

LIFE NARRATIVES AND DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

Case study about the roles and use of life narratives at Redis Peer
Support Center

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the study was to illustrate the use, meanings and roles of life narratives at Redis Peer Support Centre, Probation Foundation. Thus, the focus of the study was to discover repeated themes related to life narratives in connection to identity re-construction and desistance from crime. The research material was collected during the autumn 2012 and the target group included offenders at different stages of their re-entry process. Moreover, the research was conducted by using mixed qualitative methods. The focus of the study was on narrative inquiry which was executed by using the combination of participant observation and thematic interviews. The number of participants for the thematic interviews was five.

The main results of the study are six different themes discovered through participant observation and substantiated by the interview materials. These themes were shared life narratives (peer support), life narrative as a resource for life management, life narrative and social roles, sharing life narrative for the purpose of raising awareness, life narrative as source of experience expertise and finding/creating meaning through life narrative.

In addition, two of these themes, life narrative as resource for life management and finding meaning through life narrative, were closely interlinked themes and their importance to identity re-construction and desistance were emphasized. Furthermore, the interviews disclosed four additional themes which were first, theme that included substance abuse, addiction, sobriety and recovery, second, importance of the wholeness of life narrative, third, life span of recovery through narratives, and fourth, imperative element of hope.

Finally, the use of life narratives in social work has inherent strengths. The research revealed strengths as the connection between the use of life narratives and the general principles of holistic and client centered approach as well as the utilization of client's knowledge about his/her life situation. Conversely, the main weaknesses of the use of life narratives is that this approach requires resources, namely time, which is often scarce in the social work professions. To conclude, recognizing the importance of individual's life narrative and organizing the social work accordingly empowers person from the initial states of the process to be actively involved and so obtain self-confidence and inner motivation for finding solutions and/or engaging in life change.

Key words: life narrative, identity re-construction, desistance, offender

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1 INTRODUCTION

The complex and multidimensional problems and challenges connected to the offenders' re-entry to the society has comprehensive influence on individuals and families, local communities, social work professionals of different fields and the society at large (Healy 2010). Hence the issues related to functional and effective offender rehabilitation are contemporary and imperatively important to social work professionals in different settings (Maruna 1999).

Furthermore, criminal activities and prison sentences are entwined with substance abuse problems which elevate the complexity of the offender rehabilitation and successful re-entry programs. In addition, the subculture created around substance abuse and prison life is re-enforced by the mainstream society outlook on people who have been in prison regardless of the fact that the person have served the sentence and thus, compensated for the past crime. Therefore, alternative approaches to desistance theories and to life change in the adulthood are necessary for finding more effective and client centered service user models for supporting offender re-entry and recovery from substance abuse problems.

Finally, the research report presents the theoretical premise for the study in the section two and the methodological process in the section three. The research findings are presented in sections four and five. Section six consist of reflection of the research findings. The discussion in section seven includes also professional consideration and conclusions (see 7.1). A copy of this thesis can also be found in the library of Criminology (Finnish: Kriminologinen kirjasto) at Tikkurila.

1.1 Background and motivation

The motivation for the research arises from my professional interests and aspirations to acquire more knowledge on implementing holistic approaches in the field of social work. Humanistic psychology and narrative psychology has had

significant input in my perspective and understanding human behavior and more specifically on the issues of motivation for change and personal growth.

Furthermore, my previous work experience in the social education contains brief encounters with ex-offenders and offenders in the process of re-entry. I felt that my ability to understand the complexity of these clients and thus, provide comprehensive support were inadequate at the time. Thus, I wanted to conduct a practical placement among this particular target group and therefore, the idea of connecting my thesis research to the placement followed naturally.

Moreover, the holistic approach to social work includes wide spectrum of different theories and methods. Thus, the approach provided a flexible foundation for cooperation with the work life representative in developing the research theme and provided ample opportunities for connecting the study to the interests and needs at the practical social work field.

1.2 Developing the research theme

First, the development of the actual research theme was initiated by a meeting with the professionals from the Probation Foundation. This meeting was held at Redis Peer Support Center 4th of June 2012. Present in the meeting was Development Chief Maarit Suomela and Social Counselor Harri Eerikäinen from Probation Foundation, Mika Alavaikko representing Järvenpää Diaconia University of Applied Sciences and myself.

Furthermore, the objective of the meeting was to explore the possibility for thesis cooperation and to discuss a research theme that would respond to the interests and needs of Probation Foundation. Hence, the discussion included different perspectives and considerations regarding the research theme.

Moreover, the discussion resulted into formation a preliminary idea of studying life narratives in the context of Redis Peer Support and in connection to the process of re-entry and desistance from crime. The preliminary research theme

satisfied the interests and requirements of all parties concerned. In addition, the involvement of the work life representatives, both from the grass root level and the developmental aspect of the work, from the initial stages of the study have a significant input on the relevance of the research theme in relation to the field work. The development of the theme continued in close cooperation with the professionals at Redis during the autumn 2012.

1.3 Research question and purpose of the study

The research question is: what are the meanings and implications of life narratives for desistance from crime? Therefore, purpose and objectives of the study is to observe and describe the presence, roles and meanings of life narratives in the everyday life at Redis Peer Support Center. Thus, research aims at discovering reoccurring themes and/or patterns related to the topic in the context of the target group and research environment.

Moreover, the perspective for observing and illustrating the life narratives is derived from the theory of desistance from crime. Hence, the emphasis lies on the connection of the life narratives and identity reconstruction for initiating and maintaining change in the adulthood. Finally, the main objective is constructing a coherent and comprehensive illustrative case study which displays the inter-linked features of the above mentioned topics and their relevance for professional practice and development in the field of social work.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

The theoretical framework of the research is based upon the notions of narrative psychology and the theory of desistance from crime. Moreover, logotherapy provides complimentary elements and focus for the study. The key concepts are life narrative, narrative identity and desistance from crime. The concepts are closely connected with the theories chosen for the research and each concept is defined and/or explained.

Finally, two of the theories, narrative psychology and desistance from crime, were chosen during the initial stage of developing the thesis theme. The third approach, logotherapy, was adapted to the thesis framework during the exposure to the research environment. In the beginning of the participant observation it was discerned that one staff member has a particular interest in logotherapy and its implications to rehabilitation and recovery. Thus, additional focus for the study was found from the research environment.

2.1 Life narrative and narrative identity

First, for the purpose of this research concepts life narrative and narrative identity are use occasionally in equivalent manner and considered to have parallel dynamic in identity reconstruction and change in the adulthood. However, for clarity it is important to note that in the course of this study, although these two concepts have a parallel dynamic they do have a subtle difference.

