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Identity Change Strategies: How People Exit Stigmatized Identities

by

Mercy N. Adams

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Sociology: College Teaching Emphasis
in
Sociology Department

Minnesota State University - Mankato

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Mercy N. Adams

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Most importantly, this is for my daughter Scout, a force in this world whom I deeply admire. When I said I wanted to quit, you told me it was the dumbest thing you've ever heard me say. Thank you for that. I love you more than words.

*“Come on you target for faraway laughter
Come on you stranger, you legend, you martyr, and shine*

*Come on you raver, you seer of visions
Come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner, and shine”*

Shine on You Crazy Diamond by Pink Floyd

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ABSTRACT

Using a symbolic interactionist lens, this analysis of existing literature examines how people attempt to exit and/or repair a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963). Examining a wide range of stigmatized or deviant-labeled groups are discussed including individuals experiencing homelessness, justice involved individuals, drug and alcohol addicts, mental health disordered individuals, caregivers, sex workers, displaced workers, and those holding hidden identities in order to hide a temporary deviant identity. Four strategies are analyzed: (1) othering; (2) hiding/disguising a stigmatized identity; (3) embracing an identity, and (4) repairing a stigmatized identity. This analysis contributes to our understanding of identity change by highlighting how various groups with stigmatized identities enact similar, “generic” strategies (Schwalbe et al. 2000) when doing identity exit or repair work. It also illustrates the vast landscape in which exiting an identity can occur. In analyzing strategies often used by marginalized groups, the analysis is presented with the underlying philosophy of Harding’s (1992) notion of detachment in that one does not completely detach from the study or subject, rather one maintains openness outside of her own assumptions in order to better understand another’s unique experience and perspective, and Harding’s (1992) notion of reflexivity in which one must always reflect on her own situation and assumptions while doing research. Future studies may offer insight for how those providing services, resources, and support for individuals exiting a stigmatized identity can help facilitate these identity change strategies.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Studies examining how detrimental a label (Becker 1963) or how an individual is marked (Brekhus 1998) as deviant holds a strong place in symbolic interaction theory and identity theory. Our selves, maintained and constructed through interaction with others, hold many identities that are adaptable within certain situations (Burke 2006; Cooley 1902; Mead 1934) and can often change to align with others reflected appraisals (Burke 1991; Burke and Stets 2009). This is especially true when there is a conflict between identities (Burke 2006). Conflict can occur when an individual attempts to exit a deviant or stigmatized identity. Stigma, defined by Goffman (1963) is described as “a physical or character-driven flaw seen as tainting a person” (1963: 3) and adding to the definition, Link and Phelan (2001) describe stigma as the interaction of “labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination” (2001: 367).

In my analysis of existing literature on strategies used by various groups to exit a deviant or stigmatized identity, I will show how simple, yet intricate, strategies are used by individuals to repair a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963) and avoid alienation within society. Many forms of deviant roles and identities exist, including people experiencing homelessness, justice involved individuals, sex workers, individuals with mental health disorders, and people experiencing addiction to mood altering chemicals. The work done by these groups aims to repair the stigma associated with their role in society and often leads to a more positive sense of self-worth. Additionally, I hope to build a foundation

that may influence future studies on how policy and programming in our communities may be able to better serve marginalized groups.

Most research on identity change focuses on how an individual enters a deviant career and what occurs during the time they hold it. The notion that some populations are objects of curiosity and worthy of study because they are deviant and ultimately more interesting is important to note here (Fine 1994). Once someone sheds a deviant identity, they are no longer considered “as worthy” of study viewed as acting within social norms, and therefore are less sociologically interesting. I posit that the opposite is true; shedding of a deviant identity calls for more intense sociological focus. Especially if individuals, supportive others, and the community at large are invested in the maintenance of the individual’s non-stigmatized identity. In this paper, I review literature on exiting a deviant or stigmatized identity. I begin by giving an overview of identity theory and identity change, followed by an analysis of the existing literature on four strategies to exit an identity. I conclude by offering suggestions for future study and highlight areas that I believe can benefit from my research.

IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory through a symbolic interactionist lens assumes that people construct and maintain self through interaction with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Within interaction, roles are established, performed, and often tweaked to adapt to societal norms and expectations of others (Goffman 1963). Selves are thus constructed

by others as well as the individual. Within the selves, there are many different roles that carry particular identities.

Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) call this “indexes of the self” (1996: 115). William James (1890) states “man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their head” (1890: 294). For example, one may be a mother, spouse, business owner, formerly justice involved individual, and/or caregiver for an ill family member. Mead (1934) states “We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions” (1934: 142). Further, identity control theory (Burke 2006) states that all of those selves also connect to a particular identity that one manages, and again, that they often tweak to adapt to others’ expectations and particular situations. Snow and Anderson (1987) and King, Ross, Bruno and Erickson (2009) suggest that identity work is essentially one performing an identity that is both core to one’s self and viewed as socially acceptable to others. Similarly, Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) state identity work is “anything people do individually or collectively to give meaning to themselves or others” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996: 115).

It is important to make an early distinction among selves, identity, and roles. O’Brien (2006) differentiates selves and identities by indicating that selves are more stable, while identities may be more likely to change depending on an audience or situation. Stryker (2002) furthers this by noting that the self consists of many identities held by an individual, and that identity can be viewed as something one claims to be

within one or many of their selves. Asencio and Stryker (2011) further note that within interaction, these are maintained by interaction and “operate by comparing perspectives about how one is coming across in the situation to the identity standard” (2011: 166). Stets and Burke (2003) sum this all up by stating “the overall self is organized into multiple parts (identities), each of which is tied to aspects of the social structure” (2003: 8). An individual has an identity, or a “internalized positional designation” (Stryker 1980: 60), for each of their different positions or roles held in society. Therefore, self as mother is an identity, as is self as friend, team member, and self as any of the other many possibilities corresponding to the various roles one may claim. “The identities are the meanings one has as a group member, as a role-holder, or as a person” (Stets and Burke 2003: 8).

According to Stryker and Serpe (1982) commitment to an identity has two aspects. The first element is how many people are tied to an individual through a particular identity and second, how strong those ties are. “The more persons one is tied to by holding an identity (i.e., the greater the embeddedness of the identity in the social structure), the more likely it is that the identity will be activated in that situation” (Stets and Burke 2000: 230). Of equal if not more importance, Stets and Burke (230) state “Stronger ties to others through an identity lead to a more salient identity” reinforcing the strength of ties. Stryker (1994) furthers this discussion by indicating that an individual will be more concerned with maintaining identities that are relevant across more social settings and/or connect the individual to others or groups that are aligned with their social values and norms. Luckenbill and Best (1981: 199) discuss this connection in relation to

deviant careers when they note that “many deviants learn codes of conduct that specify the actions expected of them in particular situations and their relationship with other deviants.” Additionally, one’s identity can also be established or reinforced “when others place him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces” (Stone 1962: 93).

Waskul (1998) defines a role as “a performance that includes a set of definitions for appropriate or required behavior in a given situation” (1998: 26). The roles we occupy are created when we enact them within those requirements. For example, an individual may claim the role of mother and would be expected to perform in a way that aligns with social norms and expectations of what a mother is in society, leading to validation from others. In those roles, we either claim an identity or distance ourselves from the identity assumed by the role. Turner (1978; 1962) states that we are most likely to claim a role as an identity if it is formed during sustained interaction and are “either internalized or experienced from external sources, or both, and are judged and judge themselves according to how well they conform to the expectations” (Turner 2001: 234).

The identities we claim within roles are key parts of our self-concepts, or the meanings we associate with a role we occupy. Roles can be exited, changed, or be enacted for a short time due to certain interactions. They can also be more or less salient, like identities, and are subject to change. Identity change often accompanies role change and new behaviors and expectations are required to enter a new role and identity.

At times, one may deviate from their role in society and take on or perform a different identity for various reasons. I argue an individual can change these identities

under the correct circumstances and appropriate performance of the actor. When discussing identity and performance within interaction, I use Goffman's (1959) idea of performance. One performs to others intentionally, and with the understanding that they are being evaluated by the audience, in a way that conveys who they are, how they want to be viewed, and what they are about. The performance is an attempt to give a genuine conveyance of a role and identity that is believed to be socially acceptable and ultimately, if achieved, is likely to be considered appropriate and aligned with social values and norms to suit the situation or interaction.

Performance of an identity may include attention to appearances and objects that can provide clues to one's identity. In some cases, providing cues through appearance, can be a clear sign, to the self and others, that an individual is performing a particular identity. For example, McAlexander and Schouten (1989) illustrate how hairstyle changes in new identity construction are important in the performance of identity change. Similarly, when traveling, an individual may wear particular clothing that they normally would not wear to express their vacation identity, or if traveling abroad, one may obtain language or tour guide books to better identify with the culture in which they will become immersed. Identity work not only involves an internal process but also include planning, material possession or the lack of possessions (Stein 2011). Stein (2011) further notes that exiting from a temporary vacation identity is inevitable, some finding it difficult to do so, struggle with returning to their normal life and reacquainting themselves with their more salient identities. One way Stein (2011) notes that people integrate their vacation identity into their normal life, is by souvenirs. Stein (2011: 303) takes from Silver's

(1996) idea that objects take on a special significance during transitions, as they are “tangible evidence testifying to the salient characteristics of personal biographies” (1996: 2).

