



Introduction

Incarceration and addiction are epidemic in America. Billions of Federal and State dollars have been spent in efforts to reduce recidivism and set people free from addiction. Millions of men and women are trapped in cycles of self-destruction against which they feel powerless and hopeless. Tragically, these cycles of self-destruction all too often leave entire families trapped in generational cycles of incarceration and poverty.¹ They are in desperate need of a way to escape this trap. And they are in desperate need of hope for a better future. The RIDGE Project's mission is to build a legacy of strong families by breaking these cycles and bringing home to these desperate situations.

In this paper, we propose a Model of Change that empowers individuals and their families to break free from these cycles of self-destruction. Although we believe the cycle applies to a variety of life circumstances, we will focus on its role in the lives of individuals who have been incarcerated. First, we will briefly describe our Model of Change. Second, we will examine three foundational processes by which the TYRO program engenders personal transformation, and key theoretical underpinnings of those processes. Third, we will briefly review other mechanisms through which the TYRO program empowers individuals to move from a cycle of self-destruction to a cycle of self-improvement. Finally, we will review evidence of the TYRO program's effectiveness in breaking cycles of incarceration and poverty.

The TYRO Model of Change

The Model of Change outlined below was developed by Ron and Catherine Tijerina, out of 25 years of experience with the criminal justice and welfare system. 15 years of their experience was personal, as Ron was himself incarcerated for a crime he didn't commit. During those 15 years while Ron was in prison, and Catherine was on welfare (she successfully got off of welfare after 8 years), they recognized these cycles both in themselves, and in the thousands of individuals in similar circumstances by whom they were surrounded. Their hands on, personal research resulted in the theoretical sketch outlined below.

Out of their personal experience, the Tijerinas founded a nonprofit organization, The RIDGE Project, whose primary purpose is to build a legacy of strong families, by breaking generational cycles of poverty and incarceration. In pursuit of this mission, they developed the TYRO program, which, since the year 2000, has been delivered to thousands of individuals and, directly or indirectly, their families. *TYRO* is a latin term meaning novice, apprentice, young warrior, or someone learning something new. The TYRO program is specifically designed to move men and women from a cycle of self-destruction to a cycle of self-improvement. (See page 2 for a visual representation of these cycles.)

The Cycle of Self Destruction

The cycle of self-destruction is characterized by 5 phases: Shock, Denial, Anger, Grief, Acceptance. While an individual may experience more than one phase at a time, and not everyone experiences the phases in the same sequence, almost everyone experiences each phase at one time or another after experiencing some type of trauma or significant loss, such as incarceration.

¹ See the Appendix for sources on the impact of incarceration on dependent children.



TYRO®: STRENGTHENING CYCLES OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

CYCLE OF SELF-DESTRUCTION



The TYRO® program addresses the five R's in a comprehensive way so that people are equipped with the character, relational, and ethical foundations needed to break generational cycles.

"Your past doesn't define who you are, but it will qualify you for your future, if you let it."
- Ron Tijerina
Co-Founder of the TYRO program



CYCLE OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT



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Shock: The initial response after an individual first falls into incarceration or poverty.

Denial: The individual thinks, “I’m okay, it’s not that bad, this really isn’t a problem.”

Anger: The individual understands that present circumstances are a problem, and feels anger at the person(s) he² believes caused those circumstances.

Grief: The individual feels a deep sadness about his situation, as well as a sense of apathy accompanied by a sense of resignation that the present circumstances will not ever improve.

Acceptance: The individual accepts the reality of his circumstances and acknowledges that he must learn to live with, and make adjustments to, this new reality. He also has a sense of complacency about his/her situation.³

The Pivot Point: Victim or Victor?

Our model posits there are two basic responses to Acceptance – that of Victim or Victor. This response is the key factor that determines whether an individual will repeat the cycle of self-destruction or take the first steps toward self-improvement. Whereas Victims succumb to their circumstances, Victors overcome them. Table 1 shows characteristics of Victims and Victors.

Table 1. Characteristics of Victims and Victors

Characteristics of Victims	Characteristics of Victors
See themselves as victims of circumstance. Consciously or subconsciously acquiesce to their circumstances.	See themselves as having the ability to change or overcome their circumstances. Acknowledge their circumstances but explore options to escape them.
View not only their past traumas, but also their responses to those traumas, as being caused by other people. Do not see themselves as having any personal ability to remedy or rectify their circumstances.	While acknowledging the legitimate role of other people in their experience of trauma, believe they can choose to respond to those traumas in a way that brings healing and enables them to move past those traumas.
Do not feel any sense of personal responsibility for behaviors that have gotten them in trouble with the law or negatively impacted their relationships.	Are able to see and “own” their own role in making past and present choices that have contributed to their past and current situations.
Do not believe they have a choice in how they behave in response to difficult situations.	Believe they can choose to respond to adversity in ways that are productive rather than destructive to themselves and others.
See the future with hopelessness and helplessness due to repeated setbacks.	See the future with hope-filledness; believe that a better, brighter future is possible.

² Although we use masculine pronouns throughout this paper because we have worked primarily with men, the concepts apply to both men and women.

³ For a more complete description of these phases, see TYRO Dads: Breaking Cycles of Self-Destruction for Children of Incarcerated Fathers. In Gordon, L. (Ed., 2018). *Contemporary Research and Analysis on the Children of Prisoners: Invisible Children*, pp. 226-240. Cambridge Scholars Publishing: UK.