Therefore, life narrative is used to describe a broad spectrum of narratives (i.e. stories) that vary in their depth, coherence, authenticity and objectives. For example, person may produce narrative that is still fractured and perhaps illogical due to the life situation of the narrator. Narrative identity is used to refer to a more progressive, deeper level life story which has subjective coherence, logic and wholeness and that has been developed through continual retelling of the life narrative and re-arrangement of the events and experiences. In addition,

narrative identity contains often more symbols and processed meanings than life narrative. Hence, life narrative is a flexible concept that accommodates the objectives of the study whereas narrative identity provides connection and focus to identity reconstruction. (Bauer, McAdams & Pals 2008.)

Life narrative can be defined as

A basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process and change (Herman 2009).

Life narrative is person's subjective narration of life events and themes which are organized in sequences according chronological or thematic order. Life narratives are not only the retelling of events as they include subjective perspective of the narrator and interpretations he/she gives to different situations and events. (Holstein & Gubrium 2000.)

Furthermore, the narrative identity according to Bauer, McAdams and Pals (2008) state that:

Narrative identity refers to the internal, dynamic life story that an individual constructs to make sense of his or her life. (Bauer et al. 2008.)

Furthermore, Bauer et al. (2008) describe the role of narrative identity as element that:

Provides life with unity purpose and meaning (Bauer et al. 2008).

The concept of narrative identity is based upon McAdams (1994) concept of a human which recognizes three internal and interlinked dimensions in human that construct the personality. The first dimension is the psychological traits which determine individual temperament, outlook and core characteristics of a person. Psychological traits are principally unchangeable part of the personality which remains fairly similar throughout the life. (McAdams 1994.)

Furthermore, the second dimension is the personal strategies and this aspect involves plans and objectives individual tries to achieve. The strategy dimension is connected to prevailing contextual conditions and thus, this dimension is flexible and adjustable according to the evolving needs. The third dimension is the internal and dynamic, constantly developing narrative that person uses to unite the past, present and the anticipated future into the personal identity. (McAdams 1994.)

Finally, from these three dimensions, strategies and the narrative identity are the key elements in identity reconstruction and change in the adulthood. Therefore, McAdams' (1994) concept of a human provides a holistic and realistic approach which respects the inherent characteristics of the person while upholding the possibility of change.

2.2 Narrative psychology and logotherapy

Narrative psychology is a wide theoretical foundation that accommodates various different approaches to the use of narratives in relation to the science of psychology. The concept, narrative psychology, is fairly new and it was first presented by Theodor Sarbin in the 1986 and it has evolved and been developed by various different scholars and researchers since then. (László 2008.)

Furthermore, the narrative and narrating is inherently embedded to social aspects of human life and experience and thus, narrative psychology is naturally connected to the social rather than the biological perspective of psychology (László 2008, 29-42). The central idea behind narrative psychology is that life and experiences of human beings, both on individual and collective levels, are preserved, shared and constructed through narratives (László 2008).

János László (2008) has defined narratives well in the contextual framework of psychology:

Narratives can be defined not just in the way discussed so far, that is, as carrier and ingredient of creating meaning and reality on a social-cognitive basis. In psychology, the research on narratives covers the way in which stories work on the one hand, and several psychologically interpreted forms and functions of narratives on the other, which can be derived from the role that narratives play in people's lives. (László 2008, 9.)

This definition of narratives in psychology (i.e. Narrative psychology) provides a purposeful foundation for this study due to the flexibility and generality of the description. Thus, it is important to note that this research is reflected on the general notions of narrative psychology rather than a specific emphasis or strand of theory.

Furthermore, logotherapy is a form of psychotherapy which was created by Jewish Doctor Viktor E. Frankl who suffered and survived the horrors of concentration camps during the holocaust. The main emphasis in logotherapy is on purpose and meaning(s) in life and thus, it is also referred as meaning centered psychotherapy. Furthermore, logotherapy recognizes values and their development as integral part of finding and understanding each person's individual meaning of life. (Erämaja et al. 2005.)

Logotherapy views person as a being with physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions that are interlinked and constantly influencing one another. The inclusion of the spiritual dimension in the concept of human is the key element in logotherapy and it is also the feature that differentiates logotherapy from other psychotherapy models. (Erämaja et al. 2005.)

Moreover, logotherapy emphasizes building on existing resources of an individual and empowering person to take responsibility of his/her life and well-being accordingly. Therefore, logotherapy accepts that person may have physical and/or psychological challenges and yet the spiritual (noetic) dimension of a person provides opportunity and an avenue for change and recovery. Hence, logotherapy recognizes the potential inherent in every individual, regardless of their current disposition or circumstances. In addition, logotherapy aims at de-

veloping sustainable and purposeful recovery and outlook (including perspectives and values of the individual) that will improve the quality of life. (Erämaja et al. 2005.)

Finally, for the purpose of this research narrative psychology provides the general framework and reference point to the research theme whereas the logotherapy offers a more detailed focus and entry point that culminates in the emphasis of importance of meaning and purpose to human life and to different forms of rehabilitation.

3.3 Desistance from crime

Desistance from crime is quite recent topic in research. However, research on desistance is constantly developed in search for improved and effective rehabilitation and reintegration models.(Farrall & Calverley 2006, 1-29) Currently, an integrated approach on desistance that includes individual, societal, social and psychological aspects is widely accepted among scholars and researchers (Healy 2010).

The desistance can be divided into two main types, primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance refers to the short-term phenomena of cessation in the offending whereas secondary desistance is understood as the long term development of change and identity reconstruction. Thus, the primary desistance can be described as an event and the secondary desistance as a process. (Farrall & Calverley 2006, 1-29.) For the purpose of this study the focus is on the secondary desistance.

Furthermore, apart from the integrated approach on desistance there are various different studies conducted to explain the reasons behind secondary desistance (Farrall & Calverley 2006, 1-29). These perspectives can be also divided into to two main categories.

First there are researches that focus on finding natural/biological reasons for desistance. These studies fall under the ontogenetic approach also known as maturational reform theory which emphasizes the element of aging as key in the process of desistance. However, these researches fail to explain why aging is a relevant factor in the process of desistance. (Maruna 1999.)

Second, an emphasis on the external reasons and factors that contribute to the process desistance are under the sociogenic approach i.e. social bonds theory. The sociogenic approach underlies the importance of social bonds and the informal control within social relationships that affect the secondary desistance. Hence, all social activities such as family life/close relationships, employment and education are the main elements of desistance. (Maruna 1999.)

However, Maruna (1999) points out that both the ontogenetic and sociogenic approach lacks the understanding of person as whole and the subjective roles and undertakings of each individual. Therefore, Maruna (1999) expresses that narrative theory provides an alternative of more holistic and functional theoretical background for understanding desistance and the internal dynamics of the process (Maruna 1999). Stephen Farrall and Adam Calverley (2006) also refer to importance of understanding the internal factors of desistance. Therefore, they describe the existential elements of desistance which are closely connected to identity reconstruction and the emotional development of desister. (Farrall & Calverley 2006, 78-130.) This study focuses on these alternative approaches and the internal elements of desistance.

