Exploring the Experiences of Individuals Incarcerated for the Crime of Arson

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Exploring the Experiences of Individuals Incarcerated for the Crime of Arson

by

Joshua W. Polk

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
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of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Criminal Justice

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EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON

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Abstract

Arson is a major crime in the United States. Despite this, there is a major gap in the existing literature regarding the reason why some individuals commit arson. There are currently no preventative policies that address the root of the problem: the arsonists themselves. The purpose of this project is to help fill the existing gap in literature and lay the foundation for future research on this topic. The participants for this study were obtained from a single prison. This study was conducted using a mixed qualitative methodology: correspondence and interviews with individuals convicted of arson. Using this qualitative method, the researcher compared characteristics of each arsonist and arson offense to previously created typologies and an offense cycle model in order to uncover both typified and unique characteristics of each arson offender. In addition, the information gathered through this project exposes the existence of several psychological and environmental risk factors. Information about these characteristics and risk factors can be used to guide future research and policy development. The study is unique because information about the arson offenses was obtained through the personal accounts of the offenders themselves rather than through official documents or news stories. This allowed the researcher to reveal the thought processes of the arson offenders in their own words which could be more valuable for policy development than the basic, impersonal information contained in official records.

Key Words: typologies, risk factors, psychological/environmental, thought processes, policy, and research
Dedication

Jesse and Michelle Polk:

Thank you very much for making this possible! Where would I be without your unwavering support?
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Introduction

Arson constitutes a major form of crime as evidenced by the fact that it is one of only eight “index offenses” tabulated annually by the FBI for purposes calculating the overall crime rate. The most recent available statistics reported that an estimated 282,600 intentional fires are set each year causing over 400 civilian deaths, 1,360 civilian injuries, and $1.3 billion in direct property damage (National Fire Protection Agency 2011). One need only look at the uncontrollable fires that are intentionally set in western states such as California to appreciate the sheer devastation that is inflicted by this type of crime. By better understanding the behaviors of convicted arson offenders (e.g., motivations, risk factors, onset, persistence, desistence), it may be able to significantly reduce negative consequences arising from the statistics cited above. Understanding risk factors can help inform prevention plans within the community and rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities. There is very limited literature on the subject of arson beyond a statistical and demographical analysis of incarceration data. Researcher, Adam Brett, acknowledged this phenomenon in a research paper about arsonist recidivism rates when he acknowledged that “the literature has been poorly focused and provides little help when assessing an individual fire-setter” (2004). Doctors Ducat and Oglaff also supported the notion that there is a poor understanding of arsonist behavior, and they claimed that an increased knowledge and understanding of arsonists’ motives and thinking process would aid active investigations (2009). The state of the literature adds to the importance of the author’s project as the research has the potential to provide material where there has previously been none in the existing literature, and provide the basis for further research. The questions that the researcher seeks to answer are as follows: what
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are the major psychological and environmental risk factors associated with arson (substance abuse, vocational stressors, educational failure, psychological diagnoses, etc.)? Is the current model of the arson offense cycle accurate? How do arsonists view their own crimes (causes, motivations, etc.)? How can information gleaned from interviews and correspondence be used to develop investigation methods? Can offender typologies be developed using an analysis of offender risk exposure?

Literature Review

Previous Typologies

There have been multiple studies attempting to determine the motivations of arsonists. Existing typologies of arsonists are based primarily on the type of motivation exhibited by the offender, and general motivation types have been categorized by these studies. According to a study by researcher L. E. Pettiway, 54% of arson crimes are based on revenge motives due to some real or perceived wrong (1987). Former FBI agent and founder of the Behavioral Analysis Unit, John Douglas (2006), concurred that revenge is the most common seen motivation for arson. This revenge can be against a family member, employer, lover, or the government. This motivation suggests the importance of psychological and environmental risk factors because revenge is a response to something found in the environment, and the process of deciding to engage in revenge behavior is largely psychological in nature.

Past Methodologies and Models

Existing studies have explored the relationship between a limited range of demographic variables and the commission of arson-related behaviors but have neglected
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to consider other environmental and psychological risk factors that may increase an individual’s proclivity to commit such crimes (Kocsis & Irwin 1998). Given that revenge and personal satisfaction are two of the most commonly presumed motives for this form of crime, logic suggests that both environmental and psychological factors should be more fully examined (Douglas 2006). Two viable methods for examining such risk factors include: 1) Corresponding by mail with convicted arsonists, allowing them to relate relevant information in their own words, and; 2) Conducting face-to-face interviews which allow for more probative follow-up questions to be asked and fully explored. The former of these two methods (correspondence) has been successfully used to better understand the motivations and rationalizations of serial killers (Furio 1998). Because arson is rarely a one-time offense, it too can be considered a form of serial crime amenable to examination using the same approach. According to John Douglas (2006), there is a wide variety of arson motivations which further emphasizes the importance of studying the individualized risk factors and circumstances. Each motivation draws questions about why the offender chose arson over other means to satisfy their goal. The reasoning behind the commission of arson can be ascertained through the first person accounts of arsonists.

The latter of the two methods has the great potential to help investigators understand arsonist behavior and thought processes. The research surrounding arsonist behavior and thinking supports the interview method as is seen in a review by Adams (2015). Multiple researchers have suggested that arson crimes occur as the result of an offense cycle (Appendix A) that consists of multiple phases (Washington State, 2007). Theoretically, the phases occur in the following order: A stressful event, unmet
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interpersonal needs, fantasy, planning, and the fire-setting itself. According to the creators of the model, the stressful event can be one based in the offender’s psyche, environment, or a combination of the two. The term “unmet interpersonal needs” is interchangeable with the word “motivation.” The offender chooses arson because it may seem to them to be the best way to meet those needs (need for revenge, satisfaction, money, etc.). The fantasy phase is the one that involves distorted thinking regarding the arson offense. In this phase, the arsonist becomes excited about the crime, and supports himself through justification and excuse. The final stage before the arson itself is the planning stage which is self-explanatory (Kolko, Nishi-Strattner, Wilcox, and Kopet 2002; Washington State 2007).

The purpose of interviews and correspondence would be to obtain details about each phase of the offense cycle, which would shed light on the motives of the arsonist, the cause of the arson crime, and the effects of the offense on the offender (reinforcement, satisfaction, etc.). Understanding the thinking process of the arsonist and identifying the specifics of the individual arsonist’s offense cycle phases would be critical to the development of prevention and rehabilitation programs. It is possible to attempt to identify events in each phase by perusing the record of each offender and offense, but using this method potentially allows misidentification of these phases and events. In addition, it would be impossible to infer an offender’s thinking process without directly interacting with him. Interviews and correspondence have the unique capability of garnering the point of view of the offender and elaborating on the offense cycle phases that are related to the thinking process of the offender. Every offense has its own individual characteristics, and this apparent variability is why it is important to determine
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the circumstances surrounding each arsonist (Kocsis & Cooksey 2002). A greater understanding of each individual offense and the thinking behind it has the potential to add to the knowledge surrounding the subject.

**Current Systems**

Modern methods to deal with arsonists and arson investigations are reliant upon past research that has placed arsonists within fixed typologies with little room allowed for the variability found within arson crimes. Primarily, the United States uses the Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS) in order to gather details about arson crimes (ATF, 2015). This system is very effective at gathering statistics, and basic characteristics of the arson, but it does not involve direct research on the arsonists themselves. It is impossible to infer the thought process of the arsonist based on the BATS, though an understanding of these thought processes would be compliment the BATS information very well. Arson prevention programs rely largely on fire-setting target data, and they give advice on how to shift arson targeting away from one’s own property (Kuhn 2004). With the exception of juvenile fire-setter interventions, there are no prevention programs that attempt to reach the source of issue by reaching out to potential arsonists and making resources available to the at-risk populations. Preventing people from becoming offenders would likely be a more effective prevention method than simply shifting targets from one place to another. For this to be done, research involving direct interaction with arsonists must be completed in order to obtain a greater understanding of the fire-setter’s thinking processes and experiences. The first-person accounts of arsonist may help guide the development and approach of prevention programs.
Psychological Risk Factors

Contrary to popular belief, pyromania (sexually motivated fire-setting) is not the leading cause of arson or any type of fire-setting. Although, it is a very rare diagnosis, there is still a significant psychological aspect to the crime of arson (Burton et. al., 2012). The main focus of psychology in regard to arson is criminogenic thinking. Criminogenic thinking consists of thoughts that generate crime due to distorted cognition, low impulse control, and misperceptions of a situation. The researcher is interested in uncovering these distorted thought processes, and exposing them as a psychological risk factor.

Impulsivity is considered to be a particularly important element in the arsonist’s mindset (Krowkowski, 2003). For the purpose of this project, the researcher used the American Psychological Association definition of impulsivity: the tendency to act on a whim, displaying behavior characterized by little or no forethought, reflection, or consideration of the consequences (Vodenbos, 2007). According to Krowkowski (2003), impulsivity is most common psychological characteristic of the arson offender.

