Giving Up Crime: Directions For Policy

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Eight Principles for Supporting Desistance in Criminal Justice

1. **Be realistic:** Our approaches to criminal justice should be realistic about the nature of criminal careers and of their termination. The criminal careers of reoffenders can't be switched off like a tap; it takes time to change entrenched behaviours and the problems that underlie them. So lapses and relapses should be expected.

2. **Favour informal approaches:** First and foremost, we should ensure that our criminal justice policies and practices do not slow desistance down. There is much evidence (including from recent Scottish studies) that intervening too much, too soon and in the wrong ways runs the serious risk of establishing criminal reputations and identities rather than diminishing them. Criminalising and penalising children and young people should be avoided as much as possible.

3. **Use prisons sparingly:** We should use imprisonment sparingly because imprisonment frustrates desistance. Stopping offending is much easier where people maintain strong and positive social ties, where they can see beyond their label as a prisoner or an 'offender' and where they can reduce or avoid contacts with other 'offenders', rather than being forced to live alongside them. Prison makes all of these things much more difficult. For that reason investing in prisons is more likely to mean investing in reoffending than reducing it.

4. **Build positive relationships:** We need to recognise that the quality of a person's relationships – both personal and professional – are central to the process of desistance. Like everyone else, offenders are most influenced to change (and not to change) by those closest to them and those whose advice they respect and whose support they value. Approaches to 'offender management' that fail to recognise the significance of the relational aspects of penal practice are unlikely to work.

5. **Respect individuality:** Since the process of desistance is different for each person, criminal justice responses need to be properly individualised. One-size-fits-all approaches to intervention run the risk of fitting no-one. Recognising individuality will also produce approaches that respect, value and exploit diversity.

6. **Recognise the significance of social contexts:** In supporting desistance, we need to look beyond the individual because achieving desistance involves and requires much more than changes within the individual. Trying only to 'fix' offenders can't and won't fix reoffending. Desistance requires new networks of support and opportunity in local communities and a new attitude towards the reintegration of ex-offenders.

7. **Mind our language:** If the language that we use in policy and practice causes both individuals and communities to give up on the possibilities of change and reformation, if it confirms and cements the negative perceptions of people who have offended and their situations as risky, dangerous, feckless, hopeless or helpless, then it will frustrate desistance.

8. **Promote 'redemption':** In some respects, the criminal justice system is pretty good at condemning people. But we also need to think about ways in which criminal justice policy and practice can recognise and reward efforts to change and to desist, so as to encourage and confirm positive change. For ex-offenders, there has to be an ending to their punishment and some means of signalling their redemption and re-inclusion within their communities and wider society.

Introduction

This briefing paper explores the implications for criminal justice policy in Scotland of desistance research – that is, research about the endings of criminal careers. Given the political consensus about the central importance of reducing reoffending,[1] we pay particular heed to questions around how and why reoffenders come to cease and refrain from offending. To the extent that any policy maker or practitioner (or indeed any society) sees reducing reoffending as a priority, she or he ought to be particularly interested in desistance research because this research explores and explains the very process that the justice system exists to sponsor and to support. In outlining the eight principles listed above, we have already provided our conclusion. What follows therefore is a review of just some of the studies from Scotland, the UK and further afield that provide the evidence base for these important principles.

Desistance is not easily defined but essentially it means ceasing and refraining from offending (for a more technical discussion see appendix one). Recently, some scholars have made an important distinction between primary desistance (which means any lull or crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career) and secondary desistance (which is defined as the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or 'changed person'[2]). Given our focus on reoffenders, who might be expected to have developed a 'criminal identity', secondary desistance is a particularly important concept for

this paper to which we will return in due course. However, we begin by reviewing some key 'facts' about desistance, before exploring explanations of desistance and what we know about how it can be best supported in practice.

Some 'facts' about desistance

a. The Age-Crime Curve

Criminal careers research suggests that young people typically begin offending in early adolescence, that their offending rates peak in late adolescence or young adulthood and that they usually stop offending before the age of 30 years of age. Such research portrays offending primarily as an age-related phenomenon [3, 4, 5]. Gottfredson and Hirschi [6] argue that the 'age-crime curve' has remained virtually static for at least 150 years. The aggregate age-crime curve (which is usually generated by plotting the total number of arrests of individuals in any jurisdiction by the ages of those arrested) indicates a sharp increase in the arrest rate in the early teen years; a peak age of arrest in the late teen or early adult years (dependent on crime type); and a decrease in the rate of arrest over the remaining age distribution [7]. Evidence of the age-crime relationship can be found in studies that analyse data relating crime rates to aggregates of various types and sizes. These studies consistently report that overall the age distribution of any population is inversely related to its crime rate [8, 9, 10, 11]. That is, after the peak age, and looking at the arrest rates for the whole population, the older people get, the less likely it is that they will be arrested.