2.4 Identity reconstruction

Identity and identity construction are concepts that have multiple different definition and contextual meanings. However, for the purposes of this study identity construction has the meaning of the psychosocial process that forms the person's perceived understanding of who he/she is? Hence identity construction

encompasses personal and social aspects that function both independently and interdependently. (Fearon 1999.).

However, this research has a greater emphasis on identity reconstruction and its possibilities in the life change in the adulthood. Therefore, identity reconstruction in the contextual frame of this study is used to refer to the process of finding new dimensions of the self, shaping the existing inner order and pursuing wholeness of both the self-image and its practical implications for life. (Maruna 1999). Hence, this process of identity reconstruction in the research context often entails some identity deconstruction to create space for the reconstructed self. This is perceived as part of the reconstruction process and is not therefore mentioned separately.

Finally, a closely connected to the identity reconstruction is our understanding of human i.e. the concept of a human. For the framework of this study two different concepts of human have been chosen First, the concept of a human by Victor E. Frankl the creator of logotherapy provides the study the three dimensional concept that identifies human being as psychological, physical and spiritual being (see section 2.2) (Erämaja et al. 2005). Second, McAdams' (1994) three aspects of person which are traits, strategies and narrative identity provide a different perspective to personality (see section 2.1). The difference is the special emphasis of each approach which in logotherapy is the noetic dimension of person and in McAdams concept, the narrative identity of a person. However, these different emphases compliment rather than contradict one another regardless of the subtle differences.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based upon qualitative research methods and the aim is to construct an illustrative case study on life narratives and desistance in the context of Redis Peer Support Centre. Therefore, based upon the general principles of qualitative research methods this study has the objectives of discovering individual points of view, studying the reality of everyday life in the given research context and related to the specific theme and revealing vivid and dynamic descriptions on the topic (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, 1-38).

In addition, previously mentioned objectives are implemented within the contextual research frame and with consideration to the limitations of this study (see section 3.5). Hence, individual opinions, the realities of the everyday life and diverse descriptions of the theme are managed through data collection methods and analysis and the three features exists within the process of finding patterns and similarities within the research environment and among the target group.

3.1 Target group and research environment

Target group of this study is offenders at different stages of the re-entry process. This includes those preparing for release from prison, those in supervised probation and those who have already completed serving their sentence. The research environment is the Redis Peer Support Centre that functions under the Probation Foundation. The research environment for the purposes of the study is acknowledged as a sphere of influence rather than strictly defined physical space.

Furthermore, the target group and the research environment epitomized a subculture that has its own language, codes of conduct and hierarchy of respect. This subculture is a combination of two worlds, the world of crime and imprisonment and the world of recovery and change. Therefore, the subculture is dynamic and ambivalent and it influenced the research process both in positive

and adverse manners. For example, the positive impact of the subculture was the diverse and ample presence of life narratives and the adverse effects were the fluctuating emphasis between crime/user narratives and recovery narratives (see section 5.1). However, the key to the research process was the realization of the prevailing subculture and its complex dynamics.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection was conducted through participant observation and thematic interviews. These two stages of data collection were closely interlinked and timely overlapping. The first stage of the data collection was participant observation which was followed by thematic interviews. Moreover, after the interviews the process returned to the participatory observation.

The target group and the research environment provided ample possibilities for data collection. Furthermore, the staff members provided support and opportunities for reflection and dialogue which proved to be essential accommodator for successful and functional data collection process.

The participant observation was carried out during seven weeks at Redis Peer Support Center in the autumn 2012. The elements of participant observation were taking part to different aspects of the everyday life routines at Redis and their weekly program, engaging conversations with the service users as well as the staff members and spending time with the service users (e.g. playing pool and cooking) and getting acquainted with the subculture of the target group and the research environment (e.g. language, symbols and hierarchy).

Moreover, the participant observation proved to be a very useful and functional tool in the research environment and for the purposes of the study. However, the main challenge was to find an effective way for documenting the observations. Therefore, the observations were continually documented through writing.

Furthermore, observation notes were daily examined to discover key words and re-occurring themes and elements. These key words, themes and elements were then further studied by using different mind mapping techniques. Thus, mind mapping was essential documentation tool for participant observation and it also operated well as a foundation for reflective discussions with the staff members.

In addition, the initial observations that were made within the first two weeks were discussed with the staff members and then refined for the semi-structured frame of the thematic interviews. Hence, after the thematic interviews new observations were made and reflected upon the existing notions and themes. Participant observation was a flexible and effective data collection method which required cyclical work and constant evaluation and reflection of previously collected data in relation to new data.

Thematic interviews were conducted during the last four weeks of the data collection period. The total number of interviewees was five and two of the interviewees were Redis staff members and three service users with different connections to Redis. Furthermore, the duration of the interviews varied between half an hour to over an hour.

Moreover, the interviews were divided into two parts. First, each interview began with a free flowing life narrative. The interviewees determined the length and depth of their narrative. This part served as a foundation for the following discussion and was often referred to later on in the interviews. Second, the thematic part of the interview consisted of themes and reoccurring elements that was discovered in the participant observation and these themes were discussed and elaborated on. These themes were shared life narratives and peer support, life narratives and life management, social roles, raising awareness, life narratives as source of experience expertise and finding new meaning(s) (see appendix 1). In addition, the interviewees further raised additional new themes on the topic life narrative and its roles and meanings in connection to desistance from crime.

3.3 Data analysis

According to the emphasis of the research topic and the purpose of this study narrative analysis provides the contextual frame for the data analysis. Narrative analysis can be defined as

The study of stories or accounts – usually of individuals, but also of groups, societies, and cultures (Harvard University 2008).

Furthermore, Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) introduces four different approaches to the narrative analysis which are thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis and visual analysis. The approach within the narrative analysis chosen for this study is thematic which provides a flexible and yet comprehensive approach for the data analysis (Riessman 2008, 53-76). Hence, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from both the participant observations and thematic interviews.

Thematic data analysis for the participant observations was an ongoing process during the data collection period. The documented data was examined in three stages that were the initial reading, the micro analysis and mind mapping. During the initial reading major, reoccurring themes were noted and highlighted from the text and during the micro analysis the text was examined again with special focus on key words and patterns in the described events/phenomena. (Subvista 2010.) The final stage was to visualize the results of the data analysis through mind mapping. Hence, the data analysis of the documented participant observations was cyclical and it included reflections and dialogues with the staff members.

For example, one of the initial observations was made which indicated that the shared life narratives functioned as a foundation for peer support. This connection between life narratives and peer support was established and hence the relevance of life narratives to peer support was documented by writing about encounters between individuals in the research context. These documentations were then analyzed to find reoccurring themes and key words that substantiate

the quality of the connection. Hence, the preliminary analysis revealed shared narratives to function as contact surface for constructive dialogue and as a building block for creating a new recovery oriented social network and as tools for support and motivation. However, the analysis also revealed differences between shared life narratives on one-on-one level and the collective levels (See 4.2.1). These repeated elements were visualized through mind mapping and then used for reflective discussions with the staff members.