These responses – that of Victim or Victor –are driven by deeply held personal beliefs which lead either to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, or to a sense of hope-filledness. These beliefs, and the future outlook they engender, have an enormous impact on subsequent behavior and the likelihood of adapting to one’s circumstances with resiliency.

Our premise is that, without intervention, the beliefs that are inherent to Victims lead to further apathy (associated with grief) and complacency (associated with acceptance), resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of self-destruction. Those who believe they have no other realistic option will sadly continue down the path of the Victim, experiencing – and internalizing – increasing levels of helplessness and hopelessness, and will repeat the cycle of self-destruction again and again. With regard to criminal involvement, all too often individuals capitulate to a criminal lifestyle. They are in desperate need of hope that a brighter, better future is indeed possible for them.

It is important to note that the distinction between Victims and Victors is not a value judgment on those who respond to their circumstances as Victims. Rather, our experience in working with thousands of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men has taught us that this distinction is a critical point of self-awareness that provides a foundation for change, empowering Victims to take the first steps toward becoming Victors.

It is also important to note that our model is not in any way intended to minimize the very real and profoundly impacting traumas that have been experienced by those caught in the cycle of self-destruction, or the very real ways in which they have been victimized. Additionally, our model is not intended to minimize the very real barriers faced by those who have been caught up in a cycle of self-destruction. These individuals very often experience seemingly insurmountable challenges such as low levels of education, limited job skills and employment opportunities, difficulty with finding safe and affordable housing, social stigma, discrimination, difficulty with getting a driver’s license, lack of affordable transportation, or a history of mental health and/or substance abuse issues. We would expect that most people who have repeatedly experienced trauma and victimization, and who have repeatedly been unsuccessful in their attempts to overcome barriers, would *without intervention*, naturally be inclined to lose hope and give up. They would naturally be inclined to experience the type of thinking patterns that characterize Victims, and would naturally be vulnerable to the cycle of self-destruction.

The point of distinguishing between Victims and Victors is to empower Victims with hope that, in spite of what has happened to them in the past, and in spite of their past choices and present circumstances, they can change their future path by choosing to become a Victor. The TYRO program disrupts the cycle of self-destruction by inspiring people who have experienced victimization and defeat to begin to think differently about themselves and their circumstances. It is our premise that this new, hope-filled way of thinking empowers them to take a new path – that of self-improvement and personal transformation.

The Cycle of Self Improvement

Whereas people fall into the cycle of self-destruction unintentionally, and the sequence of the phases may vary, the path of the cycle of self-improvement is highly intentional and the stages are sequential.

The stages of self-improvement and transformation are as follows:



Recognize. To move from being a victim to becoming a victor, an individual must first reflect on his life, and recognize his own role that contributed to his present circumstances. He must also acknowledge how his actions, or inactions, have negatively impacted others, especially his family. While not denying the role of other people, this recognition helps the individual identify any personal responsibility he shares in his situation and past choices. This newfound awareness, although painful, empowers the individual with a new sense of personal agency. When the individual begins to see that he has (consciously or subconsciously) made choices that have contributed to his current circumstances, he begins to understand that he has the power to choose to respond in new ways to those circumstances. In other words, by understanding that he contributed to the problem, he realizes he can also contribute to the solution. This understanding engenders the belief, and hope, that there is a realistic option of escaping his circumstances, which in turn motivates him to want to change. Only when an individual believes that he has a realistic option of escaping his circumstances will he take steps toward doing so.

Renew. After an individual recognizes that new responses are needed to his circumstances, and that he is capable of new responses, he begins to understand that a new personal foundation is essential for change – that is, for moving from self-destruction to self-improvement. He then begins the hard work of building a new foundation. This often includes severing old (harmful) relationships, breaking old habits, and intentionally challenging old ways of thinking, and replacing them with new (prosocial) relationships, new habits, and new thoughts.

Rebuild. As one's personal foundation is renewed, he will begin to rebuild his life – for example, by pursuing additional education, taking steps to build his spiritual and/or physical health, and developing a plan to systematically overcoming long-established barriers. During this stage, the individual's confidence in his new identity grows immensely.

Reinvent. In this state, the individual emerges as someone very distinct and different from the person he was when he first began the self-improvement process. He has now taken the reins of his life and has broken free from old, destructive choices and behaviors. However, without moving on to the next stage, he can become prideful, complacent, and narcissistic.

Reinvest. In this stage the individual strives to repeat the cycle of self-improvement, looking for other ways in which he can further self-improve, beginning with the "Recognize" stage. Additionally, *and this is critical*, he begins to invest in others, supporting and promoting their self-improvement.

At the first stage of self-improvement, an individual takes some initial steps of change. When he experiences some success, along with encouragement from prosocial supportive friends, family and mentors, he is motivated to persist on his new path. As he experiences success, he gradually builds the confidence he needs to continue to change, even when he encounters obstacles and challenges. As he becomes stable at the first stage, he is emboldened to move to the second stage. Then this process repeats itself, empowering the individual to move through each stage in succession. It is possible for an individual to get stuck in any one of these stages, or repeat stages, in the cycle of self-improvement. It takes dedication, persistence, and motivation from both internal and external sources to continue moving through the cycle of self-improvement.



Theoretical Underpinnings and Research Support for the Cycles of Self-Destruction and Self-Improvement

Our model of self-improvement and personal transformation, which is what the TYRO program is built on, is supported by a number of theories that are grounded in social psychology. After a brief discussion of theoretical and research support for the over-all cycle of self-destruction and self-improvement, we will provide a more in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the transition from Victim to Victor.