Figure 1: Individual offenders with one or more charges proved in court in 2004/05 for a crime or relevant offence per 10,000 population (Scottish Executive, 2006, Statistical Bulletin CrJ/2006/3, Criminal Proceedings in the Scottish Courts, 2004/05. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, p14)
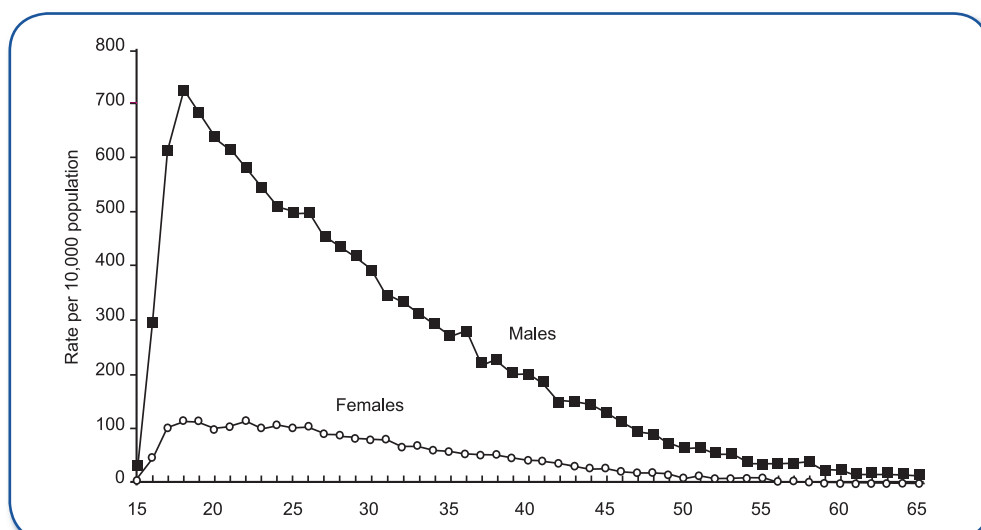
Beyond that basic description, however, the relationship between age and crime has provoked much debate in criminology[12]. Most importantly, Hirschi and Gottfredson[13] contend that crime everywhere is inversely related to age. Thus they see the relationship between age and crime as unchanging; all people, everywhere, within any historical period tend to commit less crime as they age regardless of any offence type. Against this position, Blumstein (and others) argue that age is not inversely related to criminal offending at the individual level among active offenders; in other words, what is true for the whole population isn't necessarily true for active offenders. They concede that both participation in criminal activity (the prevalence of offending - how many people offend), and (or incidence - how often people offend) rates of offending vary inversely with age in the general population. However, they argue that the age crime curve is driven by both rates of participation in offending (prevalence) and frequency of offending (incidence). A change in either of these rates affects the shape of the curve. Their key point is that for as long as offenders remain active they may continue to commit crimes at a relatively constant rate independent of their age; changes in aggregate crime rates may reflect changes in prevalence of offending within the overall population, not changes in incidence of offending amongst offenders [14,15].

b. Gender Variations

McIvor, Jamieson and Murray's[16] Scottish study explored desistance and persistence amongst three groups of young people aged 14-15, 18-19 and 22-25. They conducted interviews with a total of 75 'desisters' (43 male and 32 female) and 109 young people (59 male and 50 female) who were still offending or had done so recently. McIvor et al.,[17] discovered some age related differences concerning desistance. In the youngest age group, desistance for both boys and girls was associated with the real or potential consequences of offending and with growing recognition that offending was pointless or wrong. Young people in the middle age group similarly related their changing behaviour to increasing maturity, often linked to the transition to adulthood and related events like securing a job or place at college or university, or entering into a relationship with a partner or leaving home. For the oldest group, 'desistance was encouraged the assumption of

family responsibilities, especially among young women, or by a conscious lifestyle change'[18]. In general, the young women tended to attribute their decisions to desist to the assumption of parental responsibilities, whereas the young men focussed on personal choice and agency. Amongst persisters, girls and young women were more often keen to be seen as desisters, perhaps reflecting societal disapproval of female offending. McIvor et al.,[19] speculate that: 'Assigning the offending to the past rather than acknowledging it as a current or future reality may enable young women to better cope with the tensions that may arise when, on the one hand, society encourages gender equality and, on the other, continues to double condemn young women who step beyond their traditional gender roles' [20].

Graham and Bowling's[21] study of young people aged 14-25 found similar gender differences. They noted a clear association between the transition from adolescence to adulthood and desistance from offending among young women. Young men, in contrast, were less likely to achieve independence and those that did leave home, formed partnerships and had children, were no more likely to desist than those that did not. Graham and Bowling[22] speculate that life transitions: 'only provide opportunities for change to occur; its realisation is mediated by individual contingencies. Males may be less inclined to grasp, or be able to take advantage of such opportunities, as females'[23].