Furthermore, the thematic interviews were analyzed by same technique. However, the process was to some extent different due to the interlinked nature of the participant observations and thematic interviews. The interview analysis was initiated by preparing the data for analysis by transcribing the recorded interviews (Subvista 2010). Moreover, the thematic data analysis for the interviews was divided into four stages.

First stage was the initial reading of the transcribed interviews. This stage was conducted without regarding the predetermined themes of the interviews and thus, noting other emerging themes outside the semi-structured interview frame. The second stage was to visualize the re-occurring themes outside the thematic interview frame by creating a mind map that displays topics that the interviewees had emphasized. This stage included creating headings for the emerged themes. (Subvista 2010.). Third stage was to read the interview transcriptions regarding the themes of the interviews and conduct a micro analysis of the key words, new insights and each interviewee's elaborations of each topic. The fourth and final stage of the analysis was to compare the predetermined themes and the spontaneous themes to find underlying connection and links between the two.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The research process was launched by acquiring appropriate written permits from Criminal Sanctions Agency (Finnish Rikosseuraamulaitos) and Probation

Foundation (Finnish Kriminaalihuollon tukisäätiö). The reason for applying research permits from these two organizations was that the target group consists of offenders at different stages of the re-entry and thus, both of the above mentioned instances were required to be involved to safeguard the appropriate models of inquiry during the research process.

In addition, a consent form stating the purpose and objectives of the study and the restriction of using the interview material and its confidential handling was presented to each interviewee before the interview to ensure safeguarding informed consent from each interviewee. Therefore the data collected through participant observation and the thematic interviews is used in a manner that does not violate the anonymity or confidentiality of the service users and the usage of the data is limited to this thesis report and to the summary in Finnish language delivered to Redis Peer Support Center.

Furthermore, the research report is constructed accordingly with a strong consideration to the ethical dimension and its practical implications in the specific research environment. Thus, the research findings are presented by grouping information from the interviews and only one direct quotation is used. Instead of direct quotations research findings are explained using explanatory examples from different themes and expression that indicate how many of the interviewees had similar ideas and how many had different ideas regarding certain themes (for example 3 out of 5 interviewees expressed...).

Finally, the different dimensions of ethical approach to research were considered throughout the process. These elements are voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Hence, all the previously mentioned dimensions stemmed from conscious and continuous reflection and evaluation whether the research (or some aspect of the research) presents risk of harm to the target group or to the interviewees. (Web Center for Social Research Methods.) Therefore, the final report has been written with caution (for example: not using direct quotes) and the ethicality of the study is considered and sustained from the beginning till the end of the research.

3.5 Validity and limitations of the study

First, according to the purpose and general framework of this study the emphasis is on describing and illustrating the role and meaning(s) of life narratives in a specific research environment and target group. Hence, the limitations of this study are connected to this focus and therefore the study does not provide generalizations on the research theme but rather an illustrative case study on the topic.

Furthermore, although this study is not extensive and thus, has inherent limitations, its validity conferring to the research objectives is comprehensive due to the well-established theoretical background and the combination of participant observation and thematic interviews in data collection. This triangulation of knowledge provides a research structure that aims at ensuring validity of the study in given contextual frame.

Finally, the data analysis was conducted consequently in observance to the validity and limitation of the study. Therefore, the emphasis of the data analysis is on finding reoccurring themes and patterns (i.e. similarities) rather than variances. However, this does not exclude the variances from the study but places them in the margin of the study as complementary feature to the main focus.

4 TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF LIFE NARRATIVES IN THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The initial discovery through participant observation in the research environment was that there were two different types of life narratives among the target group, the (drug) user/crime narratives and recovery narratives. The former mentioned narratives were occasionally present in the everyday life of Redis' service users. Nonetheless, these narratives were redirected and/or suppressed by the staff members and occasionally by the service users. Furthermore, the latter, recovery narratives, were constantly present in the daily routines of Redis and their presence was evident throughout different activities and apparently casual conversations.

Moreover, these two types of life narratives were outwardly quite undistinguishable. The recovery narratives, for instance, often contained elements of the past life of drug usage and crime and they occasionally focused more on the current level of inner motivation for the recovery than the actual present stage of the process. Nonetheless, the features and characteristics of these narratives emphasized authentically the focus on the recovery. The user/crime life narratives intermittently originated from seemingly positive source that emphasized recovery. However, the underlining tone and features disclosed the concealed emphasis on the past experiences without the recovery elements or focus (for example narrating the past drug use and experience in detail for the purpose of reliving the high).

The role of the staff members was imperative in relation to these two types of narratives and in creating and safeguarding an environment that promotes recovery and opportunities for positive change. Thus, the staff members were openly directing and if necessary redirecting narratives to uphold the previously mentioned objectives. However, the staff members had slightly different outlooks and approaches on managing user/crime narratives and hence, the partic-

ipant observation was complimented with reflective conversation with a staff member which will be discussed later (in section 5).

4.1 The multidimensional roles of life narratives in identity reconstruction

The roles of life narratives in identity reconstruction and change in the adulthood (i.e. desistance from crime) are multidimensional. These different roles are both independent and interdependent agents in the identity reconstruction and thus, they may occasionally overlap and/or have common nominators.

Furthermore, these roles may have interchanging contextual meanings and therefore one role may have different purpose or meaning in different situations. Nonetheless, the roles of life narrative for identity reconstruction and recovery have also encoded characteristic that remain fairly constant regardless of the contextual setting. The following subsections present the roles or themes of life narrative in the research context.

4.1.1 Shared narratives and peer support

The work done by Redis is based on the concept of peer support and thus, on the notion of shared experiences and stories. The main principle is that shared experience provides a contact surface for dialogue and mutual understanding which is utilized in the process of offering support and creating a social network that encourages recovery, sobriety (i.e. being clean) and positive life change.

Furthermore, the concept of peer support has a strong presence at Redis. Therefore, shared stories were present at the daily routines of Redis and the stories were produced among different activities (e.g. cooking, crafts, playing pool) and casual conversations. In addition, individual conversations were used as a tool for providing a more comprehensive support for service users.

The shared life narratives in a collective setting were influenced by the individual participants, the overall consistency and the internal dynamics of the group.

Hence, the group influence directed the shared stories towards recovery narratives or user/crime narratives and the presence of a staff member was essential for support and redirection when necessary. Moreover, the different characters, personality traits and levels of inner motivation for change affected the individually produced life narratives and their coherence, agenda and genuineness.

In addition, the participant observation indicated that the most important element of shared life stories was that it provides an opportunity and space to tell and retell the life story. Hence, the life narrative may at first be fractured, broken or deliberately untruthful but the opportunity for retelling the story repeatedly in presence of others often develops the narrative towards a more whole and genuine story. However, this form of life narrative development (narrative identity) requires right environment (i.e. time, space and presence of another person) and a person (i.e. mirror) who can provide opportunity for healthy reflection.