The research has suggested that there is a strong psychological influence regarding the decision to commit arson. One study found that an arsonist is more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia or some other psychosis (Anwar et al., 2009). This research draws questions about other psychological disorders that may be related to arson commission. An article written by Paul Burton et al. (2012) opines that an understanding of the mental processes of arsonists would prove invaluable to legal proceedings due to the high correlation between psychological issues and fire-setting behavior. Based on the research, it seems to be a logical step to pursue knowledge regarding the mental state and thinking process of arsonists through direct interaction with arsonists.
In addition to exposing the thought process of the arsonist, the researcher is specifically interested in the relationship between personality disorders and the commission of arson. The research suggests that anti-social personality disorder is found in a greater proportion of the prison population than is found in free society (Davison and Janca 2012). It would be interesting to determine whether or not this statistic holds true for the arsonist sub-population within the prison setting, and such knowledge would further contribute to an understanding of psychological risk factors.

Determining the psychological risk factors associated with arson would guide interventions and community outreach programs. These research based programs would have specific risk factors to target, and they could be made readily available to people who have been determined to be at risk. According to a review of rehabilitation programs, most attempts at rehabilitation are directed towards children or adolescents with little attention given to adult offenders (Craig et al. 2013). At least one study by Gannon et al. (2015) indicated that certain psychological interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy can be useful in rehabilitation programs. Because arson is such a costly offense in the United States, it is possible that the development of targeted prison rehabilitation programs would be good investment. The efficient creation of such programs would require a reliable understanding of psychological risk factors commonly found within the arsonist population.

**Environmental Risk Factors**

The “stressful event” that is named on the arson offense cycle is one that the offender experiences within his environment. It may be possible to identify common environmental risk factors such as the loss of a job, family issues, or poor upbringing.
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The identification of these common risk factors would help inform outreach programs specifically designed to target these factors. It has been suggested by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that socioeconomic status (SES) plays a strong role in the commission of arson. Most fires in the United States occur in low SES neighborhoods according to FEMA and Pettiway (1987; 1997). It would be interesting to know whether or not the cause of this phenomenon is due to the SES of the offender or the ease of targeting low SES neighborhoods (1997). The risk factor of low SES can be aggravated by the loss of a job or perceived persecution at the workplace. These stressful events may logically contribute to the commission of revenge-based arson as the offender may perceive himself to be wronged.

Another environmental contributor to revenge based arson might be family issues. Divorce, infidelity, or some other marriage problems may lead to thoughts of revenge. The research conducted by Pettiway found that marital separations serve as risk factors (1987). A possible risk factor of interest to the researcher is the level of education that an arsonist reached. Lower education is correlated with low SES; therefore, it is possible that there is also a correlation between education level and fire-setting. Possibly the more important risk factor to understand in regard to developing preventative programs is the existence of a modeling entity. Fire-setting behavior in parents, guardians, or peers may influence the fire-setting behaviors of the individuals in question.

Method

Sample

The researcher obtained the identities of individuals incarcerated by the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) for arson and related offenses. All
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participants are over 18 years of age. The researcher focused efforts on gathering data from individuals incarcerated in a single Mississippi prison. The name of the particular institution will not be disclosed in this paper due to concerns about maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. The mixed methodology included both in-depth interviews and correspondence with 5 inmates. In addition, there were interviews with a total of 13 inmates in order gather information to compare to existing typologies.

**Procedures**

First, IRB approval (Appendix C) was obtained for this study following the successful completion of an IRB application (Appendix D). Following the approval process, the names of potential participants from the Mississippi Department of Corrections were obtained. In accordance with IRB requirements, the researcher travelled to the prison from which the participants were chosen in order to read potential participants an IRB-approved letter of introduction (Appendix E) and a standard IRB long consent form (Appendix F) to each potential participant asking them to consensually correspond with the researcher by US mail. The participants were provided with postage-paid return envelopes and asked to relate information about the commission of arson-related offenses in their own words. Additional information was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews with participants who consented and were also approved by prison administrators for visitation privileges. The basic list of interview questions that were asked by the investigator is located in Appendix B. Answers to the basic questions often led to follow-up questions in order to pursue a certain line of information; therefore, the list in Appendix B is not comprehensive in nature. For purposes of conducting the face-to-face interviews, the researcher was be accompanied by the major supervising
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professor and complied with all directives of prison administrators. The researcher applied content analysis to the results of correspondence and face-to-face interviews in order to identify latent and manifest themes within the participants’ responses. Specifically, the interviews were used to identify the typified and unique characteristics of each arson offender through the information related in their own words. Finally, these characteristics were compared to the existing typologies and offense cycle model and the comparisons were written into a thorough discussion (Chapter 5).

**Measures/Variables**

The process of qualitative analysis was an ongoing and evolving one as correspondence was received and interviews conducted. Of primary interest was the content of these exchanges and interactions with particular attention given to identifying environmental and psychological risk factors and experiences that are common between research participants and unique to each participant. The results of the qualitative analysis formed the basis for the thorough written overview of the results and the discussion highlighting the implications for practice and suggested directions for future research.

**Results**

All of the names listed next to the participant numbers are pseudonyms that the researcher used to maintain ease of reporting while protecting the identities of the participants.

*Participant 1 – “Joe”*

The relevant portion of Joe’s story began when he was a young boy. His parents divorced when he was thirteen years old, and that is when the abuse from his father
began. The abuse came at times when his father had been drinking heavily and manifested itself in physical and verbal forms. According to this participant, his father would often say things like, “You are nothing to me; you will never be anything; I wish you would just die.” He began to steal alcohol from his father’s liquor cabinet from a very early age. He was only 11 years old when he experienced his first hangover, and he was 13 years old when he started smoking marijuana. This drug/alcohol abuse would continue to be an issue especially after his mother died when he was 17 years old. In his own words, he “became an alcoholic big time after that.”

His alcoholism cost him several jobs even though he was an experienced electrician. Eventually, he found a job that had 30-day alternating shifts that allowed him to drink and experiment with drugs without interruption for weeks at a time. He started using cocaine, LSD, Demerol, and other drugs and eventually failed a urinalysis test causing him to lose yet another job. His familial issues came as a result of his alcohol and drug addictions, according to him. He has been married and divorced four times, his children left him to live with his father, and his son cut off all contact with him. All of this left him devastated and “feeling like a failure.” He decided to try to take his own life. He “couldn’t even be successful at that” and he was admitted to a mental institution for several months.

Because of this stint in the mental institution, he was unable to pay his house and car notes. His father took possession of all of his personal property including his work-tools, and refused to return any of it when Joe was finally released from the institution. He found himself homeless and without a means to garner an income. His ex-wife and her new husband took Joe in for several months which Joe described as “just another
form of emotional abuse to constantly be reminded of [his] relationship failures. I was constantly humiliated in front of my ex-wife and her husband.” He was eventually forced to leave his ex-wife’s home and he started living in a makeshift tent in the woods behind his father’s house for several weeks. This was in the middle of December; therefore, he was having to live in the biting cold with absolute minimal shelter and with no food or water. He had to see his father living in relative luxury while contemplating where his own life had gone. His father had stolen everything from him, his family had left him, and he had no friends that would help him. Finding himself homeless, without any property, and without anybody to help him was the breaking point of this man.

He started to think about burning his father’s property. He told the researcher, “I wanted some way to show him what it was like to lose everything like I lost everything. It was purely revenge.” He took several days to plan the crime, and he claims that it was not drunk reasoning. He said it was a “totally planned out thing and it went according to plan.” He gave the researcher an open view into his thinking process, “I was suicidally depressed for so long and I was tired of failing. It was time for him to know my struggle. Instead of hurting myself, I decided to hurt him. Burning his house was a way to take away his property like he took away my property.” He waited until his father had left the house on a hunting trip, then he poured gasoline on his father’s house and nearby shed. He lit the buildings on fire and ran back into the woods. He was captured by the police within a few days and he confessed immediately. He has been incarcerated ever since. When asked whether or not he experienced any regret about his actions, he said that he did not regret the action of burning his father’s house, but he did regret how his “actions damaged his family’s emotions.” He said that he still has “unresolved anger issues” that
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he can easily trace to his negative relationship with his father, and that if he could go back in time and burn his house again, he would.

**Participant 2 – “Tom”**

The relevant portion of Tom’s story began while he was a teenager. When he was fifteen years old, he and his family moved from an all-Caucasian city to one that was predominantly populated by African Americans. The transition was not a pleasant one as he started getting in trouble at school because he “couldn’t get along with the Blacks. They were mean and they picked fights all the time. [He] was suspended from school several times.” He found that he “did not work well with authority.” He was caught and jailed for vandalizing his school and church several times when he was still a teenager. Unlike Joe, he did not start using hard drugs until after he was imprisoned for his fire-setting behavior, but he did start drinking in his late teen years. He said that he has “low impulse control while sober, and that drinking makes it worse.” He also expressed that he had anger issues because of his experience with the African American students at his school that were “mean.” His anger issues and dependence on alcohol developed over several years and he finally committed his offense during an episode of drunkenness and intense anger when he was 30 years old.

