

Going Straight On Probation: Desistance Transitions and the Impact of Probation

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Policy
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May 2010

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Abstract

This thesis explores primary desistance as a transitional phase between offending and crime cessation. Recent work has explored desistance within an integrated theoretical framework, combining elements of both structure and agency theories, and this thesis builds upon this by exploring the initial transitions towards desistance, and the prospective strategies to sustain it, among a group of adult male offenders under Probation supervision. Where agency has been employed in such accounts its conceptualisation has tended to be vague, and this thesis seeks to address this by examining agency as the temporally located reflexive deliberations of adult offenders upon their future goals and present social environment. This allows for the identification of individuals' future goals in relation to desistance and the strategies that they intend to pursue to achieve them, in relation to their personal and social contexts. The thesis finds that recent Probation policy has delimited the role of supervising officer towards that of Offender Manager, which inhibits the relationship between officer and offender such that would-be desisters tend to revert to past repertoires of thought and action in their strategies. This is likely to sustain the social contexts that led to offending in the past, and is likely to hinder desistance in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Going Straight on Probation” explores the impact of Probation interventions upon individuals’ efforts to desist from crime. The aim of the thesis is to develop knowledge of the transitional process of moving away from crime, and the impact of the individual’s social context and the role of Probation interventions upon this. Therefore, the concern is not with evaluating the content or delivery of Probation interventions, but with how they are received by the individuals who are the subject of them. While the existing research has helped to identify a number of factors which are associated with the ending of a period of involvement in crime, the transition towards desistance and the impact that Probation interventions have upon this are less well understood. Indeed, most research which has explored the impact of criminal justice interventions has focused upon the quantitative analysis of reconviction data (Farrall, 2002: 6).

Notwithstanding that these studies are methodologically flawed in several respects, not least that they generally only measure reconviction rather than re-offending (McNeill, 2009: 13), they offer virtually no insight into how or why particular interventions work for particular individuals (Farrall, 2002: 4). This thesis seeks to address this by exploring the experiences and perceptions of 20 individuals made subject to Community Orders (CO) or Suspended Sentence Orders (SSO), and those of their supervising officers. In doing so, the thesis answers three research questions:

- 1) What factors are relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards primary desistance?
- 2) How do primary desisters understand desistance prospectively, and how does this influence their strategies for sustaining desistance?
- 3) How is contemporary Probation practice relevant to experiences of primary desistance?

1.1 The Emergence of Desistance Research

It is now well known that offending behaviour tends to increase during early adolescence, peaks during late-adolescence, and then declines steadily from early-adulthood (Nagin *et al*, 1995: 112). As such, it can be asserted with a significant degree of confidence that the overwhelming majority of individuals who offend do so during their adolescence, and cease shortly afterwards. However, this relationship between age and crime is 'at once the most robust and least understood empirical observation in the field of criminology' (Moffitt, 1993: 675). Further, despite the consistency of these findings within criminological research, until recently relatively little effort has been devoted to exploring the reasons why people stopped offending when they did. Rather, the focus has been upon identifying the causal factors that underpin offending behaviour. In recent years the emergence of desistance as a key concern within criminological research has begun to address this, with a number of authors expressing an interest in exploring the ending of criminal careers (for example: Bushway, *et al*, 2001; Giordano *et al*, 2002; Laub *et al*, 1998; Laub and Sampson, 2001, 2003; Loeber *et al*, 1991; Maruna, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 2005a).

Desistance – which is commonly referred to as the ending of a period of involvement in crime – emerged as an area of interest following the somewhat unexpected findings from a number of longitudinal studies in the UK and North America which began in the late-1950s. Prominent studies included the Philadelphia Birth Cohort Study in the USA (Kempf, 1990; Wolfgang *et al*, 1987), and the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development in the UK (Farrington, 1989, 1995; Farrington *et al*, 2006a, 2006b). The researchers undertaking these projects had expected to study crime over the life course but found that by the 1970s many within the cohorts that they were observing ceased their involvement in crime as they began to enter early-adulthood. Thus, the pattern that was observed followed the now well-established “age-crime curve” (described above), and researchers were left to explain how and why so many members of the cohorts had ceased offending at this time in their lives, and why a smaller group of persistent offenders remained after the majority of offenders had desisted (Farrall and Calverley, 2006: 3). In other words, the pattern of offending identified at the macro level by the age-crime curve concealed disparities in patterns of offending at the micro level between individual offenders. The task for researchers would be to explore how individual offenders were able to desist from crime at different stages of the life-course.

Indeed, following these findings, desistance became a field of research in its own right, and a number of authors began to publish their findings on how offenders ceased their involvement in crime (for example: Burnett, 1992; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1983). This has led to the identification of a number of factors associated with successful desistance, including: marriage/family formation (Osgood and Lee, 1993; Shover, 1983); employment (Fletcher, 2001; Uggen, 1999); detachment from delinquent peer groups (Maruna and Roy, 2007; Osborn, 1980);

the impact of criminal justice interventions (Burnett, 1992; Hughes, 1998; Rex, 1999); motivation and confidence in the ability to desist (Burnett, 1992; Farrall, 2002); the development of a pro-social sense of morality (Weaver, 2009: 18); and the adoption of an alternative, non-criminal identity (Giordano *et al*, 2002).

1.2 Exploring Primary Desistance

The thesis is concerned specifically with exploring primary desistance and this section will briefly outline what is meant by this concept, before providing the rationale for its study. Maruna *et al* (2004) argue that there are two types of desistance: primary and secondary. The former refers to a crime-free period of time, while the latter refers to a more permanent state of non-offending, involving a fundamental change in the individual's identity from that of "offender" to that of "ex-offender". Moreover, they argue that primary desistance is of little theoretical interest given that the majority of offenders experience lulls in their offending and, as such, there has been little interest in researching the 'first faltering steps of a journey taken by individuals on the threshold of change' (Healy and O'Donnell, 2008: 28).

While research focusing on secondary desistance has led to the identification of a number of factors which have been shown to support desistance over a longer period of time, the conditions which individuals encounter in the earlier stages of desistance are less well understood.

Therefore, it is argued that primary desistance is a significant research interest, principally because such a focus enables the exploration of individuals' experiences and understandings in

the immediate aftermath of making a decision to desist, and this may facilitate the development of interventions to sustain crime-free periods from the short-term to the long-term.

1.3 Initial Transitions Towards Desistance

By focusing on primary desistance, this thesis is concerned with the initial transitions towards desistance, and the mechanisms by which this is achieved. It is necessary to develop such an understanding because variations between individuals within the initial transition stage may lead to variations during the later stages of desistance. An understanding of such variation could help to identify appropriate interventions to be implemented. Further, a greater understanding of the initial transition towards desistance may offer a useful insight into identifying when individuals are “ready” to desist, and hence when it may be appropriate to employ certain interventions.

Drawing upon the empirical observations outlined above in relation to the factors that support desistance, a number of theoretical explanations have been proposed. Generally, there are three broad theoretical categories: structural (which relate to the social context within which desistance takes place), agency (which relate to the individual’s attitudes, values and other personal characteristics), and integrated (which seek to combine structure and agency elements) (Barry, 2010). “Structural theories” are those which explain desistance as resulting from particular life-course events, which usually accompany processes of ageing and maturation. These may prompt desistance, for example through experiencing some form of “external shock”, such as sustaining injury whilst committing a crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). However, structural theories most often explain desistance in relation to particular life-course transitions which alter the socio-

structural context of an individual's life, such as employment, marriage, or detachment from delinquent peer groups (Laub and Sampson, 2003).

“Agency theories” generally explain desistance in relation to some conception of free will or rational choice (Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Often these theories explain that would-be desisters have some form of plan or vision for an alternative future that does not involve offending (Maruna, 2001), and some perception of past behaviour as being morally wrong and incongruent with their future vision (Weaver, 2009: 18). Generally, therefore, agency theories explain desistance as resulting from enhanced decision-making skills in relation to the risks and rewards associated with crime.

Structural and agency theories have been criticised for reducing the role of the desister to either that of a ‘super-dupe’, whose actions are wholly constrained and determined by structural factors, or that of a ‘super-agent’, who is entirely free to take whatever course of action they desire (Farrall and Bowling, 1999). “Integrated theories” aim to overcome these shortcomings, not only by combining structure and agency dimensions in their explanations but, moreover, by exploring their interaction (Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Byrne and Trew, 2007). Generally, these theories explain that desistance occurs when changes to an individual's attitudes, values and decision-making lead to the individual seeking to alter their socio-structural context by searching for, or engineering, particular pro-social life-course transitions. Once these transitions take place, new behaviours are learned and new pro-social roles become cemented (Barry, 2010). This thesis employs an integrated theory because I argue that this is necessary for exploring the transition towards desistance, if the processes by which certain individuals are able to desist under particular

conditions are to be understood. Therefore, this thesis explores primary desistance by examining the interaction between the individual and their social context in making the initial transition towards desistance.

1.4 Prospective Strategies for Desistance

Although researchers have studied desistance more extensively in recent years, more research is still required on how desistance is perceived and experienced from the perspective of the individual offender. The rationale for this is that an understanding of this nature will offer a greater insight into understanding “how” and “why” successful desistance occurs for some but not for others (Maruna, 2000: 12). However, this thesis aims to develop this understanding further by exploring the dynamics between personal and social contexts, Probation interventions, and planned behaviour in relation to the intention to desist.

An integrated theory, of the type discussed above, is clearly relevant to this endeavour, as it allows for an incorporation of structural factors in relation to particular obstacles or life-course turning points in the individual’s social context, and agency factors in respect of the individual’s attitudes, values and decision-making that influence behavioural intentions. However, despite the growing body of research that employs an integrated theory, structure-agency interaction remains a relatively under-explored aspect of desistance research. In particular, theoretical and conceptual accounts of agency remain vague, and there is a dearth of research which explores notions of “active agency” in desistance, which, I argue, refers to the notion that individuals may be able to engineer their own desistance pathways, although not necessarily under conditions of their own

choosing (Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Vaughan, 2007). Indeed, there is considerable research which has paid little attention to the role of agency in the desistance process (for example: Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Laub, Nagin and Sampson, 1998; Sampson and Laub, 1993), and where the concept has been applied it has generally been considered from a rational choice perspective (for example: Paternoster, 1989; Piliavin *et al*, 1986; Uggen and Shelton, 1998).

Exploring prospective strategies for sustaining desistance may reveal a great deal about the desistance process, not least because existing evidence suggests that successful desisters tend to have a plan that they adhere to (Maruna, 2001). It is likely that one aspect of such a plan will entail overcoming certain obstacles. Previous research has identified a number of obstacles that offenders are likely to face as they attempt to move away from crime, in relation to employment, alcohol, drugs and so forth (National Audit Office, 2002; SEU, 2002), and it has been shown that individuals are more likely to desist if they are able to successfully overcome such obstacles (Farrall, 2002). An examination of the individual's prospective view point can offer a greater insight into the types of obstacles offenders face when attempting to desist, and how these obstacles are perceived by the individual. Further, such an approach is likely to reveal how such perceptions inform intended action (Forste *et al*, 2010: 2), and how this influences actual behaviour, as behavioural intention is central to actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

1.5 The Probation Context

The development of the desistance literature has broadly coincided with the resurgent interest in exploring “What Works” in community interventions in the UK (for example: Burnett and

Roberts, 2004; Mair, 2004; McGuire, 1995; Newman and Nutley, 2003). This, in turn, has led to the New Labour government establishing “reducing re-offending” as an explicit aim of criminal justice policy (Carter, 2003; Halliday, 2001; Home Office, 2004a). A rising prison population and public anxieties about the extent of re-offending – particularly among those under Probation supervision – are contemporary concerns in the UK (Doyle, 2008; Ford, 2009; Leapman, 2006), so it is pertinent to explore the topic of desistance in relation to Probation interventions at this time.

However, much of the recent policy focus on reducing re-offending has been concerned with young offenders (Soothill *et al*, 2003: 408), to the neglect of the needs of adult offenders (Soothill *et al*, 2009: 84). Further, contemporary Probation can be characterised in terms of its focus upon the management of offenders, targets and objectives, reflecting the rise and significance of risk within the criminal justice system (Denney, 2005; Hope and Sparks, 2000; Kemshall, 2003; O’Malley, 1998; Stenson and Sullivan, 2001). The effect of this has been a shift towards an ethos of “responsibilisation” and “individualism”, whereby the individual offender is held accountable for reducing their own risk of re-offending. In other words, recent changes within the Probation Service mean that the important relationship between officer and offender has been altered to the extent that individuals attempting to desist are likely to receive less help from their supervising officers.

The significant changes that Probation has undergone in recent years reinforce the importance of a desistance-focused research agenda, as it has become more uncertain how Probation can support individuals in their efforts to move away from crime. This, combined with the arguments

presented earlier in this chapter in relation to the lack of focus on “active agency” within desistance research, supports the justification for further research in this area. If Probation interventions assume that individuals are capable of exercising agency in order to reduce re-offending, then research needs to explore the nature of this agency and how individuals exercise it within the context of the Probation interventions to which they are subjected. The next section provides an overview of how this thesis aims to address this.

1.6 Thesis Overview

Chapter two provides an overview of Probation in England and Wales, offering a brief historical account of developments in the Probation Service before exploring some key contemporary features of the Service. In doing so, chapter two offers an account of Probation as engendering an ideology of individualism and responsabilisation, which renders the individual offender as accountable for reducing their own offending behaviour. Therefore, chapter two essentially outlines the context of the research and the background to the remainder of the thesis.

In chapter three the thesis develops towards a discussion of recent government responses to the challenge of reducing re-offending. A summary of the scale of the problem is provided, followed by an overview of recent changes to and trends in sentencing policy and practice. Theoretical explanations of re-offending are discussed, which provides a natural linkage between the discussion developed in chapters two and three, and the proceeding chapters on desistance.

In chapter four the key definitional and conceptual issues related to desistance are discussed. Crucially, the distinction between primary and secondary desistance is identified, and it is argued, contra Maruna *et al* (2004), that primary desistance is of theoretical interest. Chapter four also summarises the key findings from the existing desistance literature, highlighting the so-called “correlates” which are more likely to facilitate desistance.

Following this, chapter five provides the theoretical approach to desistance employed in this thesis. Existing theoretical explanations of desistance are introduced, and it is argued that existing research is too structuralist in nature. Further, it is suggested that the usage of “agency” in desistance research is under-theorised and vague, and chapter five seeks to address this by providing a more comprehensive notion of agency.

Chapter six outlines the research framework and research questions. The research framework provided gives proper consideration to both structure and agency and, more importantly, the interaction between the two. This chapter provides linkage between the theoretical framework discussed in chapter five, and the data collection and analysis methods discussed in chapter seven.

Chapter seven also discusses the sampling framework. Justification for the use of semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews is provided, and details of the sample profile and analytical framework are outlined. The analytical process draws upon the work of Attride-Sterling (2001) in relation to thematic networks analysis, as this allows for an approach that combines existing theoretical knowledge with emerging data.

Chapters eight, nine and ten provide the findings from the analysis, and the qualitative data presented are explicitly related to the research questions. Individual thematic networks are presented for each chapter to highlight the linkages between major and minor themes in the interview data. Chapter eleven offers a discussion of the key findings from the research, relating the analysis to the earlier theoretical discussion of structure-agency interaction in primary desistance. The thesis is concluded in chapter twelve, where limitations of the study are identified and recommendations for future research are offered.

1.7 A Research Agenda

This thesis identifies a number of shortcomings in the existing desistance research. Further research is required that considers primary desistance as a transitional stage between offending and desistance. There is also a need to give greater consideration to the role of the individual agent in the desistance process and, in particular, with how the individual mediates their social context in seeking to sustain desistance. Finally, research is required that explores how Probation interventions are experienced and mediated by individuals in the early stages of desistance, particularly in relation to their social context.

In this thesis, therefore, I seek to develop knowledge of desistance by specifically focusing on the initial transition towards desistance. The aim is to gain a greater understanding of individuals' attitudes and experiences in the immediate aftermath of making a decision to desist, and how these relate to their prospective strategies for sustaining desistance. More specifically, I aim to

explore the social context of individuals in the early stages of desistance, particularly in relation to those structural factors which have been shown to be associated with desistance, and how individuals mediate these in relation to their future strategies. I also seek to develop understanding of the Probation interventions that these individuals are subjected to, how these influence individuals' personal and social contexts, and whether individuals perceive these to enable or constrain their attempts to desist.

2. PROBATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of contemporary Probation in England and Wales, in order to explore the current context of re-offending, including attempts to reduce re-offending and desistance from crime. First, the chapter will provide a brief history of Probation, in order to contextualise more recent trends. The intention here is not to provide a full historical account, as excellent reviews exist elsewhere (McWilliams, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987; Oldfield, 2002; Vanstone, 2004). Rather, the intention is to provide the context within which recent trends have taken place. Second, the chapter outlines recent trends with regard to the new Community Order, Offender Management, risk, contestability and targets. Finally, the chapter offers an account of New Labour's approach to Probation, highlighting the emergence of 'bureaucratic positivism' (Whitehead, 2007) and the implications of an underlying discourse of agency.

2.1 A Brief History of Probation in England and Wales, 1907-1997

2.1.1 From “advise, assist and befriend” to the “demise of the rehabilitative ideal”

The origins of the Probation Service are often traced back to the work of the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS) (Guardian, 2007), whose work in the late-19th Century demonstrated a concern for assisting those who had fallen into crime through drunkenness (NPD, 2007: 2; Vanstone, 2004: 7). This led to the establishment of the police court missionary whose task it was to maintain contact with, and offer guidance and support to, those who the magistrates released into their care (McWilliams, 1983). Probation was established as a statutory

responsibility with the Probation of Offenders Act 1907, which introduced ‘advise, assist and befriend’ as a key principle of work with offenders (NPD, 2007: 3-4). The 1907 Act, therefore, heralded Probation as a ‘systematically organised, publicly funded, national agency’ (Garland, 1985: 22).

The aim of Probation for much of the first half of the 20th Century was to restore offenders to full citizenship, thereby simultaneously reducing the number of criminals and increasing the number of good citizens (Oldfield, 2002). Probation in the post-Second World War era was underpinned by the notions of universalism and state-led interventionism to provide all citizens with a basic minimum standard of living circumscribed by a Marshallian view of social rights. Public opinion was positive, and this allowed practitioners to work with individual offenders to achieve change (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 26). As such, the welfare state marked a critical moment in Probation history as it allowed officers to undertake casework with their clients, helping the individual who had ‘... resorted to crime in a mistaken attempt to solve his problems’ (King, 1964: 64).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the treatment model developed further in Britain and the USA, declaring that causes of crime could be discovered and appropriate interventions could be implemented, which became known as the ‘rehabilitative ideal’ (Allen, 1959). This era has been described as ‘penal welfarism’, as Garland (2001) writes:

The ideologies and interests of the new penal professionals thus articulated smoothly with the strategies of rule and forms of authority characteristic of the welfare state. ‘Reform’, ‘rehabilitation’, ‘treatment and training’, ‘the best interests of the child’, - all of these objectives meshed effectively with the new mechanisms of social regulation, with government through experts, and with

ideological stress upon universal citizenship and social integration that characterised social policies in the post-war period (2001: 47).

During the 1960s, the legitimacy of Probation began to be scrutinised, but the Service continued to expand in size and scope and retained its welfarist principles. One possible explanation for this paradox may be that, although methods and approaches began to be questioned, the underlying welfarist principles and wider feelings of optimism and confidence continued. However, a stronger challenge emerged in the 1970s that would lead to fundamental change in Probation (Nash, 2004).

Labeling theorists (Becker, 1963) and ‘new’ criminologists (Taylor *et al*, 1973, 1975) began to scrutinise the treatment model of Probation (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 26-27). However, the most significant challenge emerged from empirical studies which cast doubt about the efficacy of treatment interventions. Martinson’s (1974) often cited “nothing works” article marked a critical watershed in the development of Probation in the 20th Century, bringing into question the ability of treatment interventions to reduce re-offending (see also: Brody, 1976; Martinson, 1979). In the UK, the IMPACT (Intensive Matched Probation and After-Care Treatment) study was undertaken with the hope that it would provide evidence of reduced re-offending among those supervised on smaller caseloads (Folkard *et al*, 1974, 1976). However, the results of the IMPACT study were similar to those of Martinson (1974) and Brody (1975), that Probation interventions had little successful effect upon reducing re-offending. This led the Director of the Home Office Research Unit to declare that: ‘Penal treatments, as we significantly describe them, do not have any reformative effect’ (Croft, 1978: 4). What followed was a lengthy period of time where the

Home Office showed little interest in conducting research into the effects of Probation interventions on the future behaviour of offenders (Raynor, 2008: 74).

2.1.2 From “nothing works” to “alternatives to custody”

As such, the “nothing works” movement marked the demise of welfarism as an approach to working with offenders, yet an alternative paradigm did not exist at that time, as Bottoms (1977) wrote: ‘It is abundantly clear that there is no adequate overarching penal theory to replace the collapsed rehabilitative consensus of fifteen years ago’ (1977: 91). The lack of state support for research into interventions with offenders, and the absence of a suitable paradigm to replace penal welfarism, meant that new approaches which were developed during the 1980s were pluralistic and were often not evaluated – largely because Probation was by then regarded as an ‘alternative to custody’ (Raynor, 2002b: 1182; Whitehead, 2007:52).

Some research reviews, notably from Canada, offered evidence of interventions that could help to reduce re-offending (Lipsey, 1999; McGuire, 1995; McGuire and Priestley, 1985; Ross *et al*, 1986). Probation services began to implement cognitive-behavioural programmes (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 77), and the government began to outline a new strategy for Probation that placed the Service centre-stage and offered a renewed optimism in regard to interventions directed towards rehabilitation, albeit within a more restricted sentencing framework (Raynor, 2002b: 1178).

The Criminal Justice Act 1991, however, introduced a “just deserts” approach to working with offenders. The emphasis here lay within the ‘progressive restriction of liberty’ rather than on reforming the offender (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 43), underpinned by a belief that non-custodial options were “too soft” (Worrall and Hoy, 2005: 40). Liberal opinion was supportive, despite the break with Probation tradition that would ensue, because the Act emphasised a reduction in the prison population to ease overcrowding (Nellis, 2002: 28). Probation became more offence-focused and became more concerned with punishment in the community (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 44). Thus, the 1990s saw Probation make a transition from being ‘an alternative to punishment to an alternative form of punishment’ (Hudson, 2003: 154).

2.1.3 From “punitive populism” to New Labour

During the early- to mid-1990s Probation would be sidelined as a result of a rapid increase in the use of custody and tougher community penalties (Nellis, 2002: 29). In part this was the result of an emerging hegemonic discourse of ‘punitive populism’ (Bottoms, 1995; Matthews, 2005; Pratt, 2002) that saw crime as symptomatic of moral decline. Despite an overt hostility towards welfare principles, the Conservative government from 1979-1992 had largely protected the role of the Probation Officer, owing to ‘the fact that they were essential to the policies of the Home Secretaries’ (Raynor, 2002b: 1181). Since then, however, criminal justice policy has become more highly politicised (Robinson and Raynor, 2006: 334), leading to rapid changes in the approach to dealing with crime and those who commit it.

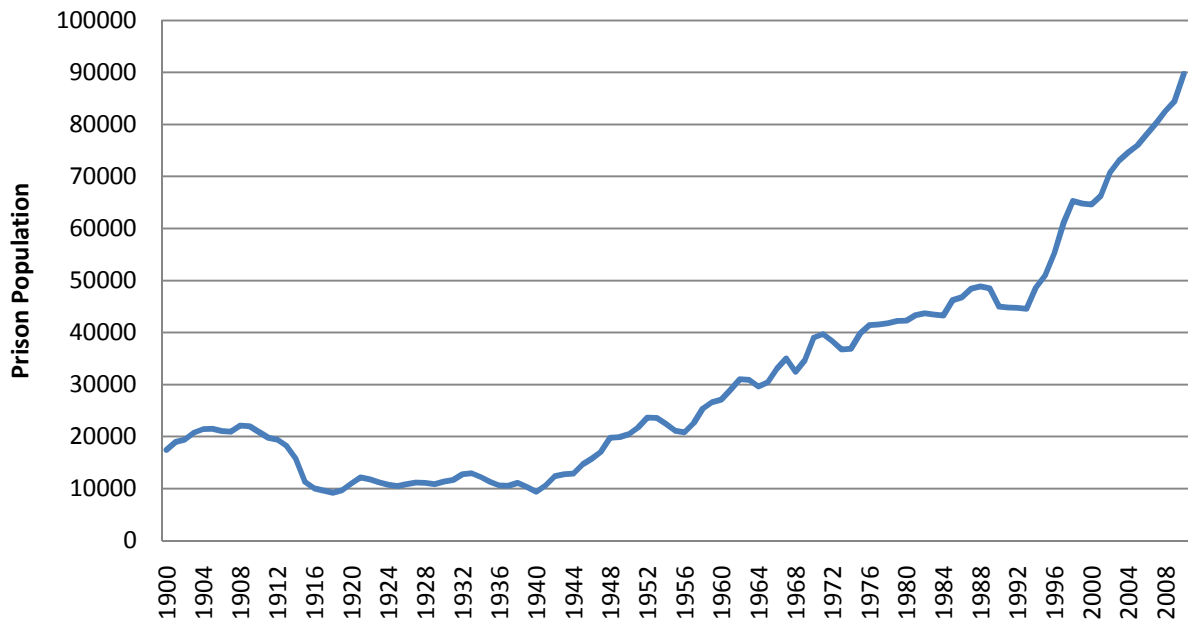
In 1993, in response to growing public anxiety about crime following a number of high-profile cases (notably the James Bulger case), Michael Howard, then Home Secretary, gave his “prison works” speech to the Conservative party conference:

Prison works. It ensures that we are protected from murderers, muggers and rapists - and it makes many who are tempted to commit crime think twice ... This may mean that more people will go to prison. I do not flinch from that. We shall no longer judge the success of our system of justice by a fall in our prison population (Howard, 1993 cited in Nicholls and Katz, 2004).

