allows us to relieve ourselves of the shame we feel for our shared responsibility in creating Them” (Maruna 2001, 168). In the cases of Husain, Saleem, Shoebat and O’Doherty, the societies they emerged from were from foreign countries so less relevant for the American public. But in the other cases, the milieus that created the formers were found in America. Their stories challenge us to examine our society and how it is fostering the racial inequalities that forged the initial identities of Rodriguez, Shakur, and Williams, as well as the racial hatred that forged Meeink and Williams. By dispelling the

myth of the bogeyman, this discourse of “evil” that surrounds them, it could lead to an acceptance of responsibility by our society towards the creation of these individuals and also a responsibility for healing them. As such, “the process of personal reform would be less a personal one . . . than a communal effort of families, communities, and collective social will” (Maruna and Ramsden 2004, 129).

My study represents an effort to dispel this damaging discourse through narrative remediation and implicitly recognizes that we, the readers, are also responsible for the formers and their predicaments. A journey of a thousand miles starts, however, with one step. We can start, therefore, by listening to their stories. As Michaels pleads in his memoir, “I need people to listen to me” (Michaels 2010). And so, I end this study with the words of Michaels to express my gratitude to my readers for being open enough to listen to his—and all the formers’—stories.

Everyone who has listened to me. Everyone who reads this. Each one of you helps me heal and together we can make the world a more peaceful and compassionate place (Michaels 2010).

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