Snow and Anderson (1987) note the importance of objects when discussing how some of those experiencing homelessness are able to “pass” while for others “passing is largely impossible” (1987: 1339) when a “role sign” (Banton 1965) or a “stigma symbol” (Goffman 1963), such as dirty clothing or outdoor living spaces such as tents, are highly visible. Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) in their work studying homeless youth and their stigma management strategies, point out that one way children attempted to pass was by selecting donated clothing based on “style rather than function” (2004: 34) and ultimately the kids just “hoped to be recognized simply as kids” (2004: 31).

IDENTITY CHANGE

I recall a recent conversation with an acquaintance (shared with permission) who dyed her hair pink while she was participating in treatment for alcohol use. When asked about her pink hair color, she stated that it was her “treatment hair” and that she would be going back to her original color upon successful completion of her program. She differentiated her “working on recovery” identity from her other more salient identities such as mother, daughter, and spouse by changing her hair color. For her, as she stated, the “treatment hair” actively advised others that she was focused on treatment in order to get back to her suspended life where her family was waiting for her. After completing treatment and returning home, she did exactly as she stated she would do and returned to

her natural hair color. By doing so, she believes her family took her seriously and noted the transition back to them was very clear to everyone by this simple change. She performed what Schouten (1991) describes as a “a transition of identity” beginning “with separation from some role relationship or other key component of the extended self” (1991: 421). By changing her hair color, she was able to show her transition and also claimed that this was a way to shed her addict identity and move forward. Of note, she later reported that she would never fully shed her addict identity, and that it helped inform her current identity in recovery. She has since become a chemical dependency therapist and her role as a professional ex (Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1998) has been solidified.

Silver’s (1996) claims regarding the importance of objects in role transitions furthers this discussion when he notes that objects are significant when conveying identities upon entering a new role. Objects give off certain cues just by viewing them, as Unruh (1983) describes when discussing identity preservation in death, they also represent “stories embedded within the objects” (1983: 344). Stone (1962) and Goffman (1959, 1963) highlight the importance of appearance, dress and other nonverbal means of performance when conveying identity. Phelan and Hunt (1998) note this in their study on prison gang member tattoos and how they convey identity by visible tattoos relaying their “moral careers” (Goffman 1961: 128). Phelan and Hunt (1998) note Wicklund and Gollwitzer’s (1982) perspective that “identity work revolves around the work of gathering and displaying symbols that are intended to make self-defining labels more complete” and are used to “convey their social identities” (Phelan and Hunt 1998: 279).

Mead (1934) states that one will view themselves in ways that incorporate the views of others, known as reflected appraisals, and perform their identity according to what Burke (2006) refers to as the identity standard.

Identity is continually constructed, managed and capable of changing. According to Stryker and Serpe (1982), their discussion on identity salience suggests one may have many identities and, depending on whether it is valued by others, or if it is seen as a more salient identity, one will give greater credence and perform those identities at a higher level. If there is a discrepancy between identities, creating a conflict, Burke (2006) indicates that one cannot solve the conflict between them and will look for a compromise. For example, Hunter and Greer (2011) note that respondents in their study of justice involved women took on an addict identity and further note that the emerging identity helped the women to disguise their justice involved identity by providing insight into why they were incarcerated. In doing so, the women were able to find a compromise and it aided in their explanation of the discrepancy between any of their non-stigmatized identities held prior to being justice involved and their current incarceration.

Would an individual with conflicting identities eventually re-identify with the stronger, more salient, identity, and how would that change occur? I speculate that a key component would be whether the identity change happens primarily from feedback and verification from supportive others in one's life, in other words through interaction and a reformulation of foundations, boundaries, and rules within society. Based on work done by Burke (1991) and Burke and Stets (2009), they suggest that not only does a change occur, but it will change in the direction of the reflected appraisals, thus showing that

others' reflected appraisals have great influence over identity change. Hunter and Greer (2011) point out that "identities are conceived of as flexible and capable of transformation" (2011: 217) when discussing justice involved women. Erik Erikson (1968) notes that there are many stages of identity formation and that they are continually being reconstructed and changing over one's entire life, especially during adolescence.

This suggests that identity change is not only necessary at times but also a very normal process throughout an individual's life. The work of Mead (1934), Goffman (1963), Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996), and Burke (2006) continue to remind us that our selves are connected to particular identities and change according to the expectations of others and within various circumstances and change occurs often and continually.

An example of this is illustrated by Fine and Victor's (1994) discussion of teenagers' experimentation with Satanism. They indicate that a person typically moves from one identity to another, especially during adolescence at which time identity is in its most important formation period. Essentially, at this time, adolescents are attempting to gain their independence and engage in activities to create shock value and rebel against adults in their lives. Some people would agree that creating shock and rebelling are normal parts of growing up and the experiences surrounding this type of identity work when engaging in satanic rituals may be viewed as deviant. It is, however, less troublesome and ominous if it is simply an experience that assists them in the formation of an identity within the self. One may have temporarily identified as a Satanist, but for most teens, this is an experimental identity that rarely becomes part of a more core and

salient self. The performance, or more importantly, the rebellion and experience involved, is likely more a key part of the self than the satanic identity that is briefly enacted.

As the example of teenage satanic tourist helps illustrate, identities can evolve, change, conform, reform or conflict with other identities. They can also be more temporally ambiguous as indicated by Howard (2006) when discussing recovery identities. In this situation, one may have conflicting identities (recovery and former addict). Brown (1991) sheds light on this as well in his study on exiting an addict role and entering into a “professional ex” role when becoming addiction counselors. One does not only work to shed their addict identity; rather, they work to embrace it by reframing it in order to use it to enter into a career directly focusing on addiction. This type of identity change can add depth to one or more of an individual’s selves. They may be more important and key than we think; especially when we are looking at deviant careers. The person may change their behavior standard and maintain the deviance as opposed to realigning with the salient, less deviant identities one may carry. Goffman (1963) notes that this can be consequential for both the individual and others in that it can further alienate one from society. Of course, the cost of alienation is severe when we consider that the self is created and maintained through interaction with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). It may not be until one attempts to exit or distance from a deviant identity that one may be slowly allowed back into society and feel less alienated. The very idea or talk of exiting may open the door for others to reacquaint with the individual

and begin to provide feedback that reestablishes an identity that aligns with social norms and expectations.

What if we were able to get close to homing in on whether their feelings of self-worth, or lack thereof, impacted whether an individual can shed a deviant or stigmatized identity and determine whether that insight could affect services, resources, and community programming to better aid those choosing to exit a deviant identity? Could insight into the identity work of a stigmatized individual change how service providers do business? Could it help others gain a better understanding into the lives of marginalized groups which then could grow into empathy and compassion? I do not know if I can answer these questions. What I do hope is to help fill in the gap in the literature regarding identity exit and change to get closer to that understanding and create a pathway for future study.

In the following analysis, I give a broad understanding of how individuals exit a deviant or stigmatized identity from a symbolic interactionist perspective. From that lens, I will illustrate four strategies activated by various stigmatized groups in an effort to show the vast landscape in which identity exits occur. These strategies include: (1) othering; (2) hiding/disguising; (3) embracing; and (4) repairing. I also provide direction for future study and suggest how this work can impact services, resources, and support for individuals who exit a stigmatized identity.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

This inquiry sets out to answer the following questions: (1) How do people change their identity once they have held a deviant identity; (2) In what populations can identity change be found; (3) What, if at all, is the role of others in identity change; and (4) What strategies are activated to elicit identity change? In answering these questions, I argue that the process of identity change reveals something about how people actively construct identities, lending support to the identity literature more broadly.

Initially, I employed a symbolic interactionist and identity theory perspective to conduct a content analysis of research focused on identity change to help answer these questions. Examining “temporary identity,” “identity performance,” “exiting a deviant career” and “identity change,” I focused on studies that show various strategies of identity change. Therefore, the populations described herein reflect those who experience significant identity change.

The initial analysis identified a small number of articles stemming from a search of one key phrase “temporary identity.” Eleven articles emerged, each focusing on a specific population. The next stage in my search mimicked a snowball sampling method in which I reviewed reference lists of the eleven initial articles. In total, nineteen additional articles were added for analysis after reviewing the reference lists. At this time, I added the following key terms into the search: “identity performance,” “exiting a deviant career,” and “identity change” and continued my snowball sample from the reference lists. An additional seventeen articles were added to the sample.

My initial focus was on which populations emerged from the research gathered. Of the 47 articles selected, 20 main populations emerged by reviewing the article title and abstract. Of those populations, those that were chosen for consideration shared the following characteristics: (1) they were viewed as deviant, thus stigmatized¹; (2) they used specific strategies for exiting a deviant identity; and (3) each population was represented among a minimum of two separate articles.

Lofland's (1995) method of analytic induction was then applied to find similarities and key concepts among the populations of (1) those experiencing homelessness, (2) justice involved individuals, (3) drug and alcohol addicts, (4) mental health disordered individuals, (5) caregivers, (6) sex workers, (7) displaced workers, and (8) those holding hidden identities in order to hide a deviant identity for a short time.