It is important to note that Tom’s father died within a couple of months of the offense. This added to stress that likely exacerbated some existing mental problems. He was committed to a mental institution against his will because he was experiencing symptoms of psychosis: audial and visual hallucinations. While in the institution, he was diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder which he associates with inability to get along with authority. He was angry at his brother for committing him to the mental
hospital, and he began drinking again as soon as he left the building on the day of his release.

The series of crimes began when he became enraged at his brother, the fire chief for his city’s fire department, after an argument about his commitment. He decided that his “brother was going to work that night.” He had started drinking earlier in the day and at this point, he was quite drunk. He stole a van from his own family and drove it until the engine burst into flames. He then stole a truck from a nearby property owned by an electric company. He was heavily intoxicated; therefore, his driving ability was severely limited. He crashed the stolen truck a short time later and it also caught on fire. He stumbled down the road until he came across two abandoned houses. He set fire to both of them then hiked up to a nearby hilltop cemetery where he took a seat on a headstone and watched the houses burn. He sat there for hours while he gradually became sober again. As he became consciously aware of what he had done, he “was afraid.”

He claimed that the “alcohol and anger caused [him] to do that. [He] would not have normally done that and wouldn’t do it again.” He knew that he was going to jail; therefore, he did not bother trying to run away. He is now serving sentences for two home arsons, two vehicle arsons, one vehicle theft, and a violation of probation for one night of offenses. He had been on probation for a theft conviction. Now, he attributes his actions to alcohol, anger, a falling away from his religious faith, and his impulsivity. He regrets what he did and he “wishes that [he] could have thought about what [he] was doing before it was too late. [He] realizes now that he could have hurt someone, and [he] would not do it again.”

Participant 3 – “Bill”
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Bill’s life story is rife with examples of past burning behaviors and other types of criminality. In addition, this was the only offender who had a clear psychological connection to the act of fire-setting. According to Bill, he was involved in several fires over the years of his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood until he finally committed the act for which he is incarcerated. He claimed that “setting and watching fires gave [him] a sense of euphoria.” It gave him a sense of “permanency and joy” when he burned things that reminded him of negative parts of his life. Watching fires “mesmerizes” him and he described himself as someone who “gets lost in the flames. [He] often sees images in the fire like art or like another world.” His cousin introduced him to the Wiccan religion, and he began to see “religious significance” in the flames. He has often fantasized about “killing people with fire and might have actually done it if [he] had not been arrested.” The following is a list of the illegal fire-setting behaviors to which he admitted:

- Lit a gas can – 9 years old
- Burned house down on purpose – 11 years old
- Set bed on fire – 13 or 14 years old
- Burned a bully’s skateboard – Sometime in high school
- Set 200 acres of land on fire – 17 years old
- Burned gasoline in creeks – throughout teen years
- Burned pictures that he did not like – throughout childhood
- Burned house down out of anger – crime for which he is incarcerated

Bill’s background provides insight into the stages of this particular manifestation of the offense cycle. He never had a relationship with his father who left him and his
mother when he was just a young child. He could not stay out of trouble at school and seemed to be in a “constant state of suspension from school.” He started drinking at a young age and “became an alcoholic when [he] was still a teenager.” He rarely had a legitimate job as he chose to receive his income through the production of illicit drugs under the guidance of his first cousin. His relationship with his wife deteriorated gradually over a couple of years as he spent most of his time “hanging out with a bad crowd and doing drugs (alcohol, cocaine, crack, LSD, mushrooms, ecstasy, weed, and occasionally prescription medication).” He admitted that he “did not realize that [his] life was falling apart. It was because [he] left church and abandoned [his] family.”

Bill committed the arson offense for which he is incarcerated on July 4th. He was extremely angry because his wife had taken out a restraining order against him and the police had forced him to leave his own property. He started drinking alcohol and thinking about how to get revenge on his wife for her actions. He claims that listening to the song, “Burn” by Eminem gave him the idea to burn their house down. He considered what to do for several hours before returning home. When he returned to his home, he set the house on fire and called his wife to tell her. He did not try to escape the scene and the police arrested him there. He claims now that “before [he] might have burned the house out of curiosity, but this was just to get revenge on [his] wife.” In his opinion, he would not have burned the house if he had not been drunk, but he probably would have expressed his anger through another means (violence).

**Participant 4 – “Larry”**

Larry’s background indicates that there is are several issues that contributed to the various stages of the offense cycle. Familial issues, substance addiction, and serious
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psychological distress all made clear contributions to the eventual act for which he is incarcerated. Many of those issues manifested themselves in the early life of this participant and were rarely addressed through any type of formal or informal intervention.

He was always in trouble at school for vandalism and getting into fights. He started experimenting with drugs in middle school, and he claims that he became an alcoholic and drug addict at the alarmingly young age of 13. To illustrate this, he told the researcher that “on [his] thirteenth birthday, an older friend bought [him] and [his] friends over 200 dollars’ worth of hard liquor.” His family lived in poverty for his entire childhood, and he never received attention from either of his parents because they were always working or trying to find work. He never knew his biological father, and his mother was married two times. Her marriage to his stepdad seemed to cause “dissention in the family.” His relationship with his mother weakened, and he often got into physical fights with his adoptive father who was physically and verbally abusive. He said that he used ecstasy and LSD as a way to “escape reality.” He got his first job at the age of 15, and said the people he worked with “influenced [him] to party all the time and lead a promiscuous lifestyle.” He was arrested for the first time for breaking and entering into his high school while high on a mix of drugs. He was sent to drug court where he “got clean for a little while.” He went to school in order to achieve his Bachelor’s degree, but his progress was interrupted by his arson offense. He eventually married, and his wife also had a history of drug abuse. They started using hard drugs together, and their marriage deteriorated at an alarming rate. They spent extended periods of their five year marriage in separation.
It was at this point in the Larry’s life that he started experiencing serious psychological problems. He started feeling like his “entire life was falling apart.” It seemed as though “everyone was against [him].” He tried to get off drugs on his own, but he could not handle the withdrawals. He started drinking heavily again in order handle the withdrawals. He tried to get help at several hospitals and rehabilitation centers, but he was constantly turned away due to his inability to pay for the services. His family did not try to help him even when he reached out. His mental state then devolved into paranoia as he said that “people were watching [him]. They were coming into [his] house while he slept. [He] could not trust [his] wife’s family because weird shit was going down at their house. They were fucking with [his] head. They were filming sex tapes for the family.” He thought that professors at his universities were trying to “make [him] fail. He even started to believe that his father in law was really trying to frame him for other things that had supposedly happened such as the “beating of [his] wife.”

All of these events and circumstances culminated in the arson offense. He said he wanted to “get rid of [his] entire past life and start over.” He “needed relief and to be freed from [his] problems. Nothing gets rid of something better than flames.” He went to his neighbor’s house to warn them that he was going to burn his house down. He then used gasoline to start the burning. He said he was not high or drunk on the day of the fire, and that he made the decision with a clear mind. He recognized that he had exhausted all other options to seek help for his addictions, mental issues, and family problems. After he set the fire, he did not try to escape. He just walked down the street until he was picked up by the police. Now, he says, “the ironic thing is that I got all the help I needed in prison. I got clean.”
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Participant 5 – “Erik”

This participant is much older than the others, and the problems that paved the way to his arson offense began at a much later stage in life. He claimed that he had an excellent childhood despite being poor. In addition, he told the researcher that he had “loving parents who worked hard to make sure that [he] never went hungry.” He maintained employment through early adulthood and never had problems with drinking alcohol or abusing drugs. The trouble began when he was severely injured on a construction job when faulty wiring caused him to be electrocuted. The injury resulted in him suffering from a “nervous, anxiety disorder” in addition to the physical pain that prevented him from successfully obtaining another job. He began to abuse alcohol and his “psych meds” that he had been prescribed. The first criminal charge that he faced was for grand larceny as he stole construction equipment hoping to sell it and purchase more drugs. He told the researchers that he “needed the drugs to deal with the physical pain and the social withdrawal.” After spending two years in prison, he found himself with no financial means. He began drinking and using drugs very soon after his release, and he found himself homeless. Several other former inmates and Erik eventually found residence in a previously abandoned home with the owner’s permission. The owner sold drugs to him and his fellow former convicts on a regular basis. This relationship with the owner of the home would provide the impetus for the arson offense.

Erik felt “a sense of obligation” to the owner of his shelter because he was allowed to stay in the home and was receiving a steady supply of drugs from the man. Eventually, he was asked by the owner to burn the home down in exchange for a percentage of the insurance proceeds. The owner threatened to stop the flow of drugs and
force Erik back out onto the streets if he did not agree to burn the house. Eventually, Erik did agree to complete the arson on behalf of his “benefactor.” According to him, it was “halfway because of a sense of necessity and halfway out of a sense that [he] owed him.”