The Cycle of Self-Destruction

Research support for the Cycle of Self-Destruction is found in Kubler-Ross's stages of grief (Kessler, n.d.), which closely corresponds to the phases of self-destruction in our model. The primary differences between Kubler-Ross's stages and our model are (1) our model begins with the experience of shock, followed by denial, whereas Kubler-Ross's model begins with denial, which includes shock; (2) our model does not include a "bargaining" stage; and (3) whereas Kubler-Ross referred to "depression," our model refers to "grief." Kubler-Ross's stages of grief have been used to explain responses to a variety of forms of personal loss, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or income, major rejection, the end of a relationship or divorce, drug addiction, incarceration, etc. (Kubler-Ross model, n.d.). Similarly, our model, like Kubler-Ross's, can be used to explain responses to the loss of freedom and access to loved ones, as in the case of incarceration, and responses to the loss of aspirations for a better life, as in the case of chronic poverty or addiction.

The Cycle of Self-Improvement

Theoretical support for our model is found in the "Theory of Cognitive Transformation" proposed by Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) – a theory they use to explain significant changes in life direction for individuals with a past criminal history.

In an examination of factors that influence whether delinquents continue to offend, or desist from crime, as adults, Giordano, et al. discuss cognitive shifts as an underlying change mechanism for male and female delinquents. They propose that cognitive shifts are an integral, fundamental part of the process of transformation from a lifestyle of criminal activity to one of desistance.

Giordano, et al. proposed four types of cognitive transformations: (1) a shift in the individual's basic openness to change (i.e., when the individual experiences a general readiness for change and recognizes that change is desirable); (2) a shift in the individual's receptivity to a particular hook or set of hooks for change, such as religion, children, or marriage (i.e., when the individual sees a new situation as a positive development and as fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation); (3) a shift in the individual's ability to envision and begin to fashion an appealing and conventional "replacement self" that can supplant the marginal one that must be left behind" (i.e. when the individual embraces a new identity that is a broad, all-encompassing personal construct.. that acts as a cognitive filter for future decision making; and (4) a shift in the way the individuals views the deviant behavior or lifestyle.

Whereas the phases of self-improvement found in our model encompass both cognitive and behavioral changes, and are posited to occur sequentially, the theory proposed by Giordano, et al. focuses specifically on cognitive changes which, with the exception of the first type of shift, do not appear to necessarily occur in sequential order. Thus, there is not a direct correspondence



between the two. However, our model of change does closely correspond to their theory in several key aspects.

1. Transformation begins with a change in thinking.

Individuals can, and do, move from a life of crime to a life of desistance due to changes in thinking (to be explained below). This includes “changes in the meaning and desirability of deviant/criminal behavior” (Giordano et al., p. 992).

2. Behavior change is preceded by cognitive change.

This is obviously a corollary to the first premise. Giordano et al. asserted, “Our fundamental premise is that the various cognitive transformations... inspire and direct behavior... Both cognitive shifts and the agentic moves that connect to them will be associated with sustained behavioral change” (Giordano et al., pp. 1002-1003).

3. The individual serves as an active agent in his own transformation process.

According to Giordano et al., to understand the change from criminal behavior to desistance, it is important to acknowledge the individual’s efforts to “make initial moves toward, help to craft, and work to sustain a different way of life” (p. 992). Both our model and Giordano et al. emphasize the individual’s own active role in selecting and responding to environmental influences (“hooks for change”) in ways that support the individual’s desire to change. This “agentic” view of transformation involves reflection, self-awareness, intentionality, choice, and power.

4. Transformation is a process that occurs over time. Giordano, et al. described transformation as a process which an individual begins with initial attempts to veer off a deviant pathway. “Individuals.. attend to... new possibilities, discard old habits and begin the process of crafting a different way of life. At the point of change, this new lifestyle will necessarily be “at a distance” or a “faint” possibility” (p. 1000). As the individual’s initial efforts at change and a new way of life become supported and reinforced, the new lifestyle eventually becomes a reality that is sustained by continued environmental reinforcement, particularly by prosocial people and networks.

5. Prosocial others are of critical importance in the transformation process.

Our model and Giordano et al. both emphasize that, for lasting transformation to occur, an individual’s initial attempts at change must be supported and reinforced by prosocial people and networks, over an extended period of time.

6. Identity transformation is a key element of behavior transformation.

A fundamental shift in identity, in which an individual adopts a prosocial “replacement self” that supplants his previous, deviant self is critical to sustain behavior change over time, as the individual encounters new situations. A stable new identity provides a stable basis and funnel for making decisions that are consistent with that identity, and that support continued self-improvement.

The TYRO Program: Foundational Processes

According to our model, the pivotal point of moving from a cycle of self-destruction to the cycle of self-improvement is found in the individual’s response to the phase of “Acceptance.” Does he become resigned to being a Victim or choose to proactively become a Victor? In the TYRO program (TYRO), the choice to move from Victim to Victor, and from self-destruction to self-improvement, is engendered by three foundational processes: first, through **cognitive restructuring**; second, through **mentoring**; and third, through **strengthening family relationships**. These processes of personal transformation are summarized in Table 2.



Table 2. How TYRO engenders personal transformation.