Within those populations, the question of how one may exit an existing identity became the next step. Each article was carefully analyzed by extensive note taking and highlighting discussions that focused specifically on strategies. Early on, patterns began to emerge among key literature (Anderson and Bondi 1998; Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1988; Howard 2006; Hunter and Greer 2011; King et al. 2009; Snow and Anderson 1987; Redmon 2003; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004). Five strategies emerged (1) shedding, (2) othering (3) hiding or disguising, (4) repairing, and (5) embracing. With the potential strategies in place, the populations were again analyzed to determine whether they fell

¹ This conception stems from Becker's (1963) argument that "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders" (Becker 1963: 9). In other words, someone may be labeled deviant and stigmatized if they fall outside of the expectations, as defined by the group or society, of what it means to be normal.

under two or more of the strategies. They were also reevaluated to determine if they still held the above characteristics needed for inclusion. A total of 27 articles were included in the final analysis.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

Many populations that experience identity change were considered for inclusion in my analysis such as student athletes (Ezzell 2009; Adler and Adler 1989), survivors of domestic abuse (Leisenring 2006; Dunn 2001), seasonal workers such as camp staffers (Waskul 1996), women in the military (Heidersohn 1992; Cohn 2000; Martin 1994), law enforcement (Martin 1994; Williams 1989) and firefighting fields (Yoder and Berendsen 2003). However, these populations did not fit under the criteria of a stigmatized population that is considered deviant and were ultimately excluded from my analysis when that focus was determined. Two exceptions were made when considering groups to include in my analysis. First, Redmon's (2003) research on backspaces at Mardi Gras in which individuals were found to participate in playful deviance and second, Stein's (2011) work on temporary vacation identities. Each were determined appropriate for inclusion due to the discussion of identity as likely to be disguised or hidden and the deviant nature in which they could be considered, if known to others. The very nature of hiding or disguising either identity made them favorable for consideration and provided valuable insight into the strategies I analyze.

Domestic abuse survivors were specifically excluded due to my extensive focus on victim advocacy as a Probation Officer who supervises high risk domestic violence

offenders. Additionally, as a witness to family violence as a child, I believe my bias from my insider status would not provide enough analytic distance from the research.

Before I delve into analysis of strategies from the existing literature on the populations I chose to include, especially in reference to the strategy of othering, it is worth acknowledging the researcher bias Michelle Fine (1994) notes that occurs simply by defining a group or individual as worthy of study. Upon selecting a target of study, or in my case a certain population of inquiry, I am labeling them as an object of curiosity thus, essentially othering the subjects of my analysis. With this in mind, I present an analysis of existing literature on populations that hold stigmatized identities, often holding marginalized places in society, with the underlying philosophy of Harding's (1992) notion of detachment (1992: 571) in that one does not completely detach from the study or subject, rather one maintains openness outside of her own assumptions in order to better understand another's unique experience and perspective. Additionally, I also take note of Harding's (1992) notion of reflexivity, in which one must always reflect on her own situation and assumptions while doing research:

if one starts from the activities of those who are necessarily disadvantaged in a particular kind of social order one can come to understand objectively existing features of it that are much harder to detect (p.584).

As previously mentioned, my decision to exclude survivors and victims of domestic violence reflects this necessary reflexivity.

In this analysis of existing literature, I hope to close the gap on the ambiguity around considering an identity as temporary or whether it is possible to shed an identity at all. Throughout the research, I found that few studies focus on various populations and

tended to single out one as a specific area of research. The analysis uncovers how those populations performed similar strategies toward a similar goal of shedding a deviant identity. I also hope my findings reveal how closely connected these varying populations actually are and how similar the strategies are for each. In this way, the identity work strategies described herein are “generic” (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

The broad discussion on various populations experiencing identity change and the strategies used that I discuss fall into a broader category of shedding an identity. While shedding could be viewed as one strategy of identity change, I view it as an overarching theme sewing a common thread throughout all strategies discussed in the following sections.

CHAPTER THREE: STRATEGIES FOR EXITING AN IDENTITY - AN ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

While various strategies are activated and performed during exiting an identity, I focus on the following four strategies: (1) othering; (2) hiding and disguising; (3) embracing; and (4) repairing. In maintaining a smaller scope to focus on a wide range of individuals from various groups, I aim to highlight the vast landscape in which identity change work can occur. This analysis prompts future areas of study that examine solutions to some of the concerns addressed among the populations discussed.

OTHERING

A form of categorizing and marking individuals in a group as inferior or different (Fine 2004; Schwalbe et al. 2000), othering is a strategy used by some individuals to shed an identity that is connected to that particular group by distancing from those within the group labeled as deviant. As illustrated by Howard Becker (1963) and his work on Labeling Theory, an individual is not inherently deviant until they are labeled as such by others. A deviant label, whether warranted or not, is key to othering. Padavic's (2005) research on contingent workers provides us with a great example in their discussion on those that reported having to wear badges labeled "nonemployee" (2005: 121) during their temporary job placement. This illustrates one example how those in power can mark others as inferior or different and of the difficulty displaced workers have in finding a worker identity, even within a work environment.

In the following, I discuss an analysis of literature focusing on individuals experiencing homelessness (King et al. 2009; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004; Snow and Anderson 1987), displaced workers (Padavic 2005) and sex workers (Oselin 2010; Trautner and Collett 2010) to show how people manage an identity within a group as a way to more positively self-identify. Not only is this strategy important for maintaining feelings of self-worth, it can also be a tool used to exit an undesirable identity and one that continues to be used well after one's exit.

An important aspect of identity work surrounds the need to create and maintain feelings of self-worth and respect (Snow and Anderson 1987). Among those experiencing homelessness, individuals are not only viewed as outcasts and stigmatized by their situation, but they also struggle to survive within their circumstances all the while attempting to gain or maintain a level of self-worth and respect. Not many strive to continue this role and most work to exit or distance themselves from their homeless identity (Snow and Anderson 1987). A strategy such as othering is employed to maintain these desired feelings of self-respect and self-worth by distancing themselves from others who also hold the stigmatized identity of being 'homeless.'

Snow and Anderson (1987) describe three major ways in which homeless individuals attempted to 'other' themselves from stigmatized identities by distancing: associational distancing, role distancing, and institutional distancing. These strategies were not only utilized when faced with their deviant status in society but also within their interaction with other homeless people. For example, a person experiencing homelessness may distinguish themselves from other homeless people by "categorical

associational distancing” (1987: 1349) in that they differentiate themselves by placing others lower in status and claiming to be different. A respondent from Snow and Anderson’s (1987) study illustrates this type of strategy, paired with “institutional distancing” (1987: 1351), by stating:

I’m not like the other guys who hang out down at the “Sally” [Salvation Army]. If you want to know about street people, I can tell you about them; but you can’t really learn about street people from studying me, because I’m different
(p.1349).

By making this statement, the respondent is not only distancing from other homeless individuals but is also distancing from an institution commonly associated with people experiencing homelessness. An individual experiencing homelessness may also role distance from various aspects, such as panhandling or participating in day labor jobs, that may associate them with homelessness in order to “disassociate themselves from those very roles” (1987: 1350) by staying away from agencies associated with helping the homeless or refusing certain jobs that would primarily only be held by a homeless person and viewed by society as such.

In their research on homeless children, Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) note that homeless children employ a distancing strategy by participated in “defensive othering” (2004: 36) a term coined by Schwalbe et al. (2000). In performing defensive othering, they speak ill of those homeless people who chose to live on the streets as opposed to shelters. They place the “street others” into a lower category of homeless as a way to distance themselves from “those” homeless people. The shelter kids used this tactic to

identify themselves as better than street homeless, and did so in order to claim a place higher in the hierarchy among the homeless.

As discussed by Schwalbe et al. (2000), individuals may engage in a cognitive coping strategy in which “subordinates may also engage in a kind of silent othering” (2000: 444). In doing so, as Padavic (2005) shows, contingent and displaced workers may create negative discourse around their superiors by framing them as inferior or incapable of doing their job without the subordinates’ contribution. In doing so, an individual may mitigate feelings of negative self-worth and identify as a valued employee who is not being given the credit they feel they deserve. On the other hand, some individuals fight back toward the stigma of their displaced worker status by performing othering through what Padavic (2005) refers to as “rejecting the ideal” (2005: 126). In this instance, a worker may frame their circumstances as a choice and place those that work in full-time stable employment as the ones who are ‘clueless’ worker bees. The contingent workers who employ this othering strategy frame those who hold full-time employment as lacking freedom and are prone to physical, mental constraints that ultimately were not worth it to them (Padavic 2005).

Similar to “defensive othering” used by individuals experiencing homelessness as a way to distance themselves from aspects of homelessness or others living on the street (Roschelle and Kaufman 2004; Schwalbe et al. 2000; Snow and Anderson 1987), students who strip (Trautner and Collett 2010) reported examples of othering that include selectively identifying as a student with co-workers, employers, and customers at their place of employment, often giving them more flexible hours, more money from

customers and, consequently, resentment from co-workers who are not students. Subjects also reported not maintaining friendships or close ties with co-workers, and they would not identify as a sex worker while performing as a student or as a family member.

