A Different Approach to Examining Prisoner Re-entry: Life as a Film
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Abstract

Criminologists studying persistent offenders traditionally couch their work in one of three paradigms: (i) criminal career trajectories; (ii) life course; and (iii) Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model. While these approaches have contributed to our understanding of offending rates over the life-course, they shed less light on how offenders understand their lives, and how those understandings, in turn, condition criminal behaviour. We seek to understand the process of persistence by examining the social contexts (e.g., relationships, employment, children, and experiences with incarceration), self-evaluations, and reflected appraisals that chronic offenders associate with their own patterns of offending. We interviewed 89 persistent offenders currently incarcerated in Pennsylvania. We used a multi-method approach to uncover how these offenders view their lives and their prospects for re-entry. In this paper we explore how our use of the narrative technique, “Life as a Film,” reveals some of their most intimate life experiences, their reflected appraisals, and their prospects for successful re-entry.