More recent studies have revised this conclusion to some extent; suggesting that similar processes of change do indeed occur for (some) males but that they seem to take longer to 'kick-in'; positive effects of the assumption of responsibilities in and through intimate relationships and employment are more notable in men aged 25 and over [24, 25, 26]. Thus, it seems that young men take longer to grasp the opportunities for change that these life transitions provide. In Graham and Bowling's[27] study, only two factors seemed to be positively associated with desistance for males in the 16-25 age range: firstly, their perception that their school work was above average, and, secondly, continuing to live at home. It may be that continuing to live at home was associated with desistance because of relatively positive relationships with parents and, as a result, spending less time with delinquent peers. By contrast, failure to desist among young men seemed to be best explained by three sets of

risk factors: a high frequency of prior offending, continued contact with delinquent peers, and heavy drinking and/or controlled drug use.

Interestingly, Giordano et al.,[28] who consider the issue of gender and its impact on desistance amongst their sample, suggest that despite the commonalities between males and females in their accounts of their change processes, women were more likely than men to cite 'religious conversions' and parenthood as catalysts for change[29]. This is broadly compatible with Rumgay's[30] theorisation of women's processes of desistance which she describes as rooted in the recognition of an opportunity to claim an alternative, desired and socially approved personal identity. Certain common identities, she suggests, such as that of a mother, may provide a 'script' by which to enact a conventional pro-social role, serving to enhance the individual's confidence in their ability to enact it successfully. This in turn positively affects the woman's sense of self efficacy and, alongside the deployment of other skills and strategies, assists in perpetuating the newly acquired identity.

c. Ethnicity

Few studies have addressed the relationship between ethnicity, 'race' and desistance. Farrall[31] found no variation in rates of desistance between white and ethnic minority probationers in his sample, although the study did not specifically explore how the processes of desistance might differ according to ethnicity. Some relevant studies have been conducted in the United States[32, 33, 34, 35]. Elliot [36], for example, studied offenders between ages 24-30 and found differences over time, with white offenders desisting earlier than black offenders. Elliot speculated that contextual differences, for example in people's workplace or living environments, might explain this phenomenon. However, this and the other studies cited are largely exploratory and it cannot be assumed that their conclusions apply to ethnic groups in Scotland. It is not an over-generalisation to suggest that almost nothing is known about the differences in desistance from crime between ethnic groups[37, 38].

That said, it may be inferred from Pager's[39] research conducted in Milwaukee, for example, that people from minority ethnic communities may face additional barriers to desistance from offending. A recurring message from desistance research is that obtaining meaningful, high quality, stable employment is an important factor in the wider process of desistance [40, 41, 42]. Yet, as Pager observes, a criminal record severely limits employment opportunities – particularly amongst the black community – suggesting that ex-offenders are left with few viable alternatives. Pager found that ex-offenders were only one half to one third as likely as non-offenders to be considered for employment, confirming therefore that a criminal record presented a major barrier to obtaining employment. Furthermore, and of particular significance, Pager found black ex-offenders were less than half as likely to be considered by employers than their white counterparts and that black non-offenders fell behind even white ex-offenders. Therefore, even if the pathways to desistance for white and other ethnic groups may be comparable, the additional obstacles faced by minority ethnic offenders as a result of racism seem likely to hinder and frustrate their processes of desistance.

Explaining desistance

Maruna[43] identifies three broad theoretical perspectives in the desistance literature. Maturational reform theories have the longest history and are based on the links between age and certain criminal behaviours, particularly street crime. Social bonds theories suggest that ties to family, employment or educational programmes in early adulthood explain changes in criminality across the life course. Where these ties exist, they create a stake in conformity, a reason to 'go straight'. Where they are absent, offenders have less to lose from continuing to offend. Narrative theories have emerged from more qualitative research which stresses the significance of subjective changes in the person's sense of self and identity, reflected in changing motivations, greater concern for others and more consideration of the future.

a. Maturational Reform Theories

Maturational reform (or 'ontogenic') theories have the longest history and are based on the established links between age and certain criminal behaviours (discussed above), locating explanations of desistance within age and maturation. In summary, such theories attribute changes in criminality in the life-course to the

physical, mental and biological changes that accompany ageing. According to this view, the effect of age on crime is natural, direct and invariant across social, temporal and economic conditions. However, Bushway et al.,[44] argue that although developmental processes occur with ageing (with age being the dimension along which the behaviour changes), age in fact indexes a range of different variables, including changes in biology or physiology, in social contexts, in attitudes, beliefs and values, in life experiences, and in the impact of social or institutional processes. Age is not, therefore, in itself the explanation for change.

