

ROAD TO DAMASCUS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ON TRANSFORMATION STORIES OF FORMERLY CONVICTED NOTORIOUS CRIMINALS ADHERING TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

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ABSTRACT

Serial killers, rapists, terrorists, and other notorious criminals are often labeled "criminals forever." Recovery for this group is unusual, according to post-positivist studies. However, positive spiritual psychology says differently. In Christian theology, Saul, a notorious mass murderer, went to Damascus and became Paul, a righteous man. Hence, this study unraveled the breakthrough stories of real-life Pauls, or formerly convicted notorious criminals before, during, and after adhering to the Christian faith. Through narrative inquiry, ten purposively selected samples were assessed through Psychology's triad of affect, behavior, and cognitions (ABC). Thematic analysis revealed that participants were chronic malefactors with vile and remorseless compulsions for victimization before adhering to the Christian faith. Egotistical convictions drove their actions. Uniformly, a similar epiphany occurred through their spiritual encounters with the Divine. From then on, they insouciantly live with rectitude, compassion, and selfless credo, which is deemed undoable with their willpower but doable with God's might. The revolutionary study reveals that individuals repented, resisted compulsions, repaired harms, and recovered right after being changed, contrary to nonlinear relapses of recidivists. The study highlights the penumbra that "change can happen even to the worst of the wicked." No matter how notorious one can be, the power of spirituality can transcend beyond human understanding onward the inner workings of the mind, body, and spirit. Based on these results, the research suggests studying Quantum Change, an underutilized concept in psychology. Still, it has been linked to effective holistic transformations.

KEYWORDS: Transformation, Quantum change, epiphany, notorious criminals, divine, spirituality

1 INTRODUCTION

Former prisoners or ex-convicts are sometimes branded as "once a criminal, always a criminal" (Maruna et al., 2006). For those guilty of notorious crimes such as murder, felonious offenses, major robbery, and rape, expressions such as "Hopeless Sinner," "Evil," and "Rot in Hell" are intensified (Terry & Presser, 2002). These humiliations continue when they are freed. As a result of their horrible crimes, they are constantly subjected to judgment, discrimination, and rejection, earning them the moniker "hopeless cases of humanity" (Piquero et al., 2015).

Notorious criminals are renowned for being the most despicable and vile individuals society has ever seen (Slack, 2016). According to criminal psychology studies, 64% of ex-convicts frequently succumb to recidivism or backslide parolees during the post-sentencing period (National Institute of Justice, 2019). Supporting neuroimaging studies further abolishes ex-convicts' capacity for change. This is because criminality is deep-seated in the amygdala's imprint for impulsivity which is rampant among sociopaths (a term used to describe serial criminals) who have grown accustomed to chronic transgression. Throughout history, even films, literary works, and books depicting heinous criminals, psychopaths, and notorious offenders are unified by the idea that their kind is beyond redemption.

Contrary to most evidence, there are instances when criminals continue to live a reformed life after being released. There are special inquests when the most notorious offenders undergo metamorphosis, showing that even terrible criminals may undergo significant behavioral change.

Among all groups that provide rehabilitation for former criminals, spiritual institutions are the most frequently mentioned "home" for guiding the "lost" ones back to a respectable existence (Johnson, 2021). Many studies associate such "change" with spiritual "redemption." This has been studied in conjunction with a life of transformation centered on features such as repentance for one's sins, transforming one's old identity, and living a new and meaningful life (Garnefski et al., 2001; Magai and Haviland-Jones, 2002). According to studies conducted in spiritual settings, transgressed individuals have developed the capacity for transformation as a prosocial process. This entails reconstructing one's internalized life story to achieve future goals, resulting in a positive self-concept connected to a higher being-given purpose. More so, religion may operate as both a catalyst for and a means of maintaining change. Specifically, that transformation occurs when a person experiences a life-altering event and questions what they have done. At this point, reflection and self-evaluation become necessary for spiritual or personal development (Göbbels et al., 2012). This establishes how religious organization or spiritual belief system is often employed as a "key" in the process of desistance.

While several studies on transformation have been conducted, many of them fall short of explaining how a debauched and corrupted person might effortlessly transition into a principled, law-abiding, and ethical citizen. The following gaps are detected independently.

First, cognitive psychological theories justify criminal behavior by emphasizing individual peculiarities, inherited characteristics, and an inability to socialize. The conclusion is that crime is a psychiatric condition, and criminals are mentally ill individuals. However, studies such as Macions (2002) indicate that the most severe crimes are perpetrated by individuals with standard psychological profiles rather than those with aberrant psychological features. In particular, documentaries, case studies, inspiring anecdotes, and testimonials cannot discount instances in which criminally convicted ex-prisoners have been rehabilitated and gone on to become preachers upon their release, despite getting no medical care.

