

**RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN PRISON: TENDENCIES IN
IDENTITY AND THE EXCLUSIVIST OR INCLUSIVIST**

**The Institute of Interfaith Dialogue
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*Malcolm L. Rigsby, Ph.D., J.D.,
Henderson State University,
Arkadelphia, Arkansas*

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Reasons For My Interest in Religion and Prison

For the prisoner,
religion is one major venue for identity expression
in an otherwise restricted population.

Studies seeking to understand prisoner life
experiences in terms of their narrative accounts
have long been neglected.

Study of religion in prison has been largely
considered as a means to understand institutional
management issues.

RATIONALE

- Two Rationales Supported the Study
 - Academic Call
 - Transformation → Desistance (pro-sociality)
 - Societal Call
 - Safety → legitimate needs for safety balanced by individual liberties

GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

- Prisoners and Religion (Will “Voice” provide opportunity for pro-social transformation?)
 - Maruna, O’Connor
 - APA and Worthington
- Terrorism, Religion, Concerns (Is there and if so, radicalization in prison of the type feared since 9/11?)
 - Lieberman, Newman, Pistole, King,
 - U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
- Conversion in Prison Studies
 - Hamm (fails to compare any religion to Islam)
 - Pew study (fails to directly recruit prisoner participants)

Prisons: A 50-State Survey of Prison Chaplains

I Was Fortunate!

“Prisoners are rarely allowed to participate in research studies of any kind,The possible ‘psychic rewards’ to inmates of being able to express their opinions and describe their experiences on a survey questionnaire, or the value of the information to the public, generally are not considered by correctional authorities to justify a survey of inmates.” (Pew 2012)

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Voice:
- Knowledge:
- Unique:
- Theory Production: Presents a “testable” grounded theory based upon sound academic research and verifiable methodology, “integrating” sociological and criminological theories

THEORY CONTRIBUTION

1. This theory is “integrative and holistic”

- Sociological Literature
 - Theory of Religious Conversion (Lofland and Stark, 1965)
- Criminological Literature
 - Strain Theory
 - Stigma and Labeling Theories
 - Social Bonds Theory
 - Neutralization Theory

2. This theory is “testable”

- Responds to the APA study, Worthington and O’Connor
- Provides an interdisciplinary method for evaluating transformation
- Provides a design that will promote “outcomes based/ evidence based” evaluation of treatment programs in “faith-based” settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the social and personal reasons given for inmate conversion?
2. How are inclusivist or exclusivist religious community identities formed and justified by the participants?
3. How are incorporationist or rejectionist world-views formed and justified by the participants?

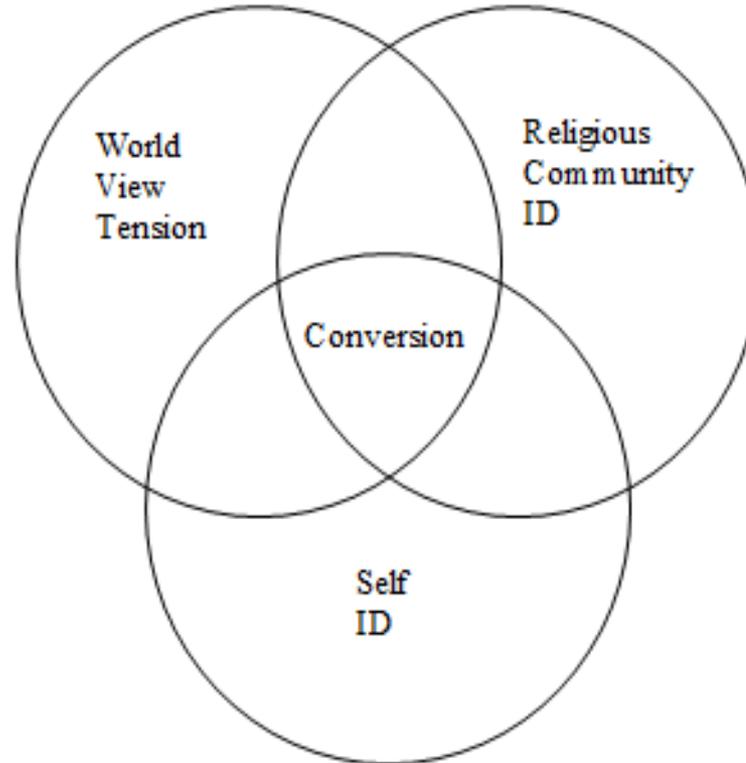
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Methodology - qualitative and quantitative
- Population – Prisoners at SCI and OSP and Chaplains at ODOC
- Participants
 - Chaplains (15)
 - Of all 22 chaplains, 15 responded to the questionnaire and 4 were selected for interviews
 - Prisoners (22)
 - Self-selection, snowball, purposive, non-probable
 - 11 Muslim, 11 Christian