He and his fellow former convicts planned the crime for two weeks. They agreed that they would use lacquer-thinner to start the fire because it is a difficult substance for arson investigators to trace. On the night of the arson, Erik became extremely intoxicated. This state of intoxication would almost cost him his life as he passed out inside the house after he and his compatriots set the building on fire. When he regained consciousness, he fled the burning house having experienced several serious 2nd degree burns himself. He was not able to go far before he was picked up by the local police. There was little evidence to connect him to the crime; therefore, he left the state lived in Florida for two years. He got into a fight there and was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon. He eventually returned to Mississippi to attend his friend’s funeral. There was a warrant out for his arrest because the other individuals who helped him commit the arson had indicated him as the person responsible for the crime. He was arrested and eventually convicted for the crime.

When asked how he perceived his own crime, he told the researcher, “Addiction clouded my mind. I would have not committed that crime if my clouded mind hadn’t told me that I need to.” His recently found religious beliefs have also caused a sense of regret in him based on the “immorality” of the crime. He told the researcher that he “takes responsibility for his actions,” but he also added that the other individuals who helped him burn the house were also doing hard drugs. He claims that this was a negative influence on him after he was released from prison. He expressed that he did not believe
that he would have started drinking and abusing drugs again had he been around more positive influences.

**Discussion**

*Participant 1 – “Joe”*

The results of correspondence and interview with Participant 1 were generally congruent with established typologies, and his account of the crime for which he was imprisoned fit well within the offense cycle model (figure 1). The background of this offender consisted of a clear path to the “Stressful Event” stage of the arson offense cycle. In his own words, he struggled with an intense depression that came about as the result of years of abuse from his father, a history of alcohol/drug abuse, and serious familial problems. His background is very important to understanding how he came to be incarcerated for the crime of arson. It would be inaccurate to say that he experienced a single “Stressful Event” when it is clear that he experienced a series of these stressful events. The “unmet interpersonal needs” stage of the offense cycle is clearly identifiable in this man’s story as are the “Fantasy” and “Preparation/Planning” stages.

This abusive father-son relationship set the stage for the negative feelings that would contribute to the “Stressful Event” and “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stages of this participant’s offense cycle. His alcoholism and drug abuse contributed to the loss of his family, employment, and almost his own life. He sought no help for his addictions and familial issues, and when help finally came to him through commitment into a mental institution, he left no better than he was when first admitted. His feelings of failure and helplessness contributed by adding more stress to an already devastating situation. It is important to note that the stress took emotional, physical, and psychological forms as it is
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not always the case that the offender experiences every level of stress before they engaged in fire-setting behaviors. The final stressful event is seen in the culmination of each of these factors as he found himself humiliated (emotional/psychological), feeling like a complete failure (emotional/psychological), and starving while his abuser lived in relative comfort (psychological/physical/emotional). The stressful event stage of this participant’s offense cycle could not be more identifiable.

The “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stage of the offense cycle is equally identifiable. The loss of his family due to his alcoholism, drug abuse, and inability to keep a job deprived him of essential interpersonal satisfaction. His negative relationship with his father and death of his mother robbed him of the support structure so often associated with parent-child relationships. The humiliation of having to live with his ex-wife who he had alienated and her new husband was absolutely disastrous for his emotional state and the fact that he could find no one else to help him is a clear indication that his social life was in shambles. It seems that the unmet interpersonal needs of Joe worked in tandem with the stressful events to lead to the fire-setting action.

The “Fantasy” stage of this Joe’s offense cycle is also identifiable. He began thinking about how to rob his father of all of his possessions just as he had been robbed. He “wanted to show him what it was like to lose everything.” The fantasies of destroying his father’s possessions led him to thinking about arson more closely and begin preparations.

This participant wanted to make it very clear that his arson offense was planned out with a clear mind and not a drunken stupor. He prepared for several days and planned out exactly what he was going to do. His lack of regret for his actions now indicate that
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he was thinking rationally at the time, and that his thinking process has not changed much. Many readers might find that his actions are a rational response to the environmental and psychological factors he was experiencing at the time. Everything he owned, including his means of improving his situation (his work tools), had been taken away by a man who was living in relative luxury. He was cold, tired, and hungry because of that man. Thoughts of revenge and even the following through with the revenge actions were a natural occurrence. The researcher is establishing the rationality of the participant’s decision because rationality is important to the “Preparation/Planning” stage of the offense cycle. A crime committed as the result of impulse does not have this stage. The actions of this participant clearly indicate a rational thought process; therefore, there is a “Preparation/Planning” stage. How each stage contributed to the eventual fire-setting is identifiable from the interview with Joe.

Regarding arson typologies, participant 1 fits in well with the existing typologies previously described. In his own words, Joe’s actions were the result of a purely revenge-based motivation. The typology developed by Douglas (2006) indicates that revenge-arson is the most common type of arson. This is a broad typology that clearly applies to Joe, but even Douglas (2006) recognized the importance of examining the psychological/environmental factors and individual characteristics of arson offenders in order to uncover what caused the offense to occur. There are many causes of revenge-based arson, and it is important to identify exactly what happened to each individual in order to attain a real understanding of the actions of an arson offender.
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Participant 2 – “Tom”

Tom fits into the established arsonist typologies because of his motivations, but his clear impulsivity and drunkenness at the time of the offense resulted in the offender skipping several stages of the offense cycle. His background has elements that suggest a path to the “Stressful Event” stage of the offense cycle, but his insistence that he would not have normally committed such an act draws questions about whether or not he ever experienced the other stages that lead to a fire-setting offense.

The stressful event came as the result of years of anger issues and impulsivity. Much like Joe, the final added stress came as the result of being committed to a mental institution due to psychological distress. Tom exhibited signs of having some type of psychosis which suggests the existence of serious psychological stress. That stress was exacerbated by the fact that his commitment to the mental institution was not voluntary. That activated his anger issues and led him to become enraged at his brother. He had also lost his father which he claimed had a “serious depressing effect on [him]” which also added to the previously existing psychological stress. The physical stress present in the Joe’s life did not play any role in Tom’s life which is one key difference.

The “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stage of Tom’s manifestation of the offense cycle is easily identifiable as he had serious familial issues. His anger at his brother proved to be the primary motivating factor of his arson offense. He felt like he had “been betrayed by [his] family” which suggests that his need to trust his family had been left unmet. In addition, his father had recently died which removed one positive element from his interpersonal relationships. Outside of those two issues, he had a wife and daughter
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than he claimed to love and wanted to support; therefore, his interpersonal needs were not left as “unmet” as those of participant 1 who had nobody to turn to for help.

It is at this point in the offense cycle that it becomes difficult to clearly identify the other stages. The time between the conception of the idea to set fires to the vehicles and houses and the enacting of the criminal behavior was much too brief for there to have been much of a “Fantasy” or “Planning/Preparation” stage. He claims that he did not spend any time planning the crime and that his arson targets were merely targets of opportunity. He claimed that he felt he had no conscious “control over what [he] was doing. Everything just happened.” As was mentioned in the discussion of participant 1, rationality in thought process is necessary for there to be a clear “Planning/Preparation” stage in the offense cycle. It seems obvious that there was no rational consideration of the actions, and this may be due to the excessive alcohol consumption and aforementioned anger issues. In this case, the offense cycle to be lacking. The research suggests that impulsivity is a common characteristic of arson offenders, but the cycle does not take this factor into account. Further evidence that this participant is as impulsive as he claims are the several white-supremacist tattoos that cover his face, head, and torso. He realizes that these tattoos negatively impact the chances of him receiving parole and being able to find a job upon release, but he “cannot seem to consider the consequences before getting the tattoos.” He expressed interest in removing the tattoos once he is out of prison, but he continues to add more tattoos weekly. In fact, he added several more between interview sessions that were only a couple of months apart. In addition, he started abusing hard drugs (methamphetamine and spice) when he came to prison. The impulsivity from these actions seems to have been a serious factor in the commission of the arson offenses.
As with Joe, the motivation for this crime was purely revenge-based. Once again, this fits well with Douglas’s (2006) claim that revenge-based arsons are the most common. Also, the psychological and emotional challenges that are often associated with this type of arson were intact in Tom’s case. He was diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder which is associated with breaking the rules in general and criminality more specifically. He had a serious addiction to alcohol to which some of his doctor’s attributed the psychotic symptoms. This information supports the claim that psychological factors should be considered when attempting to understand the actions of a convicted arsonist. In addition, the evidence suggests that the environmental factors, such as the death of his father and his family’s “betrayal,” had a serious impact on the subsequent fire-setting behavior. Individual characteristics such as the impulsivity show Tom’s case to be unique from that of Joe and from other people within the existing general typologies.