Second, despite the overwhelming evidence that religious membership and practice assist individuals jailed and living in the community, the present systematic analysis provides

little insight into the communal narrative of change among ex-prisoners of horrific crimes. More so, while empirical "evidence-based" policy continues to be popular in criminal psychology, the complexities of public debate on spirituality demonstrate their apparent flaws in an age of "punishment imperative." This frequently overlooks the sentiments of those concerned with social harm and social control, leaving a vacuum for multidimensional realities (Bounds, 2022). Because experiences are portrayed paradigmatically rather than introspectively, the capacity to stress moral issues is limited. While much research has concentrated on determining how criminal offenders can abstain from illegal activity and how they have transformed to do so (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Matsueda & Heimer, 1997), understanding the factors that contribute to transformation is critical for developing treatments that prevent re-offending, and this is supposed to be delved deeply through narratives, which are rarely investigated.

Thirdly, despite the rapid growth of research on desistance and abstinence (as transformational elements), it remains a contentious subject. Thus, the importance of either individual characteristics (Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996) or social processes (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Matsueda & Heimer, 1997) in the desistance process left room for psycho-spiritual operations. This is consistent with the view that spirituality as a cathartic intervention is occult or supernatural. However, there are claims that this is incorrect, and narratives may help reveal the change in how individuals traveled in their way. Finally, there has been little study on repentant criminals who have made extensive prosocial reforms instead.

This introduction asserts that current literature on criminal behavior does not incorporate spiritual faith into the remedial equation for the offender's behavior. More so, constructivism's strategy of focusing on life experiences can assist in identifying how former notorious criminals have successfully navigated their new existence. Given the existing literature vacuum, this research aims to analyze cases illustrating how Christian faith adherence might aid persons convicted of heinous crimes successfully reform. As psychosocial and environmental factors contribute to desistance (Göbbels et al., 2012), faith may be critical in interacting with psychological and social dynamics. This research demonstrates how involvement in faith groups transformed the horrifyingly wicked personality into something virtuous. Similarly to how a legendary mass murderer named Saul traveled the road to Damascus and was spiritually transformed into Paul, stories of reformed notorious criminals will serve as a contemporary ground for how transformed criminals took the spiritual highway less traveled to live a life of redemptive transformation with the presumptive coalescence of genuine transformation toward a holistic understanding of modern-day psycho-spiritual restoration.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to generally explore the life stories of formerly convicted notorious criminals who credit their transformation within the bounds of the Christian faith. With this, the research aims to address the following specific questions,

1. What do the stories of formerly convicted notorious criminals reveal about their lives before adhering to the Christian faith?
2. What do the stories of formerly convicted notorious criminals say about the transformation that occurred when they adhered to the Christian faith?
3. What do the stories of formerly convicted notorious criminals convey after sustaining their Christian faith?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The research is founded on humanistic theories of behavior transformation, such as the notion of guilt appeals and Congruence. Internal pressure, responsibility, and a distinction between the atrocity of a deed and the suffering psychological-emotional reaction to illegal activity are all part of the theory of guilt appeals. First, the theory of guilt appeals is intended to reduce pain by including regret aspects that assist individuals in abandoning their moral depravity. This emphasizes the concepts of accountability, guilt, penance, and regret since they are all integral parts of moral recovery. Second, Carl Rogers's theory of Congruence (1959) explains that people have a single underlying motivation. This is the drive to maximize their potential and achieve the maximum possible degree of 'human-beingness.' Carl Rogers thought that a person must be true to their values and ideas to reach self-actualization. The degree to which the self is consistent relies on (a) the motivations for one's identity commitments (i.e., pressure vs. choice) and (b) the substance of the identity-defining goals (i.e., extrinsic versus intrinsic). This also refers to an individual's belief in controlling their character, conduct, and strength (or environment control).

Additionally, it is fueled by the determination and tenacity of people seeking a stronger sense of self via character development. Both theories may illuminate the relationship between Christian faith adherence and adult criminal behavior, assuming that spirituality and human motivation are inextricably linked in synchronic and diachronic ways. Both also emphasize the relevance of individual viewpoint, thinking that individual choices contribute to character development and behavioral stability. The two theories may be combined to account for the participants' life stories of transformation in chronological order (before, during, and after) of Christian faith adherence.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study uses narrative inquiry to obtain and assess descriptions of people's experiences and perceptions. These strategies generally focus on people's lives as told by themselves. The researcher purports this method is appropriate since it is about how people make sense of their experiences via chronicle encoding. Participants will help the researcher make sense of the past, present, and future in a fluid and dynamic condition. It situates the analytic framework in which the researcher evaluates anecdotes offered in the Christian faith shared by formerly convicted notorious criminals, allowing for varied readings and conclusions. These include the story's structure, goal, content, and production. Distinguishing themselves from endless relativism, first-person narratives and moral arguments show the rich textures of change (Shi, 2021). This follows the premise that individual transformation cannot only be defined by institutional violations and recidivism statistics, but introspective accounts of their testimony can explain it.

