White-Collar Offenders and Desistance from Crime
Future selves and the constancy of change
by Ben Hunter

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Why did this book need to be written?
Because the traditional explanations for desistance from crime, often focused on aging, employment and the forming of relationships, do a poor job of explaining why white-collar offenders desist from offending. A greater understanding of what processes inform white-collar offenders’ desistance from crime and resettlement.

What do you hope readers will take away from this book?
An appreciation of the way the lives of white-collar offenders relate to their attempts to resettle after punishment. Inherent to this is an understanding that resettlement is not necessarily ‘easy’ for white-collar offenders, regardless of their previous lives.

How is it different from other books in the field?
By offering a sustained qualitative investigation of white-collar offenders’ desistance the book offers something no other text does. Further, it uses a framework grounded in existential philosophy to analyse offenders’ experiences. This effort represents an attempt to appreciate human lives on their own terms and with regard for individuals’ existences in a way that criminological research has not done to date.

What findings in writing/researching the book surprised you?
That, despite many of the advantages white-collar offenders are assumed to have when it comes to resettling following punishment (e.g. greater resources, life experience and skills that will aid them in finding work, well established social support networks), the process of resettlement is still difficult. One of the greatest challenges white-collar offenders face is demonstrating that change has taken place and that their desistance from crime is genuine. This is a challenge for all offenders, but there are peculiar difficulties for white-collar offenders given that their lives prior to their conviction were often replete with connotations of being a non-offender (e.g. they frequently have stable employment, something other offenders frequently lack and which has long been associated with desistance from crime).

What are some of the controversies surrounding this area that you discovered when writing the book?
A particularly interesting area of discussion is that which focuses on how well equipped white-collar offenders are to cope with being exposed to the criminal justice system in general and prison in particular. Some suggest that white-collar offenders are particularly sensitive to imprisonment because the prison environment is one which – given their previous experiences – is utterly alien to them. On the other hand, it has been argued that the personal traits and social ties white-collar offenders have developed over their lives make them particularly able to cope with imprisonment. One chapter of the book investigates white-collar offenders’ accounts of prison and pays special attention to this debate.
How is the field evolving?
White-collar crime has been an extensively studied area. This book represents part of continued efforts to situate white-collar crime with respect to wider criminological work (in this instance desistance from crime) and efforts to incorporate scholarship far beyond traditional criminological interests (existential philosophy in this case).

What got you interested in this area?
White-collar crime is an inherently fascinating topic because many of our traditional explanations of offending behaviour are challenged when we take white-collar crime and offenders into account. It was the opportunity to investigate one such challenge by thinking about why white-collar offenders desist from crime that interested me.