This signalled the beginning of a “penal auction”, with both main parties vying to prove to the electorate that they would be toughest on crime (see, for example: Blair, 1993: 27; Macintyre, 1993), and the prison population, despite beginning to decrease in the late-1980s, increased at an exponential rate from 1993 to the present day (see figure 1). Michael Howard also increased the stringency of National Standards in 1995, which further reduced the discretion of individual Probation Officers (Nellis, 2002: 29). National Standards had been introduced in 1988 (Whitehead, 2007: 36), and while they increased accountability and reduced practitioner discretion by pervading almost all areas of practitioner work and encouraging individual Probation Officers to consider less the substance of supervision, and more its administration, they also helped to reduce variability and inconsistency within Probation practice (Worrall and Hoy, 2005: 84). The autonomy of individual Probation Officers was further challenged by the Probation (Amendment) Rules 1995, which omitted rule 26 from the Probation Rules 1984. The effect of this was to remove the requirement that an appointed Probation Officer must have a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (The Probation (Amendment) Rules 1995, SI 1995/2622). This reduced the legitimacy of the Probation Officer role, and also meant that there

was a shortage of trained Probation Officers at the time that the National Probation Service was established (Worrall and Hoy, 2005: 85).

Figure 1 Total Prison Population by Year, 1900-2008



Source: Ministry of Justice, 2009c.

Since its inception in 1907, the Probation Service had undergone a lengthy period of ‘penal modernity’ (or welfarism) , with the concepts of individualisation and reformation at its core, reflecting the broader politics of social change and social justice, which had linked crime to poverty and socio-economic deprivation (Garland, 1996: 466), and also to more general humanitarian and welfare-based considerations. However, the 1970s witnessed the demise of the rehabilitative ideal, and Probation in the 1980s was recast as an alternative to custody. Although attempts to design and implement rehabilitative approaches existed in Probation services during

this time, the punitive populism of the 1990s and the progressive restriction on practitioner autonomy saw Probation recast again as an alternative form of punishment. However, it would undergo further rapid change under New Labour.

2.2 Recent Developments in Probation – Restructuring Probation Towards Offender

Management

2.2.1 The National Probation Service

The New Labour government elected in 1997 committed itself to an evidence-based, “what works”, approach, including: the implementation of the Effective Practice Initiative (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 80), the publication of the ‘Effective Practice Guide’ (Chapman and Hough, 1998), the development of the Crime Reduction Programme (Maguire, 2004) and the evaluation of various ‘Pathfinder’ projects (Lewis *et al*, 2007; Rex and Gelsthorpe, 2002). These initiatives were intended to inform policy decisions, although some have argued that this has not always been the case (Lewis, 2008: 64-66). In addition, in 2001 the 54 Probation Services were replaced by a National Probation Service, establishing 42 Probation areas and a National Directorate (Worrall and Hoy, 2005: 92). A new vocabulary also emerged to define the sentences that Probation would deliver, in part in an attempt to ensure that Probation would not be seen as a “soft option”. Table 1 indicates the transition in vocabulary within Probation sentences.

Table 1 Changes to Community Sentences for Adults

Former Sentence	Became
Probation orders	Community Rehabilitation Order
Community service order	Community Punishment Order
Combination order	Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order

Adapted from: Raynor and Vanstone, 2002: 101.

This new vocabulary placed “community”, “rehabilitation” and “punishment” at the heart of Probation work and the remit of the new National Service was ‘enforcement, rehabilitation and public protection’ (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 45). Indeed, in practice these changes entailed a greater emphasis upon enforcement, such that offenders had to fulfil the requirements of their sentence or face prosecution for failure to cooperate (Raynor and Vanstone, 2002: 103-104). Moreover, in practice these changes reflected an attitude that rehabilitative work was a ‘consequence of crime’, as opposed to something that offenders received as a result of their difficult circumstances. Indeed, rehabilitative work was regarded as something which would benefit the wider community, rather than just helping the individual offender (Raynor and Vanstone, 2002:113-114). Hence, the identity and philosophy of Probation altered at the turn of the century, as did its organisation and delivery. However, New Labour would soon make further changes to Probation, introducing a new Community Order and establishing a commitment to Offender Management.

2.2.2 The Community Order: A menu of requirements

The New Labour government had voiced concerns about the existing system of sentencing, and the Halliday Report (Halliday, 2001) responded to this by providing a number of recommendations for future sentencing reforms, which informed the following White Paper, *Justice for All* (Home Office, 2002), and the Criminal Justice Act 2003. One of the recommendations of the Halliday Report was that community sentencing was too complex and that sentencers should be provided with a set of options from which to construct a sentence. This recommendation became enshrined in the Criminal Justice Act 2003, as sentencers were given a menu of requirements from which to choose to construct individual sentences for offenders (see table 2) (Criminal Justice Act 2003, s. 177). The Act states that the ‘requirement or requirements forming part of the community order must be ... the most suitable for the offender’ and that ‘the restrictions on liberty imposed by the order must be ... commensurate with the seriousness of the offence’ (s. 148).

These requirements were also intended to be available for individuals who would have previously been given a short custodial sentence (that is, less than 12 months), which would be replaced by “custody plus”, involving a short custodial sentence and a period on licence in the community (Criminal Justice Act 2003, s. 181, 182). However, the ‘shelving’ of this sentence has meant that a significant group of offenders are denied access to resettlement interventions that could otherwise facilitate a reduction in re-offending (Lewis *et al*, 2007: 49).

Table 2 The 12 Requirements of the New Community Order

Requirement	Description
Unpaid work	Up to 300 hours supervised unpaid work on a community project
Supervision	The offender must attend appointments with a responsible officer
Programme	The offender must participate in an accredited programme specified in the order (e.g. substance abuse programme; drink impaired driver programme; offending behaviour programme)
Drug Rehabilitation	Drug treatment programme lasting from six months to three years
Alcohol Treatment	Alcohol treatment programme lasting from six months to three years
Mental Health Treatment	Treatment from a medical practitioner or psychologist
Residence	The offender must reside at a place specified in the order for a specified time
Activity	The offender must participate in an activity specified in the order, or present him/herself to a person specified in the order. The activity might, for example, include reparative work
Prohibited Activity	The offender must refrain from engaging in specified activities for a specified period (e.g. not attending football matches)
Exclusion	The offender is prohibited from entering a place specified in the order for a specified time
Curfew	The offender must remain, for specified periods, at a specified place
Attendance Centre (offenders under 25 years only)	The offender must go to an attendance centre for a specified number of hours

Adapted from: Ministry of Justice, 2007a: 14.

2.2.3 Offender Management

In 2004, the government's response to the Carter Report (2003) was published (Home Office, 2004b), giving approval to the proposed National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS would bring together the Prison and Probation services, and introduce the concept of an Offender Manager, and Carter (2003) claimed that this 'would ensure the end-to-end management of offenders, regardless of whether they were given a custodial or community sentence' (2003: 33). The introduction of Offender Management also witnessed the implementation of a new allocation tool (see table 3) to determine the type of sentence appropriate for each individual. One of the principles outlined in the government's strategy entailed that resources follow risk in order to determine the priority objectives for individual offenders (NOMS, 2006a: 46), and the decision-making process would be informed by assessments made using the Offender Assessment System (OASys) (National Probation Directorate, 2005: 8).

The government's *Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan* (Home Office, 2004c) outlined seven pathways that had been identified as contributing to re-offending (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), and that would be targeted to help individuals to move away from crime. These were: accommodation; education, training and employment; health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; and, attitudes, thinking and behavior (Home Office, 2004c). Therefore, the Offender Management strategy outlined by the government suggests a concern for the social factors that contribute to offending, but that the tiering framework devised to allocate

interventions limits rehabilitative approaches to medium- and high-risk cases (Maguire and Raynor, 2006a).

The strategy for Offender Management also outlined a new organisational structure for correctional services, stating that Probation Officers would become Offender Managers who could broker services and interventions for their individual cases. This would create a purchaser-provider split within Probation (Carter, 2003) that would detach officers from some face-to-face work with offenders (see also below, “Contestability”).

Table 3 Sentence and Offender Profiles within the Tiering Framework

Tier	Sentence profile	Offender profile
1	Punish	Medium or low risk harm cases Low likelihood of re-offending cases
2	Punish and Help	Reasonably motivated, reasonably compliant offenders Medium or low risk of harm
3	Punish and Help and Change	Medium/high likelihood of re-offending cases with multi-factor intervention plans Medium risk of harm cases Vulnerable offenders
4	Punish and Help and Change and Control	High and very high risk of serious harm cases, public protection priorities High local and national priority cases (prolific and/or persistent offenders)

Source: NOMS, 2006b: 48, 50.

2.2.4 Risk

Risk management remains a central focus of the Offender Management strategy outlined by New Labour, and the concern for risk evident in current policy has grown since the 1990s (Kemshall, 2003). The risk assessment tools OASys and the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS) were introduced in the Probation Service in 2001, combining clinical and actuarial approaches to assessing risk and the probability of re-offending. Such techniques draw upon ‘factorial calculations rather than individual diagnostic and assessment techniques’ (Hudson, 2003: 193), leading to the prediction of an ‘individual’s likely behaviour from the behaviour of others in similar circumstances’, or the prediction of ‘risk on the basis of an individual’s similarity to others who have been risky in the past’ (Kemshall, 2003: 65).

As these tools only provide probabilities of re-offending, there is no way of knowing whether or not an individual will actually re-offend, or when, how or why they might re-offend. As such, ‘there is a danger of investing actuarial tools with a form of knowledge they do not possess and ascribing a weight that should not be attached’ (Whitehead, 2007: 49). Consequently, contemporary Probation practice marks a shift from the welfarist principles of exploring the past to understand why offending behaviour occurred, to the risk-based principles of managing the future by identifying, categorising and controlling risk (Oldfield, 2002: 46).

Whitehead (2007) argues that risk can be presented as an ‘artefact’ which has an objective existence independent of the person who makes judgements about it. On this basis, risk assessments can provide objective, unambiguous knowledge within a positivist paradigm, which

enables the practitioner to make accurate judgements about future behaviour. Alternatively, he continues, risk can be regarded from a constructivist position, arguing that risk is a social construction that is dependent upon political and cultural circumstances, as well as the individual conducting the assessment. This approach suggests that risk knowledge is not unambiguous, but rather is variable and can be manipulated to serve political or managerial ends. The practitioner themselves may inflate risk knowledge, as they seek to avoid taking risks of their own in the current climate (2007: 50-51). The danger of risk assessment tools, therefore, is that they may make claims to presenting unambiguous, objective, scientific knowledge when, in reality, the knowledge they provide is uncertain and variable. There is also a danger of applying the methods of the natural sciences to the social world as the latter is an open system (Bhaskar, 1979), making the actions of individuals, including offenders, unpredictable.

2.2.5 Contestability

The government's strategy for Offender Management strongly emphasises contestability within the Probation Service. The Carter Report (2003) argued that more effective service delivery could be achieved through greater use of contestability (2003: 34), although this claim was not evidenced in the Report. The government's vision for contestability derives from the experience of contracting-out prison services to private firms (Home Office, 2004b: 14). Some have argued that the use of the private sector has increased efficiency and effectiveness (Hutto, 1990; Logan, 1990, 1996; Logan and Rausch, 1985; MacDonald, 1990, 1992; Young, 1987), while others have argued that successes have been overstated (DiIulio, 1988; Mobley and Geis, 2001; Robbins,

1988; Ryan and Ward, 1989), and that private sector companies can manipulate policy to achieve their own ends (Shichor, 1995).

The Probation Service offered strong opposition to the introduction of contestability, and a number of authors have highlighted the potential consequences of pursuing this objective (see for example: Nellis, 2006). Similar questions have been raised in regard to the government's introduction of a purchaser-provider split within the Probation Service (Bhui, 2004: 99; Lewis, 2008: 74), particularly in relation to the supervision of individual offenders and the potentially deleterious effects upon the officer-offender relationship (see Robinson and Dignan, 2004). However, the Management of Offenders and Sentencing Bill 2005 provided the Home Secretary with powers to direct probation boards to commission services from specific providers (s. 2).

Although the 2005 Bill was not passed during the 2004/05 Parliamentary session, the government demonstrated a continued commitment to introducing contestability into Probation, publishing a consultation document (NOMS, 2005) and, shortly afterwards, in a summary of responses to the consultation the government stated the intention to 'introduce legislation to restructure the Probation Service as soon as Parliamentary time allows' (NOMS, 2006a: 8). Later that year the government outlined further plans to increase the use of contestability:

This year and next year we are requiring local probation areas, on a voluntary basis, to double and then double again the proportion of services they contract out. From April 2008, legislation permitting, we will go further and compete a much larger proportion of the interventions they provide – up to £250m worth of services a year (NOMS, 2006b: 2).

The Offender Management Act 2007 received royal assent in July of the same year, and gave the Secretary of State powers for full commissioning and contestability to be introduced to Probation services (s. 3).

2.2.6 Targets

The explicit setting of objectives, and later targets, began in the 1980s, inscribed within the framework of New Public Management. Under New Labour, targets are central to the approach to improving public sector services as a whole, and Probation more specifically (Whitehead, 2007: 39-40). Targets now pervade considerable areas of Probation work including: OASys assessment completions within set time frames; breach proceedings initiated within set time frames; attendance at arranged appointments by offenders; unpaid work requirement completions; and Pre-Sentence Reports completed within set time frames (Ministry of Justice, 2007b). In 2007-2008, for example, the target for accredited programme completions was 17,319 (NPS, 2008: 10), and specific targets exist for individual areas, for example the target for completed unpaid work requirements in South Wales in 2007-2008 was 1,318 (National Audit Office, 2008a). The emphasis on targets of this nature is concerned with the timeliness and number of completions of certain aspects of Probation work, rather than on the engagement with the offender or the quality of the work completed. Thus, the concern is with inputs, process and outputs, rather than content, quality or meaningful outcomes.

Indeed, of the targets contained in the Integrated Probation Performance Framework, 20 per cent focus on timeliness and 18 per cent on the number of requirement completions, whereas only 11 per cent relate to quality and these are almost all in relation to risk assessments and pre-sentence

reports (National Audit Office, 2008a: 60). No targets measure the quality of engagement with offenders, despite evidence to suggest that this can be a key factor in facilitating a reduction in re-offending (Mason and Prior, 2008), and there is a lack of focus on measuring the quality of offender management (National Audit Office, 2008a: 35). Whitehead (2007) writes that targets are arbitrary devices that give the impression of precision, whereas they are actually subjective and are formed on the basis of human judgement. They are distinct from objectives, which can relate to the same themes as targets but need not be so precisely quantifiable, and also from priorities (2007: 40-41) – targets, in other words, are more quantitative in nature than objectives or priorities. He continues to argue that a target culture, as opposed to a person-centred service, is ‘much more bureaucratic, mechanised and subject to routine, and reflects a one-size-fits-all approach’ (2007: 41).

There are also issues to be considered in relation to the influence of target achievement in other areas of the criminal justice system, and of competing targets within Probation (Whitehead, 2007: 43), which could lead to undesirable consequences. For example, it is possible that an offender could escape breach for not attending a supervision session as reporting this would affect the service’s attendance target. Further, budgets, and performance-related pay for senior managers, are linked to target achievement, which could lead to questionable information in relation to sentencing advice (Whitehead, 2007: 44). There are three further reasons to be sceptical of the target culture that currently dominates Probation.

First, if completion targets are reached for a particular requirement this could reduce the incentive for staff to ensure offenders who are part way through the course to complete, nor does it

encourage continued use of the requirement in sentencing, despite its potential value in reducing re-offending. Second, establishing programme completions as a target may encourage Offender Managers to classify more absences as “acceptable”, which would preclude breach action, as unacceptable absences would prevent the offender from completing the programme. Third, targets may deter Offender Managers from continuing to work with offenders once breach action has been instigated, because offenders are less likely to attend appointments once breach proceedings have begun and this would detract from the area’s attendance performance target (National Audit Office, 2008a: 36).

Despite these potential consequences, targets are currently a dominant feature of Probation in England and Wales. The qualities and tasks involved in working with people within various organisations – such as, listening, understanding, empathising, and problem-solving – are distinct from those which are measured within the target culture, but the latter have eclipsed the former through the pursuit of ‘more bureaucratic forms of accountability’ (Whitehead, 2007: 45).

2.3 New Labour’s Approach to Working with Offenders

The discussion presented thus far may suggest that what was once a rehabilitative/welfarist model of Probation has been replaced by a punitive/risk-focused service. However, it is rather the case that ‘at times correction and reform have held centre stage, though punishment was *never fully displaced* – and ... the reverse is also true’ (Hutchinson, 2006: 444 emphasis added). Indeed, some commentators suggest that certain accounts of penal history have overstated the extent of the rehabilitative ideal during the penal welfare era (O’Malley, 2004; Zedner, 2002), and

Vaughan (2000) has argued that punitiveness and reform are always entwined in forms of modern punishment (2000: 26-27). This, I argue, is also the case for Probation under New Labour.

In theory, the approach adopted by New Labour suggests a more balanced approach to working with offenders, suggesting a concern for punishment, public protection, resettlement and rehabilitation, as outlined in the Management of Offenders and Sentencing Bill 2005 (s. 1). Further, the government's approach appears to show a concern for 'social rehabilitation' (Robinson and Crow, 2009), within the seven pathways outlined above. However, programmes of prison expansion (Home Office, 2006a), contestability, the expansion of risk assessment, and the continuation of populist approaches to sentencing (Lewis, 2008: 78) appear to contradict the more humanitarian proposals. Further, the shift towards 'bureaucratic positivism' in the use of targets, quantification and measurement (Whitehead, 2007) indicates that Probation work has become more detached from face-to-face work with offenders, and concerns have moved away from exploring "why" particular behaviours occurred towards the more immediate questions of "what" has taken place (2007: 39).

The needs of the offender are now narrowly redefined as 'criminogenic needs', or individual risk factors (Hannah-Moffat, 2005). Structural constraints upon the decisions and motivation of offenders to desist, including access to social, cultural and economic resources, are of little concern (Gray, 2005: 939), and interventions which target the causes of crime are directed, largely, at moral deficiencies and personal shortcomings (Hannah-Moffat, 1999). Put simply, individuals are responsible for the consequences of social structures which shape their lives, yet which they may be unaware of (Squires, 2006: 155).

The emphasis which is placed on the offender to take responsibility for reducing their own risk of re-offending mirrors the wider approach to social inclusion adopted by the New Labour government. Rather than attempting to remove the structural constraints which socially exclude sub-groups of the population, the focus is instead on equality of opportunity (Jordan, 1998: 18). This responsabilisation, then, creates an environment within which failure to take advantage of the opportunities created will be seen as an individual deficiency. The implication of this is that processes of moral engineering are regarded as the most appropriate intervention to reintegrate offenders, rather than approaches which tackle structural inequalities (Gray, 2005: 940).

One of the key distinctions between rehabilitation in penal modernity and the present day is that the offender is no longer regarded as a disadvantaged and marginalised individual, but rather is recast as a rational decision maker whose criminality is a response to situational circumstance. As such, offending can be controlled through the actuarial identification of individuals' risk of offending (Garland, 1996), and interventions are designed to encourage offenders to reduce their own risk of re-offending. This is exemplified by New Labour's emphasis upon risk assessment and programmes designed to challenge individuals' cognitions and behaviour, as discussed above. Programmes are also offence-focused, which provides the explicit message that the offender's actions were wrong. This suggests an ideology within Probation policy and practice such that "irrational" choices are blamed upon the individual, rather than structural constraints:

Citizens who do not make the desired choice are recast as imprudent and reckless, blameworthy and responsible for their own misfortune. Disadvantage and exclusion are reframed as matters of choice and not of structural processes, crime itself becomes a matter of irrational and imprudent choices. Citizens who fall into the imprudent category are seen as ripe for remoralization ... Offenders are of course a key group for such a remoralization and responsabilisation agenda (Kemshall, 2003: 19).

The aim of these approaches is, therefore, that as the offender recognises the immorality of their actions, they will draw the conclusion that they need to alter their behaviour, and the attitudes that underpinned it, in order to prevent against future offending (Duff, 2001: 101). Thus, offending behaviour programmes are underpinned by a philosophy of responsabilisation, with respect to the fact that they emphasise the personal responsibility and moral wrong-doing of the individual at whom they are targeted (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 121).

Of course, an argument can be made that New Labour have introduced proposals that recognise the influence of structural factors on offending, and it has been acknowledged that offenders are likely to experience multiple disadvantage. Evidence suggests that a more holistic approach to interventions is the most effective method of reducing re-offending (McGuire, 2002). Further, research has suggested that delivery of such an approach requires multi-agency partnerships and communication to provide services both in custody and the community (Partridge, 2004). Such findings, for example, informed the development of Offender Management (Home Office, 2004b). However, I argue that within such developments there is an underlying discourse of agency, as there is an implicit emphasis upon notions of individualism, responsibility, reflexivity and risk (see Giddens, 1990, 1998). A consequence of this is that individuals are, ultimately,

responsible for seizing the opportunities available to overcome structural barriers to reducing their own risk of re-offending.

This ideology reflects a shift in welfare paradigms, towards greater individualism, and ‘state institutions must now develop concurrently with the idea of the “self-monitoring individual”, and the “reflexive agent”’ (Fudge and Williams, 2006: 588). As such, the state is responsible for enabling individuals to confront challenges independently. This is because the individual agent is regarded as being responsible for their own destiny, and it is assumed that they have the power to change the conditions in which they live if they choose to do so (Greener, 2002: 692-693). As Giddens (1998) suggests:

We have to make our lives in a more active way than was true of previous generations, and we need more actively to accept responsibilities for the consequences of what we do and the lifestyle habits we adopt (1998: 37).

An example of this can be found by exploring employment, which is at the heart of New Labour’s strategy for reducing re-offending, and in-keeping with the wider programme of social inclusion (HM Government, 2005; Young and Matthews, 2003: 20). Yet the government’s policies, designed to facilitate (re-)entry into employment, are premised upon a hybrid of ‘work-first’ and ‘human capital’ approaches. The former ‘prioritise labour market attachment on the premise that any job is better than none’, while the latter emphasise the development of personal attitudes and skills ‘that will equip people to find and retain suitable jobs’ (Dean, 2003: 442). Thus, the emphasis of New Labour policy is upon ‘manipulating agency’, rather than tackling structural barriers to employment (Young and Matthews, 2003: 20).

A consequence of this approach is the perception that any work is better than no work (Young, 2002: 473), and there is little consideration of variability in demand for labour. For the majority of offenders, who are more likely to live in communities characterised by deprivation, poverty and unemployment, there is a greater probability that demand for labour will be scarce. Further, the desistance literature suggests that it is not merely having a job that decreases the likelihood of recidivism, but that it is the quality of employment and the subjective attachment the individual has to it (Weaver and McNeill, 2007a: 90; a finding which is also supported by Harper and Chitty's (2005) review of 'What Works'). However, policy and practice related to the employment of offenders is predominantly focused upon efforts to increase employability, thus reflecting an underlying discourse of agency. Further, while there is some evidence of attempts to try to engineer structural barriers to employment (see, HM Government, 2006), the overriding emphasis is upon getting offenders into any kind of work, regardless of quality or sustainability – in 2006/07 a target was set to place 15,000 offenders into employment, with a target of 12,000 sustaining employment for a period of four weeks (NPS, 2006).

Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of developments in Probation, charting the welfarist principles that underpinned its progress through much of the 20th Century, through the “nothing works” movement and the demise of the rehabilitative ideal, alternatives to custody, the punitive populism of the 1990s, and towards the present day. It will have been observed that there has been an enduring tension within Probation between rehabilitation and punishment, and that the

New Labour government has, in theory, sought to resolve this tension with a balance of proposals. However, the overriding emphasis has been upon introducing measures to enhance risk assessment and a form of ‘bureaucratic positivism’ that has detached the practitioner from much of the face-to-face work that underpinned interventions during penal modernity.