b. Social Bonds Theories

Social bonds (or 'sociogenic') theories argue that there is an association between desistance and circumstances external to the individual (although these theories often include and attend to the individual's reaction to and interaction with those circumstances). Such theories stress the significance of ties to family, employment or educational programmes, for example, in explaining changes in criminal behaviour across the life course. Where these ties exist, it is argued that they create a stake in conformity. Drawing on social control theory, proponents of this approach recognise that key life events such as marriage or employment are likely to be correlated with, although not necessarily causal of, desistance [45, 46]. The findings of such studies imply that desistance cannot be attributed solely to the existence of social attachments acting as external forces which determine the individual's behaviour. Rather, what matters is what these ties mean to 'offenders'; the perceived strength, quality and interdependence of these ties; and their impact in buttressing informal social controls which reduce both opportunities and motivations to offend.

c. Narrative Theories

Narrative theories of desistance combine individual and structural factors in their explanations of the desistance process. Increasingly, such theories, which seek to explore the dynamics of desistance, are being developed from the subjective perspectives of offenders themselves, drawing on their narrative accounts of desistance processes [47, 48, 49, 50] and stressing the significance of subjective changes in the

person's sense of self and identity, reflected in changing motivations, greater concern for others and more consideration of the future. Such findings are explored in more detail in the next section.

What Offenders and Ex-offenders Say about Desistance

(see also appendix two)

Burnett[51] studied the efforts to desist of 130 adult property offenders released from custody[52]. She noted that whilst eight out of 10, when interviewed pre-release, wanted to 'go straight'; six out of 10 subsequently reported reoffending post-release. For many, the intention to be law-abiding was provisional in the sense that it did not represent a confident prediction; only one in four reported that they would definitely be able to desist. Importantly, Burnett discovered that those who were most confident and optimistic about desisting had greatest success in doing so. For the others, the 'provisional nature of intentions reflected social difficulties and personal problems that the men faced'[53]. More recently Burnett and Maruna[54] have written persuasively about the role of hope in the process of desistance and equally importantly about how adverse social circumstances can suffocate hope[55].

On the basis of her interviews, Burnett[56] delineated three categories of persisters, though she notes that these categories are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive. 'Hedonists' were attracted by the feelings of well-being gained through criminal involvement, whether in terms of the 'buzz' at the time, the emotional high afterwards or the place of the financial rewards of crime in funding lifestyles sometimes associated with alcohol and drugs. The 'earners' varied in their enthusiasm for crime, but regarded it as a viable money making enterprise. The 'survivors' were generally dependent on substances and unhappily committed to persistent property offending to fund their substance misuse.

The desisters also fell into three broad categories. The 'non-starters' adamantly denied that they were 'real criminals' and, in fact, had fewer previous convictions than the others. For the 'avoiders', keeping out of prison was the key issue. They appeared to have decided that the costs of crime outweighed the benefits. The 'converts', however, were:

'the most resolute and certain among the desisters. They had found new interests that were all-preoccupying and overturned their value system: a partner, a child, a good job, a new vocation. These were attainments that they were not prepared to jeopardize or which over-rode any interest in or need for property crime'[57].

Although Burnett notes that, for most of the men involved in her study, processes of desistance were characterised by ambivalence and vacillation, the over-turning of value systems and all pre-occupying new interests that characterised the 'converts' seem to imply the kind of identity changes invoked in the notion of secondary desistance (which, as we noted above, is defined as the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or 'changed person'[58]).

Maruna's[59] study offers a particularly important contribution to understanding secondary desistance by exploring the subjective dimensions of change. Maruna compared the narrative 'scripts' of 20 persisters and 30 desisters who shared similar criminogenic traits and backgrounds and who lived in similarly criminogenic environments. In the 'condemnation script' that emerged from the persisters, the 'condemned person is the narrator (although he or she reserves plenty of blame for society as well). Active offenders… largely saw their life scripts as having been written for them a long time ago'[60]. By contrast, the accounts of the desisters revealed a different narrative:

'The redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator – a victim of society who gets involved with crime and drugs to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances. This deviance eventually becomes its own trap, however, as the narrator becomes ensnared in the vicious cycle of crime and imprisonment. Yet, with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in" the ex-offender, the narrator is able to accomplish what he or she was "always meant to do". Newly empowered, he or she now seeks to "give something back" to society as a display of gratitude'[61].

The desisters and the persisters shared the same sense of fatalism in their accounts of the development of their criminal careers; however, Maruna reads the minimisation of responsibility implied by this fatalism not as simple 'denial' but rather as evidence of the conventionality of their values and aspirations and of their need to believe in the essential goodness of the 'real me'. Moreover, in their accounts of achieving change there is evidence that desisters have to 'discover' agency (the ability to make choices and govern their own lives) in order to resist and overcome the criminogenic pressures that play upon them. This discovery of agency seems to relate to the role of significant others in envisioning an alternative identity and an alternative future for the offender even through periods when they cannot see these possibilities for themselves. Typically later in the process of change, involvement in 'generative activities' (which usually make a contribution to the well-being of others) plays a part in testifying to the desister that an alternative identity is being or has been forged.