Finally, according to the interview material shared life narratives and peer support were recognized as important or very important for sobriety (i.e. being clean), crime free life and recovery by all participants. For example, all interviewees mentioned AA or NA-groups in connection to peer support and sharing life stories. However, although the peer support and shared stories were perceived as important elements of support, the participants had a realistic view on the possibilities and limitation of peer support. Hence, three out of five interviewees mentioned own attitude and accepting responsibility as important aspects of meaningful and successful peer support.

4.1.2 Life narratives as a resource for life management

The challenges in life management among offenders at the process of re-entry are diverse and complex. There are common nominators of both internal and external life management challenges within the target group whilst individual variables and dissimilarities equally exist. The external challenges for life management among the target group are employment, education and housing issues, creating a supportive social network and (re-)building relationships. More-

over, the internal challenges for life management are initiating or maintaining sobriety (i.e. being clean), finding or sustaining motivation for change and discovering tools for identity reconstruction and emotional rehabilitation.

Furthermore, based on the participant observations and thematic interviews one fundamental challenge was clearly emphasized and its implication to life management and addressing other challenges was significant. This challenge was characterized as pursuit to accept ordinary everyday life and finding balance. The lifestyle connected to criminal activities and substance abuse consists of inherently immense extremes of lows and highs.

Moreover, on the other hand the people in the target group are accustomed to lows that are caused by involuntary sobriety or detoxification (i.e. when drugs are not available) and stress of gaining access to illegal substances and finding financial means to maintain the addiction. In addition, further negative consequences of drug use and criminal activities such as health problems, social problems and convictions/imprisonment were mentioned also as sources of experiences of low points. The highs on the other hand are connected to certain level of lifestyle supported by financial gain through crime; drug induced physical and psychological feelings of euphoria and/or energy and possibly a highly respected status among the specific circles of the subculture.

Therefore, the challenge of finding balance and being comfortable in the ordinary everyday life appears to have a significant importance for the process of identity re-construction and change in the adulthood. In addition, discovering internal motivation for change is connected to obtaining adequate insight to the benefits of the ordinary everyday life. The participant observation indicated that although these benefits may be perceived and described in diverse and unique terms by different individuals, the common nominator was some form of happiness and/or well-being in life.

Bauer, McAdams and Pals (2006) have researched the connection of narrative identity and eudaimonic well-being. Their research indicated that a high level of

eudaimonic well-being is connected to specific elements/emphasis in the individual's life narrative. These are emphasis on personal growth, transformative experiences (negative turned into a positive) and redemptive aspects (for example liberation and recovery). (Bauer et al. 2006.)

The quality of eudaimonic well-being is described as follows:

Eudaimonic well-being also involves pleasure but emphasizes meaningfulness and growth - a more enduring sort of happiness. It tends to be more humanistic and based upon how meaningful one's life feels in addition to how good it feels. (Bauer et al. 2006.)

Furthermore, where hedonic well-being focuses mainly on individual's subjective feeling of pleasure eudaimonic well-being emphasizes a more stable and sustainable well-being that includes elements of personal growth, meaningfulness and virtue in addition to pleasure (Bauer et al. 2006).

Therefore, in the context of this study, the struggle and quest for balanced everyday life and thus, life management, by offenders (or ex-offenders) may be illustrated as reformation of individual understanding of happiness and/or well-being. This means a shift from the pursuit of hedonic well-being (for example instant pleasure induced by drugs) towards the eudaimonic well-being that includes personal growth, identity reconstruction, finding meaning and recognition and development of values and/or virtue.

4.1.3 Social dimension and social roles

Social roles and their effect to the process of desistance from crime were very noticeable during the participant observation. The subculture related to substance abuse and criminal activity has its own role and hierarchy system which is invisible and unknown to the outsiders. However, social roles are very significant within the subculture and therefore, increasing conscious understanding on social roles of the past is very important element in identity reconstruction through development of narrative identity.

Moreover, the social roles of the subculture and the social roles of the recovery coexisted in the research environment and among the target group. During the participant observation it became apparent that the subculture related to substance abuse and crime has a very strict code of conduct which determines person's status in the system. Hence, the social role person creates or presents to other people have the objective of gaining respect and status according to the hierarchical rules of the subculture. This gained status is often preserved when person begins his/her recovery process and thus, he/she may have an opportunity to influence and encourage other people towards a positive change.

The interviews confirmed these observations. The reoccurring theme was the past social roles in the life narrative, compared to the present social roles. Hence, as the participants discussed the past social roles three out of five expressed that previously maintained roles had negative implications in their life and were worrisome and energy consuming to uphold. Therefore the concept of social role had a strong negative resonance for these interviewees and the concept was not perceived to have importance to their current situation. Hence, these three interviewees perceived and described their present as being free from the past social roles (and social roles in general) and thus, having the liberty of being/ becoming authentic and genuine self. In addition, this was recognized as important element in recovery and change.

4.1.4 Sharing experiences for the purpose of raising awareness

Redis Peer Support Centre cooperates with schools and provides lessons that aim at preventing substance abuse and subsequent activities and negative consequences among teenagers. These lessons are based upon the practice of sharing the life narrative. This form of cooperation for raising awareness has recently received very positive feedback from teachers and students alike for its effectiveness and there appears to be an increasing requirement for this form of work in schools.

This practice of raising awareness through shared life narratives evidently provide knowledge and insight that cannot be reproduced by strictly factual information on the topic. Furthermore, the process of sharing experiences for raising awareness has positive effect also in the life of the offender (or ex-offender) and it provides opportunity to attain positive experience of using the past experience for helping and educating young people. In addition, the process of sharing the life story supports the development of narrative identity and discovering new insights from the life narrative.

The interviews presented a dual perspective on the issue of raising awareness through life narrative. First, all the interviewees perceived this form of cooperation and education important and beneficial. However, there were equally concerns that were related to the execution of the lessons and focus of the shared life narratives, although the experiences had been generally positive. Hence, the main concern expressed by the participants was that content of raising awareness should be planned and conducted carefully to have a balanced and realistic picture on the topic without undue excitement. In addition, it was stated that people who participate in raising awareness should be genuine and manifest recovery and change.

4.1.5 Life narrative as a source of experience expertise

Life narrative may also be a source of knowledge and experience expertise. The previous section displayed the use of life narrative in raising awareness and this work can also be categorically perceived as use of experience expertise. However, in the contextual frame of this study experience expertise is perhaps a step further from raising awareness. Hence, experience expertise does not exist automatically but rather it needs to be consciously developed.

Therefore, a generally accepted notion in the research environment was that having experienced imprisonment and/or substance abuse does not routinely qualify person to function as experience expert. Thus, experience expertise is

perceived as refined and constructed knowledge based on personal experience which has the quality that it can be implemented also on general level.