It is argued here that the underlying discourse of New Labour’s approach to Probation has been agency, with themes of responsabilisation and individualism taking primacy as individual offenders are encouraged to reduce their own risk of re-offending. Probation interventions, on the other hand, are now systematically measured through target achievement, giving the impression that a form of scientific quantifiable knowledge exists and, therefore, that, provided targets are met, then any re-offending that occurs must be a personal deficiency of the offender concerned. The government maintains that reducing re-offending is a key aim of Probation, and the approach taken would suggest that this can be achieved by ensuring public protection, the compliance of the offender, and by following certain processes to achieve specified outputs. Re-offending (and the reduction of it) has become the responsibility of the offender, and the following chapter explores the nature of re-offending, and responses to it, in greater detail.

3. REDUCING RE-OFFENDING: NEW LABOUR, PROBATION AND COMMUNITY SENTENCES

The previous chapter provided a brief overview of Probation policy and practice in England and Wales. It was observed that the Probation Service has undergone a transition from a concern with welfarism to a risk-focused organisation with public protection as the primary aim. It explored how a process of responsabilisation has rendered the individual offender as accountable for reducing their own propensity to re-offend, and how bureaucratic positivism has rendered the supervising officer as increasingly detached from the task of facilitating individuals' attempts to achieve this. This chapter builds upon this by exploring the nature of re-offending in greater detail, outlining government responses to the "problem" of re-offending in terms of sentencing trends, and the scale of the problem in terms of current reconviction data. The chapter concludes by highlighting some recent attempts to theorise persistent re-offending, providing a linkage to the following chapter which introduces the concept of desistance.

3.1 Responding to the "Problem" of Re-offending

Public protection has emerged as the government's priority goal in recent decades, largely as the result of the hegemonic discourse of risk within debates about crime and punishment (see for example: Hudson, 2003; Kemshall, 2003; Kemshall and Maguire, 2001). Alongside this, reducing re-offending has also become a dominant goal, partly because of the economic costs of recidivism. Re-offending is estimated to cost £11 billion per year, excluding damage and repair to property and the health of victims (CIPD, 2004: 1). However, reducing re-offending has also

become a priority goal because of evidence which suggests that repeat offenders are responsible for a significant amount of overall crime – indeed, it is alleged that ‘in England and Wales, half of all crimes are committed by 10% of offenders’ (Ministry of Justice, 2008a). In recent years, public protection and reducing re-offending have become the twin goals of the government’s Offender Management strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2009d). In its ‘Five Year Strategy for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-offending’ (Home Office, 2006b) the government outlined its commitment to these shared aims:

As well as needing offenders to be punished, a healthy and safe society needs them to be given every opportunity to reform – to get back onto the straight and narrow and become constructive contributors to the good of society as a whole. This is not just because it is morally right to enable people to change their lives for the better and overcome their failures and mistakes. It is also a practical recognition that more than half of all crime is currently committed by people who have been through the system and have not yet changed their behaviour. Reducing re-offending will cut crime and make Britain safer. This strategy ... explains how we will protect the public and punish offenders, but at the same time tackle the linked factors that make them more likely to commit crime again (Home Office, 2006b: 5).

The government’s strategy incorporates a mixed economy of providers, partnerships, and end-to-end offender management. Further, the strategy builds upon the provisions for sentencing established in Part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, in advocating the use of fines, Unpaid Work, custodial and community sentences (Home Office, 2006b). It was observed in the previous chapter that the Labour government since 1997 has transformed the community sentence, presenting it as a tough sentence designed to punish and deter offenders, while incorporating aspects designed to reduce re-offending through breaking the cycle of criminal activity. Prior to this, the community sentence had shifted from being an ‘alternative to custody to punishment in

the community', as the previous Conservative government responded to attacks on the rehabilitative powers of the Probation Service (and other institutions) (Worrall and Hoy, 2005: 23).

However, following the "What Works" movement, a rehabilitative ethos was restored to the community sentence, largely through the introduction, in the mid-1990s, of various programmes designed to help individual offenders to alter their attitudes and behaviour in order to reduce their own likelihood of re-offending (Raynor, 1996). When New Labour gained power, they advocated new evidence-based interventions in the community (Chapman and Hough, 1998), and established a commitment to evaluate the effects of various programmes, which could be delivered in the community, on reducing re-offending (Raynor, 2002a). Indeed, the National Probation Service was set the target of 60,000 accredited programme completions by 2004, with an expectation that this would result in a 5% reduction in reconvictions among those under supervision (Raynor and Vanstone, 2002: 104).

More recently, New Labour have advocated community sentences as a means of rehabilitating offenders, and this is justified on the basis that:

It's great news if an offender becomes an ex-offender thanks to a community sentence. But the people who benefit most are the general public who want to see less crime (Ministry of Justice, 2008a).

The benefits of reducing re-offending are often stated with reference to the reduced cost to the taxpayer, as well as the benefits of 'fewer victims' and 'safer communities' (Ministry of Justice,

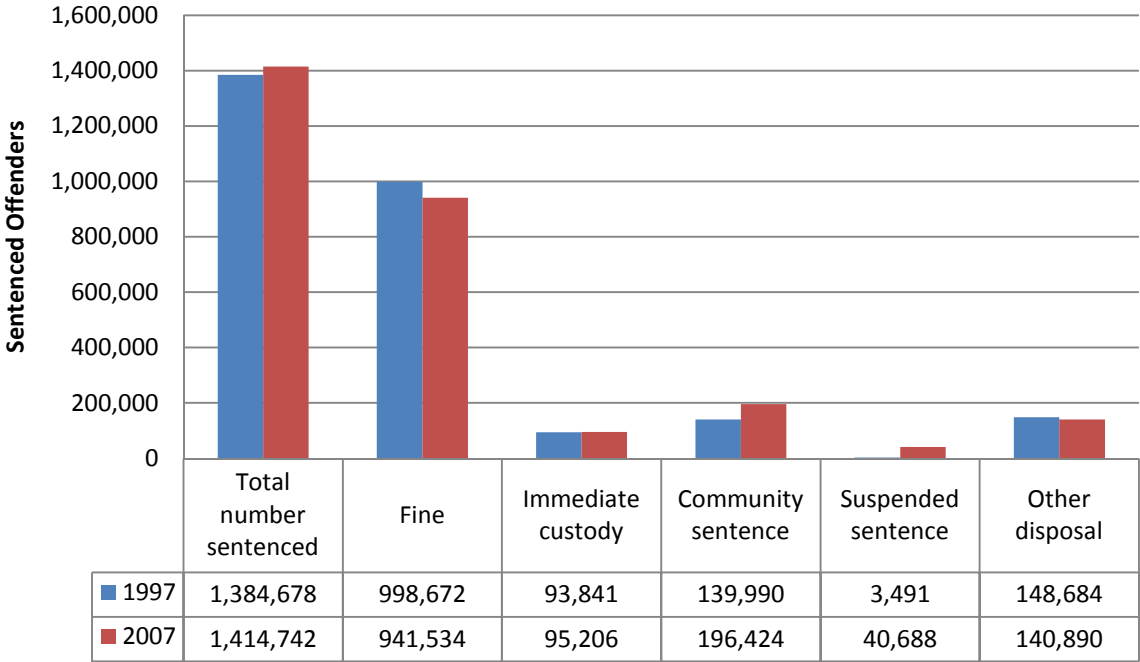
2008a). Similarly, the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) stated that ‘crime can have a devastating impact on the lives of victims. It scars entire communities, and the costs to society as a whole are huge’ (2002: 3), and efforts to reduce re-offending have also been justified by linking re-offending with public protection: ‘Public safety is not safeguarded when prisoners are released into homelessness, with no prospect of employment’ (2002: 4). These are clearly examples of ‘utilitarian rehabilitation’ (Robinson, 2008) as a rationale for community sentences.

Community sentences are now designed to tackle criminogenic rather than non-criminogenic (welfare) needs, because the latter are not directly linked to risk and, consequently, attention towards them will not reduce the calculated likelihood of re-offending (Robinson, 2008: 432). Thus, the commitment towards community sentences and efforts to reduce re-offending have been established less with reference to the wider social structural factors that influence crime causation, nor the difficulties that confront individual offenders in their attempts to move away from crime (Robinson, 2008: 432-433). Rather, the emphasis has been upon the positive effects upon wider society in terms of public protection, safer communities and reduced economic cost.

As a result of this, the use of community sentences has increased during the period in which New Labour have been in power (see figure 2). Indeed, community sentences were given in 196,424 cases in 2007, an increase of 56,434 since 1997. The most common disposal in 2007 was fines, accounting for 66.6% of all sentences, although this has decreased from 72.1% since 1997. Custody accounted for 6.7% of all sentences in 2007, a slight increase since 1997, although the proportion of sentences resulting in custody has remained broadly consistent over this time period. The largest increase (from 0.3% in 1997 to 2.9% in 2007) was in the use of suspended

sentences, largely as a result of the introduction of the Suspended Sentence Order (SSO) in the Criminal Justice Act 2003. The SSO was introduced for offences committed after April 2005 and replaced the Fully Suspended Sentence (FSS) (Ministry of Justice, 2009a: 16).

Figure 2 Total numbers sentenced and disposals used, 1997, 2007



Source: Ministry of Justice, 2009a: 23.

Thus, while the prison population has increased rapidly since New Labour came to power, the use of custody as a proportion of total sentences has remained broadly similar between 1997 and 2007, largely as a result of increases in the use of the Community Order and the SSO. As discussed in the previous chapter, the introduction of the Community Order and the SSO mark a significant recent change in sentencing policy in England and Wales. These changes were intended to replace the ‘mishmash’ of community sentences that existed beforehand (Mair and

Mills, 2009: 5); to provide Probation with a single order; facilitate offender resettlement through narrowing the divide between custody and community; and, to address the issue of “uptariffing” (Mair *et al*, 2007: 7). However, the new orders also raised the issue of “sentence overload”, as has been evidenced when sentencers are given greater options (Hedderman *et al*, 1999), as combinations of multiple requirements can be included in the original sentence, or additional requirements imposed if the order is breached (Mair *et al*, 2007: 13-14).

Trends in the use of the new sentences reveal a steady decline in one-to-one supervision, an increase in the use of punitive requirements, and a decrease in the use of accredited programme requirements (see table 4). The use of curfew and Unpaid Work requirements is most revealing, as these requirements share punishment as the primary purpose. Coupled with the decrease in usage of one-to-one or group work, this would reinforce the argument presented in the previous chapter that New Labour’s approach has been to administer a punitive community sentence, with rehabilitation the individual’s responsibility. Further, table 4 reveals that five requirements account for ninety per cent of all those used. There are a number of possible explanations for this, but increased workloads and limited resources are often cited (Mair and Mills, 2009: 11; National Audit Office, 2008a; Oldfield and Grimshaw, 2007).

Caseloads in the Probation Service have increased at a significant rate during the last decade (see table 5), and this may discourage sentencers from imposing supervision or accredited programme requirements. Alongside this, budget allocations have been reduced (Oldfield and Grimshaw, 2007: 12), and this is also likely to affect the use of requirements in individual areas. In addition to this, the number of “frontline” staff has diminished, while the number of senior managers has

increased considerably, and the ratio of offenders to supervising officers has also risen (see table 5). The evidence presented in the tables below reflects the view that New Labour's approach to Probation has been to enhance the punitive dimensions of community sentences, in order to ensure that they do not appear as "soft options". Further, the approach appears to encourage individual offenders to become more "self-realising" in their efforts to move away from crime, offering less direct support, while also demonstrating the 'surveillant managerial' discourse that underpins criminal justice policy (Nellis, 2005). This can be seen by comparing the data in table 5 – while caseloads increased by twenty-three per cent between 2002-2006, the total number of main grade officers fell by nine per cent and senior management numbers increased by seventy per cent.

Table 4 Requirements commenced under CO and SSO, 2005-2008 (%)

	Community Order				SSO			
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008
Supervision	36	36	35	34	44	42	40	39
Unpaid Work	31	32	33	33	18	22	24	25
Accredited Programme	18	16	13	12	23	20	18	16
Drug treatment	6	6	5	6	4	4	5	5
Curfew	3	5	6	7	5	5	6	7
Specified activity	3	4	4	4	2	3	3	3
Alcohol treatment	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2
Mental health treatment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Residence	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Exclusion	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Prohibited activity	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Attendance centre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	96,133	211,905	223,511	111,463	10,643	62,216	85,901	44,447

Source: Mair and Mills, 2009: 11.

Table 5 Probation caseloads, 2002-2006

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	% Change
Court orders	116,100	120,700	128,200	137,400	146,500	26
Pre-/post-release work	77,200	80,400	83,400	89,400	90,700	17
Total	193,300	201,100	211,600	226,800	237,200	23
Senior Probation Officers	1,100	1,130	1,173	1,240	1,793	63
Senior practitioners	218	227	336	439	345	58
Qualified Probation Officers	6,214	5,358	5,610	5,824	5,964	-4
Trainee Probation Officers	1,566	1,784	1,732	1,407	1,098	-30
Chief officers	40	40	42	44	40	-
Deputy chief officers/directors	26	45	54	61	77	196
Asst. chief officers	210	299	295	322	315	50
Area/district managers	82	89	153	150	180	120
All Probation Officers	9,098	8,499	8,851	8,910	9,200	1
All main grade officers	7,780	7,142	7,342	7,231	7,062	-9
All Senior Managers	358	473	544	577	612	70
Qualified Probation Officers	31.1	37.5	37.7	38.9	39.8	28
All main grade officers*	24.8	28.2	28.8	31.4	33.6	35
Frontline staff**	16.0	15.4	15.9	15.7	16.2	1

* Qualified officers and trainees. ** All senior practitioners, main grade officers and Probation Service Officers.

Source: Oldfield and Grimshaw, 2007: 13-15, 19.

3.2 Reconviction Rates as a Measure of Re-Offending

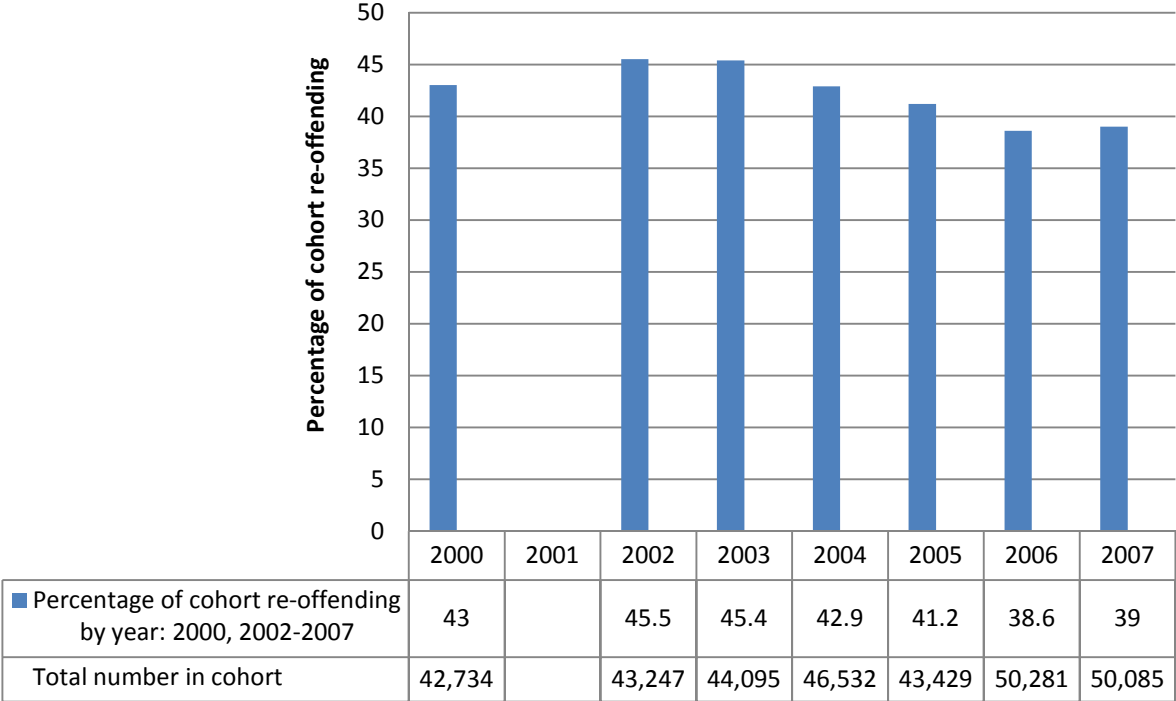
The concern here is with the extent to which these trends have impacted upon the government's aim of reducing re-offending. Figure 3 represents recent statistical data on reconviction rates in England and Wales. The data show the actual reconviction rates of a cohort of individuals released from custody or commencing a community order (sentences under Probation supervision excluding fines) in the first quarter of each year. The number of individuals who offended at least once, and which resulted in a conviction, during a one-year follow-up is presented as a percentage of the total number of individuals in the cohort (Ministry of Justice, 2009b).

The data shows a range in rates of reconviction in the one-year follow-up period between 45.5% and 38.6%. Although the rate of reconviction has reduced from 43% in 2000 to 39% in 2007, there is no consistent trend in rates of re-offending over this time period. This is a similar pattern to findings reported elsewhere (McNeill, 2009: 12), although the re-offending rates in England and Wales appear to be considerably lower.

Previous figures show that re-offending rates in England and Wales have been between 51-55% for those serving community orders, and 65-67% for those released from prison (LGiU, 2009; Thomson, 2009). Indeed, in 2002, 67% of adults leaving prison re-offended within two years and 54% of adults on a community sentence re-offended within two years (Howard League for Penal Reform, no date). The difference between previous findings and more recent Ministry of Justice statistics can be accounted for by changes to the recording and reporting of re-offending rates. In

2006, the government reduced the follow-up period from two years to one year, they argue to make ‘re-offending data timelier’ (Ministry of Justice, 2008b: 3).

Figure 3 Reconviction rate, 2000, 2002-2007



Source: Ministry of Justice, 2009b: 2.

Note: data unavailable for 2001.

However, re-offending rates over a two year period remain approximately the same as for previous years (Thomson, 2009). The government’s new measures do include an analysis of the seriousness and frequency of re-offending (Ministry of Justice, 2008a, 2009b), which is a positive development in regard to providing a clearer picture of re-offending. However, it remains the case that re-offending measures only provide data in relation to the reporting, detection and

conviction of crimes committed by those previously disposed to a custodial or community sentence. There is no reference to changes to the attitudes and behaviour of individual offenders. Rather, the effectiveness of the criminal justice system is measured by a binary “yes/no” reconviction tool. McNeill (2009) writes, in reference to a range of problems of using reconviction data to measure the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions, that:

These are not minor methodological inconveniences; they call into question not just studies that seek to compare the efficacy of sanctions by comparing reconviction rates, but also much of the literature on ‘what works’ in which reconviction, despite its flaws, has tended to be the preferred measure of treatment effectiveness (2009: 13).

One corollary of this is that comparisons of the effectiveness of different interventions are often contested (McNeill, 2009: 13), which results in some arguments for particular sanctions being constructed on economic grounds. For example, the Howard League for Penal Reform (no date) argues in favour of community sentences on the basis that:

- Sending someone to prison costs 12 times more than a Probation or Community Service Order;
- Community Sentences handle four times as many individuals as prisons, for 40% of the cost;
- Replacing 20,000 prison places with alternative sentences would save £690 million, and;
- A 5% reduction in the prison population would save £120 million.

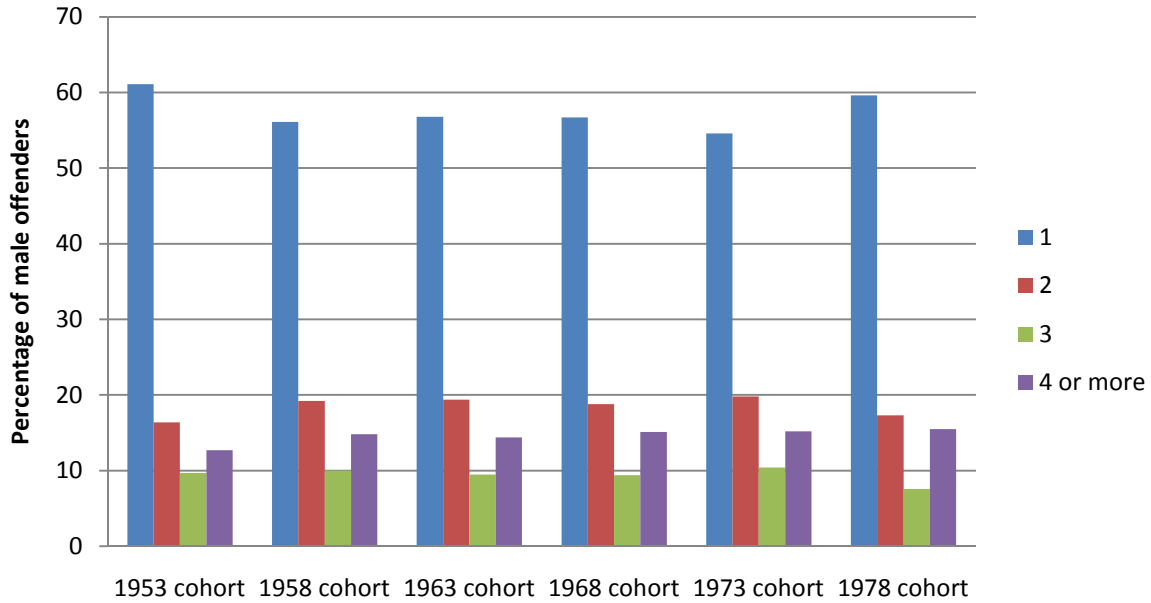
3.3 Exploring the Extent of Re-Offending

The criminological literature suggests that some form of low-level offending behaviour during adolescence or early adulthood is “ordinary” youthful behaviour, and that criminal careers

generally do not endure for long periods of time (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 42). Indeed, the literature on criminal careers shows that persistence in offending is an unusual event, insofar as many individuals cease offending after one conviction. Prime *et al* (2001) reviewed the criminal careers of offenders born between 1953 and 1978, and found that more than half of the population of male offenders born in 1953 had only one court appearance before the age of forty-six. This finding was found to be consistent within subsequent cohorts, as shown in figure 4.

In addition to the majority of offenders having only one conviction, most offenders also have criminal careers of less than one year. A criminal career is measured as the number of years between first and last conviction, so for those with only one conviction the career length is recorded as “less than one year” (Prime *et al*, 2001). Within the 1958 cohort, only three per cent of male offenders had a criminal career of two years or more, and a further three per cent had a criminal career of more than three years. Over half had criminal careers of less than one year, and two-thirds had careers of less than five years.

Figure 4 Percentage of male offender, under 17 by number of court appearances

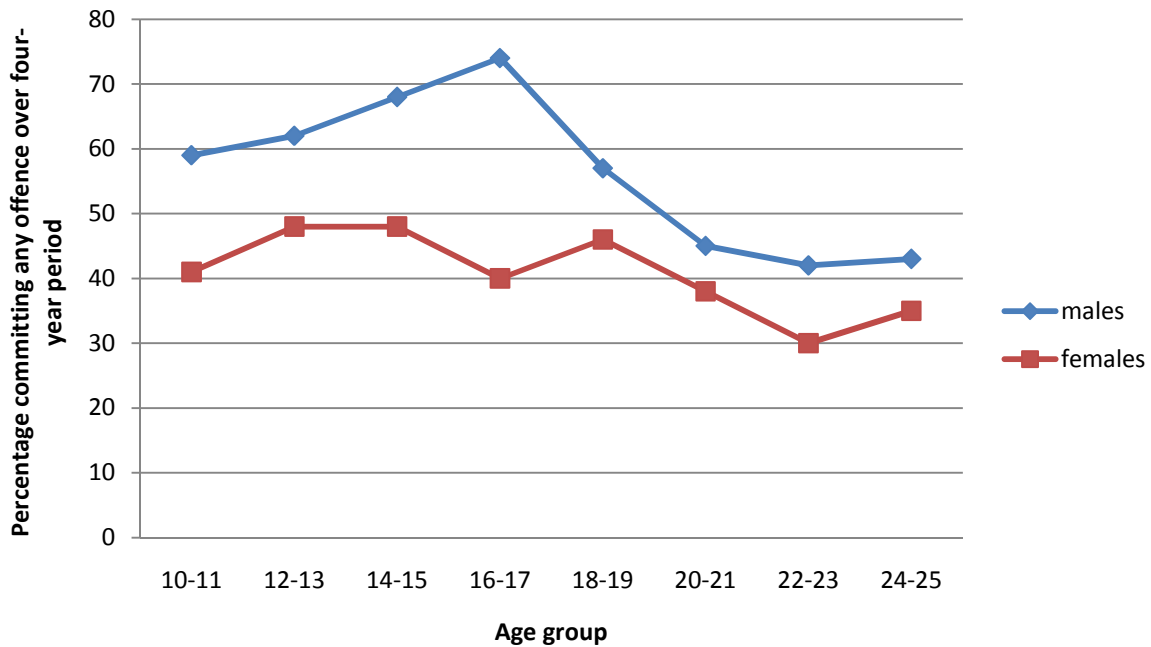


Source: Prime et al, 2001.