Supporting desistance

The implications for practice of this developing evidence base have begun to be explored in a small number of research studies that have focused on the role that criminal justice interventions (principally probation) may play in supporting desistance[62, 63, 64]. In one study of 'assisted desistance', Rex[65] explored the experiences of 60 probationers. She found that those who attributed changes in their behaviour to supervision described it as active and participatory. Their commitments to desist appeared to be generated by the personal and professional commitment shown by their probation officers, whose reasonableness, fairness and encouragement seemed to engender a sense of personal loyalty and accountability. Probationers interpreted advice about their behaviours and underlying problems as evidence of concern for them as people, and 'were motivated by what they saw as a display of interest in their well-being'[66]. Such evidence resonates with other arguments about the pivotal role that relationships play in effective interventions[67, 68, 69, 70]. If secondary desistance (for those involved in persistent offending at least) requires a narrative reconstruction of identity, then it seems obvious why the relational aspects of practice are so significant. Who would risk engaging in such a precarious and threatening venture without the re-assurance of sustained and compassionate support from a trusted source?

However, workers and working relationships are neither the only nor the most important resources in promoting desistance. Related studies of young people in trouble suggest that their own resources and social networks are often better at resolving their difficulties than professional staff[71]. The potential of social networks is highlighted by 'resilience perspectives' which, in contrast with approaches that dwell on risks and/or needs, consider the 'protective factors and processes' involved in positive adaptation in spite of adversity. In terms of practice with young people, such perspectives entail an emphasis on the recognition, exploitation and development of their competences, resources, skills and assets[72]. In similar vein, but in relation to re-entry of ex-prisoners to society, Maruna and LeBel[73] have made a convincing case for the development of strengths-based (rather than needs-based on risk-based) narratives and approaches. Drawing on both psychological and criminological evidence, they argue that such approaches would be likely both to enhance compliance with parole conditions and to encourage ex-prisoners to achieve 'earned redemption'[74, 75] by focusing on the positive contributions through which they might make good to their communities. Thus promoting desistance means striving to develop the offender's strengths – at both an individual and a social network level – in order to build and sustain the momentum for change.

In looking towards these personal and social contexts of desistance, the most recent and perhaps most wide-scale study of probation and desistance is particularly pertinent to this discussion. Farrall[76] explored the progress or lack of progress towards desistance achieved by a group of 199 probationers. Though over half of the sample evidenced progress towards desistance, Farrall found that desistance could be attributed to specific interventions by the probation officer in only a few cases, although help with finding work and mending damaged family relationships appeared particularly important. Desistance seemed to relate more clearly to the probationers' motivations and to the social and personal contexts in which various obstacles to desistance were addressed.

Farrall[77] goes on to argue that interventions must pay greater heed to the community, social and personal contexts in which they are situated. After all, 'social circumstances and relationships with others are both the object of the intervention and the medium through which… change can be achieved'[78]. Necessarily, this requires that interventions be focused not solely on the individual person and his or her perceived 'deficits'. As Farrall[79] notes, the problem with such interventions is that while they can build human capital, for example, in terms of enhanced cognitive skills or improved employability, they cannot generate the social capital which resides in the relationships through which we achieve participation and inclusion in society. Vitally, it is social capital that is necessary to encourage desistance. It is not enough to build capacities for change where change depends on opportunities to exercise capacities.

Figure 2: Constructing Desistance (McNeill, F. and Whyte, B. 2007, Reducing Reoffending: Social Work and Community Justice in Scotland. Cullompton: Willan, p148)
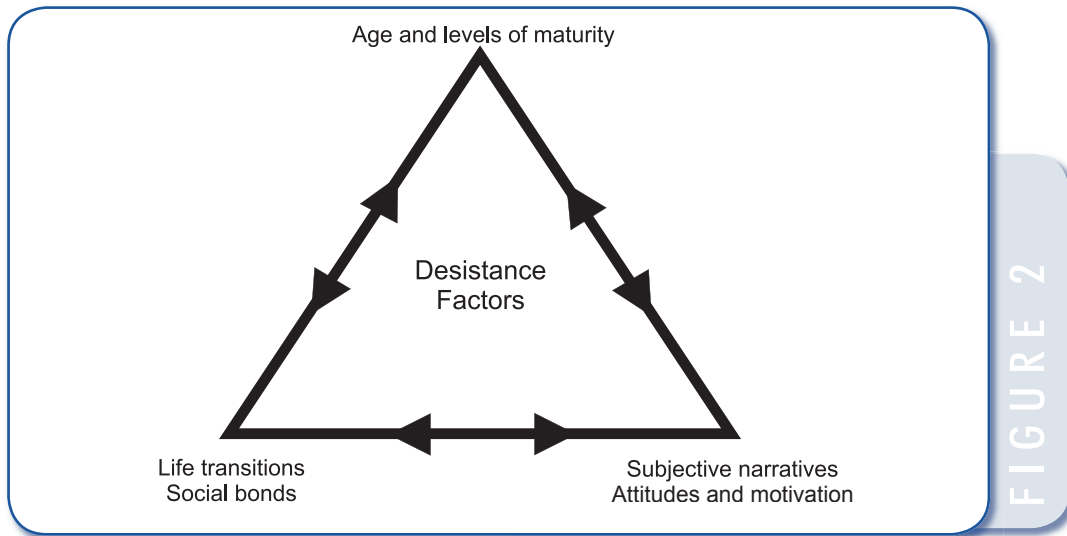