2.2. Sampling Method

Purposive sampling is used to recruit participants. Participants are chosen based on their suitability as data sources for the research. The search is focalized on tracking former criminals' testimony of spiritual rehabilitation linked to charity organizations, religious affiliations, chaplain managements, testimonial films, and other publicized accounts of villain-turned-righteous persons. Ten participants are required under narrative inquiry literary criteria (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014); hence it is followed. Participant Qualification Assessment (PQA) is also conducted. This is a pre-interview conducted with prospective referrers consisting of closed-ended questions to evaluate the suggested eligibility of participants based on life transformation.

2.3. Context and Participants

The sample should consist of 10 people who meet the following requirements: (1) Involved in a notorious crime (Operationally defined as horrible criminalities such as murder, violent and massive robberies, and rape, which may appear with other dangerously immoral impulses); (2) Criminal background dating back over five years; (3) Evident Adherence to Christian Faith; (4) Recommended by reputable sources (advocacy organizations, sectarian groups, charitable clusters, evangelical media coverage sites, etc.) and; (5) 5 years of righteous living and life transformation.

The five-year criminal history does not necessarily imply five years of total offenses. It pertains to the character of the person's illegal doings, which might manifest in different criminal behaviors other than the horrible acts they may have been accused of legally (Hagan & Daigle, 2018). This is categorized to ensure the participant is notorious. More so, studies show that the five-year period before decent living is when a constant desire to do "good" is established and exercised (LeBel & Maruna, 2012), which is why it is included in the criteria. Because the duration of incarceration is based on legislative procedure rather than psychological reasons, there is no set restriction on the years of jail. Participants were asked to show a copy of their Detention/Confinement certificate or any other evidence indicating they have been previously convicted. Participants' records will be thoroughly questioned from collective reports and recounts of referrers under the second, third, fourth, and fifth criteria (PQA).

2.4. Research Tool Instrument

Because the researcher intends to analyze the participant's "entire narrative" (Cassell, 2021), the current study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews. It uses a life-story approach to get a deeper understanding of transformation experiences. This method will help comprehend the rehabilitated criminal's life history and crucial circumstances that impacted their route (Atkinson, 1998). This interview guide will help the researcher collect data and allow the participant to offer other subjects of discussion (Charmaz, 2006). The interview guide delves on the basic overview of their experience (e.g., how does your life transformation occur?) and specific chronological occurrences on how Christian faith changed their journey (e.g., can you describe what happened in detail? Was your behavior changed as a consequence of your conversion? What has changed since?). The tool consists of three major research questions with various follow-up questions across the three phases of before, during, and after. Interviews last 45-90 minutes but might be extended depending on the complexity of the question. This interview will elicit attendees' general observations, impressions, and life transformation stories. All interviews will be digitally recorded and verbatim transcribed by the researcher.

2.5. Data Gathering

This section will detail the data collecting techniques, including preliminary inquiry, criteria sourcing, informed consent for critical participants, purposive sampling, data generation (including one-on-one interviews), and data evaluation. Data collection will begin after obtaining ethical clearance for the study topic and approach. Potential participants will be sourced via spiritual/evangelical/ministry/church foundations where ordinary rehabilitated offenders belong or are linked (Garvey, 2006; Lacey, 2013; Green, 2013). The preliminary inquiry asks these organizations whether they know the target participants who meet the first (incarceration), second (criminal background and conviction), and third (apparent life transformation) criteria. Document requests and informed consent will be delivered via email to interested participants after completing the questionnaire. Suppose the participant is recommended informally or the referrer is not a member of any formal organizations, the referrer will be asked to adjudicate formality.

2.5.1. Making Data: 1-1 interviews

Rehabilitated offenders will be interviewed individually and in phases. This step involves gathering stories, analyzing them for critical elements (e.g., time, place, and narrative), and recounting them chronologically (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The gathering is a three-step process that combines the storyteller's narrative schema, prior knowledge and experience, and cognitive processes to generate a story that increases interpersonal understanding.

2.5.2. Data Mining

This section explains the six phases of data analysis, including utilizing tools and programs and analyzing data.

- Phase 1. Code narrative blocks - The researcher will code inductively the tale components obtained during interviews;
- Phase 2. Life Event Code - The researcher will gather transcriptions and classify them based on similarities and differences. Codes for each "life event" will be created and nested in chronological order from before, during, and post-phases.
- Phase 3. Story Structure - The researcher will now compare and contrast how diverse study participants constructed their accounts about transformation. Similarities and differences might be identified. Differentiations may be further coded for analysis.
- Phase 4. To compare stories, the researcher will read narrative blocks in their entirety while coding for each unique tale structure. The NVivo program was used to undertake cross-tabulation analysis among persons in codes, ideas, and notes (Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2010).
- Phase 5. Telling the Main Story - A core narrative incorporating participant commonalities for each life event will be constructed after thoroughly researching each story block. Findings from the study base may be incorporated into a single core narrative. This also includes a comparison of different narratives of a life event. Participants' perspectives were combined in a unified story of Christian faith transformation.