Participant 3 – “Bill”

Bill has a unique set of characteristics that set him apart from the other offenders. Specifically, he is the only participant who had a fire-setting habit and the only one who seemed to have some sort of psychological connection to the flames themselves. Bill’s revenge-based motivation and some of his other characteristics such as the drug/alcohol abuse, familial issues, and psychological distress suggest some commonality between the participants, but unique characteristics set this participant apart with respect to interest to the researcher.

Bill’s background consists of a clear path to the “Stressful Event” stage of his version of the offense cycle. His familial issues that began at an early age provided a
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significant degree of emotional stress. In addition, the alcoholism and serious drug addiction that started in the teen years provided both physical and psychological stress. The fire-setting habit had connections to a psychological influence according to his own recollections of the burning events. The unresolved anger issues that have origins in his childhood also had an influence on the realization of the stressful event. His wife getting the restraining order against him appears to be the defining “Stressful Event” that pushed him to burn their house out of revenge.

The “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stage of the offense cycle is also clearly identifiable in the Bill’s case. He never had a relationship with his father who he despises for leaving him and his mother, and his mother had to work throughout his childhood often leaving him by himself. It is because of these two things that he did not have a healthy parental support structure. In addition, his relationship with his wife deteriorated to the point where he “grew tired of her,” and he occasionally hit her when he was angry. His only other relationships were with people from a “bad crowd” such as his cousin who taught him how to make methamphetamines. He left the church he had been attending which he claims was a positive influence on his behavior. He was completely lacking in positive, supportive interpersonal relationships which is an indication that his interpersonal needs were being left unmet. In addition, it seems that these unmet needs impacted the advent of the stressful event as the arson was revenge against the person who had previously been providing for interpersonal needs and had since ceased to do so.

Though Bill’s the “Fantasy” stage was much shorter than that observed in the case of Joe, it was much more evident than that of Tom. Bill fantasized about getting revenge on his wife and considered the different ways he could realize that fantasy. He claims that
the Eminem song, “Burn” influenced the fantasy to burn his wife’s possessions. It is also interesting to note that the Bill had fantasized about burning things (even people) in the past. This was a chance to enact those fantasies in reality and he started to plan how to go about doing so.

The “Planning/Preparation” stage in Bill’s version of the offense cycle was also relatively brief. He knew where he could get something with which to start the fire and he planned out exactly he was going to commit the criminal act. Bill’s reasoning did not extend to the consequences of burning the house down which he attributes to his intoxicated state and rage, but there was still an identifiable planning stage in the offense cycle.

This participant was very interesting because of the psychological factors that are evident in both his behavior and his own words. He fit into the general typology of a revenge-motivated arsonist, but it seems as though prior fantasies, fire-setting behaviors, and psychological connection to the flames influenced how he carried out his plan for revenge. Once again, this participant’s story illustrates the importance of examining the psychological factors that influence the commission of arson in order to develop a complete understanding of why the crime occurs. Finally, knowledge of other environmental factors, such as addiction, familial chaos, and poor peer influences, is valuable to developing a more detailed typology for offenders like Bill.

**Participant 4 – “Larry”**

Larry experienced a series of circumstances that resulted in a stressful situation rather than a single, identifiable triggering event. His early-onset drug and alcohol abuse was responsible for many of his future problems (maybe including his psychological
issues). Joe’s parents did not pay him much attention and they allowed him to continue on the path that led to the crime for which he is incarcerated. His father was physically and verbally abusive which led to the complete deterioration of his family life: a problem that resulted in his inability to obtain any support from his family during his crisis immediately before his offense. Joe’s peer influences (including his wife’s influence) were mainly negative according to his own assessment. The paranoia in combination with the other problems all worked together to give Larry the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that resulted in the fire-setting behavior. This was not really a “Stressful Event” stage as there was no clearly identifiable, single event that caused the breaking point.

There were many issues that contributed to the “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stage of Larry’s version of the offense cycle. The most obvious was a weak relationship with his parents. Larry resented his adoptive father for the abuse and his mother for the neglect. He had no emotional or physical support structure from his family which contributed heavily to the aforementioned stressful situation. Larry did not have any positive influences from his peers as they were the ones who contributed to a promiscuous lifestyle and continued substance abuse. His own wife encouraged a return to drug use after he had already ceased using them. When she left, he lost whatever support structure had been provided. He was left without any meaningful relationships indicating that certain interpersonal needs were left unmet.

There is no identifiable “Fantasy” stage in Larry’s version of the offense cycle. He described burning the house as a sudden realization that he could be rid of all evidence of his past. There was no time to fantasize about how to be rid of his problems.
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He “just did it.” There was a brief “Planning/Preparation” stage because he did consider the best way to “make sure it all burned.” Larry was not drunk or high at the time of the arson offense; therefore, it likely seemed reasonable to him at the time. It was a decision not based on impulsivity; instead, it was a decision based upon the analysis of available options and the belief that those options were nonexistent.

It was interesting to hear that Larry thought that the only option was to get rid of his problems by “burning the past and starting over.” His psychological problems interacted with his alcohol and drug addictions to create a situation that seemed absolutely hopeless and void of all viable options. There was no obvious external motivation as it seems as though his only motivation was to feel internal “relief” and a feeling of “permanently getting rid of the past.” This is certainly a unique characteristic of his case. It is similar to the case of Bill in that flames seemed to be the best way to be permanently ridden of stressors, but Bill had the external motivation of revenge. Once again, this is a case where psychological and environmental factors worked together to influence the commission of the arson offense. This case illustrates the value of considering psychological and environmental factors when creating a more detailed typology of arson offenses. Some offenders do not fit within the confines of the existing general typologies.

Participant 5 – “Erik”

The stressful event that began Erik’s downward spiral is perhaps the most easily identifiable of all of the research participants. Erik led a relatively normal life with a successful marriage of 13 years and a steady construction job. His electrocution injury is the occurrence that fits directly into the “Stressful Event” stage of Erik’s version of the
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offense cycle. This stands in sharp contrast with some of the other participants who had less identifiable stressful events that contributed to their arson offenses. In addition, Erik’s “Stressful Event” was much further removed from the actual crime than the other participants as it occurred several years before the arson offense.

Erik also appeared to have several unmet interpersonal needs. His divorce from a wife of 13 years likely provided a great deal of stress. In addition, once released from prison for a grand larceny conviction, he had few positive influences. His “loving parents” has passed away several years prior to the crime, and his children left when he divorced. Erik’s “benefactor” used Erik to offload his cache of drugs and eventually to collect on an insurance claim. It is not difficult to see the different social factors in Erik’s life that make up the “Unmet Interpersonal Needs” stage of the offense cycle.

Another way that Erik is unique from the other participants is the absence of a “Fantasy” stage to the offense cycle. The arson offense was one with practical reasoning insofar as Erik needed the money to support a drug habit. The act was not committed out of a psychological urge or unresolved anger issue. There was no reason to fantasize about the event because it was merely a financial means to the end of “dealing with the physical pain.” This draws attention to the failures of the existing arson cycle and typologies to address individual differences in motivation and exposure to environmental/psychological risk factors.

Erik’s offense also had a much longer “Planning/Preparation” stage than that of the other participants given that he considered how to commit the arson over a period of two weeks. The use of the lacquer thinner as opposed to more traditional means of starting fires shows an intact reasoning ability and a focus on careful planning. The
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results of the interviews with this participant suggest that he thought about this crime past the basic goal of obtaining money to purchase drugs and alcohol. He mentioned that his religious background caused him to hesitate several times over the two-week planning period. This suggests a lack of the impulsivity seen in the actions of many of the other participants.

Regarding the existing typologies, Erik’s case stands out because his motivation had not revenge-based elements. Instead, his motivation was economic in nature given that he was trying to get money in order to support his drug addiction. His case stands in contrast with that of Bill because there was no psychological connection to the crime. Even though Erik’s motivation is congruent with the existing economic-motivation typology, that typology does not take into account the individual circumstances that can cause the economic need. In Erik’s case, it was the inability to maintain employment and the development of a drug habit.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The most obvious of these is the low number of participants. The low number of participants in this study means that there is low generalizability to all arson offenders. Furthermore, the study was conducted within the context of a single prison which further limits generalizability to all arson offenders in different regions within the South or in the United States in general. Another limitation is absence of any non-Caucasian, male participants. Though it was not the intention of the researcher, the only participants in this study were white, male arson offenders. It is possible that arson offenders of different races and genders have experience different circumstances that contribute their versions of their offense cycles. Finally, the
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qualitative nature of this study limits the ability to make statistically meaningful comparisons between participants or participant groups. Despite these limitations, the research is still important as an exploratory and foundational study. It is among the first of its kind dealing with arson offenders; therefore, it was completely unknown what research might reveal. The researcher was able to uncover some of the individual stories of arson offenders that illustrate the importance of future research and establish a path for future studies.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In the future, researchers may look to this study as a starting point for conducting their own interviews and correspondence. In addition, researchers can use the stories described in this study to provide a baseline for the expansion of the project and a comparison of the results. Specifically, researchers can increase the number of the participants in order to increase the generalizability of their results. Also, they can conduct research in multiple institutions across several regions in the United States in order to uncover potential regional differences that could contribute to the aforementioned generalizability. Finally, future research should include diversity of race and gender in order to identify potential differences based on these characteristics.

