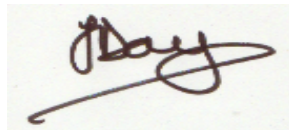


**Transforming criminal lives:  
A narrative study of selves, bodies and physical activity**

Submitted by Joanne Kate Day to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Sport and Health Sciences in July 2012.

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Day', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

(Signature)

## ABSTRACT

Over the past thirty years attention has turned to how people leave a criminal lifestyle and develop an adaptive identity. Within the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales there exist physical activity interventions designed to give people an opportunity to improve their health and facilitate rehabilitation. A review of the literature indicated benefits to developing further understanding of the role of identity (re)construction, embodiment and physical activity in supporting adult desistance from crime. A narrative approach was adopted to explore the embodied, lived experience of people with criminal convictions and life transformation. Approval was gained to access prisons and probation units in England and Wales. Through purposeful sampling, life history interviews were conducted with 16 adults, 13 males and 3 females, with criminal convictions to explore their experience of change. Six people were successfully desisting from a criminal lifestyle, eight were trying to desist, and two were still involved in crime. 14 semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Criminal Justice staff. A narrative analysis was undertaken to explore the personal and public stories. Firstly, exploring the *whats* (what does the story tell us? Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008) and, secondly, the *hows* (what do the stories do? Frank, 2010). From this analysis and interpretation six aspects of transforming criminal lives were identified and explored: embodied transformation, physical activity, spirituality, age and wisdom, claiming an adaptive identity, and maintaining change. These are represented in the thesis through modified realist tales, creative non-fictions and confessional tales to illustrate their role in the process of desistance from crime. Through the analysis, a six-domain 'web' model is proposed as one possible way to conceptualise the active, interdependent and ongoing nature of participants' journeys in transforming their lives. Finally, implications of the study are reflected upon in relation to theory, practice and future research.

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