

Sophie Nickeas | University of West London, UK

STUDENT PROFILE



Sophie Nickeas

Course

PhD Education

Year completed

2017

Title of thesis

Arts interventions and the desistance process: agency among female offenders during incarceration and upon release

Sophie’s doctoral research focused on a small group of female offenders in England and the ways in which engagement in the arts during incarceration supported and accelerated their rehabilitation via a process of desistance theory. Desistance is a modern criminological phenomenon which describes how and why offenders stop their offending behaviour rather than more traditional models of rehabilitation which look retrospectively and consider the reasons why people offend. With this in mind the transition from ‘offender’ to ‘ex-offender’ was considered, as were the ways in which agency acquired through the arts can be applied throughout the continuing stages of rehabilitation. The research gave a voice to six marginalised women, enabling them to articulate their own experiences through art during a difficult period in their life.

A desistance model developed by Giordano *et al.* (2002) contextualised alongside Archer’s (2003) theory of identity formation was critically evaluated. Links and comparisons between evolving reflexive identities and transitional stages of desistance were presented in order to answer the research questions. In doing so, it was determined that identity subgroups bear great resemblance to specific stages in the desistance process. Critical analysis further established that an individual could develop or re-establish an identity as a result of the creative activities they engaged in during incarceration.

This research has demonstrated that the practice of arts in prison for women participants can be prolific in its ability to build confidence and the associated assertion of agency and autonomy. This was largely achieved and evidenced through the consideration for personal narrative of artworks and artefacts of great importance and sentiment to the women. This also demonstrated the element of distance travelled, vital to any rehabilitative process.

The use of artefacts as data collection also offered great insight into personal journey and space in terms of psychological and reflexive activity of the participants. These artefacts have provided new phenomena in thinking around critical discourses in prison arts and how they relate to desistance theory. In particular, the emphasis of identity formation and how the physical piece of artwork can portray this process.



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Supervisors:

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