Trautner and Collett (2010) argue that these tactics buffered students from the stigma of the negative identity that can come with sex work and reinforces the non-salience of that identity. This would presumably sustain a successfully managed boundary that aids in maintaining their student identity and their feelings of positive self-worth. Trautner and Collett (2010) further discuss the students' use of othering as a means to lessen the repair work that would be needed when exiting their stripper role. By distancing from other strippers and maintaining clear boundaries between their stripper and student identity, they were essentially able to neutralize (Sykes and Matza 1957) their stigmatized identity by "appealing to higher loyalties" (Trautner and Collett 2010: 261), in this case, the goal to complete college. Students in the study reported specifically stripping to get through college and all indicated that it was "only a short-term gig to get through school, not a long-term career" (Trautner and Collett 2010: 267). This helped them to more easily shed their stripper identity after graduating college and entering the work force. The work to repair was already occurring during the performance of both identities.

In Trautner and Collett's (2010) study on students who strip, the authors highlight the "power that individuals have over their own and others' perceptions of stigmatized or deviant traits" (2010: 257). Deviant identities can be more difficult to shed without protective factors due to labeling, stigma, and at times, criminal status (Oselin 2010). Trautner and Collett (2010) pay close attention to how students manage their dueling

identities of student and sex worker, and how they ultimately mitigate negative effects on their self-concepts that may occur from holding a stigmatized identity of sex worker by maintaining a more salient identity of student. This is an excellent example of how one identity may protect an individual from stigma or social consequences due to another identity, especially if it is considered temporary by the individual or others.

In some instances, unforeseen circumstances may provide a previously unavailable catalyst causing an individual to be forced to employ othering and distancing themselves from their stigmatized identity. Illustrating another example of “appealing to higher loyalties” (Trautner and Collett 2010: 261), King et al. (2009) and Hanna’s (2001) research on young women experiencing homelessness who become pregnant viewed the pregnancy and parenting as an opportunity to distance themselves from others who are experiencing homelessness and deviant behavior such as drug and alcohol use, giving them a reason to instead focus on gaining a stable residence and providing a safe environment to themselves and their child.

Individuals experiencing homelessness are not only viewed as outcasts and stigmatized by their situation; they also struggle to survive within their circumstances while attempting to gain or maintain a level of self-worth and respect. Not many strive to continue this role and most work to exit or distance themselves from the social identity category of homeless (Snow and Anderson 1987). Othering is one strategy used to differentiate oneself from others who have been deemed inferior or different. This strategy is not only important for maintaining feelings of self-worth within a deviant group, it is also crucial to those actively working toward shedding an identity and

maintaining an exit from a deviant career. Othering may continue long after the exit while one employs other strategies to maintain their new identity.

For example, when an individual attains a residence and is no longer living in shelters or on the streets, they are no longer ‘performing’ as a homeless individual—in dramaturgical terms, they are no longer “on stage” or unable to exit the performance arena. However, this is not a transition that instantly happens like flipping a switch. If an individual is successful in exiting from a stigmatized role, I argue that one continues to do extensive identity work in distancing from their previous stigmatized identity; othering continues to be used as a tool for identity construction. This identity work may involve distancing from certain kinds of homeless people to show how they were different, even when homeless, or hiding the identity they successfully exited as those I explain in the next section.

While some people use othering to help exit identities, some hide or disguise their stigmatized identities. Othering involves the person to acknowledge and admit to a particular identity (e.g., being homeless) but hiding involves identity work aimed at making sure others do not know of the stigmatized identity in the first place.

HIDING/DISGUIISING STIGMATIZED IDENTITIES

Hiding or disguising a deviant identity can be arduous work that involves careful planning and attention to detail. In the following section, the analysis of literature on sex workers (Trautner and Collett 2010), justice involved individuals (Hunter and Greer 2011; Owens 2009; Pager 2003; Parrotta and Thompson 2011; Schmid and Jones 1991)

and those acting out a vacation identity (Redmon 2003; Stein 2011), will highlight how these groups work to hide their stigmatized identity and highlight some of the planning and attention to detail (Brown 1991; Goffman 1963; Parrotta and Thompson 2011; Stone 1962 and 1990; Trautner and Collett 2010, Turner 1962) that are important for this identity work strategy to be successful.

Trautner and Collett (2010) argue that students who worked as strippers were able to shed one identity for another when necessary and, often, this involved careful and extensive stigma management techniques in order to divide their social worlds (Goffman 1963) and compartmentalize their roles (Turner 1978). Stone (1962) and Goffman (1959, 1963) highlight the importance of appearance, dress, and other non-verbal means of performance when conveying identity. Students who strip reported “dressing toward” (Stone 1990: 149) and very differently for each identity, and often times would be in ‘disguise’ when preparing and performing their sex worker identity. Trautner and Collett (2010) note that students do this identity work “by keeping their profession secret” (2010: 269) and hide their deviant identity of sex worker. By doing so, they protect themselves from negative input from other students, friends, and family, thus maintaining their status as temporary and maintaining their positive self-concept. These techniques and careful division of identities will presumably help students shed their sex worker identity when they complete college. If their identity is successfully hidden, and their alternate identity of student was successfully maintained, students will not have to divulge their sex worker identity as they can claim student status during that time frame (Trautner and Collett 2010).

Formerly justice involved individuals face similar identity issues. One difference is that a felony, once imposed, is a label that is typically lifelong. The stigma of having a criminal history may not be entirely visible and the individual may successfully pass or be considered creditable in that they are not actively providing cues to others that they have a criminal history. Identity work among formerly justice involved individuals can be performed when and how one decides whether to let others know about their criminal history. The performance lies in who, when, and in what ways they will divulge the information, if they choose to at all.

If their criminal history is divulged, Pager (2007) finds that formerly justice involved individuals carry “negative credentials that confer social stigma and generalized assumptions of untrustworthiness or undesirability” (2007: 33). This implies that more “positive credentials (like college degrees) facilitate access to restricted social positions” (2007: 32). Owens (2009) suggests that some formerly incarcerated individuals who earned degrees while in custody, became a “professional-ex” (2009: 334) after release as their opportunities for employment were still limited due to their criminal history. Even with those limitations, Brown (1991) posits that those earning degrees while incarcerated gave them “a moral sense of self-worth and sacredness rather than credential acquisition” (1991: 226) providing tools, both internal and external, to better aid in the disguise of their former incarceration upon reentry into the community.

The need to hide or disguise an identity can also be found among incarcerated individuals. Schmid and Jones (1991) discuss suspending identities as a coping mechanism for newly incarcerated individuals. One “cannot ‘be himself’ in prison

because he would be too vulnerable, he decides to ‘suspend’ his pre-prison identity for the duration of his sentence. . . protecting himself by choosing not to reveal himself (his ‘true’ self) to others” (Schmid and Jones 1991: 419). It is the performance or impression management (Goffman 1959) of a calculated and constructed temporary identity, created to interact appropriately among other incarcerated individuals, that allows the individual to survive the prison experience and return to his suspended identities upon release. Schmid and Jones (1991) describe this as “a false identity created for survival in an artificial world” (1991: 421). In order to survive in this temporary world, the temporary identity must pass appropriately to avoid serious consequences from other inmates if the performance fails or they are found to be “acting”.

Schmid and Jones (1991) continue by addressing inmates reported concerns that they were beginning to take on their temporary identity, i.e., it was becoming more salient and that it was “becoming [their] ‘true’ identity” (1991: 424). Through consistent validation from others and remaining “on stage” to perform their imprisoned identity at all times, and the experience of incarceration causing changes in an individual, one might expect changes to the self and identity. Furthermore, the same may be true for shedding the incarcerated identity. Upon release from incarceration, those with a criminal background may want to purposely alienate from social groups that connect them to the identity they wish to disguise. As Parrotta and Thompson (2011) discuss, incarcerated individuals who participate in education programming are provided a new platform as a means to repair their justice involved identity with a new identity as student. Just as Hunter and Greer (2011) found that an “addict identity emerged” (2011: 213) in

incarcerated women's narratives, they further note that the emerging identity helped the women to disguise their justice involved or incarcerated identity by providing insight into why they were there. In both cases, people who were incarcerated took hold of new identities as part of the strategy of hiding stigmatized identities.

While a criminal record may be more difficult to hide from others in certain circumstances, such as employment background checks or housing applications, other examples may be more short term and possibly more easily hidden from others in one's normal life. This does not necessarily lessen the amount of identity work that must be done in hiding an identity, however, one may not be stigmatized unless they are found out. The attempts to avoid being found out illustrate the importance of hiding and disguising (Schmid and Jones 1991).

A population that can be considered less stigmatized while employing the same strategy of hiding or disguising are those holding hidden identities to hide a deviant identity for a short time, such as those who take on a vacation identity (Stein 2011). Individuals who hold these identities can be distinguished from justice involved individuals (Hunter and Greer 2011; Owens 2009; Pager 2003; Parrotta and Thompson 2011; Schmid and Jones 1991) or students engaging in sex work (Trautner and Collett 2010) in that they are choosing to identify in a deviant way for a short time. However, hiding and disguising that period of time in which the identity was enacted is of great importance in the maintenance of their reputation upon exiting the temporarily held deviant identity.

David Redmon (2003) focuses primarily on secret identity performance at Mardi Gras, a backstage (Goffman 1963) in which people perform a particular identity in order to interact in a particular way with others who do not know them and will not ruin their reputation, where individuals can “stand exposed and find they need not try to conceal their stigma, nor be overly concerned with cooperatively trying to disattend it” (1963: 81). In preparation for the experience of what Redmon (2003) refers to as playful deviance, one may either travel alone or only travel with others that are aware of their secret identity. In this setting, for example, one may insert themselves on a particular stage where they perform their secret identity freely.