Process	General Mechanisms	Specific Mechanisms
Cognitive Restructuring	Changes attributions (beliefs about causation of success and failure)	Helps participants attribute their own behavior to internal factors that are changeable and to attribute their circumstances to internal or external factors that are changeable – and thereby believe that change is possible.
	Increases self-efficacy (beliefs that one can and will succeed)	Helps participants believe they can succeed, and can make the choices and changes necessary to do so.
	Reduces criminal thinking.	Helps participants become more self-aware of, and change, criminal thinking patterns that undermine their success, such as entitlement and denial of personal responsibility.
Mentoring	Provides prosocial role models	Demonstrates new, positive ways of thinking and prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and motivates participants to adopt these new ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors.
Strengthening Family Relationships	Increases prosocial relationships that support steps to self-improvement	Encourages participants to communicate with their children. Teaches specific skills for parenting children. Helps participants identify people who serve (or can potentially serve) as social supports while simultaneously identifying those who serve as negative influences to be avoided.

Cognitive restructuring helps those caught in the cycle of self-destruction by changing the way they think about themselves, others, and their circumstances. The key element here is that of **belief change** – which is what TYRO directly impacts. As mentioned previously, people must believe that a realistic alternative is available to them before they will attempt to change. TYRO helps them believe that the path of self-improvement and transformation is a realistic, achievable alternative! TYRO helps individuals believe they can be a Victor, and thereby instills the desire and courage to take the first steps toward transformation and self-improvement. Additionally, TYRO helps participants develop efficacy beliefs related to parenting, relationships, economic opportunity, and overcoming obstacles. This self-efficacy emboldens them to set challenging goals, take on difficult tasks, and persist in the face of adversity. This self-efficacy is foundational for empowering them to progress from the “Recognize” stage all the way through the “Reinvest” stage of the Cycle of Self-Improvement. Successes at each stage build stronger self-efficacy, which propels individuals to the next phase and motivates them to take on increasing levels of challenge.

Mentoring provides TYRO participants with role models who teach and reinforce new ways of thinking and behavior. TYRO class facilitators serve as role models who exemplify and reinforce new learning, including new ways of thinking about themselves, others, and their circumstances. These role models also demonstrate new prosocial behaviors and promote the adoption of new values and virtues such as honor, integrity, self-discipline, and honesty. Through TYRO, participants have the opportunity to observe others who have chosen to move from Victim to Victor, and see the successes and positive consequences of that choice. Thus, through participants’ observation of a mentor (prosocial role model), TYRO provides both a powerful source of motivation to change and the path to adopt that change.



Strengthening family relationships helps TYRO participants build the social supports necessary to choose a different path, and to remain on that path over time. TYRO increases contact between incarcerated parents and their children and, by proxy, contact with their children’s caregivers. Many incarcerated parents avoid having contact with their children due to shame or the belief that their children are better off without them. TYRO helps incarcerated parents understand the importance of their role as a parent, and how their children benefit from having contact with them, even while they are incarcerated. It encourages participants to regularly communicate with their children through letters, emails, and/or phone calls, and to invite their children to visit them as often as possible. Many incarcerated parents also face strong opposition to having contact with their children, from their children’s caregivers (a process called gatekeeping). TYRO encourages participants to communicate with their children’s caregivers in positive ways, and to demonstrate sincere interest in self-improvement, to help increase the caregivers’ willingness to allow the children to visit the incarcerated parent. TYRO also teaches participants specific parenting skills, to help improve the parent-child relationship. Additionally, TYRO helps participants identify both positive and negative social influences in their lives. This process helps them identify family strengths they can leverage to overcome barriers and provide them with the emotional and financial support they will need for successful reentry. These supportive relationships are critical for helping participants break associations with past criminal peers and avoid antisocial networks after reentry.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Research Support for the TYRO Program

All three of these foundational processes are well-established by research as strengthening desistance to crime and reducing recidivism. In this section, we will discuss theories that underlie and research that supports the effectiveness of these processes.

TYRO Foundational Process #1: Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is a core part of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which has been found to be effective in reducing recidivism (Clark, 2010). CBT has been widely studied (see, for example, Bush, Harris, & Parker, 2016) and has been increasingly adopted by federal and state governments as a means of reducing recidivism. For example, Funding Opportunity Announcements in recent years for U.S. Department of Justice Second Chance Act grants aimed to assist with successful reentry have strongly urged applicants to provide treatment interventions that target criminal thinking and utilize cognitive restructuring and other cognitive-behavioral strategies. Further, Giordano et al. (2002) also argued for the importance of cognitive transformation in criminal desistance, emphasizing the individual’s own agentic role in the transformation process. Giordano et al. highlighted “the important period when actors make initial attempts to veer off a deviant pathway.”

The importance of cognitive restructuring for engendering personal transformation can be understood by examining three theories and their associated concepts: (1) Attribution Theory (including locus of causality and learned helplessness); (2) Social-Cognitive Theory (including self-efficacy); and (3) Criminal Thinking Theory (including entitlement and denial of personal responsibility).

Attribution Theory. This theory seeks to explain behavior and motivation in terms of how individuals attribute the causes of success or failure. It posits that an individual’s attributions as to why they succeeded or failed at an activity determine the amount of effort the individual will



expend in future activities. When attributions lead to positive affect and high expectancy of future success, they result in greater willingness to engage in similar tasks in the future than when attributions produce negative affect and low expectancy of future success (Attribution, n.d.)