This notion was expressed also in all five interviews. Furthermore, although experience expertise was seen as important and highly relevant practice in the field of social work, all five participants described realistic limitations and challenges of this approach. Hence, the central idea based on the interview material was that experience expertise should be developed and utilized side by side with professional knowledge and proficiency of social work. This combination was regarded as balanced and functional way of utilizing experience expertise.

In addition, two of the five interviewees recognized the employing of the informal knowledge (i.e. use of experience expertise) as important opportunity and tool for integration (or reintegration) of a person to the society in meaningful and effective way for example finding employment in helping and supporting people who struggle in the process of re-entry and positive life change.

4.1.6 Discovering new perspectives and meaning(s) through the life narrative

According to the participant observation life narratives provided the service users opportunities to attain new perspectives and to discover/create meanings to their experiences. However, the observations suggested that discovering new perspectives and meanings require the person to be past the initial stages of the recovery and actively involved in the process. Thus, the meanings and perspectives appear to be located into the deeper levels of recovery and life change and completing basic stages of the recovery process is therefore a prerequisite for the manifestation of these elements.

The interview material supported the initial observations. In addition, all the interviewees connected features such as accepting responsibility and having internal motivation for change as necessity for changing perspective and/or attitude. Moreover, four out of five participant recalled negative events of the past as turning points that in the end produced a positive effect for their present life

and all interviewees recognized a possibility for turning a negative experience into something useful and positive. (For example a long prison sentence stopped person in the path of crime/drug use and initiated questions about life's direction.) In addition one participant summarized well that discovering meaning through life narrative

provides understanding for the past, acceptance for the present and hope for the future (Interview materials, translated from Finnish)

Furthermore, these research findings have a connection to Bauer et al. (2006) research on narrative identity and eudaimonic well-being (see section 4.2.1). Therefore, life management and finding meaning through life narrative seem to be closely interlinked themes in relation to (eudaimonic) well-being, recovery and life change in the adulthood. This also endorses Viktor E Frankl's emphasis on meaning and purpose as central elements in personal growth, making conscious choices as free and responsible individuals. According to logotherapy human being is not content simply due to existence but desires to have a meaning and purpose for his/her existence in order to obtain well-being and balance. (Erämaja et al. 2005.)

Finally, there were indications that finding meaning through life narrative has influence on the decision making process of an individual on the issues connected to change in the adulthood. Hence, the participant observations suggested that as people advanced in the recovery process they were able to articulate in positive terms their expectations for the future instead of expressing their anticipations through the negative experiences (or consequences) they hope to avoid. For example, person who had progressed in his/her recovery process through identity re-construction expressed his/her desire to start a family or obtain education whereas person in the initial stages of the process expressed need to avoid repetition of the negative experience of serving a prison sentence. Therefore, finding meaning encourages person's commitment and involvement in the life change and promotes shift from avoidance behavior towards engagement behavior.

5 REOCCURRING THEMES IN THE INTERVIEWS

The thematic interviews generated additional themes relevant to the research topic. These themes may be interlinked to some of the initially discovered roles of life narratives. However, their prominence required a separate presentation and analysis. Moreover, these themes were present in all five interviews and therefore, were considered as significant findings in the study

First, the reoccurring theme was the importance of having a meaningful and/or whole life narrative. Second, the interviewees repeatedly discussed substance abuse, addiction, sobriety and recovery. These elements formed one unit or theme that was strongly connected to narrative identity and identity reconstruction. In addition, this theme had a strong bearing on the prospect of successful desistance from crime.

Third theme was the meaning of shared life narratives as illustration of the life span of recovery. This topic was connected to the discussion on peer support whereas the distinct repeatedly described features produced an evidently independent theme. The fourth and final theme was the imperative element of hope which was underlined and emphasized in connection to different topics throughout the interviews. The relevance of the fourth theme was confirmed and substantiated through the participant observations.

5.1 Importance of wholeness of the life narrative

Life and perceived life narrative connected to substance abuse and crime is often fragmented and it has substantial discontinuations. In addition, life's challenges and emotions are not adequately addressed or responded to but rather suppressed through substance abuse and avoidance behavior. Therefore, all interviewees recognized the importance of constructing a whole and continuous life narrative that consists of the entire life span of an individual until the present day. In addition, according to the participants, the successful construction of

coherent life narrative included addressing previously avoided challenges, repressed emotions and negative consequences of substance abuse.

Furthermore, there were individual differences in the manner in which life narratives were reconstructed and forged into an unbroken, whole story. Therefore, self-examination, writing, journaling, theoretical approaches (theories of behavioral sciences), ideologies, support groups or programs and using materials of 12-step program (etc.) were mentioned in the interviews. Thus, although there is diversity of methods implemented by the participants the common nominator is the goal of having a whole life story with both the negative and the positive events organized in a meaningful fashion.

Finally, László (2008) states that:

Integrity, internal consistence, complexity and coherence are traits of life stories that make it possible to draw conclusions about the state and maturity of an individual's actual identity (László 2008, 121.)

This statement resonates with the idea of wholeness of life narrative and with closely interlinked theme of finding/creating meaning through life narrative (see section 4.2.6). These two themes are grounded in the deeper levels of recovery processes and require a certain level of development in individual's narrative identity.

5.2 Substance abuse, addiction, sobriety and recovery

Central elements to life narratives and desistance from crime were substance abuse, addiction, sobriety and recovery. Hence, these elements form one unit or theme. Substance abuse was highly connected to criminal activity and hence, addressing the addiction was perceived as critically important for the process of desistance. Furthermore, sobriety and recovery were interlinked concepts and their use varied throughout the interviews. However, these two concepts were central for the change in the adulthood through identity reconstruction.

In addition, this theme conveyed an interesting example of the importance of language in relation to the subculture. In the research context being sober (e.g. being dry) has a meaning of someone being without drugs whereas being clean has a meaning that somebody is committed to sobriety and is involved in the recovery process.

Finally, the positive outlook on future was strongly connected to the anticipated ability to maintain sobriety and work towards recovery and change. Nonetheless, maintaining sobriety was stated to be a daily task and thus, the discussion of the future was marked by humble determination and hopeful anticipation. Hence, although the objective of sobriety was evident it was not taken for granted.

5.3 Shared narratives and the life span of recovery

Shared life narratives and the life span of recovery was a theme that was described and illustrated by five individuals in surprisingly similar and parallel manner. The main notion was that sharing life narratives produces a life span of recovery by participation and contribution of individuals in different stages of the recovery process. The participation of each person is appreciated and thus, those in the very beginning may be encouraged by those who have already proceeded further in their recovery process. Furthermore, those in the more advanced stages are equally encouraged by the presence of those in the very beginning of the recovery. Thus, those in more advanced stages are reminded of the past experiences and of the achieved stages of the process.