One example Redmon (2003) discusses is a man who attends Mardi Gras and has sex with other men and then returns home to his wife who does not know about his behavior. Redmon’s (2003) argument is centered on those, like the example above, who enact playful deviance at Mardi Gras to reveal their secret selves without fear of stigma or repercussion, rather, gaining self-validation from others around them. He further implies that cultural norms and rules dictate how one acts in normal life leaving little, if any, room to deviate. “The implication is that culture creates categories of forbidden activities and secret selves by outlawing them in everyday life. Yet, these outlawed behaviors are embraced when performed in themed backstages such as Mardi Gras” (2003: 36). With the rules being more lax or non-existent at Mardi Gras, people are free to play out their hidden identity and are given validation by others for doing so.

Not everyone goes on a trip to partake in playful deviance (Redmon 2003). Others simply go on vacation to take a break, to disconnect from their job and normal

life, and to unwind or relax. Stein (2011) states that “vacations can be thought of as a kind of pause in the rhythm of day-to-day life, rather than an escape from it” (2011: 292). In these experiences, a less deviant, temporary identity can be constructed during a vacation, a time when one can get away from societal norms and expectations for a brief period of time. Although less deviant than Redmon’s (2003) Mardi Gras participants, vacation identity may also be considered hidden. Some simply do not want to share their private vacation experiences or have to speak to their actions while on vacation. This may be because it is outside the parameters of their everyday life. Sharing aspects of one’s vacation identity may cause others to question their validity. Vacation identity is temporary and is not necessarily performed to highlight one’s more salient identities; rather it is conveyed to indicate that one is in fact on a break and that it is only for a short period of time. Additionally, this temporary identity is planned and constructed specifically for the experience. Relaxing their behaviors and adopting a less restrictive mentality can bring new experiences and openness (Stein 2011).

While hiding or disguising a stigmatized identity may be possible in some instances, as illustrated above, it can be difficult and time-consuming work regardless of how deviant it is considered. Often times, one does not have the opportunity to maintain a hidden identity and must activate strategies to make their stigmatized identity work for them in a positive and productive manner. In the following discussion, I hope to illustrate how an individual may shed their deviant identity in an effort to mitigate the effects of a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963) by embracing and reframing it.

EMBRACING AN IDENTITY

In the following section, I show how people actively work to adjust and change their identities to the circumstances. While analyzing literature on stigmatized groups such as justice involved individuals (Hunter and Greer 2011; Schmid and Jones 1991), individuals experiencing homelessness (King et al. 2009; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004; Snow and Anderson 1987), and addicts and those in recovery (Anderson and Bondi 1998; Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1988; Howard 2006), I will also discuss the identity work caregivers (Ganci 2016; Montgomery and Kosloski 2009) do to embrace a temporary identity. By sharing personal anecdote about my own identity change required by my circumstances, I argue that identities are not simply static things attached to us, but are actively constructed by us. I show that justice involved women who are recovering addicts (Hunter and Greer 2011) embrace addict identities the same way some individuals experiencing homelessness (King et al. 2009; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004; Snow and Anderson 1987) and addicts (Anderson and Bondi 1998; Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1988; Howard 2006) do: with effort to manage stigma. Similarly, those with caregiving thrust upon them (Ganci 2016; Montgomery and Kosloski 2009), and those that perform identity situationally (Redmon 2003; Stein 2011) embrace a temporary identity in order to participate in or perform a particular identity for a period of time to immerse themselves in a situation or circumstance.

In contrast to the argument that people create a temporary identity while incarcerated (Schmid and Jones 1991) as a survival mechanism, Hunter and Greer (2011) found that incarcerated women embraced the very identities that landed them in jail: drug

addict. As the “addict identity emerged” in the women’s narratives (Hunter and Greer 2011: 213), they made sense of their actions in ways that allowed them to identify how their addict identities got them into trouble in the first place. By embracing and reflecting on their outside addict identity while incarcerated, the women hoped they would be able to maintain it once they were released from incarceration. In this way, embracing the identity served as a reminder of what *not* to do on the outside.

Revealing “troubling stories of neglect, trauma, and abuse” Hunter and Greer (2011) explain the impact of incarcerated women’s troubled pasts had on their “ability to form a clearly defined sense of who they were as individuals, and this nebulous self often followed them into adulthood” (2011: 207). They note that this inability to craft a sense of self turned into viewing themselves as “objects to others as opposed to subjects determining the direction of their own lives” (2011: 210) and ultimately working toward pleasing others and receiving validation based on what others wanted and sadly would “leave it up to the others to determine who they will be” (2011: 211), which often lead to drug and alcohol use as a means to cope. Ultimately, Hunter and Greer (2011) found that embracing the addict identity was helpful to the women in that it provided answers to why they were incarcerated and “helped them understand the events of their lives” (2011: 221).

It is not only incarcerated addicts who find this strategy of embracing useful. Snow and Anderson (1987) show how some who are experiencing homelessness embrace identities related to homelessness to cope with their situation. Some may embrace their homelessness and, at times, embrace a particular identity within their homelessness; for

example, by embracing their skill at street performing or panhandling. However, for those working toward “a way off the street” (1987: 1357), using “restorative ideologies, such as that associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, provide some of the homeless with a readily available locus for identity” (1987: 1357). Much like those incarcerated women discussed above who are preparing for reentry (Hunter and Greer 2011), homeless individuals may embrace an otherwise stigmatized identity, such as addict or a recovery identity, to help steel themselves against the forces that got them into that situation and as “a way off the street” (Snow and Anderson 1987: 1357).

Embracing one stigmatized identity (addict) may be very important for a successful transition toward exiting a related stigmatized identity, such as incarcerated women (Hunter and Greer 2011) or homeless person (Snow and Anderson 1987). Not all addicts embrace this identity as a part of their recovery or identity change, however. Others engage in identity shedding, whereby they actively shed the more stigmatized identity and embrace an ex-identity.

Anderson and Bondi (1998) focus on this idea in their discussion on exiting the addict role by “creating an ex-role” (1998: 157; cf. Ebaugh 1998). Like what incarcerated women face when they are no longer in the addict role and attempt to distance themselves from that role, they work to embrace their previous identity as a non-drug user and actively construct a new identity. In doing so, during the attempts to construct new roles and identity around recovery, as discussed by Anderson and Bondi (1998), one may struggle with contrasting identities such as mother or family member. This may be the beginning of the work to shed an addict identity and embrace the identity

of mother or caregiver as they may be more closely tied to their more salient identity. This conflict between identities may be just the thing that helps shed the stigmatized identity.

Montgomery and Kosloski (2009), in their discussion on caregiver distress and identity change among caregivers of elderly dementia patients, posit that identity change can occur over a series of transitions from the onset of caregiving throughout the illness. They refer to a “slow, insidious process” (Montgomery and Kosloski 2009: 49) that becomes more difficult due to the demands on the caregiver as the illness progresses. While not usually characterized as a role that is often stigmatized, caregiving can come into conflict with the caregiver’s other identities and the incongruence can only be relieved by another identity change.

For example, according to Ganci (2016), a Registered Clinical Mental Health Social Worker, Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychologist and founder of Specialist Eating Disorders Program in Melbourne, Australia, often times the best approach to address anorexia nervosa in adolescents is through Family Based Therapy. The guidelines of Family Based Therapy, an evidence-based treatment founded by J. Lock and D. LeGrande, insist that the parent is the only one that can facilitate treatment. Along with guidance from therapists and eating disorder staff, the parent becomes the primary caregiver of the child and is in charge of “refeeding” their child (Ganci 2016: 8). This can take place in different levels of treatment such as outpatient, where the child is home or inpatient where the child resides in residential programming. For outpatient adolescents, this means that every meal is handled by the parent in addition to snacks and

monitoring after meals. Those with eating disorders often engage in purging, food hiding, excessive physical activity (2016: 48-49) and parents are warned to monitor for approximately one hour after meals. The typical time frame for Family Based Therapy can last between six months to one year and has three phases (Ganci 2016: 8-10): (1) refeeding and weight restoration; (2) returning control of eating back to the adolescent; and (3) treatment completion and identifying adolescent issues that may need to be addressed.

It is safe to assume that the parent is not only a caregiver for the child but also has many other identities within their life. For example, to draw on personal anecdote for the sake of illustration, I am a single mother of one child with an eating disorder. I am also a probation officer, teacher, and avid traveler. I am a caring individual with a lot of friends and family that are very important to me. I am also a graduate student and, at the time my child was at her most ill, was in the process of completing my Master's program. Most of my identities were shelved when my child became sick and my only option was to embrace a caregiving identity. If I was unable to shelve other identities, they were readjusted and moved down my salience hierarchy thus making them less salient temporarily. The caregiver identity was temporary, but necessary to embrace completely. Because my caregiver identity was considerably higher on my hierarchy, other identities suffered in that they were not being acted upon in ways that others deemed appropriate. In order to avoid alienation or becoming discredited (Goffman 1963) I had to utilize strategies to maintain my status in my work. Not only did I personally employ strategies

but I was afforded a “sick role” (Goffman 1963; Parsons 1951) status by others that allowed me to avoid stigma within the group.