Weiner (1985) theorized that attributions can be grouped within three dimensions of causality: locus, stability, and controllability. *Locus of causality* describes the internality or externality of an attribution – in other words, whether the individual attributes success or failure to himself, or to their situation, including other people. Stability refers to the degree to which the attributed causes of success or failure are perceived to be stable over time and across situations – and thus the degree to which the individual views that cause to be changeable. Controllability refers to the degree to which the attributed causes of success or failure are perceived to be within the volitional control of the individual. Attributions exert a profound influence on motivated behaviors such as persistence and choice, through their effect on emotions (e.g., shame or guilt vs. pride, hopelessness vs. hopefulness, and anger or pity vs. gratitude) and expectations for future success or failure (Harvey & Martinko, 2010).

A wide body of research supports the idea that causal attributions (for success or failure) have a profound impact on how people adapt to changing environments and overcome challenges (Harvey & Martinko, 2010). Attributions influence the degree to which people feel they have control over what is necessary to overcome failure and achieve success. This feeling of control (or lack thereof) subsequently impacts their expectations of future success which, in turn, impact whether they are willing and motivated to try to overcome challenges. Thus, these attributions determine the amount of effort and persistence people will put forth in the future to overcome adverse experiences, as well as their willingness to take on challenging tasks.

As related to the Cycle of Self-Destruction, attributions can motivate and justify deviant behaviors (Harvey, Martinko, & Borkowski, 2017; Harvey & Martinko, 2010) that are a part of this cycle. Attributions are particularly relevant to how people respond to adverse experiences, and whether they respond as a Victim or Victor. When people believe adverse experiences are due to stable factors over which they have no control, they are likely to fall into the Victim path. These beliefs often reflect a state of *learned helplessness*, which is characterized by the “belief that effort is futile because failure is inevitable” after having experienced repeated punishments and failures. Consequentially, they become passive and unmotivated even when their situation has changed and success is possible (Harvey & Martinko, 2010, p. 151).

In summary, attributions are beliefs people hold with regard to what caused their past failures and adverse experiences. These beliefs often lead people to feel helpless and powerless to change themselves or their situations. And when people feel powerless to change themselves or their situations, they feel victimized, lose hope, and are not motivated to pursue a different path. On the other hand, when people believe their circumstances were caused by factors that are changeable and that they have a level of control over their behavior, these beliefs lead people to feel hopeful and empowered. When people begin to believe that change is possible, they experience at least a spark of hope for the future, and are motivated to change. They begin to believe that they can become a Victor and can choose the path of personal transformation and self-improvement.



Social Cognitive Theory. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 2001) posits that behavior is caused by an interaction of cognition (thoughts and beliefs) and other personal factors (such as emotions) and environmental-social influences (such as teachers or role models). In this section we will discuss the aspect of this theory that focuses on the role of cognition (beliefs) in influencing behavior.

According to Bandura (1989), “Expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals and intentions give shape and direction to behavior. What people think, believe, and feel, affects how they behave” (p. 3). A key element of Bandura’s theory, with regard to beliefs that influence behavior, is the concept of *self-efficacy*, confidence in one’s own ability to achieve intended results (Self-efficacy, n.d.).

Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one’s actions... Such beliefs whether people think pessimistically or optimistically and in ways that are self-enhancing or self-hindering. (Bandura, 2001)

Efficacy beliefs, similar to attributions (discussed earlier), have a profound impact on people’s expectations for success, and influence their likelihood of taking on challenging tasks, persisting in the face of difficulty, and overcoming obstacles. In general, people with high self-efficacy are more likely to make efforts to complete a challenging task, and to persist longer in those efforts in the face of adversity, than those with low self-efficacy. The stronger the self-efficacy or mastery expectations, the more active the efforts.

Self-efficacy has several effects on thought patterns and responses (Self-efficacy, n.d.):

- Low self-efficacy can lead people to believe tasks to be harder than they actually are. This often results in poor task planning, as well as increased stress.
- People become erratic and unpredictable when engaging in a task in which they have low self-efficacy.
- People with high self-efficacy tend to take a wider view of a task in order to determine the best plan.
- Obstacles often stimulate people with high self-efficacy to greater efforts, where someone with low self-efficacy will tend toward discouragement and giving up.
- An individual with high self-efficacy will attribute failure to controllable factors (e.g., lack of effort or insufficient preparation), whereas an individual with low self-efficacy will blame uncontrollable factors (e.g., lack of intelligence).

As related to our Model of Change, efficacy beliefs have a profound influence on how people respond to adversity and on the types of goals they are willing to pursue – and therefore whether they follow the path of self-destruction or the path of self-improvement. Those with low self-efficacy are likely to give up easily in the face of adversity and avoid the pursuit of challenging goals. This is the path of self-destruction. Those with high self-efficacy, however, are likely to be motivated to pursue challenging goals and persist in the face of obstacles to achieve those goals. This is the path of self-improvement and transformation.



Criminal Thinking Theory. A number of criminologists (e.g., Damon Mitchell and Raymond Chip Tafrate, Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow, and Glenn D. Walters) have attributed criminal behavior, at least in part, to antisocial criminal attitudes and thinking patterns or styles. “Criminal thinking has been conceptualized as distorted thought patterns that support offending behavior by rationalizing and justifying how an individual acts” (Taxman, Rhodes, & Dumenci, 2011, p. 174). Interestingly, there appears to be a negative relationship between criminal thinking and self-efficacy. Taxman et al. found that “self-efficacy was negatively correlated with most of the [Criminal Thinking Scales], indicating that offenders with higher levels of thinking errors may also have a lessened ability to manage their lives” (p. 185).

