

You Can Make It without Treatment: Transforming Identity after Quitting Long-term Methamphetamine Use



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BACKGROUND: *The discontinuation of the long-term use of illicit drugs is most often conceptualised within the framework of medical discourse, which has its own limits. For example, it does not offer a sufficient explanation of the self-change process in people who stop their drug use without any formal/institutional help. In social sciences, however, there have been some attempts to provide an alternative explanation of the process; the best known, and one which is, to a great degree, unrivalled to this day, is the work by Biernacki (1986).* **AIMS:** *The article summarises the partial conclusions of my dissertation thesis on "Identity Transformation of Former Illicit Drug Users". The main goal of my study is to describe the process of quitting long-term illicit drug use from a socio-psychological perspective, applying the social constructionist theory.* **METHODS:** *The article is based on my own research (Nepustil, 2008) in which I interviewed 20 people who discontinued their long-term methamphetamine use more than 5 years ago. The process which they were subjected to at the levels of self and self-identity was analysed and interpreted using*

a collaborative approach to the research. **RESULTS:** *I have distinguished between four inter-related components – the development of self-agency, the development of reflexivity, the creation of commitments, and finding a new ethical framework – which, together, create an ever-changing form of self-identity. The notion of identity which I was drawing on shows that these processes cannot be maintained without relationships with others which increase the reflexivity and self-agency of a person, as well as mediating the new ethical frameworks for them. New commitments may be formulated within these relationships, but it seems necessary that people also adopt such commitments in their own inner dialogue.* **CONCLUSIONS:** *All the above-mentioned processes result in people's ability to connect their past, present, and future goals, make their own choices from a range of options, and find their way in the area of morality. At this stage, the role of experts may involve the temporary substitution or mediation of support relationships for people who do not have access to such social networks.*

KEY WORDS: METHAMPHETAMINE – IDENTITY – SELF – SELF-AGENCY – REFLEXIVITY

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