2.6. Member Checking

Since reliable findings are the core of high-quality qualitative research, the researcher will engage in member checking to aid with data interpretation and formulation. Participants examined the data or results to verify they were correct and compatible with their personal experiences. Members of the checking group include 1) Narrative Inquiry Research Expert 2) An NVIVO Certified Expert; 3) The Respondents.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Informed permission, voluntary engagement, non-maleficence, and relevance were required. Informed consent entails the participant understanding the assessment's purpose, how the results will be used, any potential negative repercussions, and who will access the findings. The research ensures that identifying information is not exposed in reports or articles. Participants were allowed to quit at any time without compromising future participation in services or the current program or links with any of the participating researchers or research groups. Aside from that, the researcher only examine components pertinent to the study.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Before: Saul, stories of being lost:

3.1.1. Criminal Histories: The Making of a Notorious Criminal

The criminal histories of the participants are elaborated per their affect, behavior, and cognitive reminiscence of their past self. These crimes are published in a newspaper, featured in national television, and documented by TV channels and documentaries. For instance, Ron, Jose, Contis, Bruno, and Norman are famed murderers and serial killers. They came

from varied socio-psychological and demographic backgrounds, and they treat their killings in varied ways. Contis, a serial killer, says his crimes are based on a lack of guidance which led him to massacre a family: *"My parents left me to live in the streets in the crimino, so one day, I massacred an entire family out of wrath and vengeance, a void I cannot fill."* Other crimes were also recorded, including kidnapping, abduction, terrorist involvement, and community violence. For instance, KC, Von, and Darwin are included in a gang and syndicate-related mass robberies and schemes. Before being part of the Christian Community, they were in gangs, hiding, and chased by national and international courts. Another two of the participants, Lem and Arthur, are known for rape cases. As Arthur narrated, *"I was a delinquent, and I was in conflict with a policeman; I trespassed in his house one night to kill him, but since he was not there, I raped his daughter."*

Their stories also reveal how participants gradually advance from minuscule offenses and lead to severe malefactions. The most often cited reason for committing a crime was substance use (including alcohol) and drugs and alcohol use. Peer pressure has been connected to criminal conduct; however, it is not the main reason most commit crimes. Their story also reveals how childhood maltreatment, trauma, and parental neglect have been linked to the increased likelihood of sociopathy, violence, and aggressive tendencies in adulthood. For instance, Lem's narrative highlights 'vengeance'. He believes that his repressed feelings should be compensated by another crime towards the same kind, particularly women since he was molested as a child by his aunt.

Most of the participants did not feel any remorse or fear. *"As long as I have the pleasure of the flesh, I was a slave to it with no remorse,"* Arthur said. *"I honestly did not feel anything then. I'm just like a lifeless person."* Said Bruno. *"Until the fun lasts, I'm still not satisfied,"* Von said. More so, Lem, the serial rapist, also uncovers from his perspective that behind the façade of a remorseless criminal lies a forlorn vulnerable man filled with agony. He said, *"My mind seemed to be heading for suicide. I tried to hang myself because I did not know what to do with my life."* Bruno also states how he was like a monster. *"After every rape, it was as if my self-esteem was rising, and I was being moved to rape women more and more."* Some of the participants' judgments are clouded due to an extreme desire for retribution. For example, KC reasoned that *"What I had in mind was their fault, and I am only an agent of justice."* Another participant added, *"I blame my sin on others. It is always the fault of others but for me."* Their behaviors were also objectively wicked and their thoughts are wired to villainous identities.

3.2. During: The Encounter at Damascus

3.2.1. Epiphany Stories: "Miraculous, Swift and Life-changing encounters."

It is a radical finding that quantum change or the sudden epiphanies that lead to awakening for transformation is present among participants. The stories of epiphany happen through varied sensational channels, including sight, touch, auditory and fortuitous convictions. The duration of the epiphany is seen as brief, despite the size and pervasiveness of the effect. He said, *"You know, I don't read the Bible. But there was a calling in my dream, and it said, 'do not conform' one week after, pastors came to preach about the bible verse that I had dreamed about. It is a miracle, and it cannot be a coincidence."* Another participant whom a fellow prisoner approached experienced the encounter through a surreal experience. He said *something happened inside me. I suddenly felt thirsty to read the Bible."* Ron also attests how he was miraculously halted to commit suicide. He said, *"For a while (in prison), it was as if I had lost all hope and wanted to commit suicide. I thought that when I died, all pain would disappear. When I was about to kill myself, there was a voice that stopped me."* Vincent said, *"I immediately came to realize how abominable my mistakes were and how erroneous my way of living was when the voice of God talked to me in a dream."*

Bruno describes the visible light as a "*consuming*" presence that brought him transcendence. Jose also recounts his story when he was initially reluctant because he believed that transformation comes with a change of religion. However, he was proven not because of a piece of coincidental advice.