Based on the theory that criminal thinking underlies criminal behavior, validated instruments designed to assess offenders’ risk of re-offending and recidivism commonly include measures of criminal thinking. For example, the Ohio Risk Assessment System- Prison Intake Tool (PIT) and Community Supervision Tool (CST) both include items to assess criminal attitudes, including the degree to which offenders justify and minimize past criminal acts, deny responsibility for their actions, see no problem in telling lies, feel a lack of control over events affecting their lives, and believe in “do unto others before they do unto you.”

Anti-social beliefs and attitudes have been identified by research as two criminogenic needs which contribute to an individual’s risk of recidivism (Principles of Recidivism Reduction, n.d.). More specifically, antisocial attitudes such as entitlement and externalization of blame have been identified as central predictors of recidivism risk (Picard-Fritsche, Rempel, Tallon, Adler, & Reyes, 2017). Accordingly, several validated instruments designed to measure the risk of re-offending include scales for **entitlement thinking** and **denial of personal responsibility** (blaming others) for one’s behaviors. For example, Texas Christian University (see Taxman et al., 2011) has identified 6 Criminal Thinking Scales, including scales for Entitlement and Personal Irresponsibility. Entitlement thinking is characterized by “an attitude of privilege and misidentification of wants as needs” (Taxman et al., 2011). Walters (2002) identified 8 Criminal Thinking Styles, including Entitlement and Mollification, the latter of which is a measure of the degree to which individuals are willing to take responsibility for their behavior, rather than blaming other people or situations or offering rationalizations and excuses for their behavior.

As related to our Model of Change, the thinking patterns that have contributed to past criminal behavior must be changed if an individual is to move from a cycle of crime and self-destruction to a cycle of self-improvement. Entitlement beliefs contribute to a cycle of self-destruction by leading an individual to justify behaviors such as stealing from others, to meet his perceived “needs.” Entitlement thinking may also lead an unemployed individual to not seek entry level jobs that are available, because of his belief that he deserves a higher-paying job. This prevents him from taking steps toward self-improvement. Denial of personal responsibility is a defining characteristic of those trapped in victimhood thinking. Only when an individual begins to see how his own past choices have contributed to his current circumstances, and to accept personal responsibility for those choices, can he begin to recognize that he can make different choices, begin to take steps toward self-improvement, and ultimately become a Victor rather than a Victim.



TYRO Foundational Process #2: Mentoring

Research has found that anti-social friends and peers, as well as unstructured and anti-social leisure time, are two criminogenic needs which contribute to an individual's risk of recidivating (Principles of Recidivism Reduction, n.d.). One way of addressing these criminogenic needs is through structured mentoring.

A mentor is a person who guides a less experienced person by building trust and modeling positive behaviors (What is a Mentor?, n.d.). Research has shown that quality mentoring relationships have a powerful impact on helping at-risk individuals learn new skills and behaviors, reinforce those skills and behaviors so they become stable, and achieve success. Mentoring can also have positive effects on motivation to succeed or change and the goals at-risk individuals pursue, and can lead to the adoption of new attitudes and values that contribute to goal attainment. However, not all mentoring leads to these outcomes, and a growing body of research has identified specific evidenced-based mentoring practices that lead to “quality mentoring relationships” and contribute to these outcomes (Mentoring Impact, 2017; The Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring, 2017).

Although mentoring is often discussed in the context of working with children and youth, it has also been effectively used with adults in work contexts as well as other settings. Research examining the relationship between mentoring for adult prisoners and successful reentry is quite limited. However, there is preliminary evidence suggesting that mentors (or “life coaches”) for adult prisoners can play a valuable role in the offender reentry process – offering formerly incarcerated individuals critical emotional support and access to new resources, professional networks, and social capital (Bauldry, McClanahan, McMaken, & Kotloff 2009, cited by Meyerson & Otteson, 2009).

Like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy the value of mentoring for individuals who have experienced incarceration is evident in its increasing adoption by federal and state governments as a means of reducing recidivism. Both the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Labor have included mentoring as a key component of some grants for serving the reentry population. Moreover, several government-funded publications have emphasized the importance of mentoring for successful reentry (Cobbs Fletcher, 2007; Duran, Plotkin, Potter, & Rosen, 2013; Umez, De la Cruz, Richey, & Albis, 2017; Yoon & Nickel, 2008). Because mentors typically serve as role models of desired behavior, values, and attitudes, theoretical support for mentoring can be found in Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory. Social Learning Theory, an integration of Social Cognitive Theory and other behavioral learning theory, posits that behavior is learned through observing others' behavior and attitudes, as well as the outcomes of those behaviors, and through modeling and imitation (David, 2015).

According to Social Learning Theory, learning occurs both through observation of a given behavior, and through the observation of the consequences of that behavior, a process known as vicarious reinforcement. When a particular behavior is observed to be rewarded regularly, it is more likely to be imitated by the observer; conversely, if a particular behavior is observed to be constantly punished, it is less likely to be imitated. This process of vicarious reinforcement affects individuals' expectations for the outcomes of a given behavior and consequently influences their motivation to imitate the behavior (Social learning theory, n.d.).



Bandura (1989) discussed the power of observational learning as follows. "...in observational learning a single model can transmit new ways of thinking and behaving simultaneously to many people..." (p. 22). He further stated, "Learning from models may take varied forms, including new behavior patterns, judgmental standards, cognitive competencies, and generative rules for creating new forms of behavior" (p. 23).