Themes in Narratives Emerged

World Tensions, Religious Identity, Self Identity and Conversion

FIGURE 3. Initial Concepts and Themes Coded



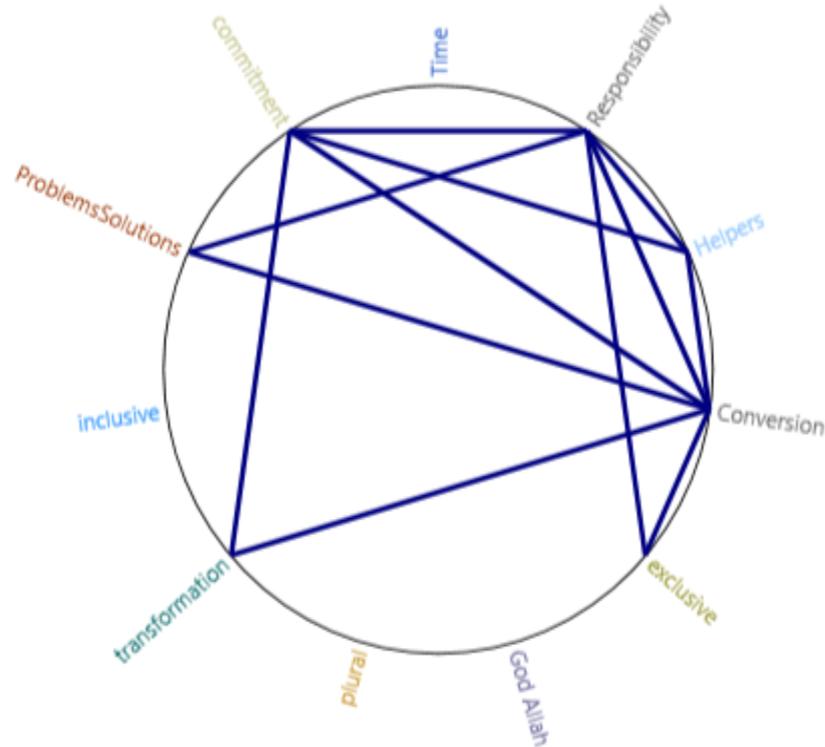
Terms - Phrases Connected with Concepts

World Tensions, Religious Identity, Self Identity and Conversion

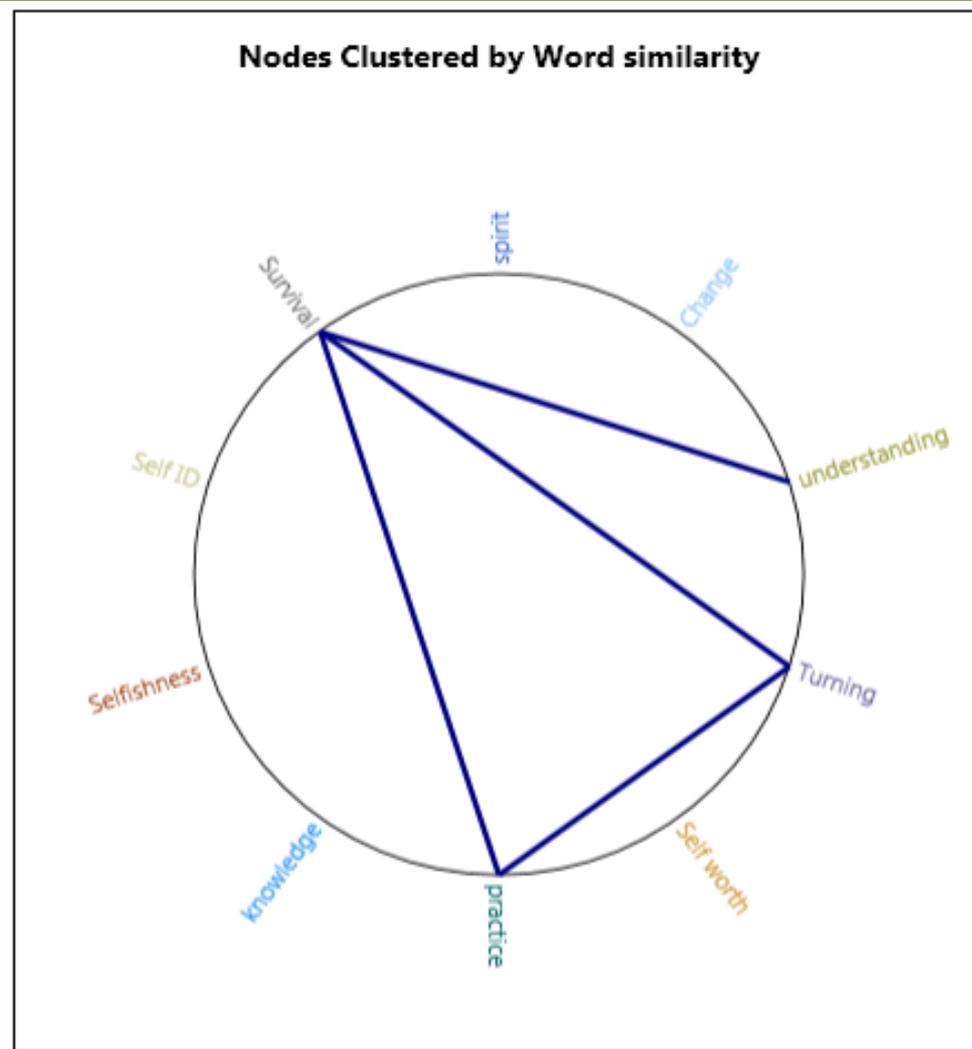
<u>Self ID</u>	Religious Community ID	World View Tensions	Conversion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -desire for knowledge, -Understanding spirit -Self-worth, value -Need to be respected -Love self before others -Turning, change -Survival -Selfishness -To be accountable, - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Community/ family -Relationships (divine, self, others, brothers) -Religion (box, free, constrained) -Testing real watched -God, The God, Allah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Free-world, (religion, practices, traditions, excluded, labeled, never felt part of, watched, skeptical, acceptance, parents teach, no father, cultural thing, separate, not religious, not spiritual, no respect, abuse) -Media, (distorts, uses, manipulates) -Religion, (used, distorted, tied to politics, social issues, lack of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To be committed to, -To be responsible to, -God/The God -Helpers (cellies, brothers on the tier, volunteers, family, chaplains, media) -Free-world structures -Time