Despite spiritual connections, Regie and Gal said that being in a Christian community does not guarantee that one will transform, as one can only identify with membership but not internalize the divine relationship. As KC suggests, the defining factor of transformation is when one accepts the Divine as no longer a savior alone, but as a Lord as well. Theologically, being a savior implies that one's service is directed toward the one in need of salvation. This results in taking the Divine for granted and squandering the grace bestowed. However, when the Lordship element has adhered, it takes a sense of responsibility for obedience.

Upon the epiphany moments, participants affirmed that they were convicted to repent then and there and pour stress and guilt in a cathartic manner. For me, this is the only thing that will help me get out of that place. According to KC, a person who sincerely accepts the Lord will never return to sin. Participants recognized the need to interpret their experience while noting that their emotions are at times inexplicable.

From another perspective, prison cannot be accounted as a factor for transformation. Arthur attests that transformation can happen even before incarceration. Ron, Bruno, Jose, and Norman emphasize that their capacity for transformation is not their own; it results from their encounters with God in various ways. When the participants are unable to find purpose in their lives, they enter a period of realization. They feel that epiphanies were not the labor of man but a miracle from God. Arthur exclaims, "*Then, while weeping and bawling, I heard a preaching that says 'you are my son, and I am your Father, my love is greater than your sins.'*" Attitudinally, Darwin's violent tendencies are tamed.

For the participants, having recognized the gravity of their transgressions, the next step is to humble themselves and surrender to grow. Regarding submitting, KC stressed that he refers to it in all aspects, as meaningful transformation occurs only when he unconditionally surrenders everything, including his jail life and the assignment to complete upon release. This complements all of their realizations as Von and Jose have learned to trust and depend on a higher being; Von no longer conforms to the horrendous acts he was accustomed to and compelled to do; Jose cannot understand how grace is shown to a ghastly unforgivable man like him and; Norman felt that God could change everything and was freed from the mental prison.

3.3. After: Paul, stories of being found.

3.3.1. Aftermath of Transformation

There is an evident long-lasting impression that participants have continued transformation in a display, externally and internally, even beyond spiritual realms and extending to nonspiritual pursuits. For instance, when KC was released, he immediately went back to church to testify; Ron regained the motivation to study again.; Jose gives honor to the Lord by serving his community; Von founded a worldwide ministry called "Toughguys" based on karate and self-defense; Moved by the love that he felt, Jose gives honor to the Lord by serving chaplains, and KC justified his continuous righteousness based on God's word since his security is no longer based on possessions but God's promises. Their affect is also empowered by humility, contentment and submission. As Ron, Von, and Darwin states: "*God is my only reason to continue because I would not be here without Him. He is the only one who can do the impossible.*" Von: "*When I experienced peace in my heart, in the presence of the Lord, I would never ask for more.*" Norman: "*Since I accepted him, God has put much*

hope in me." Finally, Lem thinks an anointing has occurred that has sanctified all of his choices to choose righteousness over crime.

The participants' thought processes or cognitive modes reflect an overflow of Love, Peace, Compassion, and Unconditional Regard. Arthur thinks with contentment and security, which he believed are bestowed by God. He says, *"I have peace in my mind. The previous criminal identity is gone because now I am full of hope."* Jose: *"There is love and unconditional regard. There are joyful thoughts. It's overflowing as if I want to channel it to others through actions based on kindness."* Von: *"I know that Christ has forgiven me. His arms of mercy are outstretched, I now have peace of mind."*

In terms of behaviors, there is a paradigm shift in the behavior processes of the participants. KC justifies his change of heart by noting that he has evolved from an easily offended guy to a forgiving one. It is revolutionary for a serial murderer like Bruno to realize his desire to kill vanished. Industriousness becomes a habit for Von. As KC puts it, *"From being aggressive, I become more humble in my actions. God is good, and so shall I."* As Arthur puts it in his words, *"Everywhere I go, the works of my hand should be for him."* Additionally, Bruno does the same reparative behaviors as he recalls how he labored for the farm of his victims' surviving family members without their knowledge. Additionally, they apply it directly to their victims as Lem said, *"I pray for them all the time."*

Similarly, KC defines it as a perceptual transformation in which one's viewpoint completely changes for the better. Von reasons, "I think that God has accepted me despite everything, so I must not waver despite any trials that may come." His bravery reflects the prospect that his strength is no longer independent; it is rooted in something dependable, which is God. Bruno, Darwin, and Norman's hearts are bent on noble deeds and will bring the almighty glory.

Correspondingly, pursuits of benevolent advocacies are pursued by participants as they are now constantly thinking about what they can do more to help.

4. DISCUSSION

Imprisonment is not a defining transformative factor, although it is contextual.

Previously, the "criminal self" narrative was dominant. Other themes were antagonistic self, lawbreaker, and self-victimization. The "criminal self" narrative may be a prison environment product, as Petrillo (2021) states that being condemned to prison is one of the most devastating experiences one may have (Petrillo, 2021). Prison also stimulates thoughts and feelings about committing a crime as their most dissonant memory, showing that it is an event that defines their former identity and is crucial to them.