Goffman (1963) also discusses the sick role status in the framework of groups when he notes:

The member who is defined as physically sick is in somewhat the same situation; if he properly handles his sick status he can deviate from performance standards without this being taken as a reflection on him or on his relations to the group. The eminent and the sick can be free, then, to be deviators precisely because their deviation can be fully discounted, leading to no re-identification; their special situation demonstrates they are anything but deviants-in the common understanding of the term (p. 141).

In this, one can assume that there may be instances where identities can be performed within a sick role and that the performance may earn a reprieve or be excused, if the role or identity is temporary, when they return to accepted societal expectations. One who is actively attempting to recover and heal may be given a reprieve by others if one is viewed as performing a sick role (Goffman 1963; Parsons 1951). This upholds societal norms and maintains the connection one has as a member of society, thus helping them to avoid alienation.

When my child was admitted to the hospital and ultimately entered residential eating disorder treatment for 10 weeks, I was involved in Family Based Therapy and was expected to be at the program for daily lunch, family group and dinner approximately 1-2 times per week. In addition, my child was given passes on the weekends that varied from short practice meals outside of treatment or longer full day passes where numerous meals were practiced. I use this example because I could go through numerous identities as I went through my day. I would work in the morning until I had to go to my child's

treatment for lunch where I would plate and serve my child. I would return to work if I did not have a parent meeting with my child's therapist and often, I would return hours later for dinner and parent programming. Two days per week I teach a class at a local Community College and would typically race there to have time to reframe and get ready for my lecture. This ultimately became a skill I called "identity jumping" and I had to become very good at it very quickly if I wanted to uphold one of my most salient identities, that as a mother.

Montgomery and Kosloski's (2009) discussion on incongruence is important to note here. I struggled with being the mom of a teenager, an age where the normative expectation is that youth are gaining more freedom and independence. I was going in the opposite direction and was involved in every aspect of my child's life, especially when she returned home and Family Based Therapy continued. At which time, I spent numerous hours at the table observing my child's meals and monitoring her after to be sure she was not engaging in purging, hiding, or excessive physical activity (Ganci 2016: 48-49). Additionally, this time period took me out of my work more than while she was inpatient causing an incongruence with my work identity. Furthermore, I was consistently supported and encouraged by my work team and supervisors. Having the opportunity to use the Family Medical Leave Act to take time off as necessary was a privilege I was afforded during that time. I was given reprieve due to my child's illness and was often told that I simply had to take care of my family and work came after that endeavor. Furthermore, my child was also given reprieve due to her disorder identity.

The discussion on the sick role (Goffman 1963; Parsons 1951) shines some light on a possible technique that individuals and others use to manage discrepancy and help gain an understanding when a deviant identity is activated or deactivated. This type of forgiveness may be needed to shed a deviant identity and begin the process of embracing a new one. A reprieve can help maintain one's self-concept and also help supportive others understand their loved one's behavior. This can maintain relationships within the group and aid in the transition out of a deviant identity. Burke (1991) and Burke and Stets (2009) suggest that not only does a change occur but it will change in the direction of the reflected appraisals (Mead 1934). This clearly illustrates how important others are and the influence they hold over identity change.

I consider my caregiver identity at that time as temporary in that my child thankfully recovered enough to return home and has been able to maintain her health and well-being. In her progress, my duties as a caregiver, and my corresponding identity as caregiver for a child with an illness, diminished. I believe that heavily identifying as a caregiver during the period of time when my child was ill, has reinforced and enhanced my identity as a mother. Furthermore, I believe I was given a "sick role" (Goffman 1963; Parson 1951) status from my employer although, I struggled with that role and worried that it would wear out its welcome with time. While it was necessary for me to embrace my caregiver identity, I also had conflicting identities that aided in my desire to exit that identity and focus, essentially, making it temporary for me and hopefully easier to shed. I know I can recall it if necessary, but it is no longer active.

In the example of an ex-addict or recovering addict, they can often be excused due to illness or disease such as alcoholism or drug addiction. While the person may not be excused during their active illness or addiction, they may be given reprieve if they cease their use and take on the role and identity of a recovering addict; the longer the period of sobriety, the more forgiveness and acceptance of their identity as addict or drug user. Just as Anderson and Bondi 1998; Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1998; Howard 2006; 2008; and Hunter and Greer 2001 discuss, those incarcerated and those in recovery can view their addict identity stemming from past trauma as well as helping them gain an understanding of their circumstances. From the viewpoint of the other, one may rationalize a family member's behavior as an addict by framing it as experimentation or to write it off as the result of a traumatic event. I believe this provides a means for the other to come to terms with a loved one's deviant or socially unacceptable behavior. The reprieve given by the others helps to validate the new identity taken on by the individual in recovery. Others giving a reprieve for past behavior and awarding temporary status may be a very important piece of the puzzle that helps one remain in or return to the social group.

In this instance, in order to move toward embracing a new identity after being granted a reprieve, or time away from other identities, an individual may continue to work to repair that stigmatized identity in order to maintain a new identity. In the next section, the examples from the literature have a unique connection in that they highlight the importance of others for identity repair work. From a viewpoint that "it is easier to exit with more bridges", a statement found scrawled in an old notebook of mine full of

random thoughts, I connect the importance of positive self-concept, acceptance from others, and the importance of resources and connections within society.

REPAIRING A STIGMATIZED IDENTITY

In a sense, all the strategies discussed can be considered ways to repair a stigmatized identity. At times, hiding an identity can prove too difficult and those that find themselves in these circumstances may choose to employ strategies to repair their stigmatized identity in order to avoid consequences stemming from the stigma instead of sustaining a hidden identity. As previously argued, othering can be used as a continuous tool to maintain one's exit from a deviant identity. Embracing a new identity, and/or embracing an identity that has been adjusted to certain circumstances, can repair a previously held deviant identity.

In the following analysis of existing literature, I examine displaced workers (Fineman 1983; Garrett-Peters 2009; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983), sex workers (Trautner and Collett 2010; Sykes and Matza 1957), justice involved individuals (Hunter and Greer 2011; McCarty 2006; Parrotta and Thompson 2011), and those that chose to repair a disordered identity by "delabeling" (Howard 2008: 177). I show how people work toward repairing stigmatized identities and specifically highlight the importance of this strategy as a means to shed an identity with an emphasis on the role of significant others as a key factor. The case of "delabelers" (Howard 2008: 177) also helps illustrate potential consequences of the lack of others during identity transition and provides contrast that sheds light on the difficulties people can face when exiting an identity.

The earlier discussion on the sick role (Goffman 1963; Parsons 1951) is important to note again in regards to repairing deviant identities. This type of forgiveness granted or rationale given for behavior that goes out of the bounds of social norms can be crucial to repairing a previously held deviant identity. A reprieve can help rebuild one's self-concept and help others understand their behavior. This can maintain relationships within the group and aid in the transition out of a deviant identity. This clearly illustrates how important others are and the influence they hold over identity change.

In my discussion on hiding or disguising a deviant identity, repair work looks a bit different with regard to the role of a significant other. For example, in Redmon's (2003), discussion on playful deviance, only the audience for the backstage performance at Mardi Gras is aware of the deviance enacted. Upon their return home, their partner or family members are unaware of their deviant behavior. The individual attempting to hide that identity may have to do covert repair such as following a set of rules enacted to avoid disclosure such as leaving behind costumes, maintaining their script indicating the purpose of the trip, or creating a made up script to utilize in anticipation of the inquiry into the trip. I note this briefly as a possible way to repair; however, I believe there is a gap in the literature regarding rules in this situation and note possible areas of future study regarding this type of repair strategy in my closing statements.

Earlier, I emphasized the importance of othering for students who strip (Trautner and Collett 2010) as a means to lessen repair work upon shedding their sex worker identity. By maintaining their student identity and carefully maintaining the boundaries between stripper and student, specifically by keeping their student identity connections

with campus, professors and classmates, they were able to essentially hide their sex worker identity and, upon completion of their degree, were able to fully repair that deviant identity by simply shedding that identity and stepping into a graduate and worker identity.

A non-stigmatized worker identity not only contributes to feelings of self-worth, it is also held in high regard in our society. Often individuals are faced with losing their employment and tasked with managing a stigmatized displaced worker identity. Garrett-Peters (2009) explains the importance of repairing the stigmatized identity of displaced worker by highlighting the following: (1) the identity based on one's job may be a key resource for generating positive reflected appraisals and favorable social comparisons, both inside and outside the workplace, and (2) action in the workplace may be crucial for creating and sustaining feelings of self-efficacy through self-perceptions of competence" (2009: 548). Garrett-Peters further notes Fineman's (1983) argument that a job loss is not only detrimental to one's self-concept but also detrimental in that one loses resources. In essence, we need others for support, resources, and validation to ensure that an experience such as job loss does not do permanent harm to our identity. A societal expectation would be that one will "enlist others in a collaborative process of self-concept repair" (Garrett-Peters 2009; cf. Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

Highlighting the importance of social groups when attempting to repair self-concept damage, Garrett-Peters (2009) discovered five strategies that were activated to maintain feelings of self-efficacy: (1) redefining the meaning of unemployment; (2) realizing accomplishment; (3) restructuring time; (4) forming accountability partnerships;

and 5) helping others. Reframing a loss can provide an opportunity to view the situation “as an opportunity for spiritual growth” and placing the experience under the guise of “God’s plan” (2009: 554) as a way to help understand the experience. Additionally, being able to reframe their unemployment as an opportunity to work full-time seeking employment helped them fulfill a need to be productive and to use their time in a structured manner. Reframing accomplishments to focus on progress made in job seeking and making small accomplishments more significant can aid in encouraging positive self-concepts. Given that our self-concept is informed by others’ appraisals, having a group that one can report these accomplishments to and form partnerships with is significant in helping repair damage.