This is further illustrated in the recent *Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) 2003-2006* which provides self-reported data on offending among 10-25 year olds in England and Wales. The survey shows that over a four year period, almost half (49%) of respondents stated that they had offended on at least one occasion over the past four years, and almost a quarter (23%) reported offending in the previous 12 months, with the peak of offending occurring during the mid- to late-teens (see figure 5) (Hales *et al*, 2009). Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Anderson *et al*, 1994; Budd *et al*, 2005a, 2005b; Flood-Page *et al*, 2000; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Riley and Shaw, 1985; Roe and Ashe, 2008), although considerably higher rates of self-reported offending were recorded by Jamieson *et al* (1999) where 94 per cent of boys and 82 per cent of girls stated that they had committed an offence (cited in McNeill and

Whyte, 2007: 42). I suggest that the higher rates of self-reported offending in Jamieson *et al's* (1999) study may be the result of their sample being limited to 13-16 year olds (for details of sample size and age range see McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 46).

Figure 5 Percentage of OCJS sample offending over a four-year period, by age



Source: Hales *et al*, 2009: 9.

For others, offending becomes a more entrenched aspect of their lives and their criminal careers endure for considerably longer. The data from the 1953 cohort of Prime *et al's* (2001) study show that of the 114,740 males in the sample, 62,010 had criminal careers of less than one year. However, 29,280 had criminal careers of 10 years or longer and 3,090 had careers of 30 years or more. This indicates that a smaller group of the offender population are convicted of disproportionately more crime than the rest of the offender population (Soothill *et al*, 2003: 390).

Indeed, Farrington *et al*'s (2006a, 2006b) *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* showed that 7 per cent of males accounted for approximately half of all convictions up to age 50.

3.4 Problems Linked to Re-Offending

The argument presented in this chapter thus far suggests that changes in patterns of sentencing under New Labour have not significantly impacted upon reducing rates of re-offending. In part, this is a consequence of a policy emphasis upon youth offending (Soothill *et al*, 2003), as evidenced by a range of studies (MacDonald, 2006; McAra and McVie, 2007; Smith, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Webster *et al*, 2006). The effect of this has been a decline in the number of young offenders, and in the number of persistent young offenders. However, those who were first convicted aged 10-14 are now significantly more likely to become persistent offenders. Further, the number of "new" adult offenders has risen (Soothill *et al*, 2009: 84). This suggests that Probation for adult offenders under New Labour has, in some respects, begun to neglect the individuals who receive community sentences (substituting management and surveillance for traditional casework), which further enhances the arguments made above.

However, the aim of this thesis is not to evaluate the effectiveness of particular criminal justice interventions, nor is it to measure the success of Probation in reducing re-offending. Rather, it is the intention in this thesis to explore how individuals experience the delivery of Probation in relation to their attempts to reduce their likelihood of re-offending. If Probation interventions are designed to reduce re-offending then an understanding of how individuals receive them is required in order to explain their impact upon changes in offending behaviour. In order to explore

this, however, it is necessary to provide an overview of the characteristics of offenders which interventions are targeted at.

While offenders are far from being an homogeneous group, there are some characteristics that many offenders share (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 41). Offenders are, generally, young males and they often experience multiple personal and social problems, and high levels of deprivation and social exclusion. This was highlighted in the Social Exclusion Unit's (2002) report *Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners*. The report identified 9 key areas where offenders are likely to experience problems: Education; employment; drug and alcohol misuse; mental and physical health; attitudes and self-control; institutionalisation and life skills; housing; financial support and debt; and, family networks (SEU, 2002: 6).

The extent to which prisoners, in particular, are disproportionately more likely to experience disadvantage in these areas is highlighted in table 6, and can also be seen in the Home Office research studies by Niven and Olagundaye (2002) and Niven and Stewart (2005). These studies identify the difficulties that many prisoners face in finding employment and accommodation upon release from prison, and are supported by more recent findings which suggest that almost half of prisoners are unemployed in the year before custody, 13 per cent have never had a job, and 15 per cent are either homeless or living in temporary accommodation prior to custody (Stewart, 2008: ii). The weight of research suggests that issues such as these are associated with criminal activity (Miethe and Meier, 1994), and problems in relation to drug use, employment, accommodation and finance are related to reconviction (May, 1999 cited in McNeill, 2009: 14).

Relatively recent Home Office data shows that individuals who receive custodial sentences are more likely to experience problems than those who are given community sentences (Harper *et al*, 2004: 19). The authors compiled OASys data from 10,000 assessments from 19 areas and found that offenders were assessed as having, on average, significant problems in relation to four criminogenic needs (see table 7).

While it is clear from the evidence shown below that prisoners are more likely to experience problems than the wider offender population, those who receive community sentences are still likely to experience a number of problems that are likely to hinder individuals' attempts to move away from crime (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 40). Indeed, over half of those who received community sentences were assessed as experiencing problems in relation to education, training and employment, and those given community sentences experienced, on average, almost four problems in relation to criminogenic needs. Issues such as those outlined in the tables below have been identified as 'criminogenic needs' and risk factors, which offenders are likely to need to overcome in order to avert re-offending. Indeed, many of these factors are incorporated into assessment tools, now commonly used in the criminal justice system, to predict the likelihood of an individual re-offending and the risk of harm that they pose to themselves and others.

Table 6 Social policy analysis of prisoners

Social Policy Area	Linkage to Prisoners
Family ties	(Re)engagement with family is a crucial component in the attempts of individuals to desist (Webster <i>et al</i> , 2004: 21). 45 per cent of prisoners lose contact with their families during their sentence (PRT, 2005a: 28).
Mental Health	90 per cent of prisoners have some kind of mental health or substance use problem. Severe mental health conditions are 20 times those in the general population (SCMH, 2006: 8).
Alcohol Abuse	Around three-fifths of male and two-fifths of female sentenced prisoners admitted to drinking which carries the risk of physical or mental harm (SEU, 2002: 62).
Housing	13 per cent of prisoners are homeless before they are sentenced, and a further 34 per cent lose their homes during their sentence (Cavadino, 2000).
Benefits and Debt	72 per cent of prisoners are in receipt of benefits when imprisoned, and almost 25 per cent say they need help with benefit and debt problems (SEU, 2002: 105).
Drug taking	55 per cent of prisoners report committing offences related to drug taking. The need for money to buy drugs is the most common factor (Ramsay, 2003: 2).
Unemployment	66 per cent of prisoners are unemployed at the time of imprisonment. This is around 13 times the national average (Niven and Olagundaye, 2002: 2).

Table 7 Factors associated with offending

Section of OASys		Offenders assessed as having a problem	
		Community sentences	(%) Custodial sentences
1&2	Offending Information*	50	66
3	Accommodation	31	43
4	Education, Training and Employment (ETE)	53	65
5	Finance Management and Income	22	29
6	Relationships	36	42
7	Lifestyle and Associates	35	52
8	Drug Misuse	27	39
9	Alcohol Misuse	34	33
10	Emotional Well-being	40	38
11	Thinking and Behaviour	50	59
12	Attitudes	21	32
No. of Criminogenic Needs		3.99	4.97
No. of Criminogenic Needs Excluding Sections 1&2		3.50	4.31

*Includes current offence and criminal history

Source: Harper et al, 2004: 19.

However, while the offender population do share a number of these characteristics and are disproportionately more likely to experience disadvantage and social exclusion, it is important to reiterate that offenders are not an homogeneous group.

This has led some to argue that the validity and reliability of assessment tools is somewhat limited, on the basis that accurate prediction of future behaviour becomes more problematic and more difficult as the frequency of that behaviour in the population at large decreases. This difficulty is exacerbated when such acts are committed by minority sections of the population, as predictive power is based upon an even smaller population base. This is because actuarial methods of prediction are based upon a comparison of the individual's profile to that of the aggregated population, so where an individual differs in certain respects to the wider population (for example, in terms of gender, race/ethnicity) this reduces the reliability of any comparison made (Kemshall, 2004: 210). Similarly, the notion of 'criminogenic need' is somewhat flawed as it may vary from one social group to another. As a consequence of this, the specific needs of certain groups may be neglected in assessments (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2000).

However, even accounting for diversity within the offender population, it is reasonable to assert that offenders are likely to experience multiple personal and social problems and are likely to have a range of unmet needs. Further, for an individual's likelihood of re-offending to be reduced these problems need to be overcome and their individual needs met (McNeill, 2009: 15). This thesis posits, as the next chapter will explore in greater detail, that the likelihood of desistance is increased as individuals learn to overcome or manage these problems. Before turning to this discussion, however, this chapter will explore existing explanations of persistence in offending. This is because persistence and desistance are two aspects of the overall criminal career (the third being onset) (Soothill *et al*, 2009), and an exploration of how individuals come to desist therefore necessitates an understanding of why individuals persist in offending.

3.5 Theoretical Explanations of Re-Offending

The focus upon persistent offenders is reflected in recent policy in the UK (Home Office Communications Directorate, 2004), and the government has demonstrated a concern with identifying specifically which interventions help to reduce re-offending among persistent offenders (Perry *et al*, 2009). Such concern is also reflected in attempts to theorise why some people continue to re-offend while others are able to stop. Among the first to explore this were Glueck and Glueck (1945, 1968, 1974), who suggested that persistent offending is the result of suspended maturation – that is, that persistent offenders, regardless of their age, are yet to develop the maturity necessary to desist. Indeed, they argued that it is ‘the achievement of adequate maturation regardless of chronological age at which it occurred that was the significant influence in the behaviour change of our criminals’ (Glueck and Glueck, 1945: 81). Crucially, persistent offenders are able to develop this maturity, albeit at a later than expected age, as the authors later stated that the men in their study:

finally achieved enough integration and stability to make their intelligence and emotional-volitional equipment effective in convincing them that crime does not lead to satisfaction and in enhancing their capacity for self-control (Glueck and Glueck, 1974: 170).

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990; Hirschi and Gottfredson, 2001) also make reference to individuals’ capacities for self-control, arguing that the propensity to commit crime remains stable over time between individuals but that levels of self-control can fluctuate. They argue that self-control is formed in early childhood and, therefore, some individuals will have relatively lower self-control than others. However, as socialisation processes continue throughout the life-

course, absolute self-control can increase. Therefore, persistent offenders are likely to have relatively low levels of self-control, but that as absolute self-control increases they are more likely to be able to desist. The authors give no consideration to the influence of life-course events or environmental context upon persistent offending, however, and instead write that:

... maturational reform is just that, change in behaviour that comes with maturation; [Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory] suggests that spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behaviour that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 136).

However, Ezell and Cohen (2004) found little evidence to support the key tenets of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory and, arguably, more insightful theories exist elsewhere in the literature. Laub and Sampson (2003) are also somewhat critical of these approaches, arguing that theories based on self-control imply that persistent offending results from individual deficiencies with respect to coping with the demands of society.

Moffitt (1993, 1994) has constructed a typology of offenders to illustrate how some have brief criminal careers while others persistently offend. Adolescence-Limited (AL) offenders, generally, begin offending in early-adolescence and commit relatively minor offences until they cease to offend during late-adolescence. AL offenders aspire to certain goals of adulthood (such as employment, money, or status), but are unable to achieve them – what Moffitt refers to as the 'maturity gap'. As a result, they imitate the behaviour of Life-Course Persistent (LCP) offenders and offend as a means of achieving their goals. As they approach adulthood the maturity gap narrows as they are able to achieve goals more easily through legitimate means.

LCP offenders, by contrast, are individuals who begin offending at an earlier age (often early-childhood), and continue to offend throughout adolescence and well into adulthood. LCP offenders are more likely to have neuropsychological deficits, which could include low levels of self-control which lead to an inability to control impulses. During childhood, LCP offenders are likely to present difficult and challenging behaviour which is likely to elicit parental responses. But, as Moffitt (1993) suggests, these parental responses are often inadequate or inconsistent as the family finds it difficult to cope with the challenges presented. As a result, the antisocial child develops into an antisocial adolescent, and the LCP offender does not experience the socialisation necessary to cease offending in late-adolescence.

It is, as Moffitt (1994) points out, the interaction between the LCP offender's personality traits and the environmental reactions to them that diminish the likelihood of change (1994: 28), rather than simply the early experiences of offending. Ezell and Cohen (2004) found evidence of the presence of AL offenders, but found six groups of LCP offenders, as opposed to the one group identified by Moffitt (1993), although Moffitt (2003; Moffitt and Walsh, 2003) later acknowledged the possibility of other offending typologies. Maruna (2001) also produced a typology of offenders in his book *Making Good*, in which he described two types of offender: desisters and persisters. Desisters were those individuals who were able to cease offending and forge a new life as a pro-social citizen. Persisters, by contrast, were those individuals who appeared to be unable to move away from crime.

Maruna (2001) writes that a common theme among the persistent offender group in his study was the presence of a ‘condemnation script’. Within these scripts persistent offenders suggested that their life histories were already written for them, and that although they wanted ‘to go legit or at least do something different with their lives’ (2001: 74) they stated that they felt powerless to make changes in their lives. Persisters suggested that they were victims of circumstance, constrained by poverty, drug dependency, or social stigma, and that they sought refuge in alcohol, drugs and crime. Maruna (2001) suggests that, for some, crime was a means of ‘escaping the burden of choice’, in that individuals would intentionally offend in order to receive a prison sentence and avoid the burden of responsibility for making decisions about their own lives.

Maruna (2001) also argues that for persistent offenders the future outlook is ‘dire’ (2001: ch 3), although this is not because of personal deficiencies or particular personality traits, but instead because of their common social circumstances and poor life chances (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 46), as outlined above. Similarly, Laub and Sampson (2003) argue that persistent offending results from a lack of positive turning points in an individual’s life. Drawing upon the case study of “Boston Billy” in their research, they write that he had:

little opportunity or ability to engage successfully in the traditional pathways away from crime. He did not serve in the military, he did not have a steady job that he was willing to invest in (or an employer willing to invest in him), and he did not have any strong ties to a wife (2003: 160).

Laub and Sampson (2003) also write that the excitement of crime can be an attractive alternative to conformity for persistent offenders (2003: 165), and that many persistent offenders have to contend with serious alcohol problems. As such, many offenders face considerable challenges to

moving away from crime and, therefore, are condemned to persistent offending behaviour, at least until they are able to overcome such obstacles. This is illustrated in Leibrich's (1993) work, in which she describes offending careers as curved, and that the offenders in her sample could not be divided into "neat" categories. It is unlikely that many offenders will be able to overcome all obstacles, and desist from offending behaviour that they may have engaged in from a young age, in an instant. This highlights, again, the problems associated with the statistical analyses of reconviction data discussed above, insofar as they do not take into account subtle changes in behaviour that can lead to gradual reductions in re-offending. However, many individuals, including persistent offenders, are able to overcome the obstacles and challenges referred to above and cease offending (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 46). The following chapter builds upon this by exploring what is known about the process of desistance.

Summary

This chapter began by outlining the government's twin aims of public protection and reducing re-offending. However, it was argued that attempts to reduce re-offending are underpinned by an ideology of 'utilitarian rehabilitation' (Robinson, 2008), as opposed to a concern for the welfare of the individual offender. This, coupled with the analysis presented here that re-offending is linked to a range of socio-structural problems, enhances the argument presented in the previous chapter that individual offenders are increasingly responsible for reducing their own risk of re-offending, and that supervising officers have become increasingly detached from the task of facilitating reductions in re-offending. This is, in part at least, a corollary of the risk-focused nature of contemporary Probation, as interventions are targeted at criminogenic rather than non-

criminogenic (welfare) needs. Some theoretical approaches highlight the role that environmental factors play in influencing persistent offending, identifying a range of socio-structural factors that contribute to individual's offending behaviour. The linkages identified here between the nature of contemporary Probation, responses to the problem of re-offending and attempts to theorise persistent offending provide a context within which attempts to reduce re-offending can be explored. It will be clear from this chapter that attempts to reduce re-offending are likely to be considerably challenging, but it is the case that many individuals do cease to offend, even after lengthy criminal careers. The following chapter explores this in relation to the concept of desistance.

4. UNDERSTANDING DESISTANCE

The previous two chapters have provided a discussion of the nature and scope of re-offending, policy responses to the challenge of reducing re-offending, and how this is manifested in practice through the Probation Service. This chapter builds upon this by providing a discussion of the key dimensions of desistance – the process of ceasing to re-offend. First, the chapter provides an overview of desistance knowledge as found in the existing literature, and in doing so it explores the key conceptual debates surrounding the issue. Second, the chapter discusses the distinction between primary and secondary desistance, and outlines the rationale for exploring the former. Finally, the role of criminal justice interventions in relation to desistance are explored, in order to contextualise how desistance can be supported through Probation interventions.

4.1 What is Desistance?

Desistance from crime has emerged as a key research interest, leading to a number of studies with desistance as the principal focus (for example: Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001). This is illustrated by the number and range of desistance publications in recent years. In addition to various journal articles (for example: Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Maguire and Raynor, 2006b; McNeill, 2006a), publications have included: an historical account of desistance (Farrall, 2000); an overview of the research literature (Laub and Sampson, 2001); an international collection of leading criminologists' work on the topic (Maruna and Immarigeon, 2004); special issues in the international criminology journals *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* (Farrall and Maruna,

2004) and *Theoretical Criminology* (Farrall, 2009); and the inclusion of the term in recent criminological dictionaries (Canton and Hancock, 2007; McLaughlin and Muncie, 2006).

However, despite the burgeoning interest, there remains a lack of clarity with regard to the definition and conceptualisation of the term. Some have argued that the lack of agreement regarding the term has impeded research into desistance (Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Bushway *et al*, 2001; Maruna, 2001). In some respects the lack of agreement results from the tendency of some researchers to conflate the definition of desistance with the measurement of the concept. Indeed, there is considerable variability in the operationalisation of desistance within the existing research as shown in table 8 (Kazemian, 2007: 8), and Laub and Sampson (2001) noted in their research review that there was no consensual definition of desistance. This has led to disparate research findings and some commentators to suggest that:

... because conceptual and operational definitions of desistance vary across existing studies, it is difficult to draw empirical generalisations from the growing literature on desistance from crime (Uggen and Massoglia, 2003: 316-317).

In turn, some have stated that knowledge about desistance is somewhat limited. McCulloch (2005) argued that collective knowledge about desistance is ‘embryonic’ (2005: 8), Farrall and Calverley (2006) described desistance as ‘something of an enigma in modern criminology’ (2006: 1), and Shover (1996) argued that most desistance work ‘has been approached inferentially’ (1996: 124). Many commentators would agree upon the meaning of desistance in its simplest form as termination of, or cessation from, offending. Indeed, Maruna (2001) suggests that ‘the criminal career literature traditionally imagines desistance as an event – an abrupt

cessation of criminal behaviour' (2001: 22). For example, Farrall and Bowling (1999) define desistance as the 'moment that a criminal career ends' (1999: 253). However, as Maruna (2001) argues, defining desistance as an event ignores the fact that criminal activity is sporadic, and that offenders have a tendency to drift or zig-zag in and out of crime (Glaser, 1964; Matza, 1964).

In this respect, "termination" occurs throughout a criminal career, and it could only be known that desistance had truly taken place if observed retrospectively. In the previous chapter evidence was provided to show that a considerable number of offenders re-offend within two years of a previous conviction. Evidence from the desistance research also shows that many initial attempts to desist are unsuccessful (Maruna, 1997). As such, it is rather the case that desistance does not occur abruptly, but that instances of reversals and relapses are likely (Burnett, 2004: 169). Studies which regard desistance as termination, therefore, are more likely to observe a lull in offending and to conceal progress made towards desistance.

Termination also implies that there is a certain point at which desistance occurred. However, if this point is deemed to be the moment at which an individual commits their last crime then, at that moment, the individual is both an offender and a desister, which cannot be the case (Maruna, 2001: 23). Alternatively, a number of commentators, writing within a rational choice framework, have argued that desistance begins at the moment that the decision to desist is made (Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). However, making a decision to desist is not the same as desistance itself, and although a decision to desist might be considered to be rational, this does not guarantee that it will occur.

Table 8 Operational definitions of the concept of desistance in past studies

Study	Operational Definition
Farrington and Hawkins (1991)	Conviction at age 21 but not between ages 21 and 32
Farrington and Wikstrom (1994)	Age at the last officially recorded offence up to age 25
Haggard, Gumpert and Grann (2001)	During the follow-up period, no reconviction in the previous 10 years (at least)
Kruttschnitt, Uggen and Shelton (2000)	Absence of new officially recorded offences or probation violation throughout a 2 year period
Laub and Sampson (2003)	Absence of arrest (follow-up to age 70)
Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen and Farrington (1991)	Nonoffending throughout a period of less than a year
Maruna (2001)	Individuals who identified themselves as long-term habitual offenders, who claimed they would not be committing offences in the future, and who reported at least 1 year of crime-free behaviour
Maruna, LeBel, Burnett, Bushway and Kierkus (2002)	Absence of reconviction after release from prison during a 10 year window
Mischkowitz (1994)	Last conviction having occurred before age 31 and lack of conviction or incarceration for at least 10 years
Pezzin (1995)	Individuals who reported having committed offences in the past but who did not report any criminal income in 1979
Sampson and Laub (1993)	Juvenile delinquents who were not arrested as adults
Shover and Thompson (1992)	No arrests in the 36 months following release from prison
Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998)	Behavioural desistance: Absence of self-reported illegal earnings during a 3 year follow-up period Official desistance: No arrests during a 3 year follow-up period
Warr (1998)	Individuals who did not report having committed any offences in the past year

Source: Kazemian, 2007: 9.

Burnett's (1992) study of prisoners, for example, highlighted that most offenders wanted to move away from crime, but that relatively few were able to achieve this. Deciding to desist does not preclude, first, the need to overcome barriers to desistance, and second, the need to maintain desistance over time. Further, there is evidence to suggest that many offenders desist without consciously intending to do so (Laub and Sampson, 2003).

Thus, many commentators have preferred to employ a dynamic definition of desistance, primarily because 'the dynamic model is much more articulate than the static [termination] model about the nature of the desistance process' (Bushway *et al*, 2003: 146). In doing so, researchers attempt to overcome the caveat inherent to static definitions, that a focus on the termination of offending ignores the progress made by the individual towards desistance. However, this raises the question of what duration of time needs to have elapsed before desistance has occurred? For Farrington (1986), 'even a five-year or ten-year crime-free period is no guarantee that offending has terminated' (1986: 201).

Even prospective longitudinal research may observe only relatively short periods of the life course, so distinctions between termination and suspension with regards to desistance are important for clarifying the phenomenon being measured. Identifying desistance over a given time period may lead to researchers observing "false desistance", whereby the individual may appear to have desisted but then proceeds to offend again (Kazemian, 2007: 9). This has led some to refer to "interruptions" in the criminal career, as opposed to actual desistance (Mischkowitz, 1994). However, this implies that offenders are perpetually at risk of relapse and recidivism

which would suggest that actual desistance is unachievable. Some authors have developed innovative definitions of desistance in order to overcome this dilemma.

Laub and Sampson (2001) drew a distinction between the concepts of “desistance” (the process) and “termination” (the outcome). They suggest that ‘the process of desistance maintains the continued state of non-offending’, and that, as a result, the termination of offending is separated ‘from the dynamics underlying the process of desistance’ (2001: 11). However, in this definition desistance is confused with the causes of desistance. In criminology, desistance is taken to mean a state of non-offending, not the causes of that non-offending. Further, Laub and Sampson’s (2001) definition does not imply a separation of desistance and deceleration of offending. Elliot *et al* (1989) distinguished between desistance and suspension from criminal activity, suggesting that the non-offending period under observation could be temporary, but does not preclude its potential permanency. In the same respect, deceleration of offending may not necessarily lead to desistance. To overcome this, the concepts of primary and secondary desistance have been developed.

4.2 Primary and Secondary Desistance

The delineation of separate categorical phases of desistance advanced by Maruna *et al* (2004) has, perhaps, been the most innovative development in providing clarity to the notion of desistance as a process. The notion of primary and secondary desistance draws from the work of Edwin Lemert (1951, 1967). Lemert discerned two categorical phases in the transition towards deviance. Lemert (1951) suggested that primary deviance was considered to be ‘the initial

flirtation and experimentation with deviant behaviours’, while secondary deviance involves deviance becoming ‘incorporated as part of the “me” of the individual’ (1951: 11).