However, it is the insight, convictions, and decisions that bring about transformation, not jail. The members' spiritual beliefs overshadowed the jail cells. They argue that many people are imprisoned, but only those who undergo excruciating enlightened remorse, metanoia and reparative decisions to accept and submit to the divine will are set free.

4.1. Total Package for Holistic Transformation

Religion vs. Spirituality

True Christianity is founded not on religion or rituals but the connection and bond formed through an epiphany of contact with the Divine. Although spiritual encounters may never be objectively validated or quantified, they have undeniable effective patterns. Although the participants share that Jesus Christ is their Savior, their faith systems, denominations, and religious affiliations vary from Baptists, Evangelists, Pentecostals, and Protestants. Beyond affiliation, it is observed that the story of transformation reveals a pattern among once

infamous criminals in three phases: (1) enlightening repentance, (2) metanoia, and (3) enthusiastic reparation leading to transformation.

4.1.1. Enlightening Repentance

Following the participants' sinful conduct, they experience negative sentiments of shame, guilt, and regret due to their actions which are all scoped by repentance. It is as though the conscience and feeling of humanity have been revived (Alex & Farisha, 2021). However, even recidivists demonstrate a range of superficial regret, commonly referred to as repentance or guilt in psychology (Lippke, 2021, but this is not effective because recidivists grow defensive about their mistakes, striving to rationalize or deny them outright, this cosmetic repentance is motivated by agonizing guilt. What happened to the participants is immensely different and can be compared to godly sorrow. Godly sorrow is a theological notion based on a sincere conviction to understand one's deeds that have caused offense, pain, and grief, resulting in shame, humiliation, and regret that drives people to a better path. This leads to a fundamental character trait of acceptance and submission without opposition. It is a complicated mental process in the inherent substructure of the personality known as "conscience," which assesses past activities concerning its own psyche's responses. In the end, it transforms behavior and life in general, leading to the acquisition of life's purpose.

Additionally, a person's conviction in their capacity to exercise control over their character, behavior, and strength is driven by a desire to establish a stronger sense of self-identity via character development. Hence, contrary to popular belief, this enlightened repentance is productive. This distinguishes between guilt and excessive "shame" and concentrates on the self rather than repairing chances. In these circumstances, guilt might lead to self-reparative activities rather than reparations to others, and with painful realization, some with too much guilt commit suicide (Zavaliy, 2021). Auspiciously, what happened to the participants is permanent and is vastly different from a pang of self-consuming guilt. This is because although repentance may atone for sins, the participants' mechanisms lead to positive action.

More so, the notion of guilt appeals states that guilt induces admissions, apologies, excuses, or inhibitions of future actions. The goal of these behaviors is to restore the pre-transgressive relationship with others. However, existing research does not fully relate guilt to healthy behavior. It lacks transformation because restorative acts are only viewed by authority figures, victims, or court officials. Thus, regret or remorse does not appear to be a universal trigger for restorative actions (Turner & Rains, 2021). However, as this study's results show, the transgressor will make amends regardless of the presence of victims, location, or observer when it comes to identity reformation. This is elicited in the metanoia phase represents where identity remodeling transpired.

4.1.2. Metanoia

Participants believe they are "Bagong nilalang" (new creation) which significantly influences their conduct and self-image. According to an earlier study (Comvalius-Goddard, 2021), people who self-identify as criminals are less likely to modify their ways to reduce criminal activity frequency, diversity, and severity (Farrington, 2007). Hence, applying the traits of their new identity or metanoia, which is a process marked by a mix of passion, melancholy, self-surrender, and a confrontation with the inner abyss (Ashokbhai, 2021) can condition the self in favor of a more responsive one (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). This also lead to a kind of self-reparation before social reparation (Maglione, 2022). In fact, to support people as they decide to break down and go through a momentary recovery, rather than deferring such attempts by reinforcing a person's extant personality defenses and thus perpetuating the underpinning discord (Sellers & Arrigo, 2021), is fundamental to therapeutic methods. It was described as "a permanent shift in gestalt."

In terms of identity, the individuals achieved desistance through changing their self-perceptions. They no longer identify as criminals. Because identity is developed over time, it may be changed to reflect life events such as criminal identity, stigma, personal growth, and healing (Maruna et al., 2004; Rowe, 2011; Stone, 2016). This study found that criminals who rebuilt their identity by accepting their accomplishments and comprehending their experience in prison had reduced recidivism rates and a prosocial mindset. They have also gotten an internal attribution of blame from past external attributions (Holder et al., 2021), absent from shallow repentances. To minimize confusion, while identity reformation is a crucial component of the transformation formula in significant research, it cannot stand alone. In the absence of genuine regret or reparation, a person may acquire egocentric and narcissistic tendencies. Hence, the reparation procedure should be sufficed.

