

An Intersectional Analysis of Agentic Efforts Individuals Under Community Supervision Describe to Improve Their Lives

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Reasons for Examining Agency and Social Location in Desistance Research

Personal agency, or the ability to exercise individual choice, is broadly recognized as playing an important role in desistance. However, it remains unclear how individuals with criminal histories see themselves exercising agency within their desistance journeys. In other words, not much is known about the specific actions people choose to take to avoid further legal troubles. Likewise, little is known about how social location, specifically racial/ethnic minoritized status and gender, is related to agentic moves relevant to desistance. Our key objectives are to examine racial/ethnic and gender differences in how individuals on probation and parole describe their agentic efforts to improve their lives and how these efforts connect to desistance.

The Study

We analyzed data from qualitative interviews conducted with 277 men and women under community supervision in Michigan who have been convicted of a felony. Of the 277 participants, 141 (51.50%) were members of a minoritized racial or ethnic group, and 182 (65.70%) identified as men. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe what they have been doing to improve their lives since beginning parole or probation. We first identified all life-improving projects, which were then sorted by thematic similarities before

examining how the nature of these projects varied by race/ethnicity and gender. **Nineteen different life-improving projects** were noted, which were categorized into three overarching *project types*:

<p>1) Avoidance projects – projects that help participants avoid negative or illegal situations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid illegal behaviors • Avoid substance use • Avoid system-involved people • Avoid places • Avoid everyone • Stay at home • Participate in legal activities
<p>2) Interpersonal relationship projects – projects to improve or develop relationships with specific individuals or make connections with prosocial groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child relationship • Family relationship • Interpersonal relationship • Socialization • Support group • Support person • Child rearing
<p>3) Cognitive projects – projects involving changing patterns of thinking, beliefs, or shifts in perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cope with feelings • Improve self-image • Cultivate a positive mindset • Think about consequences • Think about the future

Key Findings: Agentic Projects Vary by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

While most participants described a desire to avoid further involvement with the criminal-legal system, the strategies used to achieve this goal varied by one’s social identity.

- In general, many of the life-improving projects taken on by **minoritized individuals** were **self-guided and self-sustained** with a focus on limiting time out in public. For example:

- Minoritized men tended to spend time with their children **at home**, rather than on social outings
 - Minoritized individuals had **limited involvement** in legal activities outside of employment
 - Minoritized individuals were likely to **seek support from informal channels**, like family or friends, rather than formal institutions
 - In contrast, the life-improving projects discussed by **white participants** often involved **formal, institutional support** and took place in the **public sphere**. For instance:
 - White participants described taking their children on **social excursions**, such as to the park or zoo
 - To stay busy and limit the risk of legal trouble, white participants engaged in a **wide range of legal activities**, including going to therapy, obtaining a gym membership, or socializing with friends
 - White women were the most likely to discuss using **formal support networks**, like participating in Alcoholics Anonymous, to achieve prosocial relationship projects
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Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

Identify the types of life-improving projects individuals under community supervision are pursuing. Doing so helps probation and parole agents be more responsive to their clients and provide individualized support, advice, and referrals. This type of matching strengthens the **"service-need fit,"** which is related to reduced risk of recidivism. Additionally, identifying the agentic efforts of men and women on parole or probation can improve rapport and facilitate a more **supportive agent-supervisee relationship**, which is also connected to decreased risk of reoffending.

Source:

Auten, A. R., Hoskins, K. M., & Morash, M. (2025). An intersectional analysis of agentic efforts individuals under community supervision describe to improve their lives. *Crime & Delinquency*,