This research area has much potential for policy development. There has been a renewed interest in community outreach programming on the local level. This research could influence the development of community outreach programs given that it exposes the existence of several environmental and psychological risk factors associated with a serious criminal act. Community outreach programs could be shaped to deal with these risk factors. In addition, the cases described above indicate that the existing typologies do
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not take certain elements of the arson offense into account. Information gleaned from future research could serve a role in the development of more meaningful typologies that are based on more than just motivation types.

Conclusion

Arson is a serious crime in the United States; therefore, research in this area has great potential for importance. The research project presented above addresses the root of the cause of arson: the arsonists themselves. This was done through mixed qualitative methodologies (interviews and correspondence) that gleaned offense information from the offenders’ own words. Using the results of the correspondence and interviews, the researcher described the various psychological and environmental risk factors that contributed to the individual arson cases in order to aid understanding of why arson crimes occur. In addition, the researcher exposed potential failings of the existing typologies and offense cycle. Though it has limited generalizability, this study has great value due to its foundational and exploratory nature. There is much room for expanding the project and influencing the development of community outreach and public policy.
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Australian/New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 38, 6 pp. 419-25


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Washington, United States: Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
Appendices

Appendix A: Offense Cycle Model (Washington State, 2007)
**Appendix B: Partial List of Basic Interview Questions**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. How would you describe the neighborhood in which you grew up?</td>
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<td>2. Please tell me about your parents and your childhood.</td>
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<td>3. What events and circumstances led to the crime for which you are imprisoned?</td>
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<td>4. In your own words, what caused you to commit the arson?</td>
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<td>5. Did you have any fire-setting habits when you were a child?</td>
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<td>6. As a youth, did you come into regular contact with anyone who modeled fire-setting behavior such as your parents or peers?</td>
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<td>7. Were you disciplined by parents/guardians for fire-setting behavior?</td>
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<td>8. Would you consider your family to have been economically disadvantaged when you were a child?</td>
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<td>9. Were you employed at the time of your arrest?</td>
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<th>Psychological</th>
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<td>10. How did committing the arson make you feel emotionally?</td>
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<td>11. Did you experience feelings of satisfaction when you engaged in fire-setting behavior?</td>
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<td>12. Do you perceive your actions to be justified? If so, why?</td>
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<td>13. Before your arrest, were you satisfied with any social services that you had access to?</td>
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<td>14. Have you ever sought therapy for any psychological issues that you have faced? If so, did you receive a diagnosis for any psychological disorder?</td>
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<td>15. How would you describe the level of social, psychological, and economic stress that you faced prior to your arrest?</td>
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<td>16. What did you intend to accomplish with your fire-setting behavior?</td>
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Appendix C: IRB Application

**HUMAN RESEARCH APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

Use this form to apply for IRB review. IRB approval is required before human subjects research can begin.

- Before completing this form, review the information included on the sample consent forms and FAQ section of the IRB website: [http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board).
- Department chairs and, if applicable, research advisors must review the completed form and provide authorization where indicated.
- Department chairs must submit completed versions of this form with all necessary authorizations to irb@usm.edu using their Southern Miss email address.

**SECTION 1: INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION**

| Project Title: Exploring the Experiences of Individuals Imprisoned for Arson |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Principal Investigator: Joshua Polk | Phone 601-600-0225 | USM Email joshua.polk@eagles.usm.edu |
| Campus ID: 863597 | College: CoST | Department/Crime Justice |
| Department Phone: N/A | |

**Research Purpose (check one):**

- Undergraduate project
- Graduate project
- Faculty or staff research

**Student Research Advisor (if applicable):**

- **Name:** R. Alan Thompson
- **Phone:** 601-266-5172
- **USM Email:** alan.thompson@usm.edu

**Funding Agency/Sponsor (if applicable):**

- **Organization:**
- **Grant #:**

**List USM affiliated investigators; completion of CITI Common and Human Subject Research Courses is required.**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Faculty or Staff</th>
<th>Graduate Student</th>
<th>Under-graduate</th>
<th>Project Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Polk</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>All phases (initiating contact, collecting qualitative data, report writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Alan Thompson</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Supervising all phases (initiating contact, collecting data, and report writing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If other individuals will be involved in data collection, describe their role and their training.**

**List all Non-USM affiliated investigators.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University or Institution</th>
<th>Project Role</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

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40
Describe your expertise and qualifications related to this research:
The research applicant has conducted literature reviews for research papers. In the past, the research applicant has collected data for projects involving vulnerable subjects (children). He has also completed all relevant CITI modules including the "Research with Prisoners" module (SBE ID 506). Additionally he has taken university-level courses pertaining to research methods and ethics (Department of Psychology & Honors College).

The research applicant's faculty advisor has conducted a number and variety of research projects within the general domain of criminal justice and has also directed funded research at USM. Additionally, he has instructed research methods at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Finally, the research applicant has completed all required Research and Scholarly Integrity Assurance Programs, specifically the "Research with Prisoners" module (SBE ID 506).

SECTION 2: RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Briefly describe the project and its goal(s) in two to three paragraphs.

RESEARCH PURPOSE & GOALS:

The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of individuals imprisoned for committing arson and arson-related offenses. Study participants will be asked to provide their own account of events through personal recollections, words and writings. Specifically, the primary research goal of the proposed project is to give qualitative / narrative voice to individuals who commit this variety of crime which is categorized as a Type I (serious) offense by the FBI.

METHODS FOR ACCOMPLISHING THE PRIMARY RESEARCH GOAL:

To accomplish the stated research purpose and goals, the research applicant plans to communicate with individuals who are presently imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses. As recommended by the IRB, the research applicant will meet with each potential participant and personally inform them of the consent procedures by reading aloud the "Long Consent Form" and any other consent forms that may be required by the confining department of corrections. By doing so any questions that a potential participant may have can be both asked and answered immediately and fully. Once consent is obtained in person, the research applicant will ask the potential participant to correspond in writing by regular mail using procedures outlined below and already approved. Over time, the research applicant will likely return to the institution and further communicate with participants in order to obtain qualitative information of interest. In all instances the research applicant will consult with institutional administrators to obtain approval (in addition to those already received).

Are any of the subjects under 18 years of age?
☐ Yes  ☑ No

Note: Parental consent is required for participants under the age of 18.

Describe subject population, number of subjects to be included, and criteria for selection.

TARGET POPULATION:

The target population for this project includes inmates over 18 years of age who are imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS TO BE INCLUDED:

At present, the number of participants to be included is difficult to estimate. Ideally data will be collected from roughly 100+ participants. That being said, the goal would be to collect data from as many participants who are willing to provide their time and voluntarily correspond / communicate with the research applicant.
**SELECTION CRITERIA:**

Potential participants will meet the profile described above. Individuals over the age of 18 who are imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will participants be recruited?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Class announcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Posted campus advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Television, Radio or Newspaper ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ E-mail announcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Other (explain): The research applicant will verify participant age by examination of publicly available records of the event. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that anyone under the age of 18 will be imprisoned in an adult correctional facility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For adult subjects, how will you verify that individuals are over 18?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Survey or interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ No adults will be participating in this research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other (explain): The research applicant will verify participant age by examination of publicly available records of the event. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that anyone under the age of 18 will be imprisoned in an adult correctional facility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate consent procedures (check all that apply):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Oral presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Information letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Short Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Long Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Assent form (children or subjects with disabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Request for waiver of consent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detail procedures for obtaining participants' consent or justify request for waiver.**

Potential participants will be informed in person by the research applicant that they are not required to communicate / correspond with the research applicant and that their decision to do so is purely voluntary (See attachment - Long Consent Form). Consistent with federal regulations potential participants will also be informed that their involvement (or non-involvement) will not affect future release or parole decisions. The consent forms (both IRB and others that may be required by the confining department of corrections) will be read aloud by the research applicant. All questions will be immediately answered. Potential participants will be asked to review, sign and submit one copy of the consent forms and will be given a second, mutually signed copy to retain for their personal records.