4.1.3. *Enthusiastic Reparation*

Positive socio-psychological personality change predicts an increased desire to accept punishment and show correction via actual productive conduct. Thus, the conviction's earnest conscious penance (structural-logical scheme) includes attitude toward oneself, others, life, future, society, crime, consequences of crime, punishment, and preparation for life under conditions of liberty and interpersonal interactions (Klishevich, N., & Sulitskyi, 2021). These "prosocial behaviors" benefit the whole community. It is not like the "unpleasant" component of guilt for reparation. While the other form entails how people feel guilty and fake bad feelings (such as sadness or disgust) to "get out" and recover a positive emotional state, this form of repair is joyous. The accomplishment of a "beneficial" deed restores this jubilant emotional state.

Additionally, an earlier study concluded that corrective action is necessary to promote conformance with the applicable standard. Recognizing mistakes and adopting a new identity encourages altruistic conduct and inhibits antisocial behavior, shame, and remorse, all of which promote transformation in offenders. This is also different from restitution because the idea of restitution as compensation for damages is incommensurate with the degree of anguish and loss of life. However, reparations may improve one's social standing. While reparation is a defining factor, still, it can be forfeited for self-promotional motives. It cannot last without a new identity and a true feeling of repentance.

Going back to the theory of guilt appeals, while the emotional components include humiliation and suffering, marked by the phase of repentance, it is possible to repent 11 times and yet make the same mistakes (just like one of the participants did). Moreover, whereas guilt appeals explain how unpleasant emotions encourage a person to participate in a reparative activity, *reactance* occurs when individuals believe their freedom of action is threatened. To restore one's freedom (or at least one's illusion of freedom), one must behave in a way that is contrary to the essential. Graton and colleagues found that guilt induction led to prosocial behavior when persuasive messages contained minimal reparation instructions. To demonstrate that guilt alone does not inspire human behavior, guilt's overt or explicit message resulted in reactance-like responses (i.e., behaviors opposed to the persuasive information request). This is shown on the case of the participants because despite years of direct preaching about transformation, participants perceived it as a threat to their freedoms, and no change happened. They were formerly only externally identified with the group, but not internally; or they may seemingly accept but deep inside, they reject. In the case of the participants, the reactance was abolished only when epiphanies connected with supernatural experiences or quantum change occurred, both of which are implicit and subjective. This event shows that epiphanies reduced reactance. Thus, true internalization occurs when an entity conducts a transaction internally rather than outsourcing it to another party.

Finally, the interplay of the triadic components (affect, behavior, and cognition) is hypothesized. This research carefully reveals how the interplay of affect, behavior, and cognition might be the missing link.

4.2. *When sudden epiphanies lead to permanent transformation*

Adversity is considered an essential and significant piece of their life transformation. The individuals generally reported terrible life experiences, including alcohol/drug addiction, interpersonal and behavioral issues. Fearful interactions, feelings of loneliness, and confusion are considered equally concerning discovering courage, belonging, and a sense of meaning. This act of assigning meaning based on their own experiences seems to be at the heart of being found. This critical aspect of the participants' viewpoints also reveals a shift from egocentric self-conceptualization to developing connections with others. Additionally, participants' sense of self became broader and more pleased as they sought compassion with others and the more benevolent world. Their worldview and sense of self are intertwined with harmony, which tends to bolster their optimism. On that note, epiphanic moments tend to signify a shift toward self-fulfillment. Theoretically, the participants' self-descriptions matched Rogers' (1974) fully functioning person and Maslow's (1970) self-actualization.

Revolutionary analysis shows how participants indicate that they have never returned to their offenses since the divine intervention. As Chilton (2015) and Taylor (2015) described, the narratives imply quantum change. Fundamentally, this may be because psychological anguish was often mentioned as a catalyst for an awakening experience, and consolidating the participants' new identities was a constant process, aided by their clarity of purpose and direction change. The spiritual encounters also appeared to generate a sense that something higher than themselves would guide and affect their lives after. Instead of being shaped by experience, the self has developed from inside the body. In fact, it is supported by psychotherapeutic claims as McGovern and colleagues (2021) discovered that 'some internal truth' surfaced in epiphany experiences (p.52).

The participants in this study also had the psychological flexibility to use the meaning-making process in whatever way they wanted. Often, this was closely linked to a connection with their spiritual self, which appeared to give them meaning and vitality (Taylor, 2020). Themes of "natauhan" (awakening) abound. More importantly, their epiphanies have had a visible and immediate consequence. *"From the day God spoke to me, I turned away from wickedness and murder,"* said Bruno, a former terrorist who murdered a family. *"I never wanted to murder again."* He added. Participants have shown complete adherence to what is ethically correct. *"If today I was ingrained to sexually assault; from tomorrow till now, no more, all lusts are gone,"* says Lem. *"I can't even talk or think about it. I don't want any of it anymore."* Arthur also recounted, demonstrating the same promise. *"I humbled myself and pledged never to repeat my misdeeds. Since then, I have never committed a crime."* Von also states that he does not just weep, apologize, and go back to doing wrong. *"It was as if I had lost my hunger for my prior sins,"* he says. *"This is me. Since then, I have never returned to my previous life."* He added. The experience of Noel was also echoed: *"It is a miracle!"* *Temptations vanished. I give up everything. Someone had touched my hand. He said: 'Do not let go from then on; I remained devoted, which is impossible for a ruthless criminal like me.'* he said.