Another example of performing more than one identity to repair a more stigmatized identity is highlighted by Parrotta and Thompson (2011) in their findings from teaching Sociology courses within prisons. They state that “Education of marginalized populations is largely thought to be a positive step toward rehabilitation” (Parrotta and Thompson 2011: 175). They further note that “a critical education not only can prepare inmates for reentry but may also restore their sense of self-worth and an understanding of the world around them” (Parrotta and Thompson 2011: 175). Most importantly, the authors “aimed to transcend the prisoner label from the outset of our teaching inside experience” (2011: 176). In doing so, they were able to succeed in what McCarty (2006) describes as giving justice involved individuals “the opportunity to identify themselves as something other than criminals; they identify as students. They have the opportunity to interact with and be seen by people from the outside as something

other than criminal as well” (2006: 93); the very key to positive identity development and likely one more effective way to shed a temporary justice involved or incarcerated identity.

An individual who is sentenced to incarceration could consider their circumstances as what Burke (2006) describes as a “disturbance” (2006: 84), a situation that is ripe for identity change due to its large scale impact on the meaning of the self. Justice involved individuals who opt into education programs while incarcerated are working toward repairing their identity by engaging in what Burke (2006) describes as “selective interaction” (2006: 94) in which the individual chooses who they will interact with and what situations (or programming) they choose to participate in order to assist in the validation of the identity they are trying to enact or create. In this instance, justice involved individuals have a discrepancy between the identity connected to their criminal history and the student identity they hope to cultivate during their incarceration and enact upon release. By signing up for education programs, carrying books, and being in a classroom setting with other students and teachers who identify them as students, they are not only receiving validation toward their student identity, they are also repairing damage to their feelings of self-worth.

Education programs in jails and prisons are not always available or they are not the direction a justice involved individual chooses to take. Incarceration can be a period of time when an individual can enter into an addict identity and participate in recovery. In doing so, individuals opt to enter programming with treatment providers in order to repair their justice involved identity by aligning with and gaining support from others in a

similar situation. Additionally, they are entering an identity that is validating to their self-worth because it helps them explain why they may have entered the justice system in the first place. In this instance, if one continues this strategy upon release, they can enter treatment in the community and belong to a social group that welcomes them and supports them in this strategy. Similar to a student identity, a recovery identity can transcend the justice involved identity and provide opportunities for someone to further distance themselves from a felon label and their criminal history. In some cases, a recovery identity can pair with a student identity and an individual can repair a deviant identity by utilizing “vestiges of their deviant identity to legitimate their past deviance and generate new careers as counselors” (Brown 1991: 219).

Just as identifying with an addict role can be beneficial for justice involved women to help them understand how they came to be in their current situation and “understand the events of their lives” (Hunter and Greer 2011: 221), embracing a disordered identity can do the same. In some cases, certain mental health diagnoses can help an individual construct a new identity as Estroff (1981) suggests. Howard (2008) focuses on cultural obstacles when negotiating an exit from a disordered identity. Shedding that identity creates ambiguity and a more difficult explanation as to why particular events may have been happening in their life (Howard 2008). In a different vein, choosing to disconnect from the therapeutic culture may elicit empowerment and independence when one may have previously become dependent on therapeutic professionals (2008: 189).

At times, repairing a stigmatized identity may be in the work an individual does within themselves, changing or “delabeling” their self-conceptions. Howard (2008) in her study of “delabelers” (2008: 177) highlights individuals who have chosen to shed identities associated with their mental health diagnoses. Respondents reported that their disordered identity was no longer useful to them and they came to view it as something that “undermined their recovery processes” in addition to having negative consequences on their self-concept (2008: 180-181). She identifies three obstacles people face when choosing to exit a disorder identity (2008: 178): (1) existential, (2) interactional, and (3) cultural. From an existential standpoint, shedding one’s identity can cause one to question who they are if they no longer hold their disordered identity and decline to take on an “ex-role” (Ebaugh 1988 and Brown 1991). Howard (2008) indicates that this may not involve an identity change but rather in identity forfeiture which can leave a void in some ways but would be necessary as illustrated when Howard (2008) relays delabeler Eliza’s narrative:

Eliza realized as she was discarding her disorder identity (“sex and love addict”) that to replace it with another label would be “pointless”: “It would be like sticking myself in another box that I would then have to climb out of!” (p. 181)

On the other hand, Howard (2008) shares the journey of another respondent, Anne, who chose to shed her multiple personality disorder identity. Anne commented on her struggle with delabeling: “It can be so comforting to know who you are, even if it’s a false self” (2008: 182). And, lastly, another of Howard’s respondents, Lettie, shares her take on her struggle to discard her disordered identity by asking the following question: “Why is it that we consider someone to ‘have’ a physical illness but ‘be’ a mental

illness?” (2008: 183). These few examples of questions and narratives from those that Howard (2008) studied provide meaningful insights into the struggle with identity when one is labeled to “be” something as if it is an essentialist part of self, and instead work towards shedding that identity and enter into a “identity void” (2008: 181).

Repairing a stigmatized identity by delabeling, as seen in Howard’s (2008) subjects, is meant to forfeit a “master status” (Goffman 1963) or a label that they found they were building their lives around. In choosing to delabel, they decided that they did not want to repair their disordered identity by replacing it with another identity that may serve the same negative consequences to their self-concept as the forfeited identity. In doing so, their work to repair can be viewed within the lens of their self-worth and positive self-concept and a way for them to repair by choosing to “recover from recovery” (Howard 2008: 191).

While completely disassociating from a deviant identity and entering a void is one way to shed an identity, this strategy can often be fraught with distress and, without proper resources, close to impossible to maintain. Howard (2008) notes that resources and “privilege” (2008: 190) are important to an individual’s success in fully repairing a stigmatized identity.

Identity repair work is especially important if we consider that the highest cost of not getting care or opting out of care for mental health disorders is death. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States for adults and the 3rd leading cause of death for people age 10-24 (Center for Disease Control 2021; National Alliance on Mental Health 2021). Not only is this a daunting reality in our society, it is a glaring

reminder of the importance in addressing the task of lessening stigma connected to many marginalized groups and how others are key to an individual's feelings of self-worth and their acceptance within society. I suggest that the concepts of resources, support and opportunity, often discussed as a side-note within the existing literature, are integral in facilitating change and are worthy of being centered in future discussion and research. Regardless of the combinations of strategies individuals employ to exit these stigmatized identities, it is important to examine these processes to fully understand the complexity of identity management.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

In this analysis, I examine four strategies for exiting a deviant or stigmatized identity among various groups. While I believe there are many more strategies and groups that are faced with doing identity work to shed a stigmatized identity, the more narrowed focus I chose was intentional. By focusing on othering, hiding/disguising, embracing, and repairing as exiting strategies, I illustrate the simple yet intricate ways in which people do similar identity work in order to shed an identity. By narrowing down this difficult task among varying groups, I show that this work can be done in many situations and across many circumstances, and that the insight gained could be used to implement appropriate policy and program changes to better serve the community. Furthermore, I hope it is evident that this work can be viewed as vital to an individual's sense of self, and often, their survival in society.

Shedding a stigmatized identity holds a great deal of value in our society if you consider the impact a stigma has on an individual. It does not necessarily matter what the stigma is, if there is one and an individual is marked (Brekhus 1998) or labeled (Becker 1963) as deviant, the alienation from group members can be devastating. This is especially true when we consider the emphasis on constructing and maintaining self through interaction with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934) within the field of Symbolic Interactionism.

Revisiting key points offered by Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) who state that identity work is “anything people do individually or collectively to give meaning to

themselves or others” (1996: 115) and Stets and Burke (2000) who state “the more persons one is tied to by holding an identity (i.e., the greater the embeddedness of the identity in the social structure), the more likely it is that the identity will be activated in that situation” (2000: 230) provides us with an understanding that who we are and how we view our selves hinges on our interaction with others.

Individuals that shed a deviant identity show that they rebuild their sense of self-worth and gain acceptance among society by aligning with social norms. In doing so, many of these groups exit not only a deviant identity but also potentially dangerous circumstances. If we consider that over 70,000 people die from drug overdoses every year in the United States and that number rises approximately four percent every year, (Center for Disease Control 2021) or that in 2018, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, claiming over 48,000 lives (Center for Disease Control 2021; National Institute of Mental Health 2021) exiting can be the difference between life and death. I believe this is more of a global statement that society must work to de-stigmatize mental health and, in doing so, individuals who struggle with mental health and their identity attached to it can fight one less aspect of the stigma.