As related to our Model of Change, an individual can learn both criminal and prosocial behaviors and attitudes from other people who serve as role models, for good or for bad.⁴ Just as those who have engaged in criminal activity have been influenced by the antisocial attitudes and behaviors of others in their environment, so also can they be influenced by the prosocial attitudes and behaviors of others, and intentional mentoring. Similarly, assuming that people follow the path of Victims at least in part because of the negative thinking patterns and antisocial values they learned from their old roles models, we can have hope that they can choose the path of Victors by observing and imitating the positive thinking patterns and prosocial values of mentors, who serve as new role models. Further, they can be motivated to do so by observing in the mentor's life the powerful positive consequences of embracing these new thinking patterns and values.

TYRO Foundational Process #3: Strengthening Family Relationships

Research has shown that, in addition to quality mentoring relationships, strong relational ties to family members and other people who serve as prosocial influences strengthen desistance to crime and decrease recidivism (Cobbina, Huebner, & Berg, 2010). Families and social networks play a critical role in the successful transition from incarceration to the community. When an individual is released from prison, he faces a myriad of challenges and is likely to rely heavily on family members and social support networks for help with overcoming those challenges (Fontaine, Gilchrist-Scott, Denver, & Rossman, 2012).

Tragically, low-income fathers, including those who are formerly incarcerated, typically have extremely limited family support and social networks. These social networks are essential for producing social capital that helps offset significant life challenges such as past involvement with the criminal justice system, and low levels of education, employment and earnings (Valdovinos D'Angelo, Knas, Holcomb, & Edin, 2016).

For obvious reasons, incarceration severely impairs the relationship between inmates and their families and other social support networks. Thus, family disintegration is the norm among families affected by incarceration, and these families are in desperate need of interventions that rebuild trust and promote emotional healing, forgiveness, bonding, and communication.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of rigorous research aimed at identifying the specific family-strengthening methods that are most effective in promoting successful reentry. However, Meyerson and Otteson (2009) have identified several key practices that appear to be widely supported by the available research on families affected by incarceration. These include (but are not limited to) mapping the family system and its potential strengths; mentoring to broaden the

⁴ For a more complete description of Social Learning Theory and its application to criminal behavior, see http://criminology.wikia.com/wiki/Social_Learning_Theory and <http://law.jrank.org/pages/815/Crime-Causation-Sociological-Theories-Social-learning-theory.html>



family's circle of social support; and using the period of incarceration as an opportunity to strengthen family relationships – for example, by helping family members maintain contact with their incarcerated family member, and by providing cognitive-behavioral interventions and research-based parenting programs. The TYRO program incorporates each of these practices.

One method of strengthening family relationships during incarceration is that of in-person visitation. Although the effects of visitation are not well-researched, there is some research support for the idea that prison visitation can contribute to reduced recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008) and post-release employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011).

As related to our Model of Change, children and prosocial adult family members can play a critical role in helping an individual move away from a cycle of self-destruction to a cycle of self-improvement. Because incarceration typically damages the individual's relationship with his children and prosocial adult family members, it is critical that those relationships be restored to the greatest extent possible, preferably during the incarceration period. These family members, including children, serve as a powerful motivator to change – that is, to create a better future for subsequent generations. They also can provide critically needed emotional support and encouragement for the individual to change and to do the right thing when he is faced with adversity and temptation to engage in old, self-destructive patterns of thinking and behaving. These family members also serve as a powerful source of social support and social capital for the formerly incarcerated individual, enabling him to replace past criminal/anti-social friends, peers, and leisure time activities with new, prosocial networks and activities.

Other Mechanisms Through Which TYRO Operates

The foundational processes of cognitive restructuring, mentoring, and strengthening family relationships work together in the TYRO program to empower individuals to take the path of self-improvement and transformation. TYRO further engenders self-improvement by engendering the development of **self-regulation** and **emotional intelligence**, improving **executive functioning** of the brain, and **transforming personal identity**. Although an in-depth discussion of these mechanisms, and theoretical/research support for them, is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief explanation of their incorporation into the TYRO program is in order.

Self-regulation. Research has shown a strong link between anger and violence (Bonn, 2017) and between deficient self-control and criminality (Baumeister, Schmeichel and Vohs, n.d., p.3). Additionally, alcohol and drugs are implicated in an estimated 80% of offenses leading to incarceration in the United States (Alcohol, Drugs and Crime, 2015). Based on these facts, the development of self-regulation would appear to be a key factor for many incarcerated individuals, if they wish to move from a cycle of self-destruction to one of self-improvement. TYRO includes specific components designed to help participants develop self-discipline in their lives. For example, starting with the first workshop, participants are asked to choose something in their lives to “fast” from – this could be a food, an activity, or even a person who the individual needs to avoid.

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a personal quality that has been found to be associated with successful outcomes in leadership, interpersonal relationships, and employment. Daniel Goleman, one of the primary proponents of EI, identified five components of EI, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman,



1998). The development of Emotional intelligence would appear to be a critical process for moving incarcerated individuals from self-destructive to self-improving behaviors. Self-awareness (the recognition and *accurate* assessment of one's current thinking patterns, behaviors, tendencies, and emotions) is the first step toward virtually any intentional behavior change—thus, is critical to the “Recognize” stage of self-improvement—and would appear to be a prerequisite to self-regulation. Self-regulation is important for reasons described in the previous paragraph. An individual must be able to maintain his motivation to change over time, and in the face of adversity, to consistently take steps toward self-improvement. The development of empathy is critical for an individual to strengthen his family relationships, and transform anti-social beliefs and attitudes into prosocial beliefs and attitudes. And social skill are most certainly required for strengthening relationships with prosocial adults who will help support the individual on the path to self-improvement, and build networks that will help him obtain employment and desist from crime. TYRO includes activities that develop each of these components, including the development of hope and self-efficacy as self-motivating mechanisms.