History of cognitive and neurological psychology findings indicates discontinuous transition patterns as key treatment strategies which rejected linear healing. In fact, religion is frequently referred to as a "shared hallucination." Nevertheless, discernible patterns like these with psychological concepts cannot be ignored. For example, in humanistic and transpersonal perspectives, epiphany (Chilton, 2015) or critical moments (Berglund, 2014) and tipping point encounters have been described extensively (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). Miller and C'de Baca (2001) describe these interactions with 'quantum change.' These are vital aspects of

awakening, increasing awareness, connection, and knowledge. The participants' accounts indicate how "*an unexpected, sudden, and unanticipated occurrence*" led to a successful and total unbending transformation.

5. CONCLUSION

Most people transform very incrementally, little by little, step by step. However, it is possible and does sometimes occur for individuals to be altered abruptly and irreversibly by a profoundly memorable event. Such frequent remarkable spiritual experiences occur in real life, as documented in the biographies and autobiographies of prominent individuals, including infamous criminals. Spirituality is often left out of discussions of psychological rehabilitation due to its inability to be quantified. Even though William James and other advocates, testimonials, and evidence supported this occurrence for almost a century, there remained an odd silence about it - not even a term for it. Although philosophers and psychologists have sometimes referred to it as "conversion," transformational change is not restricted to formal religious situations or noble individuals. This research sought to elucidate the narratives behind what society considered to be the anathema of humanity and determined that quantum change is genuine and not all that rare. From an examination of what occurred before, during, and after these encounters, the subjective processes of the participants reveal that they have comparable experiences. They recalled the event, describing it as similar to walking through a one-way door. None of them professed to have done it; their steady-state was one of subservience as if they were being acted upon externally. These were known criminals with disparate sociodemographic characteristics, criminal histories, and walks of life, but significantly more alike after the encounter than ever before. Before converting to Christianity, participants were chronic criminals with loathsome and remorseless compulsions for victimization, motivated by egocentric beliefs. Across the board, their spiritual experiences with the Divine resulted in a similar revelation. The significant convictions led participants' to follow inexplicable callings that caused them to surrender, fight urges, repair harm, and recuperate right away from the moment they were changed. This shows how spirituality can be a powerful tool to help criminals undergo the process of transformation from acknowledging the offense, aversion to wrongdoing, sympathy for the victim, discomfiture for the crime and its consequences, candor in their thoughts, and a desire to atone for moral injury. The study also acknowledges that unlike the concept of relapse, a change in moral purpose can transpire with recognition of the mistakes and the pursuit of a new direction in a quick continuous shift that leads to substantial, positive, and enduring transformation revelation, as a moment of self-awareness or psychological awakening. Although subjective, this act of contrition that is observed can provide hope for similar cases of the population, particularly in breaking the cycle of criminality through reintegrative and disintegrative processes. Finally, the research demonstrates transformation may occur even to the most heinous of the wicked and that regardless of one's notoriety, the force of spirituality can transcend human comprehension and into the inner workings of the mind, body, and spirit.

Recommendations and Implications

- For Psychological Institutions. There is a theoretical possibility that moral emotions are "here-and-now" elements that may be intervened upon. The same way that a variety of social-cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, and interpersonal therapies are beneficial in combating criminal tendencies, spiritual positive psychology strategies can be plausible methods to modify offender registries' moral affective characteristics – specifically, to demonstrate their ability for interactive guilt and mitigate their

potential to perceive guilt – in the same way, that they are effective in Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) systems.

- For Correctional Institutions. Pre, actual, and post aftercare should be provided for offenders. Just as how the Philippines is a Christian country with phrases of "Implore the aid of Almighty God" in the preamble and "So help me God" in court and legislature, each step should be established with a spiritual touch from plugging them in chaplains, intervention inside prisons, and reintegration in society through intricate spiritual incorporation. The correctional facility may also adapt into reformation programs that are flexible and enriching to the spiritual encounters of prisoners.
- For Personal Interventions. An introspective examination of criminal culpability can be encouraged only after a crime has been committed and an attributional process linked with the criminal self has been established. In the case of convicts who regret committing a crime, they may see jail time as a period of personal development and thereby alter their perception of criminality; especially how spiritual aspects can deliberate and self-initiate interpretations of a transpersonal experience, in which the self is acted upon by an Other that appears to be greater than oneself, which provides an alternative to the majority of accounts of psychological change.
- For Future Research. With these results, the research suggests further investigation of the potential of Quantum Change, a concept in psychology that is seldom used or recognized but is associated with the covert spiritual world and effective holistic changes; especially how the sudden and deep epiphany has mostly focused on the antecedent and facilitative variables with repentance, identity reformation, and reparation.

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