In a similar respect, there are two distinct phases of desistance. Primary desistance refers to a lull or break in criminal behaviour, while secondary desistance refers to ‘the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of the role or identity of a “changed person”’ (Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, 2004: 19). There is evidence to suggest that desistance is accompanied by a change in identity, from that of “offender” to “non-offender” (Giordano *et al*, 2002; Maruna, 2001). As individuals experience such a change, they come to regard criminal activity as incompatible with their new identity, while simultaneously distancing themselves from their past identity (Vaughan, 2007: 394).

Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel (2004) argue that, because lulls in offending behaviour occur periodically throughout a criminal career, primary desistance is of little theoretical interest. As such, the focus of research should be upon secondary desistance, examining the process by which an individual was able to “become” an ex-offender. However, at this point in the discussion, this thesis departs from the views of Maruna and his colleagues in relation to the concepts of primary and secondary desistance.

It is argued here that desistance should be viewed as a process, rather than an event, which is likely to involve periods of vacillation. Also, it is argued that the usage of the term desistance requires greater clarification than that which it receives in much of the existing literature, and that the delineation between primary and secondary desistance provides a useful means of doing so.

However, this thesis does not agree that primary desistance should be regarded as a normative feature of all criminal careers, to the extent that research of this conceptualisation of desistance should be neglected. This is not to suggest that studying secondary desistance cannot provide a useful insight into the process of desistance. Indeed, Maruna (2001) argues that exploring *how* people manage to refrain from offending is of greater importance to the study of desistance than developing an understanding of *why* people choose to desist (2001: 24), and secondary desistance is clearly related to the former question. However, I argue that exploring primary desistance can encapsulate individuals' experiences in the aftermath of making the decision to desist. Indeed, it is my contention that research on primary desistance can provide much fruitful evidence regarding the nature of the broader transition towards "fully-fledged" desistance. Moreover, I would argue that because secondary desistance itself is only ever a provisional state, research which explores the processes by which individuals move from criminal activity to conformity (and vice versa) may offer a greater insight into how ex-offenders are able to sustain desistance over a longer period of time. In other words, I argue that a reconceptualisation of primary desistance as a transitional phase between offending and crime cessation (as opposed to simply a lull in offending), which is necessary for secondary desistance, offers a potentially fruitful arena for desistance research to explore.

The argument for secondary desistance as the focus for research appears to be premised upon four key assumptions. First, that for offenders to truly desist from crime, an identity transformation from that of offender to non-offender is required. However, while it may be the case that many individuals do experience such identity change, this position assumes that individuals whose identity does not significantly alter cannot have desisted. There is evidence to

suggest that many individuals are able to desist for long durations without experiencing any significant cognitive transformation (Bottoms *et al*, 2004: 371). Second, it is assumed that because most, if not all, offenders experience periods of non-offending, primary desistance is of little interest due to its normative nature. Thus, proponents of secondary desistance argue that primary desistance should not be the focus of research because the vast majority of offenders experience lulls in criminal activity. However, it is my contention that it is precisely because only a proportion of primary desisters make the transition to secondary desistance, that research which explores individual experiences during the stage of primary desistance can provide useful insights into how this transition might be achieved.

Third, as secondary desistance relates to the transformation of identity and the changing roles of ex-offenders after criminal activity has ended, research based upon this conceptualisation is concerned with the long-term maintenance of desistance. However, this does not reveal much about the factors that precede the decision to desist, or what occurs at the within-individual level in the immediate aftermath of making the decision to desist. As mentioned earlier, making a decision to desist is neither necessary nor sufficient for desistance, but a focus upon primary desistance can explore how individuals respond after such a decision has been made. Fourth, because secondary desistance is associated with the maintenance of non-offending, this does not explain how individuals are able to switch from offending to conventional behaviour, and possibly back again, at various stages of the life-course. Primary desistance, on the other hand, specifically refers to lulls in offending throughout the life course and, as such, studies of this type can explore why offenders switch from offending to non-offending behaviour at particular moments in their lives (Healy and O'Donnell, 2008: 28).

It is, therefore, my contention that there is significant theoretical interest in researching primary desistance. Such research can help to develop knowledge and understanding of the broader processes of desistance and individual change, while also identifying whether the underlying mechanisms of secondary desistance also pertain to primary desistance. However, the overriding rationale for researching primary desistance, it is argued here, is that such research can help to develop interventions which are designed to facilitate the transition towards sustained non-offending.

In much the same way that criminal careers are often interrupted by periods of incarceration, it is reasonable to assume that a considerable number of offenders who are placed under Probation supervision will, temporarily at least, cease to offend. Consequently, these individuals can be considered to be primary desisters. The lulls in offending behaviour that relate to primary desistance may be relatively brief durations of time, and these periods are likely to be fraught with the ambivalence that characterises many desistance pathways. Thus, interventions through Probation are among the most likely to support individuals during times where the probability of lapse or relapse is greater. It is for this reason that I argue that research on primary desistance can help to develop knowledge and understanding of the interventions which are most likely to sustain desistance in the longer-term.

4.3 The Desistance Process

Much of the desistance literature has involved ‘the discussion of the wider social processes by which people themselves come to stop offending’ (Rex, 1999: 366). As such, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of criminal justice interventions upon the desistance process (for exceptions, see: Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; McCulloch, 2005; McNeill, 2006a, 2006b; McNeill and Whyte, 2007). This is largely a corollary of the origins of the study of desistance, which emerged from a critique of the medical model of corrections. The emphasis was upon studying those individuals who were able to desist without assistance from criminal justice agencies, as Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel (2004) write: ‘one either “desists” on one’s own accord or else one is “rehabilitated” through formal counselling or treatment’ (2004: 11).

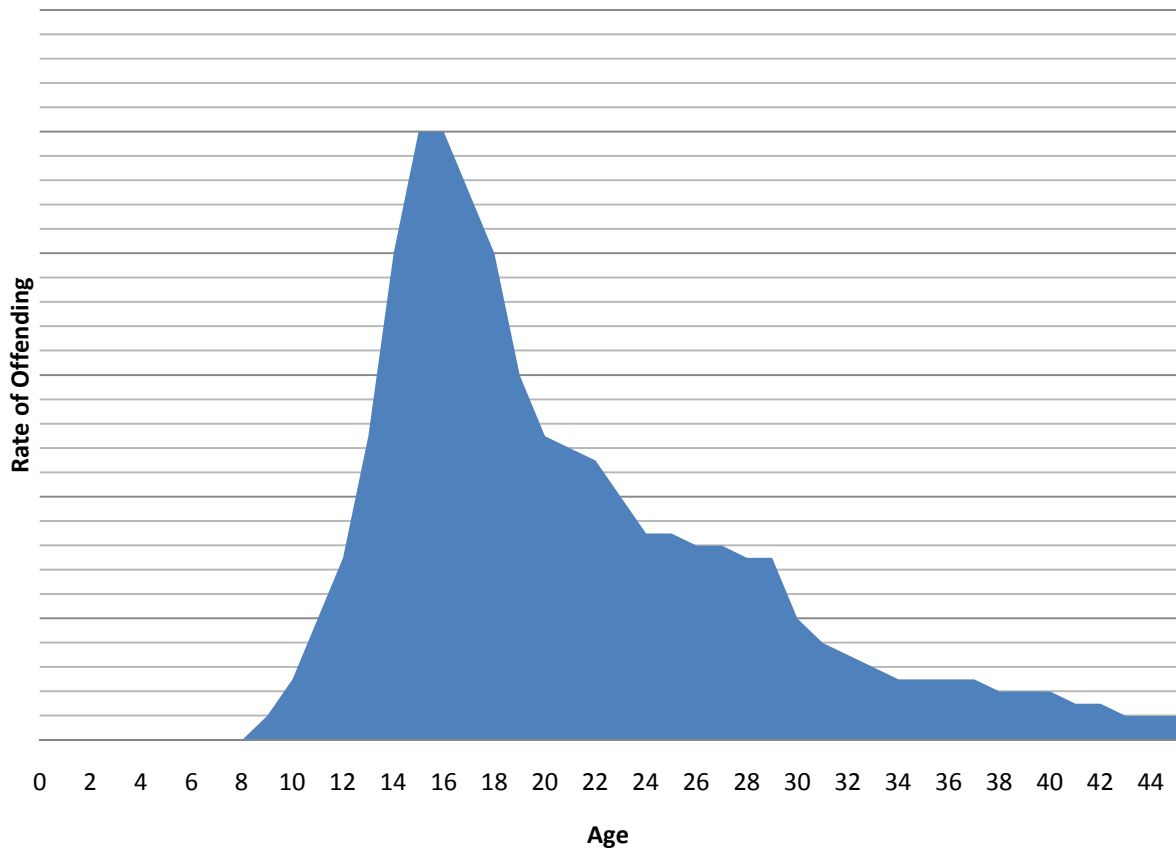
Indeed, some suggest that the literature on criminal careers, including desistance, justifies a reduced emphasis upon rehabilitative work with offenders. This perspective is supported by those who argue that desistance naturally occurs through a process of maturation, as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) write: ‘Crime declines with age. Spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behaviour that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens’ (1990: 136). Even the often quoted “nothing works” literature (Brody, 1976; Martinson, 1974) suggested that individuals mature out of crime, arguing that control groups reformed at the same rate as treatment groups. This has led some to suggest that criminal justice interventions have relatively little effect upon desistance from crime (Farrall, 2002).

However, desistance and rehabilitation share many similarities and, if not the same thing, they are part of the same process. Indeed, if individuals do experience correctional interventions, then these are likely to be for relatively short periods of their daily lives, and much desistance work takes place away from formal settings. Likewise, those who do not receive treatment or counselling are likely to receive assistance from elsewhere – from family or friends for example. Therefore, desistance is part of a multi-level process incorporating self-determination, professional intervention and informal support (Maruna, Immerigeon and LeBel, 2004: 13). This section will now discuss various factors which have been shown in the literature to support the desistance process.

4.3.1 The Age-Crime Curve

It has been suggested that the relationship between age, crime and desistance is ‘one of the surest things in all of criminology’ (Griffin, 2006: 1). As individuals age they are more likely to decrease the frequency of their offending, until they cease offending altogether. This is illustrated by the age-crime curve (represented by figure 6), which shows that most criminal careers follow a similar pattern. Offending begins during pre- or early-adolescence, and peaks at around late-adolescence. There is a sharp decrease in offending between late adolescence and early adulthood, and criminal activity levels-off by middle-age.

Figure 6 Representation of the age-crime curve



Adapted from: Nagin et al, 1995: 112.

However, there are some notable gender differences within the age-crime curve. Females tend to begin offending at a later age and also terminate offending before males. Overall levels of offending also tend to be lower among females than for males, and chronic or persistent offending is more discernible among males (D'Unger *et al*, 2002). However, the age-crime relationship also 'easily qualifies as the most difficult fact in the field' (Hirschi and Gottfredson,

1983: 553). Indeed, as Moffitt (1993) argues, the age-crime curve is ‘at once the most robust and least understood empirical observation in the field of criminology’ (1993: 675).

There is an argument to be made that desistance may be delayed by “suspended maturity”, by which I mean the concept of certain behaviours characteristic of adolescence remaining present during adulthood. Such a concept could support particular observations in the age-crime curve, notably that some individuals desist at a later age than most, and it would be these individuals who experienced such suspended maturation. If this were the case then it might be expected that a long-term offender’s behaviour could be incongruent with their stage of the life-course, although Hayford and Furstenberg (2008) found no evidence to support this expectation.

However, it is likely that, for most, desistance does not occur merely as a function of chronological age (Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990: 452), but rather particular life-course events are likely to correspond with certain periods of transition such that desistance is more likely. The theories developed by Giordano *et al* (2002) and Runggay (2004) suggest that individuals must be both open to change and regard particular life-course events as opportunities, or ‘hooks’, for change. As such, life-course events which are associated with desistance exist only as potential opportunities to change until they are acted upon by the individual concerned.

These opportunities (employment, housing, and so forth) are more likely to be available at different times during the life-course, such that factors associated with offending are likely to have a differential impact depending upon the individual’s age. According to Jamieson *et al* (1999), desistance among younger adolescents (14-15) is more likely to be associated with a

negative evaluation of crime. For older adolescents (18-19), increased maturity, often linked to life-course events such as employment or relationships, and the transition to adulthood are more likely to prompt desistance. For young adults (22-25), desistance is associated with the assumption of new roles, such as “parent” or “breadwinner” (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 51).

In brief, ageing does not cause desistance, but chronological age is an index of particular transitions and life events which can have an effect upon the desistance process. Such opportunities are likely to be effective only if they are perceived as realistic and attainable, and if the individual is inclined to change. There are a number of such life-course events identified in the desistance literature which are more likely to have a discernible effect upon desistance.

4.3.2 Family Formation

The establishment of a “family unit” has been shown to be a key factor for men in the desistance process, in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Farrington and West, 1995; Horney *et al*, 1995; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Shover, 1983, 1996; Warr, 1998).

The association between marriage and desistance has also been shown to be significant among research with female offenders, although the findings are less robust than studies concerned with male offenders (King *et al*, 2007). Shover (1983) found that for desistance to occur it was important for the offender to establish a ‘mutually satisfying relationship with a woman’ (1983: 213). Developing this further, some have suggested that it is not simply the relationship that is instrumental in facilitating desistance but, rather, it is the quality of the relationship that is more important (Mischkowitz, 1994). Indeed, it is unlikely to be marriage alone that will lead to

desistance, but rather it is the effect that marriage has upon the individual that will alter behaviour. Laub and Sampson (1993) wrote that when offenders marry they are establishing a new social bond. As social bonds grow, the individual's investment in them increases, and this means that the individual stands to lose more of their investment from committing crime in the future. Thus, offenders are likely to avoid crime in order to protect their investment in marriage (see also: Laub *et al*, 1998).

Alternatively, Osgood and Lee (1993) have argued that marriage leads to a change in an individual's routine activities and to a change in peer group association. This argument is supported by Warr (1998) who found evidence to suggest that marriage leads to a reduction in time spent with friends and a decline in association with delinquent peers (1998: 183). Changes to routine activities and peer group association are likely to emerge as marriage imposes a particular set of obligations upon the individual which are incongruent with a criminal lifestyle and which will not support association with delinquent peers. Laub and Sampson (2003) support this view by suggesting that marriage replaces unstructured time and activities with a more structured lifestyle, and add that marriage allows for the emergence of a new identity, to that of "husband" or "parent", which is imbued with a set of responsibilities. In addition to the establishment of a relationship, a number of authors have suggested that becoming a parent also has the capacity to influence desistance (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 218).

However, others have queried the correlation between family formation and desistance. In research on the criminal behaviour of young men, for example, Rand (1987) found no evidence to support either contention that marriage or parenthood significantly influence the desistance

process. More recently, it has been suggested that while marriage can influence the likelihood of desistance, cohabitation has the effect of increasing re-offending (Horney *et al*, 1995: 659).

4.3.3 Employment

Previous research has indicated that obtaining and sustaining legitimate employment is associated with desistance. It remains relatively unclear as to what the exact nature of this relationship is, but it may be the case that employment provides economic resources such that individuals do not have the same need to offend, and that the workplace provides an environment where the offender can build relationships with other non-offenders. Shover (1983) suggested that employment provided the desister with ‘a pattern of routine activities’ and that these then ‘left little time for the daily activities associated with crime’ (1983: 214).

In a similar vein to the effect of marriage, employment is likely to provide a set of obligations and responsibilities that provide the individual concerned with an investment in the social bond and an incentive to avoid future criminal behaviour and association with delinquent peer groups. Indeed, the expectations for behaviour of a “conventional employee” may be such that they preclude criminal activity. Farrall (2002) argues that, again in a similar way to the effect of marriage, employment can offer ‘a reduction in “unstructured” time and an increase in “structured” time’ (2002: 146). Clearly, one argument against this position is that many crimes occur in the workplace (Croall, 2001; Friedrichs, 2002), and that certain opportunities to offend or engage in antisocial behaviour may result from associations with co-workers (Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly, 1998). Rand (1987) also found no evidence to support the claim that employment

helps desistance. So employment, in contrast to much of the extant desistance literature, may either offer opportunities for crime or it may not preclude opportunities for crime away from the immediate working environment.

However, those who have questioned the effect of marriage or employment upon desistance have not considered the age of participants. It must be remembered that such life-course events are likely to have a differential impact depending on the individual's age (Farrall and Calverley, 2006: 5). Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that employment can be a key factor in the desistance process (Farrall, 2002; Fletcher, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2001; Rhodes, 2008; Uggen, 1999; Visher and Travis, 2003), and in recent years a significant volume of research has been undertaken which has explored the role of employment in the desistance process; the barriers faced by offenders in trying to gain employment; and, potential ways in which practitioners can help to overcome such barriers.

This research has emerged from a variety of sources, including: employment bodies and unions (CIPD, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; TUC, 2001), the academic community (Burns, 1998; Crow, 2006; Fletcher, 2001, 2007, 2008), third sector organizations (Boyle, 2007; Fletcher *et al*, 2001; Maley *et al*, 2007; NACRO, 2003), and, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions (Harper and Chitty, 2005; Haslewood-Pocsik *et al*, 2004; Mair and May, 1997; Metcalf *et al*, 2001; Niven and Olagundaye, 2002; Niven and Stewart, 2005; Sarno *et al*, 2000; Webster *et al*, 2001). This research effort has culminated in UK policy makers establishing the improvement of employment opportunities as the prominent concern in reducing re-offending strategies (HM Government, 2005, 2006). The recent emphasis that has been placed upon employment in

reducing re-offending strategies is supported by empirical evidence which suggests that stable employment can reduce the risk of re-offending by between one-third and a half (LGA, 2005: 1).

4.3.4 Cutting Ties

Some evidence has been provided which demonstrates that relocating away from the place where the offender grew up is an influential factor in the desistance process (Osborn, 1980; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 217). Other research suggests that as offenders lose contact with previous peers, desistance becomes more likely (Warr, 1998). Maruna and Roy (2007) discuss the process of ‘knifing off’ previous associates, and they draw a distinction between avoiding people or ‘formally ceasing one’s friendship’. However, the authors suggest that, akin to divorcees who remarry, former friends and associates may try to re-establish contact, particularly if the ‘knifer’ chooses to stay in their home community (Maruna and Roy, 2007: 108).

Perhaps, then, desistance is more likely if the offender leaves behind *both* the place and the people with whom their previous offending was most associated. However, it is worthwhile noting that choosing *not* to ‘knife-off’ (consciously or otherwise) particular places, people or opportunities does not necessarily preclude desistance from crime. Indeed, maintaining previous ties may provide the desister with the necessary social networks required to support their desistance, particularly if new pro-social identities are adopted within a familiar setting (for example, shifting from partner to husband and/or parent). The importance of maintaining social networks in order to facilitate desistance is supported by empirical evidence which suggests that

most offenders find employment through social ties, as opposed to via formal routes (Niven and Stewart, 2005).

4.3.5 Subjective Factors

A number of researchers – predominantly operating within a qualitative research framework – have found that individual-level changes can impact upon desistance, and often these changes are related to identity (Giordano *et al*, 2002) or motivation (Shover, 1983). Farrall’s (2002) study of probationers revealed that individuals who wanted to stop offending and felt that they were able to, were more likely to desist than those who stated otherwise. This led Farrall (2002) to construct a typology of probationers (see table 9), where ‘confidants’ were more likely to desist.

Table 9 Probationer groups by perception of desistance

	Want to desist	Feel able to desist	Supervising officer supports
Confidants	✓	✓	✓
Optimists	✓	✓	X
Pessimists	✓ (X)	X (✓)	N/A

Adapted from: Farrall, 2002: 101.

Burnett (1992) similarly found that prisoners who were confident and optimistic about desistance were more likely to be successful. Before release, 80 per cent of Burnett’s sample stated that they wanted to stop offending, but 60 per cent reported re-offending after release. While most stated that they wanted to desist, few reported that they would be able to. Only one in four stated that they would definitely be able to desist. For those who were not confident or optimistic about

desisting, this tended to reflect experiences of personal and social problems. The most resolute and certain desisters in Burnett's study were those who had been able to reinterpret their value systems following a particular life-course event (a relationship, becoming a parent, gaining employment). These accomplishments became incongruent with criminal activity, and desisters were unwilling to jeopardize them by re-offending (Burnett, 2000: 14).

A number of authors have found that changes to an individual's sense of morality can influence cessation from criminal activity (Paternoster, 1989), as Shover (1996) writes that desistance can follow the: 'acquisition of an altered perspective on their youthful self and activities' (1996: 131). Leibrich (1993) was among the first to explore the relationship between desistance and probation. Her book provided an account of the desistance experiences of 48 men and women who had been sentenced to Probation, but who had subsequently remained crime free for approximately three years. For her, remorse was found to be the primary reason behind making a decision to desist (Leibrich, 1993, 1996). By contrast, Giordano *et al* (2002) suggest that remorse is associated with a repudiation of past actions, and occurs at a later stage of the desistance process. Sampson and Laub (1995) argue that desistance can result from a realisation that offending behaviour can incrementally 'mortgage' future life chances, and that individuals come to regret offending in terms of its impact upon limiting opportunities (1995: 147). These individual-level subjective changes can be 'triggered by an individual offending against their personal morality – [as they come] to think that their offending was wrong' (Weaver, 2009: 18).

Maruna's (2001) study explored the narratives of both persisters and desisters, and found significant differences in subjective factors. Each group had similar backgrounds and lived in

similar environments, yet the narrative ‘scripts’ constructed by each group were markedly different. Persistent, or active, offenders produced a ‘condemnation script’, while desisters articulated a ‘redemption script’. Active offenders regarded their ‘life scripts as having been written for them a long time ago’ (2001: 75), and ‘view themselves as victims of circumstance. They claim to have a clear picture of the “good life” but do not feel they have the ability to get there using their own volition’ (2001: 83).

Like the active offenders in his sample, desisters’ narratives also began by placing themselves as victims of circumstance in the development of their criminal careers. However, desisters undertook self-reconstruction of the ‘true self’ in order to develop a non-offending identity (2001: 89), and desisters had to develop personal agency to achieve this, to overcome structural barriers to desistance (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 55). In forging alternative identities and developing agency, desisters often identified some significant other, or outside force, that empowered the individual to accomplish ‘what he or she was “always meant to do”’ (Maruna, 2001: 87). Desisters also suggested that, as change became more certain, they became involved in ‘generativity’, or activities often underpinned by a moral purpose and which are for the benefit of others, typically younger generations (2001: 99).

4.4 Making Connections in the Evidence-Base

The discussion so far has identified a range of factors that have been shown, in the existing literature, to support the process of desistance. The work of Burnett (2000) and Maruna (2001) has suggested that a dynamic relationship between structure and agency underpins this process,

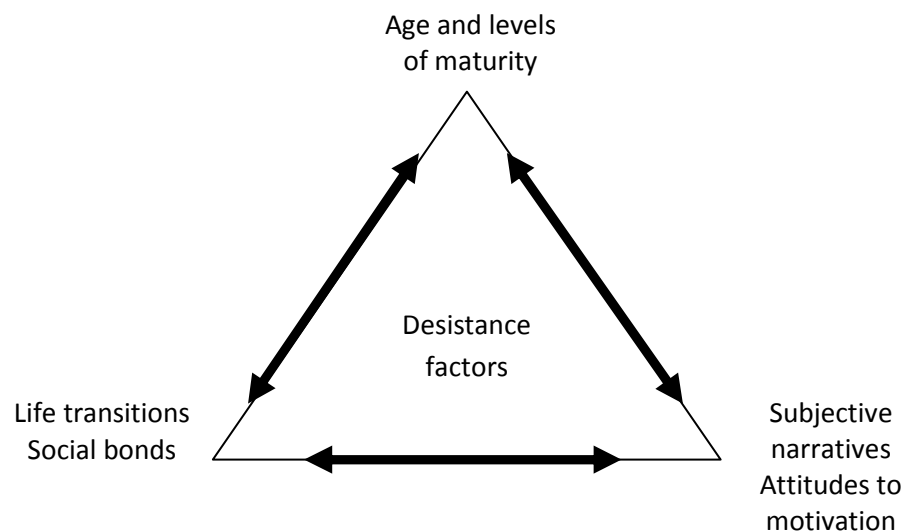
and that a particular interaction occurs between these two dimensions which will affect the likelihood of successful desistance. For Maruna (2001) there are three broad theoretical positions in the desistance literature, each attempting to explain how desistance occurs. ‘Ontogenic’, or maturation, theories are based upon the long-established relationship between age and crime. ‘Sociogenic’ theories explain that there exists a bond between the individual and certain social ties, including family and employment. As these bonds develop, individuals have a stake, or an investment, in society that future criminal activity could jeopardise, so there is an incentive to conform. ‘Narrative’ theories, which are the primary concern of Maruna’s (2001) study, explain how desistance can result from changes to identity and an alternative future outlook.