Executive Function. According to Baumeister, et al. (nd) Executive Function refers to the active, intentional aspects of the self, which is ultimately responsible for an individual's actions. It is the means by which “the self exerts control over its environment... makes decisions and choices, and also regulates itself” (Baumeister, et al., nd, p. 8). There are two primary Executive Functions: self-regulation and choice. Thus, an individual's Executive Function reflects the degree to which he possesses and uses core decision-making and behavior management skills that are essential for personal transformation. In terms of the present discussion, Executive Function enables an individual to make choices and engage in behaviors that lead him away from self-destruction and toward self-improvement. A growing body of research has shown that the stresses of poverty can compromise the development of Executive Function skills. Stress swamps our analytic capabilities, compromises our ability to think about the future, and heightens our impulsiveness (Babcock, 2017). Additionally, because of the stresses inherent in living in poverty, “poverty has the capacity to negatively impact the decision-making processes involved in problem-solving, goal-setting and goal attainment” (Babcock, 2014, p. 5). In summary, individuals who have experienced chronic poverty also have experienced chronic stress, which in turn inhibits the individual's ability to problem-solve and make decisions that help them overcome poverty. TYRO helps individuals strengthen their Executive Function (decision-making and behavioral self-management skills) by helping them change their attributions, develop self-efficacy, increase self-regulation and by providing a mentor who can guide them in goal setting, developing a plan of action for the achievement of their goals, and problem-solving to overcome barriers to goal achievement.

Identity Transformation. A final mechanism through which TYRO helps individuals move from a cycle of self-destruction to one of self-improvement is that of identity transformation. Giordano, et al. (2002), identified fundamental shifts in identity as a critical part of the process of the personal transformation of individuals with a criminal history. According to these scholars, a key element of desistance to crime is the development of a new, crime-free identity. This identity is an all-compassing personal construct which acts as a filter for decision-making, and gradually decreases the desirability of deviant behavior. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) discussed the role an individual's identity plays in his engagement in, or desistance from, criminal behavior. Interestingly, family ties can facilitate identity transformation, which in turn



can motivate behaviors that are incompatible with a life of crime (Berg & Huebner, 2011). Individuals who complete the TYRO program experience this fundamental shift in identity. To become a TYRO means to become a person of honor, discipline and integrity, who is someone worth following. At the beginning of each TYRO workshop, participants stand and read the TYRO Declaration, which includes (but it not limited to) the following statements:

“I am a man (woman) of honor. I am a man (woman) of good character.... I do not live my life justifying my mistakes and shortcoming. I am trustworthy... I am grateful. I strive to achieve my highest potential... My self-esteem does not come from others, but from doing what is right and just in all things... I am an ambassador of hope for the hopeless... I am a man if discipline... I am responsible. I can be depended upon to do what I say I will do... I AM A TYRO!

Similarly, at the conclusion of each workshop, participants stand and read the TYRO Pledge, which begins by stating, “I am a TYRO. I am a man of honor, integrity and promise” and concludes by stating, “I am an ambassador of hope and a man (woman) of discipline. I am a man (woman) worth following. I AM A TYRO.” Through this process, and the course activities which reinforce these statements, those who complete the program are conferred the title of, and develop the identity of, a *TYRO*.

Evidence of Effectiveness of the TYRO Program

The RIDGE Project, Inc. has been formally implementing the TYRO program in Ohio prisons since 2006. The effectiveness of TYRO in reducing recidivism and increasing economic self-sufficiency has been verified by independent, third-party research (Johnson, Wubbenhorst, Schroeder, & Corcoran, 2014; Saint Wall Street, 2013). A Randomized Controlled Trial study of TYRO Dads by Baylor University found that TYRO Dads helped fathers improve their parenting efficacy, perception of co-parenting relationship with the child’s mother, and role identity, which in turn contributed to their parenting satisfaction and the frequency of father-child activities (Kim & Jang, 2018). The RIDGE Project has been nationally recognized, by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for its use of promising practices (2010, 2009), for successful development of partnerships needed to effectively engage offenders and ex-offenders (2011), and as an innovative program supporting incarcerated and reentering fathers (April 2010). Additionally, The RIDGE Project has been spotlighted by the U.S. Department of Justice (2011) for its best practices in engaging fathers for successful reentry.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined our Model of Change and the mechanisms by which the TYRO program empowers individuals who have experienced incarceration to break free from a cycle of self-destruction and begin taking steps toward self-improvement, bringing a hope-filled future for not only incarcerated individuals but also their entire families—especially their children. Although we have examined the process of transformation for individuals who have experienced incarceration, we believe the cycle applies to people in a variety of other life circumstances, including those who are experiencing addiction to drugs, alcohol, and pornography, and those who are trapped in poverty. We look forward to expanding TYRO to help build a legacy of strong families and help more and more families break generational cycles of poverty and incarceration!



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APPENDIX

Selected Resources on The Impact of Incarceration on Children

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