Age and levels of maturity

Desistance
Factors

Life transitions
Social bonds

Subjective narratives
Attitudes and motivation

FIGURE 2

Conclusions

Figure two aims to represent the connections between the main explanations of and evidence about desistance reviewed above. We argue that desistance is constructed in the interfaces between age and maturation, developing social bonds and the life transitions associated with them, and the attitudes, motivations and narrative constructions that offenders or ex-offenders develop as their lives progress (or fail to do so). The implications for criminal justice should be, by now, obvious. If we want to reduce reoffending, we would do well to construct criminal justice policies and practices that work in all three planes to generate a concerted 'pull' towards desistance. We need to facilitate the development of maturity by enabling people to take responsibility (rather than taking it from them), we need to facilitate positive life transitions and the development of positive social ties, and we need to enable 'offenders' to look beyond that label and to recognise their own potential and their possibilities. But all of that depends on two things. Firstly, we need to develop a set of criminal justice policies and practices that are capable of rising to these challenges. Secondly, we need somehow to try to develop a society that believes in the possibility of change and acts accordingly towards offenders trying to change and ex-offenders who have changed. Ultimately, we would argue that all of us would be safer and feel safer in a society that believed offenders could change and worked seriously at enabling them to do so than in a society where 'offenders' are cast merely as a threat that can only ever be imperfectly contained, constrained or and controlled.

Appendix 1: Definitions of Desistance

There is no agreed definition of desistance although historically most criminologists associate desistance with the state of having 'terminated' offending. Thus most empirical measures typically identify individuals who evidence a significant lull or crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career, essentially redefining desistance as temporary non-offending, precisely because most data sets do not allow for verification of permanent cessation of offending[80]. In an important sense, as Maruna and Farrall[81] argue, it is impossible to know when an offending career has finally ended until the person is dead. Moreover, it is not always clear what type of offending and therefore what type of desistance is at issue. Shover[82] for example, defines desistance as 'the voluntary termination of *serious* criminal participation' (emphasis added), suggesting that some low level offending is typical throughout the life course and that its presence does not necessarily negate the wider process of desistance; consider, for example, the example of a former armed robber who picks up a speeding ticket. Is he better described as still being a 'desister' or does this make him a reoffender?

For these and other reasons, more recent commentators have focused less on this end state of non-offending and more on the process by which people come to cease and sustain cessation of offending behaviour[83, 84, 85]. Fagan[86] describes the desistance process as the decline in the frequency and severity of offending, where frequency is observed counts of offending behaviour. However, Bushway et al.,[87] propose that desistance should be construed less as a matter of quantifiable frequencies of arrest and more as an underlying change in 'criminality' (defined as propensity to offend); an approach which they suggest is implicit in more qualitative accounts of desistance [88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93].

The process of desistance has been likened to a zig-zag path[94] and to a drifting in and out of offending[95]. Such oscillations between conformity and criminality have been recognised in both empirical studies and theoretical accounts of desistance. Others have suggested that there are distinguishable phases in desistance processes [96, 97, 98, 99, 100]. Most recently, Maruna and Farrall[101] have suggested an analogy between Lemert's[102] conception of primary and secondary deviance [103] and what they describe as primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance refers to any lull or crime free gap in the course of a criminal career. Secondary desistance is defined as the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or "changed person"[104]. Though the usefulness of this analogy has been contested,[105] it does seem likely that where policies and practices are concerned with reoffenders who may have acquired entrenched criminalised identities, then the concept of secondary desistance may be highly significant[106].

Appendix 2: 'Offenders' Voices

Probation

"Something to do with self progression. Something to show people what they are capable of doing. I thought that was what [my Officer] should be about. It's finding people's abilities and nourishing and making them work for those things. Not very consistent with going back on what they have done wrong and trying to work out why – 'cause it's all going around on what's happened – what you've already been punished for – why not go forward into something… For instance, you might be good at writing – push that forward, progress that, rather than saying 'well look, why did you kick that bloke's head in? Do you think we should go back into anger management courses?' when all you want to do is be a writer. Does that make any sense to you at all? Yeah, yeah. To sum it up, you're saying you should look forwards not back. Yeah. I know that you have to look back to a certain extent to make sure that you don't end up like that [again]. The whole order seems to be about going back and back and back. There doesn't seem to be much 'forward'" (Farrall 2002: 225).