McNeill (2003; McNeill and Whyte, 2007) argues that desistance occurs somewhere within the interaction between the three dimensions outlined by Maruna (2001) (see figure 7), and that the success or otherwise of desistance is dependent upon the interrelationship between each area. On the one hand, if there is correspondence between each area, moving away from offending, then desistance will be more likely. However, it is likely that most individuals will experience some correspondence and some dissonance between each of the areas throughout the desistance process (McNeill and Whyte, 2007: 148). Indeed, it is the interrelationship between aspects of structure and agency, rather than discrete factors, which underpins desistance:

... the process of desistance is one that is produced through an *interplay* between individual choices, and a range of wider social forces, institutional and societal practices which are beyond the control of the individual (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 261 emphasis in original).

However, desistance does not occur simply through the choices made by individuals from a range of available options. Rather, desistance occurs as a result of the objective and subjective circumstances of individuals' lives at a given time.

Figure 7 Constructing desistance across three theoretical dimensions



Source: McNeill, 2003.

Indeed, it is not just the incidence of particular life-course events that matters to desistance, but the relationship between these and an individual's subjective attachment to the event. This offers an explanation as to how individuals with similar backgrounds living in similar environments can experience desistance in alternative ways. Individuals' reactions to particular situations can be explained in terms of a manifestation of individual characteristics, as people acquire different ways of reacting to similar situations (Zamble and Quinsey, 1997: 146-147). As Farrall (2002) argues:

... the desistance literature has pointed to a range of factors associated with the ending of active involvement in offending. Most of these factors are related to acquiring “something” (most commonly employment, a life partner or a family) which the desister values in some way and which initiates a re-evaluation of his or her life, and for some a sense of who they “are” (2002: 11).

The nature of the subjective attachment to a particular life-course event may be affected by various individual characteristics, including: age, other personal and social circumstances (distinct from the event in question), and existing social ties, in addition to personal attributes such as motivation. As a result of the nature of interaction between subjective and social factors, the desistance process is likely to be complex, lengthy, and non-linear (Maguire and Raynor, 2006b: 24). This is particularly likely to be the case for individuals who attempt to desist during late-modernity.

As risk has emerged as something which individuals have to encounter in their everyday lives (Bauman, 1992, 2000; Beck, 1992a), and courses of action have developed into a myriad of possibilities from which individuals are charged with the responsibility of navigating for themselves (Bauman, 2002; Giddens, 1991), transitional experiences have become more complex (Lash and Urry, 1994; Quinn, 2009). Coupled with this has been a decline in traditional forms of trust, which has made the day-to-day navigation of social worlds more uncertain (Luhmann, 1988; Mishra, 1996; Misztal, 2001). The importance of this is that the transition towards desistance, and the processes that need to be navigated in making it, has become even more complex and challenging. While this provides challenging conditions within which various interventions take place (Smith, 2001), it is argued here that they also provide the rationale for a re-consideration of interventions which are aimed at supporting desistance.

4.5 Supporting Desistance in Probation

The discussion so far highlights a number of implications for practice which is oriented towards supporting the desistance pathways of (ex-)offenders. A number of authors have argued that relationships between key workers and offenders can play a crucial role in the desistance process (Barry, 2000, 2007; Burnett, 2004; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; McNeill *et al*, 2005). There are various ways in which these relationships can influence the desistance process, not least in terms of providing practical support and nurturing pro-social narratives (Burnett and McNeill, 2005: 236). However, despite the growing interest in desistance from crime in recent years, relatively few studies have focused upon the role of interventions from the Probation Service on the desistance process.

Farrall (2002) reviews the existing research related to the outcomes of criminal justice interventions (2002: 11-16), and suggests that the literature can be divided between two research paradigms: the smaller, criminal career research which focuses upon cessation from crime and reveals little about probation supervision; and the much wider literature exploring the outcomes of criminal justice interventions. This latter body of work is predominantly positivist and focuses upon criminal history variables and official recorded data. The limitation, therefore, of this literature is that little can be said about how or why particular interventions work. The recent emphasis underpinning research on outcomes of interventions has been upon assessing the outcomes of cognitive behavioural approaches, coupled with a focus upon specialist interventions as opposed to the generic process of probation (Farrall, 2002: 13). As discussed in previous

chapters, this reflects the rise of the “what works” literature in the 1990s, which, in turn, reflects a concern for evidence-based practice, the forerunner of which has been “cognitive behaviouralism”, and the increase of specialist programmes which focus on specific activities. However, there are some notable exceptions within the literature which have explored the “how” and “why” of Probation.

Rex (1999), in her study of 60 probationers and their experiences of Probation, found that a number of individuals attributed behavioural change to work undertaken by their supervising officer. Most probationers believed that Probation supervision served a rehabilitative purpose (a finding also supported by McCulloch, 2005: 17), and that 41 (68%) of the probationers she interviewed felt that they would be less likely to offend as a result of Probation supervision. Her participants suggested that feeling engaged with Probation and being given the opportunity to take an active role in their own change processes were important. Probationers were also willing to accept direct guidance from their supervising officers about their problems and behaviour, and this was related to the perception that supervising officers were concerned for them and interested in their well-being. The dedication and loyalty of supervising officers was interpreted as a crucial aspect of facilitating behavioural change, as Rex (1999) wrote:

... the commitment shown by probation officers in a whole variety of ways was crucial in preparing probationers to take quite directive guidance from supervisors whom they saw as concerned about their wellbeing (1999: 380).

Rex’s (1999) research, therefore, resonates with the pro-social model that has emerged from practice in Australia (Trotter, 1993, 1996, 1999). Within this model the supervisor encourages the

offender to be actively pro-social, and supports this through praise as a reward for their actions. For this model to be successful, the supervisor needs to provide a framework within which the offender is guided towards a “pro-social lifestyle”, involving the encouragement of reliability, honesty, and respect.

The importance of the “relational” aspect of the desistance process is also highlighted by Barry (2007) and McCulloch (2005), among others (see, for example: Burnett, 2004; McNeill, 2006b). As part of the Scottish Desistance Study, Barry (2007) asked young people for their perceptions about what helped them to reduce offending and their opinions on good practice as “expert witnesses”. With respect to the factors that helped individuals to reduce offending, most stated that resolving personal and social problems was key, but that the process of achieving this was often initiated and maintained by developing significant relationships with friends or family (although this was more often the case for women than men) (Barry, 2007: 413) With respect to respondents’ opinions on good practice, the majority of respondents in the sample suggested:

... that the best approach was for supervising officers to talk and listen to their clients, about the problems, fears and consequences of offending... so as to encourage personal development, learning and meaningful interaction... (Barry, 2007: 416).

Respondents also suggested that to encourage desistance individuals should be: given opportunities to become active members of the community and have a stake in society; directed towards information and advice, particularly with regard to drugs and alcohol; and, provided with tailor-made interventions, to suit the particular contexts of different people. Most respondents

suggested that intensive probation, where individuals were able to build a rapport with their supervising officer, and community service, as it gave people a sense of purpose, were good examples of effective practice in facilitating desistance (Barry, 2007: 416-417). Commonalities that exist within many accounts of the relationship aspect of desistance interventions suggest that talking and listening are fundamental aspects of Probation work, both as a method of dealing with particular problems and as a means of nurturing the relationship necessary to enable probationers to be receptive to more direct guidance (McCulloch, 2005: 18).

In contrast, while more than half of Farrall's (2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006) sample of 199 probationers evidenced the emergence of desistance, very few cases attributed this success to the interventions of Probation. Rather, desistance appeared to emanate from individual motivation and to the particular personal and social contexts of individuals' lives. Indeed, both officers and offenders suggested that overcoming personal and social difficulties was contingent upon a range of factors, many of which were out of the direct control of either party (Farrall, 2002: 207).

Further, McCulloch (2005) found that it was more common for 'improvements' to be made to probationers' social problems, rather than 'resolutions' (2005: 20), and Farrall (2002) found that probation officers were reluctant to become involved in working on desistance-related needs, such as employment and family formation, but where this did occur greater rates of success were seen (2002: 227).

As such, he questions the value of "conversational" approaches to Probation work, which focus upon the individual to the neglect of personal and social contexts. Farrall's (2002) argument is that these interventions can develop agency – for example, through enhancing decision-making

and reasoning skills, or through increasing an individual's employability – but that interventions are also required which are 'aimed at altering some aspects of an individual's social and personal circumstances' (Farrall, 2002: 214). He does not suggest that Probation is irrelevant to the desistance process, rather he argues that Probation has an indirect effect upon factors which contribute to desistance and, as such, Probation interventions should incorporate a greater degree of direct assistance in relation to personal and social contexts:

In many cases the work undertaken whilst on Probation was of little *direct* help to many of the probationers; however, the *indirect* impact of Probation (i.e. naturally occurring changes in employment, accommodation and personal relationships) was of greater significance. "Of greater significance" is unfortunately about as precise an estimation of the impact of social and personal contexts relative to Probation work as can be made (Farrall, 2002: 215 emphasis in original).

McNeill (2006a) has drawn upon these findings to suggest a desistance paradigm for offender interventions. Such a paradigm, he argues, refocuses the work that is carried out with offenders in the context of contemporary penal policies and public discourses around crime, punishment, public protection and re-offending. Further, he argues that desistance should be supported by work with offenders and, therefore, that interventions need to be based upon an understanding of the processes of desistance, particularly as a means of reducing harm and making good to both offenders and victims (2006a: 56). Emphasis is also placed upon the need to explore the connections between structure, agency, reflexivity and identity, such that interventions can develop both social and human capital, while also recognising strengths as well as needs and risks (2006a: 55). Finally, he also highlights some of the 'practice virtues', which are often

identified as valued aspects of the officer-offender relationship (see above), as being relevant to desistance-focused work (McNeill, 2006a: 52).

This desistance paradigm for work with offenders can be incorporated with the conceptualisation of desistance illustrated in figure 7 (above), suggesting that supervising officers and those delivering interventions can play an integral part in the desistance process. The desistance literature highlights that attitudes and motivation are significant to the desistance process (Burnett, 1992, 2000; Farrall, 2002), and that being open to and ready for the possibility of change are likely to be pre-requisites for change to occur (Giordano *et al*, 2002; Rungay, 2004). Assessing the extent to which an individual is ready to change will necessarily impact upon the practical strategies that are employed during formal work with the offender. This suggests a collaborative working relationship between officer and offender to explore each discrete area, as well as the interrelationships between them, to discover which factors in the individual's life are likely to enable or constrain desistance, as McNeill and Whyte (2007) write:

If there were consonance between the three areas such that all are “pulling together” in the direction of desistance, then a reinforcing support plan might be relatively straightforward to construct. If all aspects were consonant in the direction of continued offending, by contrast, this would suggest both implications for risk assessment and, if community supervision were appropriate, the need for an intensive and multifaceted intervention. If, as is perhaps likely in most cases, there were some dissonance within and between the three areas, then the task becomes one of reinforcing the “positives” and challenging the “negatives” (2007: 148).

Both Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2006; McNeill and Whyte, 2007) have argued that the role of Probation work should incorporate methods of supporting change by developing human and

social capital. While human capital – in the form of individual’s skills and knowledge – is already targeted by Probation work, developing social capital remains largely neglected (Farrall, 2002: 217). This is, at least partly, the result of the current emphasis upon the individual offender and their criminogenic needs. Essentially, the argument for supporting desistance in Probation practice relates to the contention that the body of work that has developed from recent desistance studies challenges the correctionalist paradigm that has emerged as the hegemonic discourse in penal policy, public discourse and discussions of effective practice (McNeill, 2004: 241).

Indeed, as discussed earlier in the thesis, recent Probation policy and practice has been primarily geared towards challenging individual deficits and responsabilisation (Whitehead, 2007: 90). Largely this is due to current thinking being dominated by a concern with criminogenic need rather than desistance facilitators, while practice is often led by heavily managerialised and homogenous accredited programmes that challenge individuals’ thinking skills. Therefore, the knowledge and understanding about desistance that has emerged in recent decades has, to date, been relatively unable to effectively influence work that is undertaken with offenders. From the discussion of Probation practice presented in the earlier chapters, and the discussion of desistance presented here, it can be observed that there is incongruence between the two. What remains relatively under-explored is the early transitional stages of desistance, and where there exists consonance or dissonance between Probation interventions and primary desistance.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the key conceptual debates surrounding the study of desistance. It has been observed that, despite recent growing interest in desistance, there remains a considerable lack of clarity about the subject. Part of this problem results from difficulties relating to the definition of desistance, and some authors have developed innovative approaches to discerning what desistance is. Perhaps the most significant of these has been offered by Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, (2004), with respect to the notions of primary and secondary desistance. While this thesis accepts the distinction between these two categorical phases of desistance, the assertion that primary desistance is of no theoretical interest to research is rejected, in four key respects outlined below:

- 1) identity transformation is neither necessary nor sufficient for desistance to be achieved;
- 2) many do not make the transition to secondary desistance, so a greater understanding of primary desistance is required;
- 3) research on primary desistance can develop an understanding of individuals' thinking in the immediate aftermath of making a decision to desist, and;
- 4) research on primary desistance can explore discrete "moments of transition".

As a result, primary, rather than secondary, desistance is the main focus of this thesis. Despite the lack of clarity and, at times, competing approaches to the study of desistance, a significant wealth of knowledge has developed in recent years, providing an overview of the factors that are likely to support desistance. A number of studies have shown that both life-course events and subjective factors are influential in leading towards successful desistance. In addition to this, a few studies

have highlighted the important role that key workers can play in facilitating desistance among those with whom they work.

Drawing these findings together, McNeill (2006) has argued that work with offenders should incorporate an understanding of the desistance process, in particular with respect to identifying the connections between structure, agency, reflexivity and identity. Both Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2006) argue that desistance-focused work exists to a degree, insofar as interventions do exist which help to develop human capital. However, interventions do not develop the social capital that is necessary to provide opportunities for offenders to change. Such consonance and dissonance between interventions and desistance facilitators is highlighted by the discussions presented in the thesis so far, but a greater exploration of this in relation to the early transitional stages of primary desistance is required. The following chapter outlines a theoretical framework for exploring this.

5. STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN DESISTANCE

In the previous chapter several desistance facilitators were identified from the existing literature, relating to changes to both social and subjective factors. Indeed, many explanations of how individuals exit criminal careers have tended to focus upon either structure or agency (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 258). This chapter seeks to provide a theoretical framework that incorporates the role of structural properties in enabling and constraining individual action and the role of agency. However, it proposes a stronger conceptualisation of agency than that which has been previously offered in the desistance literature, by drawing upon the work of Archer (2000, 2003, 2007) and Emirbayer and Mische (1998). This builds upon a number of recent approaches which have explored integrated theories of desistance (Barry, 2010; Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Byrne and Trew, 2007). The theoretical approach proposed here attempts to account for the way in which individuals both receive and respond to the structural properties in their social context. This chapter will provide a brief overview of existing theoretical explanations of desistance, before discussing more recent theoretical developments. It will then conclude by providing a theoretical framework within which primary desistance will be explored in this thesis.

There are three broad theoretical explanations of desistance: “agency” theories, “structural” theories, and “integrated” theories (Barry, 2010). Agency theories generally explain desistance in relation to some conception of free will or rational choice (Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Within these theories desistance is explained as resulting from individuals’ choices, motivations, values and beliefs. Individuals will desist (or at least attempt to desist)

when they regard offending as either morally wrong, or where they determine that the rewards to be gained from crime are outweighed by risks. Structural theories, on the other hand, explain desistance as resulting from particular life-course events, such as employment, marriage, or parenthood. These events alter the socio-structural context of an individual's life, such that offending becomes incompatible with the roles that the individual finds themselves occupying, or where the structural context creates a new set of routine activities that inhibits offending behaviour. Integrated theories explain desistance in terms of an interaction between agency and structural factors. Within these theories desistance occurs as changes to an individual's attitudes, values and decision-making lead to the individual seeking to alter their socio-structural context by searching for, or engineering, particular pro-social life-course transitions. Once these transitions take place, new behaviours are learned and new pro-social roles become cemented (Barry, 2010). This thesis employs an integrated approach to desistance because I argue that this is necessary for exploring the transition towards desistance, if the processes by which certain individuals are able to desist under particular conditions are to be understood. Therefore, a theoretical approach is offered which incorporates agency, as the means by which individuals seek to take some control over their future lives, and structure, as the social context within which individuals act.

5.1 Agency and desistance

The early impetus behind this position can be traced back to the work of Clarke and Cornish (1985 – although it is worth noting that, in their work, desistance is neither the explicit nor a main focus), underpinned by a rational choice perspective. Within this position, individuals are

presumed to be rational actors who make rational calculations about their situations in order to make decisions about those situations (Kim, 2009: 316-317). For Clarke and Cornish (1985) the driving force behind desistance is the individual's role in making a decision to give up crime, and individuals will base this decision upon wider social factors in their lives. It is important to note that Clarke and Cornish (1985) do not suggest that wider social factors constrain actors' decision-making, nor that social factors might condition decision-making without the actor's awareness of them or their influence. Essentially, much of the research which emphasises the role of the individual agent in the desistance process is concerned with how actors re-assess and re-evaluate their situations, the impact on their orientations towards criminal and non-criminal behaviour, and the decisions that will ensue (Cromwell *et al*, 1991; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Leibrich, 1993; Shover, 1983). In other words:

... the probability of desistance from criminal participation increases as expectations for achieving friends, money, autonomy and happiness *via* crime decrease (Shover and Thompson, 1992: 97 emphasis in original).

More recent research which focuses upon the role of the individual in the desistance process has tended to emphasise the ways in which similar social factors can be mediated in different ways by different individuals, and how this can lead to different desistance outcomes. For example, Giordano *et al* (2002) have argued that 'agentic moves' (2002: 992) are the most influential aspect of the desistance process, and that an individual's commitment to change, openness to change, and ability to identify 'hooks for change' are the factors which are most likely to facilitate desistance. Similarly, Maruna and Roy (2007) have suggested that desistance is more

likely to result from changes in an individual's 'self-identity and worldview' such as their commitments, concerns and needs (2007: 115), and the ways in which social and environmental factors are likely to be interpreted differently depending upon these changing outlooks.

In their review of the existing desistance literature, LeBel *et al* (2008) argue that there are 4 interconnected themes which are related to the role of the individual agent in the desistance process:

- Hope and self-efficacy
- Shame and remorse
- Internalising stigma
- Alternative identities (2008: 136).

They suggest that 'hope' is more than just some intangible concept, but rather that it refers to the imagining of future goals and the pathways to achieving them. It is about envisioning future outcomes and perceiving the ability to realise them. As Maruna (2001) argues, desisters tend to have a plan and are optimistic that they can achieve it. In a similar way, Giordano *et al* (2002) suggest that an:

exposure to a hook and one's attitude toward it are important elements of successful change. In addition to externally manipulated shifts (e.g., actor is offered a job), then, we must consider that what changes may primarily involve either the hook's perceived availability and its meaning, salience, or importance for the individual (2002: 1001).

A considerable body of the desistance literature suggests that shame and regret about offending behaviour are linked to processes of moving away from crime. Leibrich (1996) suggested that shame was ‘the primary reason’ for giving up crime, while Giordano *et al* (2002) argue that desistance involves the individual regarding criminal behaviour in negative terms (2002: 1002). However, Giordano *et al* (2002) state that the repudiation of past criminal behaviour is one aspect of a broader collective of cognitive transformations which enable the actor to desist from crime. The shame and regret which they refer to is not, in a sense, the “trigger” for giving up crime, but rather it enables the individual to distance their “reformed self” from their past “criminal self”. For Giordano *et al* (2002) then, shame and regret may be more closely associated with the transition towards secondary desistance. A number of authors, therefore, suggest that feelings of shame about past behaviour are linked to desistance, but LeBel *et al* (2008) argue that this association should not necessarily be read as a ‘direct inverse relationship’ as, for some ‘the deep internalisation of shame may trigger feelings of depression and powerlessness’ (2008: 137).

Braithwaite’s (1989) theory of shame and reintegration states that there are two distinct ways in which offenders can experience shame. Reintegrative shaming is more likely to encourage desistance because it is the criminal act that is brought under scrutiny. Stigmatising shame, on the other hand, is more likely to lead to recidivism because both the act and the individual are regarded as incompatible with mainstream society. When offenders are stigmatised and excluded, they:

... are left with limited opportunity for achieving self-respect and affiliation in the mainstream – but are welcomed among subcultural groups of similarly

stigmatised outcasts. Hence, the vicious cycle of persistent offending (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell and Naples, 2004: 273).

In brief, if a probationer feels that they are, or have been, degraded then it is unlikely that they will engage with individuals or programmes intended to facilitate their desistance from crime.

LeBel *et al* (2008) argue that stigma can be a subjective variable, that is it can be defined from an individual's perspective (2008: 137), and as such different individuals' perceptions of their experiences of stigmatisation and the way in which they reflect on those experiences are likely to impact upon the desistance process.

There is also a significant body of evidence which suggests that desisters develop alternative, pro-social identities which are incompatible with past selves. Giordano *et al* (2002: 1001) argue that this is part of the broader cognitive transformation that takes place in successful desisters.

For Maruna (2001), successful desisters were more likely to display identities of "generativity" than recidivist offenders and were more likely to show a caring nature towards others (see also: McNeill and Maruna, 2007). Generativity is:

The concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation, manifested through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to benefit youth and foster the development and well-being of individuals and social systems that will outlive the self (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1998: xx).

This suggests that "giving back" to the community can help offenders to desist, and reinforces the importance of constructing positive narratives and new pro-social identities.

In brief, a focus upon the role of the individual agent in the desistance process can elicit a considerable breadth of knowledge about how some individuals come to move away from or give up crime. However, agentic accounts need to consider the ways in which human beings' decisions and actions are constrained by the world around them, even under circumstances where the individual is unaware of such constraining forces. Desistance accounts which emphasise human agency often presuppose that what offenders say about their experiences of the processes of desistance are an accurate representation of those experiences. There are many forces which the individual will be unaware of, but which nonetheless influence the individual's activities, and they will therefore be unable to articulate how such forces have enabled or constrained them. Furthermore, as individuals talk about their lives and their experiences they are likely to "plug the gaps", in order to give their lives a greater sense of order, rationality and meaning (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 260-261).

5.2 Structure and desistance

The literature which predominantly emphasises the role of structures in the desistance process has been, largely, premised on the theoretical understanding that desistance occurs through processes of ageing and maturation. In brief, this thesis contends that as individuals grow up they tend to experience those things which give human beings a "stake" in society, and it is the structural influence of an individual's changing social environment that is the precursor to desistance (Glueck and Glueck, 1940; Laub and Sampson, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 1993). The personal and social challenges faced by offenders have been well-documented (Burnett, 2000; Farrall, 2002; SEU, 2002). A significant number of offenders experience homelessness or face barriers to

housing (Niven and Olagundaye, 2002; Niven and Stewart, 2005; Petersilia, 2003), and many face problems with employment and education (Fletcher *et al*, 1998; Sarno *et al*, 1999).

It is perhaps, then, little surprise that many offenders experience financial difficulties and debt, particularly those offenders who have served custodial sentences (Hagell *et al*, 1995). Many experience mental health problems (Ditton, 1999), and for many offenders alcohol/drug misuse is a factor in their offending (Rumgay, 2004; Ferguson *et al*, 2006; Schroeder *et al*, 2007). These structural factors may have a compounding effect, whereby individual offenders become increasingly socially excluded and segregated. For example, incarceration can “knife off” opportunities to participate in mainstream society, while increasing opportunities to commit crime. Indeed, community orders, to a lesser extent, can have a similar impact, particularly if there are requirements which the probationer is obliged to fulfil which act as a barrier to pro-social opportunities.

Such social structural factors can lead to recidivism, which has led some to theorise that the primary route away from re-offending is through structural changes in an individual’s life.

Sampson and Laub (1993) call these changes ‘turning points’, and they argue that the three most important of these are marriage, military service, and employment (Laub and Sampson, 2003).

Such turning points allow for the development of social bonds which give the individual more of a stake in society, they can alter routine activities, and they can provide a form of social control.

As Laub and Sampson (2003) summarise:

Overall it appears that successful cessation from crime occurs when the proximate causes of crime are affected. A central element in the desistance process is the “knifing off” of individual offenders from their immediate environment and offering them a new script for the future (2003: 145).

Others have found that marriage and parenthood are turning points that can lead to desistance from crime (Farrington and West, 1995; Horney *et al*, 1995; Warr, 1998), and there is also evidence to suggest that gaining paid work facilitates a reduction in re-offending (Fletcher, 2001; Rhodes, 2008; Shover, 1983; Uggen, 2000; Visher and Travis, 2003). However, it is important to note that it is not necessarily the turning point itself that facilitates desistance, but rather it is the qualitative nature of the turning point that is likely to lead the offender away from crime.