Along the same lines, justice involved individuals struggle with the stigma of a criminal history and face many barriers because of this label. Diminishing the stigma of a criminal history creates opportunities for housing, employment, and rehabilitation. For example, the Prison Policy Initiative (prisonpolicy.org) found that formerly incarcerated individuals are ten times more likely to be homeless than the general public. Incarcerated individuals who do identity work to help disguise their criminal history by entering

educational programs are already trying to mitigate the consequences of their justice involvement and work toward what Brown (1991) suggests is “a moral sense of self-worth and sacredness rather than credential acquisition” (1991: 226) providing tools, both internal and external, to better aid in the disguise of their former incarceration upon reentry into the community.

For Reginald Dwayne Betts, a Yale Law School graduate, attorney, and poet who spent nine years in prison as a young man, his self-concept is still deeply tied to his justice involved identity, even after more than 15 years of being out of prison. In an interview with journalist Robert Preston for the *Star Tribune*, Preston highlights the following from Betts’ collection poetry titled “Felon” (2019); Betts writes “Did a stretch in prison to be released to a cell” (Betts 2019: 83) and further states that “prison grabs you and you’re trying to figure out a way for it to let you go. As a writer, I think if I tell the right story in the right way, it will let me go” (Preston 2021). One way Betts works toward shedding this stigma is by replacing his prison number after his name with “Esq.” and states “Sometimes you need a way to name yourself to be who you want to be in the world. I’m trying to figure out new ways to remember who I am” (Preston 2021).

While my analysis clearly points out that individuals like Reginald Dwayne Betts, Esq. do extensive work to attempt shed their stigmatized identity, I believe it is not the individual’s sole responsibility to face this task. It is very clear that this analysis can continue by adding a more structural or macro approach to these issues and study whether individual identity work can influence and inform policy makers and community

organizations to better serve marginalized groups. In the ways that some groups embrace or reframe their “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963), so can the community at large.

In some instances, small parts of this work have been done but there is a long way to go. The legalization of marijuana in the United States has been passed in many states and the number continues to grow. The Sentencing Project (2021) reports that 5.2 million people in the United States are currently denied the right to vote due to a felony conviction, and one in four of them are currently incarcerated. While many agencies continue to fight for voter rights for those with felony convictions and have had some success in states like Maine, Vermont, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico where they have reinstated voting rights to those currently incarcerated, many have failed to make changes and continue to block voting rights even for individuals with felony convictions who have served all of their time and have successfully completed probation or parole. Ban the Box Campaign is another example of efforts to de-stigmatize justice involved individuals by challenging employers to choose the best candidates for employment on skills and qualifications, not past convictions (bantheboxcampaign.org). Since its inception in 2004, 36 states, the District of Columbia, and over 150 cities and counties have enacted ban the box policies. Most recently, the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019, which prohibits most federal agencies and contractors from requesting arrest and conviction history on employment applications until after an offer for employment has been given, has become law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act and will be effective as of December 2021 (nelp.org).

Another example of slow but important progress in de-stigmatizing certain groups can be seen in the advocacy work to reframe the term “sex worker.” This call for change is relatively new and is in response to the call to de-stigmatize those who chose to enter this profession willingly. For example, Weitzer (2017) discusses individual strategies sex workers have used to advocate for their work by stating that “At the individual level, resistance by a sex worker may take the following forms: announcing that he or she had full agency when entering sex work; is currently in control of his/her working conditions and interactions with clients; defines the work as a service profession like any other or as a form of support or therapy for clients; denial of harm; condemnation of the stigmatizers; or distinguishing their echelon (e.g. escorting) from what they consider disreputable forms of sex work (e.g. street prostitution)” (2018: 720). In contrast, a staggering 4.8 million, 99% of which are women and girls, were victims of sex trafficking in 2016 (International Labour Organization; Walk Free Foundation) and are not, nor should they be, considered sex workers. While sex work is still stigmatized and often those that chose to enter into the field of sex work are still lumped with the victims of sexual exploitation, work is being done to lessen the stigma and differentiate between the two. In my analysis, I specifically highlight students who strip (Trautner and Collett 2010) because the young women in the study chose to adopt a deviant career of sex work and did not consider themselves victims in any way. An important area for future study should be in the extensive identity work that victims of sexual exploitation likely do to exit from their trafficked identity and how it pairs with the extensive work of addressing trauma and abuse.

This brings up an important question: Is it possible to fully shed a deviant or stigmatized identity? There can be ambiguity around considering an identity as temporary or whether it is possible to fully shed an identity at all. Further research into those that shed an identity and whether they can maintain their new identity and how or if their previous identity has influenced that new identity would be worthy of analysis. I illustrate how addicts can embrace their addict identity and use their experience as an addict to create a professional ex (Brown 1991) identity and how justice involved women embrace their addict identity to “help them understand the events of their lives” (Hunter and Greer 2011: 221). How do these identities shape and influence one’s salient identities and how do they shape and influence newly formed identities? In contrast, how do salient identities shape and influence exiting an identity? This is briefly highlighted when discussing the creation of an ex-role, (Anderson and Bondi 1998; Brown 1991; Ebaugh 1998; and Howard 2006, 2008) however, all studies note that this is also a gap in the literature.

Continued study on displaced workers and caregivers would also provide worthy insight into identity work, especially when they re-enter the work force or when they are able to retire their caregiver role and either of those identities move lower in the hierarchy. What experiences during their time holding a displaced worker or caregiver identity shaped their current identity and how, if at all, did it shape their more salient identities? This question could and should be posed for future study on all populations within my analysis.

Regarding my personal experience as a caregiver to a child with a severe eating disorder, I have experienced caregiving during my child's hospital stays, long term residential and intensive outpatient programming, psychological and psychiatric care, and intensive therapy in our home and within a residential treatment setting. As an insider, I know the toll a caregiver faces; it is extensive, painful, and life changing. The conflict among my identities was incredibly jarring and I, as I am certain many do, struggled to manage them. One thing it absolutely did was solidify my salient identity as a mother. Not only did I want to maintain a caregiver identity, I wanted to do so in order to validate and gain validation from others toward my salient mother identity. Furthermore, I often questioned the salience of other identities I hold and whether they were as important as I had previously believed them to be.

After years of very intense programming and recovery, I continued to struggle with giving up my temporary identity as a caregiver. It became so ingrained in my salience hierarchy that I had to make rules for myself and essentially practice releasing that identity. Burke (2006) speaks to this concept when he discusses the idea that when one deviates, they may either change their behavior to appease others or change the rules on how that identity is performed or managed. When my daughter maintained a level of success in her recovery over an extended period of time, I was able to change the rules imposed on us by not only my daughter's eating disorder but by the programming and treatment expectations such as Family Based Therapy, and was able to give both of us more freedom and independence. In each instance, especially at the beginning, I practiced each step often changing the rules as I went along. An interesting line of study

may be into examining those new rules. How are they made, why, and how do others influence those rules? How does this process maintain or help change an identity?

Addict identity work, i.e., those that maintain the deviant identity or those who choose to return to it after previously shedding it, would be a good start, as there a vast amount of literature on the subject.

Future study into caregiver and supportive other identity would not only add to the literature; it would also inform helping agencies on identity dynamics and hopefully impact how agencies better support them and work more cooperatively with caregivers and supportive others. Ultimately, any type of research on identity work among those in need of services from chemical health, mental health or social services would add to the literature and benefit agencies that work with them.

Lastly, an important but lacking piece of research worthy of future study would be those choosing to exit an identity but do not have access to or choose not to utilize resources or support. Howard's (2008) work with those that chose to forfeit a disordered identity and enter into a void illustrates a consequence that can have a lasting impact. By exiting, they are disconnecting from resources and support and often end up isolated and ostracized by their previous support system. In the discussion on displaced workers, Garrett-Peters (2009) highlights this concern regarding those that did not make it to support groups and may experience non-repairable damage by failing to do so. This could be explained by Gross and Stone's (1964) study on embarrassment and how it impacts role requirements. They state that "embarrassment occurs whenever some central assumption in a transaction has been unexpectedly and unqualifiedly discredited

for at least one participant. The result is that he is incapacitated for continued role performance” (1964: 2). If one who has experienced a job loss, for example, and is no longer situated within a social setting that they once identified with, the level of embarrassment could potentially lead to isolation or one could be ostracized by social groups. I contend that this would be worthy of further study as it appears that most of the literature focuses on those that seek out support and resources, not those that have retreated from society. These groups may be the most in need of services and support.

In conclusion, the analysis of existing literature on exiting an identity is broad and intricate. It illustrates the many ways in which people construct and manage their identities and how strategies can be used to mitigate perceived deviance and enter a non-stigmatized identity. Not only do people employ these strategies to lessen stigma, they do so to maintain their place in society. Without interaction or closeness to others, we are not human beings. Without interaction, we have no place in the world. Interaction is what makes us who we are.

With the insight on how stigmatized individuals do identity work, I hope my analysis has at the very least sparked an interest for future study into how this insight can begin to impact how programs work with these individuals and what impact it can have on programming and policy. This may start to answer the questions I posed earlier, in which I pondered whether this work could help pinpoint whether feelings of self-worth, or lack thereof, impact whether an individual can shed a deviant or stigmatized identity and possibly determine whether that insight could affect services, resources, and community programming to better aid those choosing to exit a deviant identity. The

insight into identity work could be a catalyst not only for how service providers do business but could also help others gain a better understanding of the lives of marginalized groups, which in turn may promote a higher level of empathy and compassion.

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