Therefore, shared stories and experiences are the core elements in creation of recovery culture. However, one interviewee stated that there should be adequate number of people who are more advanced in their recovery process in order to promote the creation of functional and sustainable recovery culture. Nonetheless, the commonly expressed view was that the life span or mosaic of recovery is critically important both in initiating and maintaining life change and as a catalyst for hope.

5.4 The imperative element of hope

The interview material had continuous references to hope which were verified also through the participant observation. Therefore, hope has an evident importance in the life change and recovery processes of offenders in the process of re-entry. Furthermore, re-constructing and shaping a whole life narrative had apparently a positive impact in generating hope. In addition, shared stories (peer support), positive experiences (e.g. goal attainment) and finding meaning to even difficult life experiences and devolving a more trustful outlook on life was perceived as elements that generate hope. Moreover, presence of hope was also connected to the person's attitude and expectation of the future. Thus, the interviews suggested that hope generated in the present life situation for the present challenges reflects hopeful attitude towards the future and for the possibility for a positive change.

Finally, hope was also connected to the feelings of peace and serenity. However, it was unclear whether hope promotes feelings of peace and serenity or vice versa. In addition, hope was related to accepting the past experiences and overcoming the negative feelings of guilt.

Donald Capps (1995) has described hope and hopelessness well by stating that:

Images of hope are characterized by our perception of the future as novelty, they are prominent in the transitional events of life, and they reflect our realization of the capacity to be alone. The conditions for hopelessness exist when future evokes no perception of novelty but just more of the same, when transitions in life are ignored, and when there is no capacity to be alone because the object of our desire is outside of us. (Capps 1995, 51.)

This description of hope and its opposite, hopelessness, encompasses well the previously described aspects of life that was perceived by the interviewees as encouraging hope in their life. Hope has three major allies and three major threats. The allies are trust, patience and modesty and the threats are despair, apathy and shame (Capps 1995, 98-162). The interviewees expressed similar

elements in connection to hope or challenge of maintaining motivation (threat to hope) such as trust, patience, being genuine, guilt and maintaining balance.

6 HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LIFE CHANGE IN THE ADULTHOOD

A life narrative is a foundation for a holistic approach that acknowledges the different aspects of human being (e.g. psychological, physical, spiritual) in connection to time (past, present and future) and to the environment (social, physical, societal). Hence, findings from both the participant observations and thematic interviews suggested that life narrative and narrative identity have significant role in life change and reconstructing the identity due to the holistic perspective it provides.

Moreover, holistic approach and understanding appeared to be well received by the service users and it was perceived to promote well-being and the recovery in respectful and effective manner. In addition, life narratives provided an important perspective to providing support since they contained the service user viewpoint and thus, endorsed service user centered work models.

Furthermore, the crime/user narratives (see section 4.1) present both an opportunity and a challenge to the staff members at Redis. The reflective discussion on the research findings with Harri Eerikäinen elaborated the initial observations of the theme. The discussion revealed interesting feature in connection to crime /user narratives which is connected to the client centered approach and holistic perspective.

Consequently, allowing crime /user narratives appears occasionally to be an effective way in opening a genuine dialogue with a service user and utilizing the client's own understanding and/or statements about his/her situation. Thus, allowing the crime/user narratives in the beginning permits the work (e.g. providing support, building motivation for change etc.) to be based at conditions (both internal and external) where the service user actually is, rather than where the staff member (or other social work professionals) considers the service user should be. (Harri Eerikäinen, personal communication, 25.1.2013.)

In addition, previously mentioned approach appears to provide a more comprehensive and sustainable foundation for the recovery process and client centered perspective to life change in the adulthood. Hence, controlling/ suppressing undesired crime/user narratives may not be as effective as allowing these narratives and later re-directing them towards new ideas of change and recovery. Nonetheless, both approaches, allowing and suppressing, have their own strengths and weaknesses which should be assessed in each situational context. (Harri Eerikäinen, personal communication, 25.1.2013.)

Finally, life narrative is a subjective perspective on life of an individual narrator. The experiences, turning points, needs and hopes of a person are stored in the life narrative. Therefore, the life narrative emphasizes the person's expertise in relations to matters concerning his/her life. Accordingly, employing person's life narrative in supporting holistic change in the adulthood is based upon respect and in providing opportunity for repeated re-telling of the life narrative. This requires allowing the narrator to begin where he/she discerns to be a relevant starting point and thus, it may lead to storylines that are not perceived as acceptable by mainstream society. The crime/user narratives are good example of the complexity of this approach.

7 DISCUSSION

Life narrative has a clear and strong connection to identity re-construction and life change in the adulthood, namely desistance from crime which was substantiated through diverse and highly interlinked research findings. The research process has revealed different roles and re-occurring themes of life narratives in connection to the re-entry and recovery processes (see appendix 2).

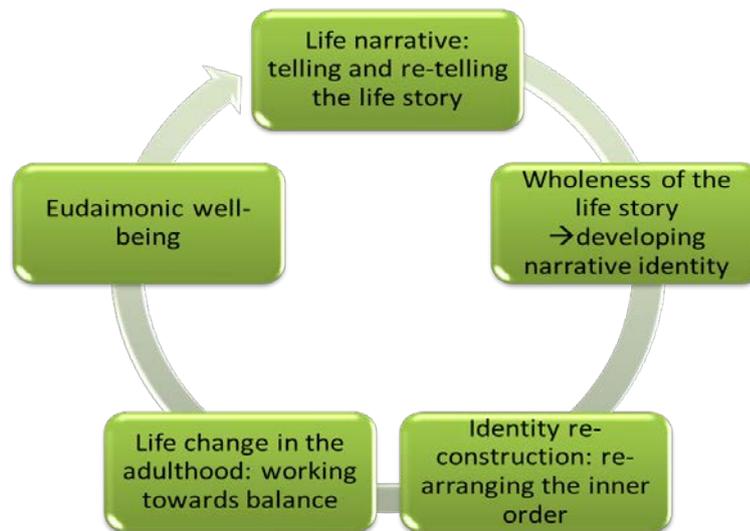
Consequently, the interlinked nature of the research findings is comparable to a process (see picture 1 below). The telling and retelling of the life narrative endorses creation of a whole story often from fractured and incomplete pieces of narrative. Thus the process of retelling the life narrative promotes wholeness of the story which is essential element in developing dynamic inner narrative i.e. narrative identity.

Furthermore, narrative identity is necessary for identity reconstruction that has practical implications to life such as discovering resources for life management and finding meaning/purpose for life. These two themes, life management and finding/creating meaning, had a strong interconnectedness and their importance to the recovery and desistance were emphasized. In addition, evaluating previous social roles and their negative implications through life narrative was perceived relevant for meaningful identity re-construction and moving towards authentic self.