CLUSTERS EMERGED DURING CODING

Nodes Clustered by Word similarity



CLUSTERS EMERGED DURING CODING



INTERESTING FINDINGS

- Exclusivist religious outlook did not necessarily lead to a rejectionist world-view in a way that would be conducive to radicalization or terrorism
 - Exclusivists
 - Found a way to be in the world but not of the world OR
 - Chose to keep to their own beliefs and communities and isolate themselves
- Rarely were tendencies of the kind that would alert security agencies of radicalization processes evinced as a result of religious conversion.

SURPRISING FINDINGS

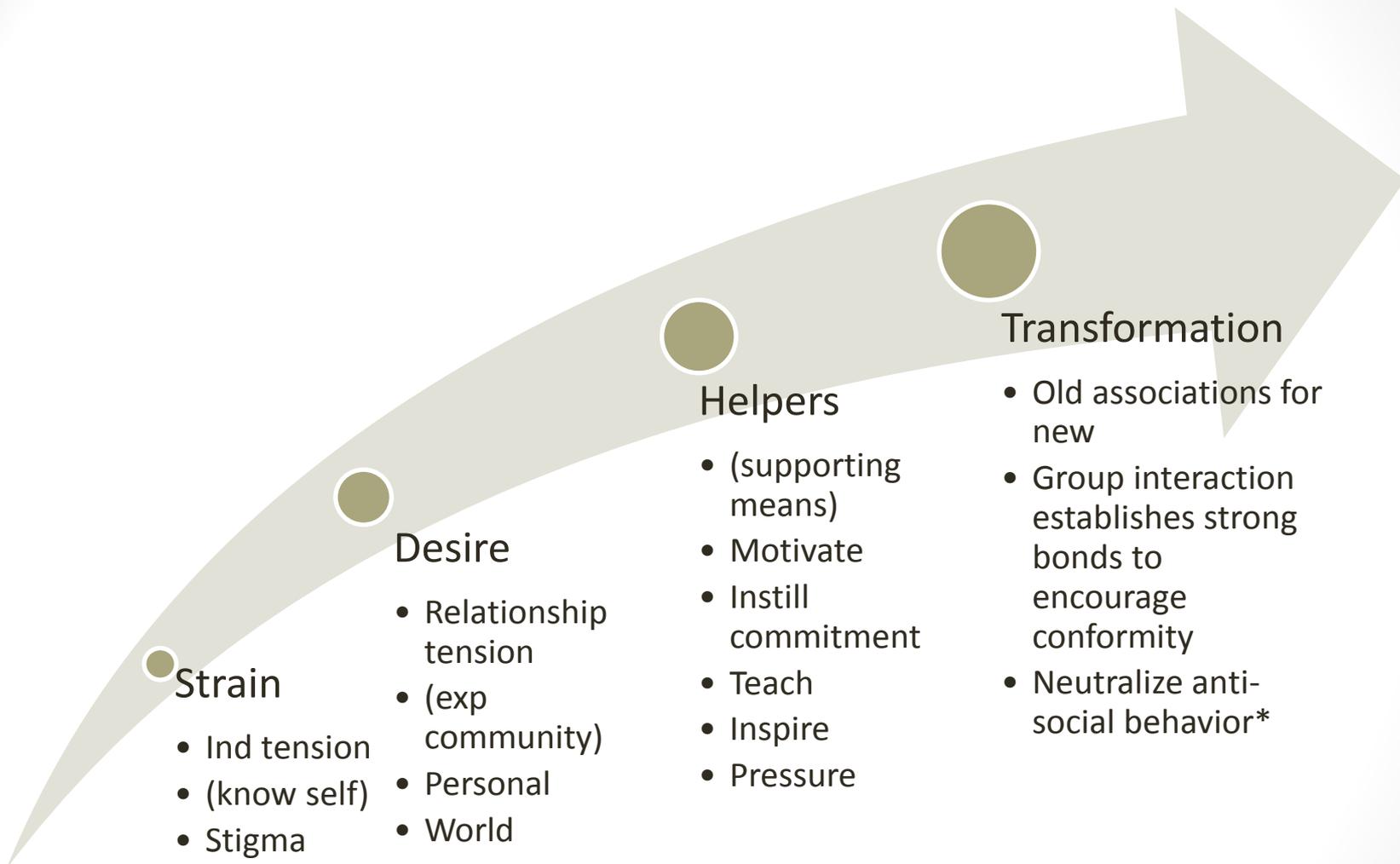
- Exclusivist undertones were detected in the majority of narratives.
- Surprising in light of media reports and concern for prison Islam serving a role in radical recruitment, is that more Muslims coded inclusive/incorporationist than Christians.