It is important to note that if the potential participant later ceases communication, the research applicant will send follow-up correspondence just to make certain that letters are not somehow getting lost or misdirected in the mail. However, the research applicant will not send excessive correspondence that may be construed as "hounding" or "pressuring" the potential participant to unwillingly respond. It is generally anticipated that the research applicant will follow up two additional times. The text of the follow-up letters will be the same as the initial introduction with the only difference being an indication of the number of attempts: the letter represents (1st, 2nd, or 3rd).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many interactions will be required with each subject?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ 4 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 10 or more</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum length of each interaction:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Less than 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Less than an hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Less than three hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Three hours or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ No direct interaction with subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where will interactions take place? (check all that apply):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ On campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate means of data collection (check all that apply):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Personal interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Audio or video recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Questionnaire or survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Behavioral Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Focus Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Other (explain below):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To accomplish the stated research purpose and goals, an IRB-approved consent form and others that may be required by the confining institution will be read aloud in person by the research applicant to potential participants as a means of soliciting voluntary and informed participation. It is generally**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do any of the following apply to your study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Use of human biological samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes ☒ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Use of physical exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes ☒ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Medical examinations or procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes ☒ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Use of drugs or biological products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes ☒ No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON

expected that all qualitative data will be collected in the form of face-to-face interviews and written correspondence from individuals who consent to participate. The research applicant will adhere to all institutional policies and will obtain administrator approval in conjunction with corresponding and meeting with potential participants. In the case of telephone calls, no recordings will be made - the research applicant will simply make written notes.

Give a step by step explanation of human subjects data collection procedures.

The proposed study focuses attention upon one distinct group of participants: Individuals over 18 years of age imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses.

The primary method of data collection will be face-to-face interviews and written correspondence between potential participants and the research applicant. Written correspondence will be exchanged through US mail in adherence with institutional policies as both required and approved (see attached approval).

Potential participants will be asked to meet with the research applicant during an initial site visit to the institution of confinement. During the introductory meeting the purpose of the study will be explained, the terms of informed and voluntary consent will be read aloud, and participation in the form of establishing and continuing correspondence / communication with the research applicant will be requested. A postage-paid, self-addressed business-reply envelope will be given to potential participants so that there is no postage expense to participants (see attached approval).

Ideally, potential participants will agree to establish a "writing relationship" with the research applicant. It is hoped that as time progresses the participant will relate the facts and circumstances surrounding his / her offense from their personal perspective - in essence, taking the opportunity to tell "their side of the story" in narrative first-person language.

A secondary method of data collection will be face-to-face interviews with certain select inmates from participating departments of correction. The first step of this process will be to obtain institutional permission to interview particular inmates. This will be accomplished within established institutional guidelines, and the intention to conduct research within the prison will be made explicitly clear to the prison officials who review the researcher's application for visitation (see attached approval).

Once contact has been made with the participating inmate and prior to any interview questions being asked, the participant will be asked to sign the IRB-approved Long Consent Form (and any others that may be required by the confining department of corrections). The research applicant will then answer questions regarding the same subject matter as the correspondence with a goal of ascertaining a first-person account of the facts and circumstances surrounding the potential participant's offense. Potential participants will be told that they are under no obligation to answer any of the questions and that they are free to stop the conversation at any time. This method will be useful for a quicker and more detailed collection of data from potential participants where possible. The research applicant will make no audio or video recordings of these interviews, but will take handwritten notes. Inmate's personal information will be de-identified when reporting results (names or other identifying information will not be used).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your research involve only the collection of anonymous data?</td>
<td>☑️Yes</td>
<td>☐No</td>
<td>Note: 'Anonymous' means that investigators cannot associate the data with individual subjects and vice versa. Electronic surveys must be conducted via websites that do not link responses to email addresses or other identifiers. Personal interviews are not anonymous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your research involve sensitive information?</td>
<td>☑️Yes</td>
<td>☐No</td>
<td>Note: Sensitive information may include (but is not limited to) information about sexual activity, drug usage, criminal behavior, financial or medical data, and religious views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your research involve hidden video or audio recordings or deception?</td>
<td>☐Yes</td>
<td>☑️No</td>
<td>Note: Deception includes any information or procedure that misleads a subject intentionally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SECTION 3: RISKS AND BENEFITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate all potentially vulnerable subjects involved in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Nursing home patients</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Mentally ill patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Pregnant females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ HIV positive individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Detail the methods that will be employed to protect vulnerable subjects.

In the past, the research applicant has collected data for projects involving vulnerable subjects (children). He has also completed all relevant CITI modules including the “Research with Prisoners” module (SBE ID: 506). Additionally, he has taken university-level courses pertaining to research methods and ethics (Department of Psychology & Honors College).

The research applicant’s faculty advisor is familiar with generally accepted, prevalent, and customary methods for protecting vulnerable subjects during the course of conducting social science research by way of: 1) Exposures to such issues as a doctoral student in a research-intensive program of study that often focused attention on inmate research, 2) Experience instructing both undergraduate and graduate-level research methodology courses that address these issues; 3) Successful completion of the required Research and Scholarly Integrity Assurance Program; and 4) Successful completion of the “Research with Prisoners” CITI module (SBE ID: 506). Given the nature of the proposed topic, approval will first be obtained by the University’s Institutional Review Board. The proposed project will also be reviewed and approved by any collaborating departments of correction (e.g., prison systems). Finally, individual participation will be both informed and voluntary with no reward or penalty for involvement or non-involvement, respectively.

If your research involves prisoners, explain how it is directly relevant to prisoners or the prison system (check all that apply):

- ☐ the causes and/or effects of incarceration
- ☐ the process of incarceration
- ☐ prisons as institutional structures
- ☐ the conditions of prisoners or prisoners
- ☐ procedures for improving the wellbeing of prisoners
- ☐ other (explain):

The proposed project is relevant to prisoners, scholars, and others in the criminal justice system insofar as it examines a topic that has previously been unexplored – the first-person narrative experiences of individuals imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses. These types of cases are often depicted by law enforcement, the media, and prosecutors as attributable to either some sort of psychological defect or an act of extreme anger directed at a specific target. This fact presents the possibility (or at least the perception) that defendants may not be given ample opportunity to present an effective defense to prosecution. Thus, exploring the experiences of these individuals should: 1) provide unique insight into the mindset and thought processes of individuals whose actions pose significant risk for loss of life and property, and; 2) allow the individual to provide a first-person explanation for their actions, a recollection of their apprehension/arrest/prosecution, and conditions/consequences of subsequent incarceration. The proposed project intends to fill several critical gaps in the existing empirical psychology and criminal justice literature.

Note: All research involving prisoners requires compliance with federal regulations pertaining to biomedical and behavioral research involving prisoners as listed in PR 5965 Subpart C. Research must be directly relevant to prisoners or prisoners (e.g., the effects of incarceration, criminal behavior, prison infrastructures, etc.). Completion of the CITI Research with Prisoners Module is also required.
**EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will you maintain confidentiality?</th>
<th>Describe final disposition of data.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Anonymous data</td>
<td>The data that is collected from this project will be retained for ten years in a manner consistent with customary and prevalent methods for maintaining security of sensitive information. The rationale behind maintaining the data from this project for such a relatively long time arises from the strong potential for subsequent utility in a larger analytic and publication framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Electronic data will be password protected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Physical data will be locked in a file drawer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Public/non-confidential data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other (explain):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks, inconveniences, or discomforts subjects are likely to experience (check all that apply):</th>
<th>Describe potential risks, inconveniences and discomforts subjects are likely to experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Physical</td>
<td>It is possible that some study participants may experience psychological distress as a result of relating their experiences to the research applicant. For other participants, such expression may be cathartic and help to &quot;ease the conscience&quot; regarding past actions and present circumstances. Because it is not possible to predict the type of reaction that individuals will experience, all reasonable precautions will be taken to provide participants with contact information for the psychological services provider in their particular department of corrections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Psychological</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Financial</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Occupational</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Legal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe the methods that will be employed to mitigate any potential risks, inconveniences or discomforts.

The most foreseeable risk to participants is psychological anxiety or distress brought about by relating information regarding their past behavior and present incarceration. During the entire course of both the conversational and writing relationship potential participants will always have the option to communicate only that information they wish to divulge. That is, participants are free to choose what they do or do not want to disclose. There is no way for the researcher to force participants to write or talk about sensitive information they do not wish to disclose. An additional mechanism for mitigating any risk of adverse psychological discomfort is the amount of "distance" between the researcher and participant. By communicating with potential participants through the mail (after obtaining consent in person), there will be no "eye-to-eye" contact which might otherwise create a display of awkwardness, distress, judgment or emotion on behalf of either party. Finally, potential participants will be informed of available psychological services within their respective department of corrections should they sense the need to seek professional counseling services. Risk of negative legal consequence arising from subpoena of research records will be minimized by redaction of sensitive and identifying information once all data have been collected. Inmate’s personal information will be de-identified when reporting results (names or other identifying information will not be used). All reasonable efforts will be made to protect participant information and disclosures.

Describe any potential benefits subjects may gain as a result of participation.

There are no tangible, financial or physical benefits for individuals who participate in this research project. This has been made very clear in the draft introductory letter (see attachment). Participants will not be offered any money, goods, services, etc. It will also be made clear (consistent with federal guidelines and best practices) that participation (or lack thereof) will not affect future parole or release decisions.