The previously mentioned stages leads towards life change that consists of continuous maintenance of sobriety (i.e. being clean) and pursuit of balanced lifestyle. For that reason, life change in the adulthood should not be comprehended from perspective of goal attainment, but rather as sustained and maintained process and continuous movement towards well-being. Thus, individual in the process of life change often reforms his/her understanding of well-being and the shift takes place from hedonic well-being towards more sustainable eudaimonic well-being. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there may be variation in the

order of these stages according to the individual differences among the target group.

FIGURE 1



Finally, recovery and life change are not a straight forward processes and they have inherently high rate of hindrances and obstructions such as relapses to old behavior (e.g. substance abuse and offending) and exterior setbacks such as difficulty to obtain employment or education. Therefore, hope is imperative necessity both for finding and maintaining motivation when the ordinariness of everyday life feels difficult to be content with or when person has relapsed and is struggling to start the process again. Thus, hope provides opportunities for generating meaning also for the periods of relapse and setbacks which in return provide basis for wholeness of life story by incorporating the relapses to the life narrative as learning experiences and turning points.

7.1 Professional development

The research process on life narratives and desistance from crime has been enlightening experience which has re-enforced my professional interest in the use of life narratives in social work. Furthermore, the use of life narratives in

social work has inherent strengths such as client centered and holistic approach, respect for clients knowledge about his/her life situation, finding sustainable solution models from the clients past life experiences (i.e. solution based social work approach) and having the professional focus on the process and empowerment rather than specific predetermined result (anti-oppressive practice).

Conversely, the weaknesses of using life narratives are that this approach requires resources, namely time, which is often scarce in the social work professions. The need of time is critical for building trust and enabling the process of free flowing narration. In addition, the use of life narrative (as other social work models) does not function effectively in every case (for example with people who have difficult personality disorder). Hence, the life narratives provide ample opportunities but not without limitations and challenges in their use which needs to be considered in specific cases and situational contexts.

In addition, the research process has provided me with a new perspective on the information stored in social work database about service users and their life situations. The information we collect from the service users is essential for functional multi-professional team work and utilizing the social work professional networks for the benefit of the service user. However, through this research process I have realized that social work professionals should carefully construct this information and insert service users own narration as much as possible into the description of his/her situation.

Thus, how the service user perceives his/her situation should be clearly presented and our own professional opinions should be distinctly separated from that perception. Therefore, the social work professionals should have a strong ethical consideration when constructing reports and the process should be transparent to the service users and provide them the opportunity to influence the process and to have their voices heard through authentic documentation of their narration.

Similarly, when the social work professional receives information about a service user who she/he has not yet met there is even greater need for careful analysis of the information. The social work professional should assess whether he/she can find the service users own opinions, perceptions and wishes through in the information provided or does the information consist entirely of social workers perception and narration about the situation. Moreover, as social work professionals meet new service users it is critically important to provide time and space for service users to narrate their life story regardless of what information we already have about the service user.

To conclude, considering the person's life narrative i.e. person's narration about his/her past, present and anticipated future, about the strengths and weaknesses, challenges and about the self-image (who the person say he/she is?) is critically important in the field of social work. Therefore, recognizing the importance of individual's life narrative and organizing the social work accordingly empowers person from the initial states of the process to be actively involved and so obtain self-confidence and inner motivation for finding solutions and/or engaging in life change. Hence, the interest in the narratives in the field of social work represent positive development but there is possibly a need for more innovation in implementing narrative approach in the practice.

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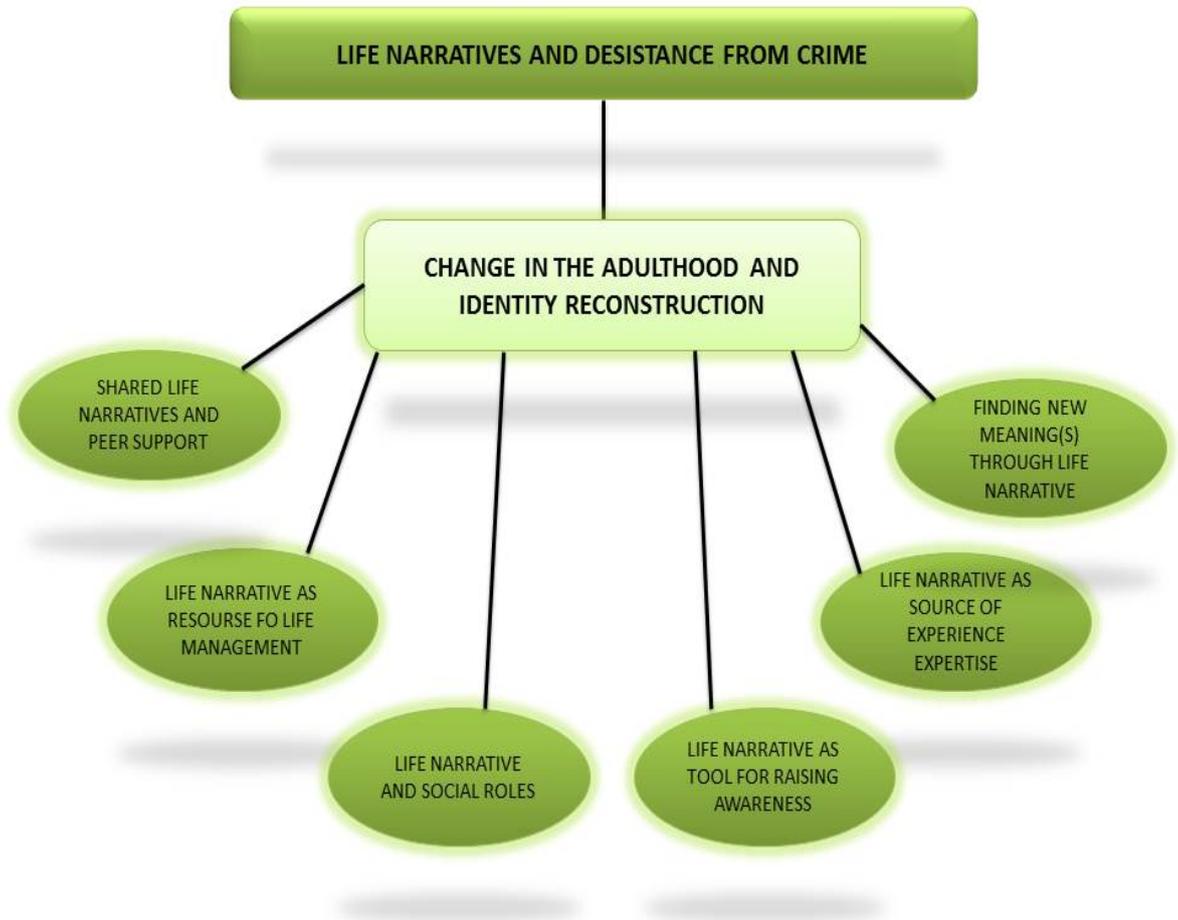
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APPENDIX 1 THEMES FOR THE INTERVIEW



APPENDIX 2 DISCOVERED THEMES