Frequency Distribution of Religious Community Identity by Religion

	Religious Community Identity		
Religion	Exclusivist	Inclusivist	Total
Muslim	6	5	11
Christian	9	2	11
Total	15	7	22

Frequency Distribution of Religious Community Identity and World-View Community Identity by Religion

	Community Identity Religious Community Identity				
Self-Identity	Muslim		Christian		Total
	Inclusivist	Exclusivist	Inclusivist	Exclusivist	
Incorporationist	4	5	1	8	18
Rejectionist	1	1	1	1	4
Total	5	6	2	9	22



Strain

- Ind tension
- (know self)
- Stigma
- Labels
- Prisonization

Desire

- Relationship tension
- (exp community)
- Personal
- World

Helpers

- (supporting means)
- Motivate
- Instill commitment
- Teach
- Inspire
- Pressure

Transformation

- Old associations for new
- Group interaction establishes strong bonds to encourage conformity
- Neutralize anti-social behavior*

The Nuanced Pathway of Prisoner Religious Conversion

1. Religious Conversion for both groups is a “much nuanced pathway”.
2. What is found in both religions is that there are many “forks in the road” during the conversion process and transforming identities.
3. Forks were evidenced in both the inclusivist and exclusivist religious community identity and in the incorporationist and rejectionist world-view identity.

The Nuanced Pathway of Prisoner Religious Conversion

4. The narratives evidenced that religion is just one alternative for gaining knowledge of self
 - Other alternatives are education, counseling, and gangs
5. It emerged that not all who experience religious conversion and become “exclusivist” also become “rejectionist”
6. Each religion - no definitive process of radicalization emerged.
7. Data showed that only two participants (one to Islam and one to Christianity) coded both exclusivist and rejectionist
 - Of these one coded as “non-violent and isolationist” and the other coded “violent and isolationist”

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research:

1. *shows that isolating one religion as a radicalization source may unduly burden free practice of religion but also fail to recognize other religions have the similar tendencies
2. helps prison treatment personnel understand how including a person's religion and spirituality into their correctional treatment relates to desistance.
3. supports the need for treatment professionals and institutional administrators to work holistically in overall treatment programs.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research:

4. provides support and direction for prison chaplaincy and volunteer programs and enhances chaplaincy as a correctional profession.
5. shows the need to replicate this method and advance qualitative studies of religion in prison
6. supports concern for radicalization, but provides data to reduce fears and claims about prison as a primary situs for terrorism recruitment

Ordering a Copy

- Religious conversion in prison and its directions: Community identity, religious dogma, and exclusivist or inclusivist religiosity in American prisons
by Rigsby, Malcolm L. Ph.D., Texas Woman's University, 2012, 232 pages; AAT 3550846
- ORDER your copy at ProQuest/UMI: Just type “Malcolm L. Rigsby” in the Search Box.

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