Mischkowitz (1994), for example, argued that it was the quality of the relationship, as opposed to the presence of a relationship, which impacted upon an individual’s offending (1994: 319).

Furthermore, Laub *et al* (1998) argue:

that turning points are "triggering events" that are, in part, exogenous – that is, they are chance events. If these events were entirely the result of conscious calculations or enduring patterns of behaviour, we could not argue for the independent role of social bonds in shaping behaviour (1998: 225).

Therefore, if structural changes can be ‘chance events’ then it must be presumed that they can occur without any impetus from the individual agent. This position would overlook the possibility that individuals can shape their own lives, instead painting a picture of human beings as passive agents whose lives are determined by the wider social structural environment.

While each of the positions outlined above offers much by way of advancing knowledge about desistance, it is unhelpful to view the process in such dichotomous terms. This divide regards

would-be desisters as either ‘super agents’ or ‘super dupes’ (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 261), suggesting that individuals are either entirely free to make decisions about their lives or that they are wholly constrained by the social structural forces that surround them. Until relatively recently the exploration of the interplay between subjective and structural factors has been somewhat limited.

5.3 Structure-agency interplay in explanations of desistance

Many recent accounts of desistance have argued that the process of moving away from crime occurs as a result of an interaction between structure and agency (Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Farrall and Bowling, 1999; Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2003; Vaughan, 2007). Indeed, McNeill (2006) suggests that:

Desistance ... seems to reside somewhere in the interface between developing personal maturity, the changing social bonds associated with certain life transitions, and the individual subjective narrative constructions which people who have been involved in offending build around these key events and changes (2006: 131-132).

Farrall (2002) argues that desistance can result from particular structural turning points that offer the individual something that they value (such as a job or a partner), and which prompts a re-evaluation of their involvement in offending behaviour (2002: 11). Similarly, both Giordano *et al* (2002) and Runggay (2004) have argued that desistance occurs where structural contexts offer opportunities for individuals to change. Crucially, for these authors, the individual needs to be both open to the possibility of change and ready to seize opportunities in their social contexts. Such recent attention to structure-agency interaction in desistance has led to the development of a

number of models of the desistance process which seek to explain this interaction, and how it can lead to successful desistance (see table 10).

Table 10 Three models of desistance processes

Giordano <i>et al</i> (2002)	Vaughan (2007)	Sheffield Pathways Out of Crime Study (SPOOCS) (ongoing)
General cognitive openness to change	Discernment: reviews possible choices	Triggering event
Exposure and reaction to “hooks for change”	Deliberation: about possible courses of action	Decision to try to change
Availability of an appealing conventional self	Dedication: commitment to non-criminal identity	Thinking differently about oneself
Transformation in attitudes to deviant behaviour		Taking action to desist
		Maintaining change – offender looks for reinforcers, but may encounter obstacles

Source: Weaver and McNeill, 2010: 43.

However, despite the emergence of such recent theoretical approaches, a number of authors still under-emphasise the role of the “active agent” in the desistance process (Vaughan, 2007: 390). LeBel *et al* (2008) argue that this is the case primarily because the concern has often been with uncovering the social factors that impact upon desistance by controlling for individual differences (2008: 139-140). Such views of desistance emphasise the role of the social environment in conditioning (if not determining) humans’ activity, to the neglect of the complicity of the individual agent in the occurrence of life events. In other words, a “strong social” understanding of desistance:

... omits consideration of how the agent originally submitted to these [structural] forces and why they remain enthralled by them (Vaughan, 2007: 390).

Laub and Sampson (2001, 2003), in their follow-up study of the life-history narratives of fifty-two offenders and ex-offenders, argue that they will integrate structure and agency in their explanation of desistance (2001: 4). However, their approach is essentially structuralist, and they suggest that desistance occurs through a series of 'side-bets'. Attachment to marriage and employment inhibits involvement in offending in the short-term and, over time, as individuals invest more in these institutions long-term conformity is secured (2001: 50-51). They argue that individuals do not need to develop 'deep and lasting interests' to alter their behaviour and sense of self, but rather that various structurally induced turning points 'knife off' criminal opportunities and ensure a commitment to desistance without the individual realising it (Vaughan, 2007: 391). In this account, desisters appear to be 'super dupes' (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 261), they are passive agents whose behaviour is altered by their structural context.

The transition towards desistance cannot be fully explained by Laub and Sampson's (2001, 2003) account, as there is no elaboration in respect of why people choose to submit themselves to certain structural institutions or why they remain during periods of ambivalence. In the short-term they could argue that individuals seek to satisfy their immediate preferences, but this does not explain why this is so during challenging times in the absence of 'deep and lasting interests' to sustain their commitment (Vaughan, 2007: 392). Further, this does not account for 'the central point that is implied in all definitions of agency: alternative courses of action are available, and the agent could have therefore acted otherwise' (Hays, 1994: 64).

Alternatively, they could argue that structural institutions provide the individual with a particular role and an associated set of behaviours and obligations to which members of that role adhere to (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 256-257). However, individuals do not always have full knowledge of their social contexts (Archer, 2000: 90) and, thus, may be unaware of how to conform to particular roles. This may be particularly the case for a group of individuals who have spent much of their lives marginalised and excluded from mainstream society. Individuals can only fulfil certain roles through reflecting on their situational context in relation to their long-term interests, and the range of possible courses of action available to realise them (Vaughan, 2007: 392).

Desistance research requires a theoretical framework that can account for why individuals may choose to submit to certain structural institutions and why they should remain within them for longer periods of time. Vaughan (2007) argues, drawing upon Archer's (2003) notion of the 'internal conversation', that desistance can occur as a result of individuals' internal narratives. That is, ultimate concerns that individuals aspire to achieve are considered in relation to their social circumstances, and this enables individuals to decide upon what they perceive to be appropriate courses of action from a range of possibilities. This moves beyond a simple cost/benefit analysis of a particular course of action, and instead explores how individuals make certain choices in relation to future objectives. This thesis builds on this approach by offering a theoretical framework for the study of primary desistance that incorporates both individuals' subjectivity and the objectivity of their social contexts. Such an approach would, thus, allow for the consideration of the subjective dimensions of the initial transition towards desistance

(Bottoms *et al*, 2004: 374), but also with how individuals might anticipate making the transition from a temporary lull in offending towards longer-term desistance.

The previous chapter highlighted that successful desistance often involves the individual reflecting on past actions and coming to regard them as an affront to their personal morality and incongruent with desired future actions. Further, successful desisters often have a plan, or life script, that involves who they want to become in the future (Maruna, 2001; Runggay, 2004).

Various structural turning points were also identified that have been shown to facilitate desistance. However, rather than following Laub and Sampson's (2001, 2003) thesis that these turning points are 'side-bets' that produce conformity and desistance by default, it is argued here that individuals will actively consider who they want to become and how they want to act in the future, and will decide upon the structural turning points necessary to achieve these objectives.

This is because the life-course events that Laub and Sampson (and the wider desistance literature) refer to need to be 'relevant' to the individual in order to facilitate a move away from criminal activity (Haigh, 2009). In the absence of this relevance, it is argued here, individuals are unlikely to be able to re-orient their preoccupations with the factors that maintain criminal activity towards those factors which are likely to sustain desistance (Serin and Lloyd, 2009: 352). In order to explore the relevance of structural factors for individuals engaging in the desistance process, it is necessary to explore how they receive such structures and how this influences their decisions and strategies for future action. To achieve this it is necessary to explore their 'inner dialogue' (Archer, 2007).

5.4 The Internal Conversation and Primary Desistance

The theoretical approach offered here aims to avoid the determinism of the structuralist approaches outlined above, without resorting to the usage of agency as free will or adhering to the relatively recent claim that: ‘if you believe in agency you need to adopt a rational choice perspective’ (Paternoster and Bushway, 2004 cited in Sampson and Laub, 2005a: 38). Therefore, a theoretical framework is offered that gives proper recognition to the roles of structure and agency in the desistance process, but which also considers how social structure influences human action. This is not a particularly radical approach, as the argument simply follows Bhaskar’s (1989) assertion that ‘the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency’ (1989: 26). However, the notion of how agency is conditioned by structure has been largely neglected, and consideration needs to be given to both the objective impingement of structures, and the subjective response to this from the individual agent (Archer, 2007: 10).

Social theory has accounted for the objective side of this argument, outlining how: structural properties shape the situational context that individuals find themselves in; how they enable or constrain various opportunities and actions; and how various interests in certain actions and resources to undertake them can be differentially distributed. However, these structural accounts do not, generally, explain how people in similar situational contexts can act, or react, in different ways (Archer, 2007:10-11). Similarly, desistance theory has accounted for a range of structural factors that are more likely to motivate individuals towards desistance, but there has been little exploration of how individuals receive these structural factors. It is argued here that this is largely the result of inadequate conceptualisations of agency within the desistance literature.

While agency has become more prominent in recent accounts of desistance (Giordano *et al*, 2002; Maruna, 2001), usage of the term in these contexts remains somewhat vague (Bottoms *et al*, 2004: 368). In the broader sociological literature agency is frequently defined in juxtaposition to structure, and this contrast is often taken to mean:

that structure is systematic and patterned, while agency is contingent and random; that structure is constraint, while agency is freedom; that structure is static, while agency is active; that structure is collective, while agency is individual (Hays, 1994: 57).

However, such a contrast is unhelpful in exploring the interaction between structure and agency, as there is no consideration of how individuals are able to actively reproduce or transform their social contexts. This is required if research is to be able to explore the ‘black box’ of desistance – that is, *how* and *why* individuals desist under certain social circumstances (Farrall, 2002). The argument presented in this chapter so far is underpinned by an assumption that agency possesses some degree of ‘transformational power’ (Simmonds, 1989: 187), such that individuals have some degree of control over the actions they undertake, although the range of possible courses of action will be determined by the distribution of various structural properties within the social context.

It is argued here that explanations of desistance need to be able to account for how individuals decide upon particular courses of action from a range of possibilities. Also, there needs to be linkage between such an explanation and the objectives that individuals hold – this can be found in the work of Archer (2003, 2007). It is also argued that desistance involves both an

individualised consideration of the past (in terms of reflecting on the immorality of past actions), and of the future (in terms of envisaging life scripts and identities for desistance). If explanations are to be found for how individuals undertake the ‘structurally transformative agency’ (Hays, 1994: 64) necessary to knife away the past and commit to relevant life-course turning points in order to realise future aspirations, then an account of agency is required that explicitly incorporates notions of how individuals actively seek to alter their socio-structural contexts.

5.5 Archer’s ‘Inner Dialogue’

Vaughan (2007) argues that desistance can be explained according to three interrelated processes, drawing upon Archer’s (2000, 2003) notion of the internal conversation. First, the individual reviews a range of possible choices that they could make in relation to their lifestyle. Second, the individual considers the possible courses of action that they could take to achieve this lifestyle. This includes a comparison of who they were, who they currently are, and who they would like to be. Third, the individual commits to a new non-criminal identity (Vaughan, 2007). This is Archer’s (2000) ‘DDD scheme’: discernment, deliberation and dedication are the three fundamental moments of the internal conversation that Archer argues is the reflexive aspect of agents’ subjectivity which explains the mediation of structural properties. If the study of primary desistance is concerned with how individuals respond in the immediate aftermath of making a decision to desist and, therefore, with the goals and projects in relation to this which individuals commit to, then an account of how primary desisters decide upon these is required.

Discernment is, essentially, a review stage whereby individuals consider what aspects of their lives they are currently satisfied or dissatisfied with, and they clarify their concerns, including desires and objectives, in relation to this consideration. Positive concerns are highlighted as either actual or potential items worthy of further consideration, while concerns that are not considered to be of worth at that moment in time are rejected, leaving only certain concerns available for further deliberation.

Deliberation involves an exploration of the perceived rewards, demands and implications of those concerns deemed to be worthy of further consideration in the first stage. During the deliberation phase individuals can choose to reject concerns, make comparisons between various concerns, or they may make initial determinations of which concerns to commit to. Individuals may rank these concerns, often envisioning the “way of life” that this may entail.

Dedication is the culmination of the previous two stages, within which the individual will decide (a) whether the life envisioned in relation to a particular set of concerns is worth working towards, and (b) whether they are capable of both achieving and sustaining it. Individuals will prioritise the concerns to which they choose to aspire, necessarily rejecting or suppressing others, which entails that the individual must align the concerns that they have prioritised, while simultaneously resolving any disappointment at relinquishing others (Archer, 2000: ch. 7, 2007: 20-21).

Archer (2007) also explains that individuals engage in a process of consulting their ongoing projects to assess whether they can achieve them. In turn, this may result in the individual

adapting or adjusting their projects, or abandoning them altogether if they decide that they are no longer viable or desirable. If courses of action prove to be successful, individuals may gain in confidence and may prioritise more ambitious projects, whereas if courses of action lead to undesired consequences individuals may begin to lose motivation and commitment. It is this aspect of agential subjectivity that enables a more precise exploration of how individuals act, moving beyond empirical generalisations about what most people in similar positions will do most of the time, while also avoiding the imputation of subjectivity by the researcher (Archer, 2007: 21), as individuals can explain, to the best of their knowledge, why they undertook a particular course of action at a particular time.

There is clear resonance with the argument outlined by Archer (2007) and accounts in the existing desistance literature (Vaughan, 2007). Giordano *et al* (2002) and Runggay (2004), for example, both argue that would-be desisters need to be open to the possibility of change and need to be able to identify catalysts, or ‘hooks’, for change within their social context. This suggests that individuals need to perceive certain structural turning points, desires or objectives both as positive developments, and as available for realisation. As Vaughan (2007) argues, the structural account of desistance presumes that structural turning points (such as employment) can exert change even in the absence of participation from the individual.

However, even if the individual does experience a particular structural turning point, this does not ensure that their dispositions are consequently altered. Rather, for structural turning points to be influential in facilitating change, individuals need to regard them as personal concerns, and this is achieved through the individual reflecting on those aspects of their life with which they are

satisfied or dissatisfied, and clarifying their concerns accordingly (Vaughan, 2007: 394). Further, as Archer's account suggests, individuals will frequently re-evaluate their concerns, perhaps altering or abandoning them accordingly, and for individuals attempting to desist this may result in lapse or relapse (Burnett, 2004 – see previous chapter). Alternatively, individuals who encounter positive experiences as a result of their attempts to desist may reaffirm their commitment to their concerns.

It is argued here that desistance is one such concern, or “life project”, that (ex-)offenders may dedicate themselves to. This concern will be one amongst multiple life projects, and may be held as the individual's ‘ultimate concern’, that is what they care about the most (Archer, 2003). Alternatively, individuals may hold other concerns in higher regard, but which require desistance to be achieved. A concern is regarded as ‘an end that is desired, however tentatively or nebulously, and also a notion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it’ (Archer, 2003: 6). This is not to argue that individuals are free to make what they want of their own choosing (see Hollis, 1994: 19), nor is it a ‘concession to social constructionism’ (Vaughan, 2007: 395).

Rather, concerns are determined through the mediation between agents' own subjectivity and the objective constraints and enablements that confront them in their social context. Indeed, the “interior dialogue” is not just a window upon the world, rather it is what determines our being-in-the-world, though not in the times and circumstance of our choosing’ (Archer, 2000: 318). It is in engaging in this ‘interior dialogue’ that individuals decide upon what they want to achieve in relation to their self-knowledge about the world (which is always fallible) and what matters most

to them (Archer, 2003). In relation to desistance, this entails that individuals dedicate themselves to an alternative lifestyle that enables them to move away from crime, and which will, ultimately, define them as being an “ex-offender”.

Therefore, Archer (2000, 2003) argues, individuals determine the concerns that constitute the future lifestyle that they desire. In doing so:

the present “I” considers its future self, the “You” ... The past “I”, which has now become the memory bank, the “Me”, may also supply material for thought ... The present “I”, which alone is capable of action, basically has to weigh future aspirations against past self-knowledge. Whether a course of action is forthcoming or not, the “I” could not have been busier and there is nothing more reflexive than the internal conversation (Archer, 2003: 44).

Prior thoughts and actions undertaken by the past “Me” shape the objective structures which enable or constrain the array of concerns and projects under consideration by the present “I”, which, in turn, will influence conditions and outcomes for the future “You”. The “I” must continuously reflexively consider its concerns and projects, deliberating about the viability of their realisation and the potential opportunity costs incurred through their continued pursuit. It is the temporal orientation of the present “I” that determines whether or not the individual will continue with or resign themselves to neglecting a particular project. The outcome will have clear implications as to the identity of the future “You”, and the circumstances within which they will find themselves (Flynn, 2008: 123).

The case of Russell, discussed in Farrall and Bowling (1999: 261-262), illustrates how this tripartite reflexivity can lead to desistance. The authors, following Giddens’s (1979, 1983, 1984)

structuration theory, argue that Russell's desistance emerged, partly at least, as a result of the position-practices within which he found himself after being arrested. They state that this is an example of 'how desistance is demanded of an individual' (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 261), because Russell was unable to continue drug dealing because he no longer had the capital needed to acquire drugs, and because his wife would not allow him to keep drugs at their home any longer. However, Russell could have acted alternatively, despite the financial constraints he faced and the wishes of his wife. Rather, it is argued here that he determined that his concerns were to become a "family man" and reflected that his past commitments to drug dealing were incongruent with this. He determined that he was able to pursue his concerns given the structural enablements and constraints within his social context, rather than resorting to the criminal activity that had been part of his past "self".

Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) work, therefore, outlines how individuals reflexively construct their own identities (whether this entails continuation in relation to certain projects, or the emergence of alternatives) by undertaking a temporal internal conversation which enables them to determine what is of most importance to them. This entails the individual reflecting on "who they were" in the past in relation to "who they want to be" in the future. Through doing this, the individual in the present is able to distance themselves from the past and work towards their future concerns. Such a consideration of human reflexivity can offer a greater insight into how individuals exercise "transformative agency" – that is, agency which can alter the socio-structural context of an individual's life. The importance of this to desistance is clear, insofar as individuals who are able to engage with and exercise transformative agency are more likely to successfully move away from crime. In order to achieve this, individuals will need to exercise agency that is

oriented towards the future, and the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) offers an insight into how different temporal orientations of agency can influence action.

5.6 Emirbayer and Mische's 'Chordal Triad of Agency'

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that there are different temporal orientations of agency, and that, depending on the particular orientation of an individual at a given time, the socio-structural context within which the individual operates may either be reproduced or transformed. They define agency as:

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (1998: 970).

Agency is, therefore, the capacity of individuals to respond to problematic situations and, in relation to this, the ability of individuals to alter their temporal orientations and thus reproduce or transform their social contexts (Biesta and Tedder, 2006a: 11). Further, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that there should be greater exploration of transformative agency. This is clearly relevant to the study of primary desistance as individuals who are encountering this transitional stage are likely to face problematic situations and, as discussed in the previous chapter, one of the aims of studying primary desistance is to explore how individuals approach the task of sustaining longer-term desistance prospectively. The existing literature clearly shows that individuals will need to overcome challenging circumstances if they are to successfully desist, and an exploration

of primary desistance which incorporates this conceptualisation of agency can provide an insight into how individuals approach such tasks.

The perspective outlined here contends that agency involves the capacity to exert influence over an individual's social context, and possibly alter the trajectory of their life-course. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue, however, that agency should be understood as being three-dimensional: that is, that agency refers to the past, orients towards the future, and engages with the present. They call this distinction the 'chordal triad of agency' (1998: 970), and argue that the importance of recognising these agentic dimensions is 'that agentic processes can only be understood if they are linked intrinsically to the changing temporal orientations of situated actors' (1998: 967). Crucially, these orientations are only analytical distinctions and each is present within all action, although not in equal measure, and to understand agentic processes necessitates an understanding of the interplay between these dimensions, and how the interplay varies according to the structural context of action (Biesta and Tedder, 2006b: 3).

The orientations of agency that Emirbayer and Mische (1998) refer to are the iterative, the projective, and the practical-evaluative. It is argued here that individuals may alter their temporal orientation to agency in relation to the status of their internal conversations and the circumstances of their social contexts at particular moments in time. A positive internal conversation, whereby the individual believes that they are making progress towards achieving their goals, and a social context that includes enabling structural properties may be more likely to lead to a projective dimension of agency, leading to innovation on the part of the individual.

The iterational element of agency involves reflecting on past actions and the individual's understandings of them, and is defined by the authors as the:

selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971).

Thus, the iterational dimension of agency is the individual's ability to recall and select schemas of thought and action that they have developed through historical interactions. However, 'the agentic dimension [of iteration] lies in *how actors selectively recognise, locate and implement* such schemas' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 975 emphasis in original), rather than simply referring to the possession of these schemas. This builds upon Giddens's notions of 'practical consciousness' and 'routine practices'. Routine practices constitute the foundation of individuals' habitual activities (Giddens, 1984: 282), while practical consciousness refers to the ability of individuals to be able to accomplish these everyday tasks, without necessarily being able to describe them (Farrall and Bowling, 1999: 255). This practice of recursively activating structures to enable the routinisation of action (Giddens, 1979) can be explained by reference to the notion of 'ontological security'.

According to Giddens (1991) individuals have to constantly locate their own sense of ontological security, a point which is shared by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) when they write that 'modern guidelines actually compel the self-organization and self-thematization of people's biographies' (2002: 31). Individuals will routinely try to maintain a sense of ontological security, or else they would be paralysed by anxiety, and this is most effectively achieved by establishing

circumstances of familiarity and routine (Liddle, 2001: 56). Thus, for Giddens, it is the need to achieve ontological security that coerces individuals to routinise their activities, in order to obtain a sense of stability. However, this does not account for how individuals will seek to challenge their routinised actions, and attempt to induce changes in their social contexts.

The projective dimension of agency 'is linked to the intention to bring about a future that is different from the present or the past' (Biesta and Tedder, 2006b: 3). Agency, therefore, involves more than merely repeating past actions, but instead entails that individuals are active in producing new possibilities of action. The projective dimension of agency is defined as the:

imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971).

This aspect of agency has been neglected in many contemporary theories, although a number of authors have argued that individuals are capable of "active agency" in effecting change. May and Cooper (1995), for example, suggest that humans possess the capacity to 'resituate' themselves and transform various aspects of social activity (1995: 77). For Giddens (1998), under conditions of late-modernity individuals must live in a more reflective manner, which can generate new possibilities of thought and action (1998: 37). However, these frameworks do not allow for the analysis of agency as leading to change (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 983 footnote).

Drawing upon Mead's notion of 'distance experience', the projective dimension of agency explains how individuals are able to distance themselves from past repertoires of action,

including the habits and traditions of social structures that constrain their identities and activities. It is this capacity for distanciation that allows for individuals to undertake new schemas of action and alter life-course trajectories, through the ‘narrative construction’ of future possibilities and their ‘hypothetical resolution’ prior to the actual execution of appropriate courses of action (Biesta and Tedder, 2006a: 14). These future possibilities encompass both ‘strongly purposive ... goals, plans, and objectives’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 984), and potentially more transient aspirations and desires.

The projective dimension of agency is, therefore, future-oriented as individuals ‘construct changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 984). Thus, the projective dimension of agency can be regarded as, ‘an essential element in understanding processes of social reproduction and change’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 991), and any adequate understanding of these processes needs to acknowledge ‘the relevance and influence of future expectations’ (Biesta and Tedder, 2006a: 15). However, this alone does not explain how or why individuals act in present social contexts.

The practical-evaluative dimension of agency relates to the actions of individuals in response to the contextual demands of the present. This aspect is defined as the:

capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971).

In this respect, the practical-evaluative dimension of agency can be understood as the manner by which individuals incorporate knowledge of past actions, and their orientations towards the future, into the circumstances of the present (Biesta and Tedder, 2006a: 15). As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue, ‘relatively unreflective routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations; and newly imagined projects must be brought down to earth within real-world circumstances’ (1998: 994). Thus, crucially, the practical-evaluative dimension is not merely an adaptation to certain problematic situations, but encompasses the judgement and deliberation that individuals exercise in their decision-making strategies.

The practical-evaluative dimension of agency consists of: the problematisation of the present situation as somehow inconsistent with or resistant to the realisation of projects; the characterisation of present circumstances in relation to past experience; deliberation between potential courses of action as a response to situational contexts in relation to broader objectives; the decision of how to act “in the here and now” following deliberation among various possibilities; and the execution of the decision in the correct manner at the right time (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 998-1000). As such, the practical-evaluative dimension involves a consideration of both the means and the ends of action; that is, what individuals want to achieve and how they intend to achieve it (Biesta and Tedder, 2006a: 15).

Archer’s (2000, 2003, 2007) arguments are relevant here, as individuals’ capacity for exercising agency that can challenge social contexts and routinised actions can be enhanced by particular forms of reflexivity. Reflexive deliberations which are concerned with generating alternative future possibilities are more likely to lead to the individual exercising transformative agency.