Prison

When you first go out the gate again on a town visit, or when you come to work you feel—even though you haven't got HMP stamped on the middle of your forehead—you feel very aware of your position, and where you are and you think, 'Do people know?' (Burnett & Maruna 2006: 93)

You have to get used to the fact that for a lot of things life is never going to be the same because you've got a criminal record. That takes some getting used to. Just in simplistic

living it takes some getting used to. As far as society is concerned you are never, you are never rehabilitated. (Burnett & Maruna 2006: 93).

I think it's very difficult because I think when you go to prison, I mean in the time leading up to it, you try and shrink from your identity. You're trying to be as anonymous as you can probably. When you go into prison, I mean my experience of going into prison is very much a case of you try and blend in, you don't want to stand out, so all the time you're pulling yourself back.

You don't give away information, you don't talk about yourself, you don't talk about your family to start with anyway. You are pulling yourself back and by the very nature of you pulling yourself back in your interaction . . . to a degree you begin to lose your identity really because you're suppressing it. It's a protectionary mechanism in prison. So because you don't want to stand out it's all about being, you know, you talk to a lot of guys inside and they say, 'Well, all I want to do is keep my head down and finish my sentence'. And that's what it's all about, and you're keeping your head down and finishing your sentence. (Burnett & Maruna 2006: 93-4).

''…when I come into prison, obviously, I was still with Jenny, still living with her. After a couple of months of visits and letters of support she eventually trailed off, wouldn't answer me letters, wouldn't answer the phone' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 72)

'..I'm thirty-six in two weeks time, I think I've wasted an awful lot of time not knowing what I was doing. I think basically, I really feel as if the years from when I was twenty-nine, when my missus and me kids left me, til this moment in time have been really wasted…You know? I've achieved nothing. And I'm back to, from when I leave prison now, I'll be in a worse, the same position that I was when I was twenty-nine, still without a home, no money'. (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 75)

'Absolutely devastated. It just tears up your whole life up. I didn't have that much of a life but everything I did have…Obviously I think I committed a crime, I think prison is justified, that's the penalty you pay. But I also think what is has done to, err, to put me back, it's basically put me back two and a half years. And it's made me miss out on me kid's life, I feel a bit bitter about it to be honest' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 75)

'I see Probation as a step forward for me. It helps

me as an individual. There is someone there for me now and I need it. I would have been in prison now. That would destroy me completely. If I ended up in prison I would have been even worse.' (Farrall 2002:179)

Social Bonds

'Three things [in life] really, get a job, get a place and have a family you know. They're the three key things in this world you know and if you don't go with that then all you're ever going to be is a criminal, drug user and a bum you know.' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 63)

Hope & Despair

'The government really don't care, I mean they couldn't, they really couldn't give a flying fuck about you. At the end of the day, I've been trying to get a house for the last four years, they tell me I'm not sick, I'm not an asylum seeker, I'm not [a] queer and I haven't got a kid. Basically what they're telling me is, you can be born, pay taxes all your fucking whatless life or whatever whatless [inaudible] you've had, and you ain't got no rights, you can't get a house…' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 141)

'I got pulled over by the police at one o'clock in the morning, and normally, throughout my life I've had hassle from the police, …just an attitude off the police. As soon as the police pulled me over, I actually got my wallet out and I said, 'I've finished work late and this is the reason why I'm out late' and they said, 'Who do you work for?' And I said, 'Shufflebottoms,' and I pulled out an ID card and that was totally it they were fine. Totally different. Black and white they were like white. And I had bald tyres on the front of my car, and they said, 'No problems – can you sort it out within 14 days?' whereas before it had been 'Here's six points.' It's just little things like my bank manager – he treated me so much differently when he knew I was working full stop.' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 101-2)

Clive: 'I'm now passing that on, that information on to younger generations and they're dealing with it and that's…'

Interviewer: 'And how do you feel about that?'

Clive: 'Brilliant. It's an achievement isn't it, know what I mean? When you've achieved something. Compared to feeling guilty for the damage I've caused not only to me parents, but to numerous other people throughout me life, when you help

somebody and you get praise for it, it means everything, you know what I mean? You've got a purpose in life. It's really nice when someone thanks you for something, and you don't know what you've done, know what I mean, you don't feel like you've done anything, so when they say, 'Oh cheers for that,' that makes all the difference' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 102)

AC: What would you say has been the biggest change in your life since, well since we last interviewed you five years ago?

Jules: Stopped taking drugs, working the programme and just being happy. And just being happy. Well I've got another partner that I love and that's it really just, you know, just grown up really, I think…and change in everything. …Yeah [inner changes] in myself, inside myself because I'm me today, I'm not anyone else, I'm just me and I don't need to put on a front to this person or a front to that person, I'm just me.' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 104)

AC: How do you feel about having stopped offending?