Potential intangible / latent benefits include but are not limited to: 1) Participants may be glad to know that the researcher is interested in her/his background; 2) Participants may appreciate having contact with others through written correspondence; and 3) Participants may experience a sense of catharsis by using the "writing relationship" as an opportunity to express emotions regarding their decisions, actions and consequences.
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON

List all incentives subjects will receive for their participation. Participants will not receive any incentives from the researcher. However, the researcher does not control institutional practices (for example, a participant may be given extended time and access to areas of the institution other than their cell where letter-writing is allowed). At the outset, it will be made clear that the researcher cannot offer or endorse the dispensation of incentives for voluntary participation. It will also be made clear that participation will in no way affect future parole or release decisions (consistent with federal guidelines).

Note: If class credit will be given for participation, describe what other options exist for nonparticipants to receive the same credit.

If individuals are unwilling or unable to complete their participation, how will their incentives be distributed?

☐ They will still receive all incentives.
☒ They will be informed that they will receive no incentives.
☐ They will receive partial incentives (explain):

SECTION 4: CHECKLIST AND AUTHORIZATION

The following documents must be attached to this form:

☒ CitiCommon Course Certificate
☒ CitiIRB Course Certificate
☐ Research proposal approval from dissertation or thesis committee (if applicable)
☒ Study recruitment documents (if applicable)
☐ Survey questions (if applicable)
☐ Permission letter from external organization participating in the project (if applicable) on official letterhead
☐ Assent form for minors (if applicable)
☒ Consent forms (long or short if applicable) and any related documents (such as an oral script or information letter)
☐ Letter to parents (if applicable)

Instructions for Attaching Documents:

1) Place the cursor where you want the attachment to appear.
2) Select the “insert” tab at the top of MS Word.
3) Select “Object” located on the far right of the tool bar (PC) or the bottom of the list (MAC)
4) Select the “Create from File” tab and check the box that states “Display as Icon.”
5) Browse to the location of your document, and double click on it.
6) Repeat these steps for each document to be attached.

Note for Mac Users: Word for MAC is unable to attach .pdf files, so you will have to first save the Citi certificates or any other .pdf files you intend to attach as a .doc or .rtf file before attaching them. There are several ways to accomplish this. You may use Adobe to open the file and then select “File” and “Save as” and change the file type to an .rtf or .doc format. Alternatively, you may also download or create your own .pdf to .doc application.

Attach all relevant documents in this section:

A. Thompson Citi Module Completion Rx

Citi Completion Report 2185180.pdf
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON

Instructions for Authorization:

1) Type your name and date in the appropriate box.
2) Graduate students should email the form to their advisors, who should add their name and then send it to department chairs for review. Department chairs should add their name and send the finalized form with all required authorizations to irb@usm.edu.

By typing my name below, I acknowledge that I have read, understood, and approve of the information contained herein.

Joshua Polk
Principal Investigator
2-3-15

R. Alan Thompson
Student Advisor (if applicable)
2-4-15

Department Chair

Date

Date

Date
Appendix D. IRB Approval Letter

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone 601.266.5997 | Fax 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 21, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the 'Adverse Effect Report Form'.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15011404
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Experiences of Individuals Imprisoned for Arson
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Joshua Polk and Dr. R. Alan Thompson
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Science and Technology
DEPARTMENT: Criminal Justice
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: Eagle SPUR
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Full Committee Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 06/05/2015 to 06/04/2016
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
Appendix E: Introductory Letter

Inmate Name
Inmate ID Number
Institution
Address
City, State Zip

Date

Dear (Inmate Name),

My name is Joshua Polk and I am sending this letter with the hope that you are willing to communicate with me about your case. I have recently become interested in learning more about the experiences of individuals like yourself who have been sent to prison for being involved in arson offences. Because information is filtered through the media, members of the general public only ever hear the “official” version of events, but I would like to learn the “other side of the story” in your own words. Basically, I want to know your recollection of the events and how / why things turned out as they have.

If you are willing to tell me about your case, I would like to correspond with you by mail. Because I am completing research in a university setting, I am required by the principles of ethical research to tell you that participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate (or not) will have no effect on any future release or parole decisions. If you do not want to correspond with me or talk about your case, no action will be taken against you and I will understand. With the hope that you are willing to exchange letters with me I have included what is called a “Long Consent Form.” Please read it carefully, sign it, and send one copy back to me using the enclosed envelope. You should keep the other copy for yourself.

I am not familiar with the mail procedures for your institution. But I promise to provide postage-paid envelopes for you to mail back to me so there will be no expense on your part. If necessary I can also send paper for you to write on but you will have to tell me to do so.

Please give my request some consideration. I hope to hear back from you soon. Thank you in advance for your time and effort.

Regards,

Joshua Polk
## Appendix F: Consent Form

### Project Information

**Principal Investigator:** Joshua Polk  
**Phone:** 601-266-6172  
**Email:** joshua.polk@eagles.usm.edu  
**College:** Science & Technology  
**Department:** Criminal Justice

### Research Description

1. **Purpose:**
   
   You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a study that explores the experiences of individuals like yourself who are imprisoned for arson and arson-related offenses. Specifically, I want to hear your account and recollection of the events surrounding your case. I also want to know about your past and what you believe led to the crime for which you have been convicted. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. **IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE THAT IS OKAY - NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST YOU.**

2. **Description of Study:**
   
   I am asking that you exchange letters with me through the mail regarding your past and the events that have led to your imprisonment. Often times arson offenses are depicted by the media as the result of psychological disorder or extreme anger directed at a specific target. This is an opportunity for you to relate in your own words and writings what happened based on your recollections. Each time we meet or exchange letters I will provide you with postage-paid, self-addressed business-reply envelopes so that there will be no cost to you when writing. The number of times that we meet/correspond is solely up to you. I would like to meet/correspond as often as you are willing but understand if you decide to stop doing so. I will not pressure you to continue meeting/corresponding.

3. **Benefits:**
   
   I cannot provide you with any incentives or rewards for agreeing to correspond with me. I cannot give you money, food, tobacco, goods, or services. You will not earn you any special institutional privileges or time toward early release. Your decision to correspond with me will not have any impact on your chances for parole or early release. There are two potential (not guaranteed) benefits that you may experience as a result of agreeing to correspond with me. First, you may experience a sense of psychological relief or catharsis by expressing your feelings about your situation. Second, you may find that writing to someone on the outside provides a nice change or distraction from the routine of prison life. **AGAIN, YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO CORRESPOND WITH ME - THIS IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST YOU IF YOU DECIDE THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO WRITE BACK. MOST IMPORTANTLY, YOUR DECISION TO CORRESPOND WITH ME WILL NOT INFLUENCE YOUR**
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS INCARCERATED FOR ARSON

CHANCES FOR PAROLE OR RELEASE, NOR WILL IT EARN YOU ANY SPECIAL INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGES.

4. Risks:
   The most likely risk or negative consequence that you will experience as a result of corresponding with me is psychological distress or anxiety as a result of recounting the events that led to your imprisonment. In order to counteract this possibility, I will provide contact information for mental health counselors within your state's department of corrections who can provide assistance if you so desire. The following correctional staff are available to assist you in this regard:

Area 1:
- Unit 7 — Case Manager Hayco Ext. 1083
- Unit 8 — Case Manager Causey Ext. 1075
- Unit 9 — Case Manager Torrence Ext. 1104
- Unit 10 — Case Manager Powe Ext. 1101
- Unit 11 — Case Manager McLeod Ext. 1096

Area 2:
- B.2 — Case Manager Hodges Ext. 1250
- D.2 — Case Manager Berry Ext. 1282
- Lockdown (MSU) — Case Manager Roberts Ext. 1533

Area 3:
- A & B zone — Case Manager Johnson Ext. 1150

5. Confidentiality:
   Because even the most general details surrounding your case may be linked back to you given the ease with which others can access information on the internet and through other publicly-available sources, I am not able to guarantee the confidentiality of what you tell me nor can I guarantee that your identity will remain anonymous. Because all meeting and correspondence are subject to monitoring by prison officials, you should be mindful of what you say / write. I promise to not identify you by name in any manner. It is vital for you to understand that in rare instances a researcher's noted can be subpoenaed by judicial order. Because of this you should be mindful of what you say / write - do not admit to any act (past, present or future) for which you are not willing to take responsibility. Your personal information will be de-identified when reporting results (names or other identifying information will not be used).

6. Alternative Procedures:
   With your consent it may become possible for us to communicate in the future by telephone or in person depending upon institutional policies.

7. Participant's Assurance:
   This project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

   Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Manager of the IRB at 601-266-5997. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits.

   Any questions about the research should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided in Project Information Section above.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Participant's Name: __________

Consent is hereby given to participate in this research project. All procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purpose, including any experimental procedures, were explained to me. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.

The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures was given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to the Principal Investigator with the contact information provided above. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-5997.

__________________________  __________________________
Research Participant        Person Explaining the Study

__________________________  __________________________
Date                      Date