George: I feel good about myself. Its more of a conscience clear, one is that you know that no-one is going to come to you and say ' excuse me can you come down the nick please I want an interview about this….?' because, you know, you haven't done anything. Secondly I think it is important when you meet people that ain't criminals, you know. When you are a criminal and you meet people that ain't criminals there's always something inside you saying 'they're not like you, they're not like you, they look down upon you', you know. And then you start getting angry towards them because 'you can't look at me that way, I did what I did for my reasons', you know. And being not a criminal now I feel that I'm on an equal level to everybody else you know. There's nobody out there that's better than or worser that me. I get up, I go to work, I pay my taxes, I pay my national insurance, I've got just as much right to hold my head up high as anybody else and feel good about myself in that way' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 106-7)

'Very hopeful for the future. Very hopeful. And hopefully I can work with other people who've been, or who was in my situation. And show them that they can…there is another life out there. Cos when you're mixed up in this kind of life, er, it's rotten, you know, um. To take that on board once you're in the middle of it, well the next question is, 'Well what am I going to do about it?' So you can't admit that to yourself.

You know? So if it's good to do crime, it's good to do drink, it'd good to do drugs. But if you say 'no it's bad' you're fucked, because you've got to change it. And it's a massive, I don't whether you know anything about addiction and alcohol and stuff, even crime, crime is an addiction, um, it's a fucking massive problem. Cos it's all, well more or less every fucking behaviour in the book you've got to change. And the force, well. [Sighs] It'll blow you away, you know what I mean? But erm, its doable, it is doable, if you want' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 115)

'Well, it's worth it. It's worth it because, um, again once I've been out of jail a year I can start helping people again and that's got to give me a good purpose in life. I know about people, 'cos I've been there, done it. And I can pass it back, my experiences, onto trying to help the next one, who are all going through the same shit as me, or went through the same shit as me. You know what I mean? And I think that's what it's all about really. Obviously I'll do other stuff as well. What yet I don't know. I don't know yet, I don't know. But um, we'll get through this, and then we're going to look at it seriously. And I'd love to become a counsellor. And I can't see no reason why not. But um, and obviously, again, that's passing my, see cos I don't know whether you can understand the last twenty years, I've had a lot of fucking experience, and um, like you, you go to college to do a degree, can you see what I'm trying to say here? And now, I'm a fucking criminal, it's not the ideal occupation to have, but if you can pass that back to the next robber and try to say to him 'look, I you know you're going to end up there, there, there, there and there, right, and you're fucking, you know it's not a very nice place', surely thats got to be worthwhile.' (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 116)

'Well I've settled down with me girlfriend. Although some times we do have [our] ups and downs…erm, my financial situation's a bit better cos I've been working on and off. I'm not always in a steady job though. Er. I just think, you know, I'm getting on a bit better with my life, you know, I've grown up a little bit but I'm still not there you know. (Farrall and Calverley 2006: 112)

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SCCCJ Publications List

- **June 2007: An Unnecessary punishment**

  Alec Spencer, Honorary Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice, Department of Applied Social Science, Stirling University. This briefing paper looks at a major problem facing Scotland in terms of the number of people being sent to prison, and also the projections for this number to rise significantly over the next couple of decades.

- **2007: Crime and Justice in Scotland 2005/06: A Review of Progress**

  The second review of the progress of crime and justice in Scotland.

- **July 2006: Women in Prison in Scotland: An Unmet Commitment**

  A Briefing Paper: The first in a series of short briefing papers on criminal justice topics of current interest.

- **10 May 2006: Early Release from Prison**

  Comments by SCCCJ on the Report of the Sentencing Commission for Scotland.

- **October 2005: Crime and Justice in Scotland 2004/05 A Review of Progress**

  This is the first in a series of annual reviews of the progress of crime and justice in Scotland. SCCCJ hopes it will promote discussion and debate and lead to more interest generally in defining, measuring and building on success.

- **2005: Reducing the Prison Population: Penal Policy and Social Choices**

  The Consortium's aim in this report is to further the debate about how best to reduce the prison population in Scotland whilst maintaining public safety.

- **2004: A Unique Punishment: Sentencing and the Prison Population in Scotland**

  A study of decision making by sentencers in Scotland by Prof Jacqueline Tombs.

- **2004: Re:duce Re:habilitate Re:form**

  Consultation -Consortium discussion paper. This discussion paper has been produced to encourage debate on the current consultation by the Scottish Executive.

- **2002: Making Sense Of Drugs And Crime**

  This report goes beyond an analysis of the 'drug problem' to indicate how a harm reducing and more principled and effective penal policy on drugs, alcohol and crime could be developed.

- **November 2000: Rethinking Criminal Justice in Scotland**

  This report argues for a broad integrated social policy approach to crime reduction, with an emphasis on early prevention, given the evidence that this is the best way to protect victims and communities.