This is because, in undertaking these reflexive deliberations, the individual wishes to distance themselves from their present context. However, individuals may wish to maintain their contexts, to retain a sense of ontological security, and will therefore act to achieve this by undertaking habitual action.

Thus, reflexivity can lead to a “strong” form of agency, whereby the potential for transformative action is heightened, or it can lead to a “weak” form of agency, whereby individuals will accept their structural surroundings as they are and resort to the iterational orientation of agency to reproduce them. In other words, what I am arguing in establishing this theoretical framework is that distance can be achieved through the exercising of projective and practical-evaluative orientations of agency, which will lead to structurally transformative action. Particular forms of reflexivity located within an individual’s internal conversations can enable such agency, while other forms of reflexivity may lead to an iterational, or reproductive, orientation of agency.

5.7 Constraining Agency: The Importance of Structure

The distinction between strong and weak agency indicates how individuals in differential positions can possess varying capacities of agency to fulfil objectives, change life-course trajectories and alter future contexts of action. This, it is argued here, is the result of differentially distributed socially structured opportunities, and the related structural constraints on the possibilities of action. This, clearly, influences the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, as individuals have to deliberate over courses of action in relation to perceived available opportunities. However, structural constraints also influence the projective dimension of agency,

in the sense that individuals in certain social contexts may be less capable of conceiving of a future as fundamentally different to their past or present.

Projectivity can occur with greater or lesser clarity, and can extend farther or nearer into the future. Further, it can generate relatively mundane goals or more sweeping and radical projects for change (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 984-985). One explanation for this is that some individuals may possess a greater capacity for exercising agency than others, and that individuals may be more able to employ agency within particular temporal contexts. This results from both individuals' capacities and the resources at their disposal, such as knowledge, skills and abilities, and power, wealth and social capital respectively. In addition, variations in the projective dimension of agency can be explained by the social structure of opportunities and life chances (Marshall, 2005: 68-69).

Individuals will possess different capacities, and varying levels of them, and these can change over time, which influences individuals' agentic potential. This is because agency itself is not something that people "have", but instead is something that is achieved by individuals through their actions in certain contexts (Biesta and Tedder, 2006b: 3). Thus, agentic potential can be developed over time, and can be exercised given particular contexts of socially structured opportunities. This indicates both the importance of the temporal location of activity and the differential distribution of power and resources within social structures, as the resources required to exercise agentic potential are socially inherited from past structures (Archer, 1995: 72).

The importance of this from a social policy perspective is that desistance could be facilitated through the implementation of policy which is designed to address this imbalance in the structural distribution of power and resources. Indeed, policies which redistribute power and resources to reduce inequality are likely to help individuals to overcome the difficulties that they experience and which maintain their social positions. Where inequality does exist, I argue, this is likely to limit the reflexivity of individuals which, in turn, reduces the power for transformative agency.

While it is important not to overestimate the role of economic and material resources in the construction of individuals' biographies (May and Cooper, 1995: 79), New Labour's policies neglect the structural constraints that inhibit identity construction and, in particular, the importance of access to economic resources and cultural spaces that make self-realisation a possibility (1995: 80), as argued in chapters two and three. Empirical support for the economic, social and cultural marginalisation of persistent offenders brings the approach to Probation as underpinned by claims about individualism, liberty and choice under close scrutiny. Most of Farrall's (2002) sample suggested that they wanted to stop offending and, while many showed signs of desisting by the end of the study, there was a significant difference between the experiences of those who faced structural obstacles and those who did not (table 11). Indeed, individuals who faced no obstacles were significantly more likely to be able to desist.

Table 11 Desistance by obstacles: probationers' reports

	Faced no obstacles N (%)	Obstacles were resolved N (%)	Obstacles not resolved N (%)	Total N (%)
Desisters	62 (82)	27 (69)	20 (51)	109 (71)
Persisters	14 (18)	12 (31)	19 (49)	45 (29)
Total	76 (100)	39 (100)	39 (100)	154 (100)

Source: Farrall, 2002: 87.

This suggests that offenders are likely to be excluded from the economic, social and cultural resources required to achieve the self-realisation that can lead to successful desistance. Indeed, the individuals in Farrall's (2002) sample who faced no obstacles were more likely to be able to re-construct their own identities than those who did confront structural challenges. While much of the recent desistance literature recognises that human agency does play an important role in the desistance process, it is important to also retain some focus upon the influence of structure.

This thesis follows the work of Farrall (2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006) and McNeill (2003, 2006, 2009; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; McNeill and Whyte, 2007; Weaver and McNeill, 2007b), in suggesting that contemporary Probation policy and practice is oriented towards the development of human capital, to the neglect of developing social capital. It is the contention of this thesis that contemporary Probation policy and practice has been driven by a Third Way politics (Giddens, 1998) that has led to this scenario. In particular it is the prominence of agency in New Labour's discourses of inclusion, and the emphasis upon individualism, that has led to a concern predominantly for individuals' human capital.

Thus, the central argument of this thesis can be located within wider discussions of paradigm shifts in welfare provision, such as Williams *et al* (1999) who argue that ‘we cannot afford to lose sight of “old” welfare research concerns with the broader patterns of inequality and the structural constraints limiting people’s opportunities and choices’ (1999: 1-2). It was argued in chapter two that, in terms of reducing re-offending, Probation is concerned with creating and distributing opportunities for individuals to reintegrate into society. An example of this is the use cognitive-behavioural programmes which are designed to alter attitudes, thinking and behaviour. As such, it is the individual’s responsibility to ensure, after completion of the programme, that they take responsible risks and make prudent decisions that do not involve further offending. The argument that I am presenting here is that desistance is more likely when an individual’s reflexive deliberations entail transformative agency, and that structural inequalities will both limit such reflexivity and reduce the power of agency.

5.8 Primary Desistance – Structure and Agency

In a recent article, LeBel *et al* (2008) outline a subjective-social model of desistance that incorporates agency and structure. They argue that, while it is the interplay between these factors that leads to desistance, subjective changes are likely to lead to particular structural turning points that can facilitate desistance:

The findings suggest that subjective changes may precede life-changing structural events and, to that extent, individuals can act as agents of their own change. This prior influence of internal logic, or cognitive scripts, works in both positive and negative directions: positive ‘mind over matter’ helps the individual

to triumph over problems and make the best of situations, while a negative frame of mind leads to drift and defeatism in response to the same events (LeBel *et al*, 2008: 155).

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that primary desisters would display agency, as they occupy the initial stages of desistance that may precede structural turning points that could lead to longer-term desistance. This is the central aim of the research undertaken by Healy and O'Donnell (2008) who explored the influence of agency and generativity upon primary desistance. They explore primary desistance by seeking to identify various themes of agency, drawn from the work of McAdams (1992, 2001) and Maruna (2001) within the accounts of their participants, and these themes are shown in table 12. However, Healy and O'Donnell (2008) found little evidence of agency in the accounts of the individuals they interviewed, in relation to both generativity and the four themes of agency. While it was clearly not their intention to explore primary desistance beyond the framework offered by Maruna (2001), it is argued here that a broader conceptualisation of agency can provide a greater insight into the understanding of primary desistance.

Table 12 Themes of agency

Component	Definition
Self-mastery	The realisation of new goals, plans or missions in life, gaining new insight into identity, control over destiny, or feeling strengthened by an important event.
Status/victory	The attainment of heightened status or prestige among peers.
Achievement/responsibility	Successfully meeting challenges, overcoming obstacles, or taking on responsibilities.
Empowerment	Person is enhanced by association with someone or something larger than the self.
Hope and self-efficacy	Belief in a plan or goal, and a belief in the capabilities required to achieve it.
Shame and remorse	A repudiation of past actions.
Internalising stigma	The use of negative labels to facilitate reintegration.
Alternative identities	The envisaging of alternative future selves, roles or identities that the individual wants to fill.
Generativity	A desire to undertake actions or duties which will benefit future generations.

Adapted from: Healy and O'Donnell, 2008; LeBel et al, 2008; Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 1992, 2001.

The argument presented thus far states that desistance can be achieved as individuals reflexively consider their objective social contexts, and devise courses of action accordingly. For some, desistance will be the primary goal, and they will determine projects (based upon their subjective assessments of the structures they encounter) that are necessary to achieve this. For others,

desistance may be considered to be a project necessary to achieve alternative “ultimate concerns” (for example, desistance may be necessary for an individual to achieve a happy marriage).

It is argued here that would-be desisters will identify a future “self” that is different from their past “self”, and to which they will strive. This future self may either be that of “non-offender”, or some other identity that is incongruent with offending. The pathway chosen to become the future self will depend on how the individual mediates their objective social contexts, and the structures within it that impinge on them. Further, the particular courses of action that the individual takes along this pathway will depend upon their temporal orientation at that time – whether anticipating the future, drawing upon the past, or responding to the immediate demands of the present.

This approach to desistance also resonates with existing knowledge about the subjective factors that support a move away from crime. It suggests that individuals may consider alternative identities, and that these are likely to be different from past identities. In this regard, the present “I” may be ashamed of, or regret, the past “Me”. The individual will also determine particular courses of action that they feel they are capable of achieving, demonstrating both self-efficacy and hope, as individuals visualise future outcomes and perceive the capability to realise them (see LeBel *et al*, 2008; and above). Individuals could also become empowered to make changes in their lives, or could be spurred on by gaining self-control, achieving heightened status or achieving a particular goal (see Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 1992, 2001; Healy and O’Donnell, 2008).

This theory is particularly relevant to the study of primary desistance, as it enables the exploration of how individuals perceive desistance prospectively. Primary desisters can provide an insight into what their future concerns are, and how they plan to achieve them in relation to their social contexts. Exploring how individuals “receive” structures in their social contexts enables for the exploration of how individuals in similar positions act, and one such position is being under Probation supervision, so the theory allows for the exploration of how individuals receive and respond to Probation. The theoretical framework outlined here, therefore, gives due recognition to the influence of structure, but also offers a more complex conceptualisation of agency than has been offered in much of the literature to date.

Summary

The theoretical framework offered here enables the exploration of how individuals subjectively receive the objective structures within their social contexts, and how they respond to this in their courses of action. It is argued that this is relevant to the study of primary desistance as it allows for the study of how individuals seek to make changes in their lives, and the goals that they identify as necessary to achieve this. In doing so, this approach offers a more considered approach to agency, and overcomes the shortcomings of theories which are focused on agency or structure.

Through incorporating Margaret Archer’s (2000, 2003, 2007) theory of the ‘internal conversation’ an examination of agent’s subjectivity in relation to socio-cultural objectivity is possible. Unless this is examined, it is not possible to move beyond empirical generalisations of

the type “most people in x do y ”. The theory of internal conversation also helps to explain how individuals answer the questions “what do I want to achieve?” and “how do I achieve it?”. Thus, the internal conversation involves explaining actions through understanding intentions.

Individuals answer the two questions above through the interplay between their concerns (what they hold as most important to them) and their contexts (the structural properties that impinge on them, and which they have to respond to) (Archer, 2007: 19-20).

This consideration of reflexivity allows for a greater exploration of how agency is exercised by individuals in their interactions with their social contexts. Agency, it is argued here, is multi-contextual and, therefore, through reflecting on their context individuals are capable of exercising agency through different temporal orientations. For desistance to be achieved, transformative agency is necessary, and to achieve this individuals need to reflexively deliberate that future change is possible. This approach to agency also incorporates the subjective factors that are already found in the desistance literature, such as: hope/self-efficacy; shame/remorse; alternative identities; self-mastery; status; achievement/responsibility; and, empowerment (Healy and O'Donnell, 2008; Maruna, 2001).

It is argued here that these subjective factors can be found within individuals' internal conversations, perhaps triggering transformations in the conversation or by reinforcing existing narratives. Therefore, the theoretical approach offered here can enable the exploration of primary desistance as it allows for an understanding of how individuals receive the structural properties that impinge on them and how they respond to these in relation to their concerns and projects.

Essentially, I argue that this is an appropriate theoretical framework as desistance can be

achieved through transformative action which, in turn, emerges from a projective and practical-evaluative orientation of agency. This agency, however, can only emerge through an individual's reflexive mediation of their social contexts. Building upon this, the next chapter outlines the research thesis, the research questions, and the philosophical framework that they are located within, before moving on to a discussion of the methods to be employed in the data collection and analysis stages of the research.

6. PRIMARY DESISTANCE AND CRITICAL REALISM: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The discussion presented thus far has suggested that desistance entails an interaction between structure and agency, and that while Probation policy and practice appear to foreground individualism and responsabilisation as ideological underpinnings, the evidence for the role of agency in the desistance process remains under-explored and under-theorised. In seeking to address this, a more comprehensive account of agency has been provided which aims to explain how individuals approach desistance prospectively. This chapter builds upon this by outlining the research framework within a critical realist paradigm, and it demonstrates how the arguments presented thus far have informed the research questions for this thesis.

6.1 Research Thesis

In chapter 4 evidence was provided to show that while desistance can be facilitated by changes in relation to particular structural factors (such as employment and family formation), an individual's agency is also a prominent feature in relation to the desistance process, particularly in relation to motivation and identity change. Further evidence for the importance of subjective factors (such as "hope and self-efficacy" (LeBel *et al*, 2008) and "empowerment" (Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 1992)) to the desistance process was provided in the previous chapter, where the importance of agency was identified as the capacity to make choices in relation to the achievement of desired goals. It was argued in the previous chapter that these subjective factors

can be located within a framework of agency that gives consideration to the projects, goals and choices that individuals make, and that the temporal orientation of agency influences subsequent action. This understanding of the role of agency in the desistance process leads to the question of how agency influences primary desistance, and the way that primary desisters plan to sustain their moves away from crime. There has to date, however, been little consideration within the academic literature of the phenomenon of primary desistance, and the concept remains largely under-theorised (but see also Healy and O'Donnell, 2008).

I have also shown earlier in the thesis that structural inequalities are evident as a prominent linkage to re-offending, and that structural turning points can facilitate desistance. Indeed, much of the desistance literature has highlighted structural turning points as being particularly influential, especially within developmental and life-course theories where structure is said to lead to desistance in relation to: decreases in antisocial potential (Farrington, 2005); increased social control and routine activities (Sampson and Laub, 2005b); and, changes to opportunities, risks and rewards (Catalano *et al*, 2005). In Laub *et al's* (1998) account of desistance, the authors argue that structural factors:

... are, in part, exogenous – that is, they are chance events. If these events were entirely the result of conscious calculations or enduring patterns of behaviour, we could not argue for the independent role of social bonds in shaping behaviour (1998: 225).

Similarly, as discussed in the previous chapter, Laub and Sampson (2001, 2003) argue that desistance occurs through individuals submitting to structural institutions as 'side-bets', with little consideration to why individuals would commit to them in the first instance, nor as to why

they would remain committed to them over longer periods of time. However, some studies which have built upon the conclusion that structural factors facilitate desistance instead locate this influence within a framework of meaningful social attachments (Farrall, 2002). Other studies have given considerably greater credence to the role of agency in the desistance process, most notably in relation to the conscious and voluntary transformation of identity (Giordano *et al*, 2002; Maruna, 2001).

This has led some to argue that desistance can only be understood as a dual process of interaction between structure and agency (Barry, 2009), and this thesis is aligned with such a position. However, there is little detailed understanding of how meaningful social attachments and agentic orientation interact and, in particular, how this interaction might be temporally contingent (Bottoms *et al*, 2004: 382). In part this is a consequence of the methodological implications of retrospective research designs, which may be limited by instances of cognitive dissonance or rationalisation as research subjects seek to construct a coherent narrative. Indeed, the validity of retrospective research depends upon the memory recall of participants (Hegney *et al*, 2007: 1184), and cognition can lead to retrospective justifications or rationalisations for particular actions (Thakker *et al*, 2007: 15). For example, in Farrall and Calverley's (2006) study, one of the participants (Mark) stated retrospectively that he had 'got a bit older, a bit wiser' (2006: 54), but this does not account for how meaningful social attachments interacted with agency and how this was manifested in action at a given moment in time.

The lack of understanding in relation to the interaction between social attachments and agentic reorientation is further compounded by the usage of "agency" in desistance research being

unsuitably vague and under-theorised (Bottoms *et al*, 2004; Vaughan, 2007), as was highlighted in the previous chapter. If the role of agency in desistance is to be more fully understood then this demands a consideration both of how and why individuals make the initial transition towards desistance and of its subsequent maintenance (Bottoms *et al*, 2004: 375). Thus, this thesis incorporates a more precise theoretical conceptualisation of agency, which enables an exploration of the interaction between structure and agency during primary desistance.

This research thesis, therefore, is intended to contribute to existing knowledge by exploring primary desistance, and by exploring the strategies that individuals intend to employ in relation to longer-term desistance. This, in turn, enables the exploration of how would-be desisters perceive their situational contexts in relation to the process of sustaining desistance which, in turn, enables the exploration of how these contexts enable and constrain the strategies that individuals intend to employ. Such an approach gives consideration to the theoretical conceptualisation of agency discussed in the previous chapter, and combines this with the structural context that individuals find themselves in. The theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter provides the basis from which to explore offenders' resources and capacities within their personal and social contexts. Thus, the theoretical language employed in this thesis is underpinned by critical realist ontological and epistemological assumptions.

6.2 Conceptualising the Research Thesis in a Critical Realist Framework

While the concepts of social structure and agency are ubiquitous in much of the sociological literature (Hays, 1994), their definitions are frequently varied and conflicting (Sewell, 1992). For

example, structure can be defined in terms of constraint, in relation to available opportunities for action (Healy, 1998); in terms of the ‘rules and resources’ that enable actors to operate (Giddens, 1986); or, quite simply, as the broader context within which individuals act (Bates, 2006).

Structure dominates the ‘strong social’ models of desistance which contend that changes in an individual’s social context coerce the individual towards moving away from crime, as LeBel *et al* (2008) argue:

It is the arrival of these [life-course] events, which are largely outside of an individual’s control, that will best predict success ... rather than the mindset of the individual ... the subjective mindset ... is not important for going straight. In empirical models, subjective variables should have no impact on the outcomes (2008: 139).

Such an approach adheres to the notion of determinism, and advocates would claim that outcomes could be predicted given a specific set of circumstances that operate as variables within their explanatory frameworks. However, if, as this thesis argues, it is assumed that individuals have agency (the capacity to determine objectives and projects) and that this is manifested in their actions, then an approach is required which gives proper consideration to agency and action but also accounts for structural constraint (Marshall, 2005: 69). The ‘strong subjective’ model contends that: ‘One need only decide to change and envision a new identity for oneself in order to go straight’ (LeBel *et al*, 2008: 138). However, this proposition suggests a concession to voluntarism, implying that actors are capable of transforming or reproducing their environment with free will, which is not the case (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 26). Rather:

it is precisely because such elaboration is co-determined by the conditional influence exerted by antecedent structures together with the autonomous causal

powers of current agents, that society can develop in unpredictable ways (Archer, 1995: 75).

In this respect, ‘players make their own history, in part creating their own rules, but they do not do it in conditions entirely of their own choosing’ (Hollis, 1994: 19). This assumption underlines realist philosophy in that there is a reality that is independent of our knowledge of it, but that this reality only conditions, not determines, human action. Therefore, desistance is not something that can occur, given propitious structural conditions, regardless of individual cognition or intent. Nor can it be achieved in the face of challenging structural barriers by individual willpower alone. Rather, individual action, and therefore desistance, is the product of the interaction between structure and agency, and disentangling this interaction is the task of the social scientist.

This is the dilemma that Bhaskar (1975, 1979, 1993) attempted to resolve with his ‘Transformational Model of the Social Activity’ (TMSA). He begins by critiquing the ‘philosophical logic of immediacy’ and the ‘epistemic fallacy’ that are inherent to empiricism. This suggests that knowledge is always known immediately, and is knowable without any interpretive factors (Cruickshank, 2003: 7). Thus, an empiricist epistemology assumes that we have direct access to observable regularities, which is underpinned by an ‘actualist’ ontology, which entails that knowledge claims are restricted to observable “facts” (Bhaskar, 1975: 64). This necessitates that causal laws exist in ‘closed systems’ and rejects any notion that there exist ‘causal mechanisms which are unobservable in their effects’ (Cruickshank, 2003: 96). The shortcoming of this approach is that the social world is an ‘open system’, in that there are extraneous variables that cannot be controlled for (Farrall, 2002: 33).

Rather, critical realism suggests that the social world is constituted of a stratified reality, within which there are structures that are unobservable but which, when activated, generate events and experiences which are observable (Delanty, 2005: 146). In this sense, structures exist independently of the events that emerge from them, and that the pattern of events may occur in ways that are contradictory to the relevant structures that underpin them (Al-Amoudi, 2007: 545). Thus, critical realism presupposes an ‘ontologically layered, historically open system’ (Harvey, 2002: 165), where causal laws exist as emergent properties which have the capacity to produce different effects depending on their interaction. In a closed system, observed regularities would obtain because the precise interaction of emergent properties would remain fixed. However, in open systems the interaction of emergent properties will alter as different properties will interact with each other and at different points in time. So, causal laws can be observed as events, but these observations are dependent upon the particular effects of interaction (Cruickshank, 2003: 100). From this position, Bhaskar (1979) provides an account of how such interaction occurs between structure and agency to influence human action, beginning with a critique of voluntarism and determinism.

6.2.1 The Transformational Model of Social Activity

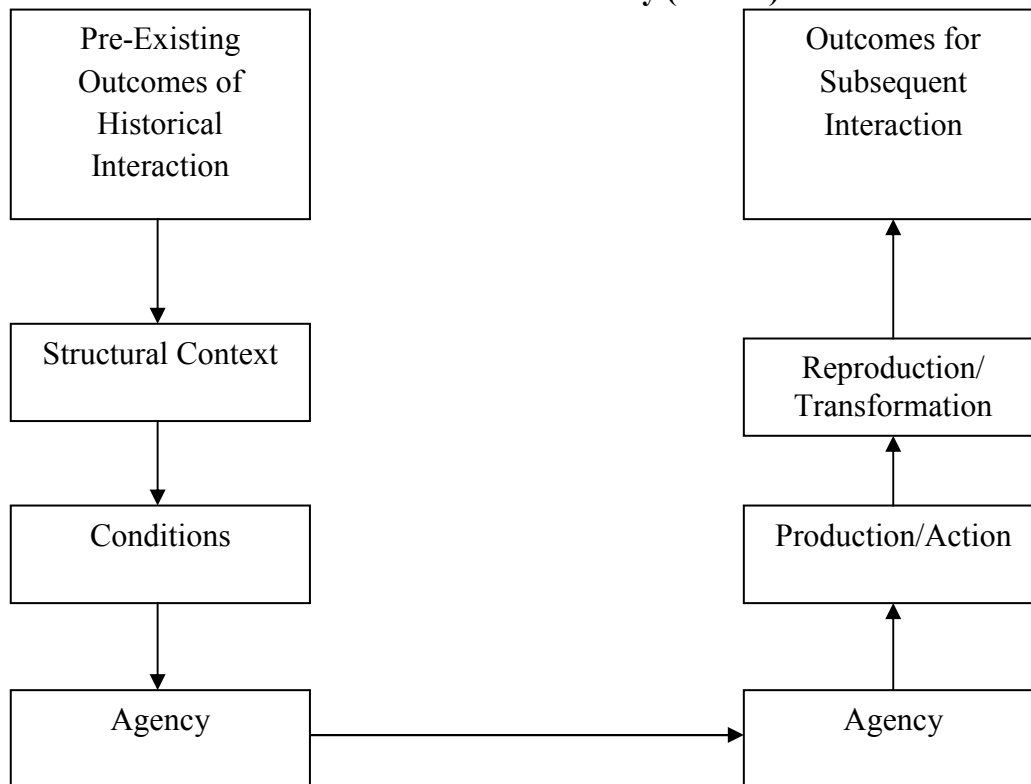
Interpretivist or hermeneutic accounts of social activity tend towards voluntarism, with the effect that social action is essentially the product of human intentionality, regardless of the particular structural context. Positivist accounts, on the other hand, tend towards determinism, such that human beings are coerced into certain actions as a consequence of their situational environment. Thus, critical realism offers an approach that rejects Humean causality in favour of emergence,

which allows for the identification of causes, and it rejects interpretivist perspectives on the basis that they cannot discern between the rationality of various explanations (Archer *et al*, 1998: xv). Following this, any explanation of desistance, therefore, needs to avoid the ‘Weberian [interpretivist] stereotype’ and the ‘Durkheimian [positivist] stereotype’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 32), if it is to adequately account for social action in an open system.

Bhaskar (1998) argues that individuals and society are characterised by a duality of structure and a duality of praxis. Society is both the cause and outcome of human agency, and human agency is both the production and reproduction of society. Action is inherently dependent upon pre-existing social forms in society, and society is inherently dependent upon the perpetuation of human activity, as shown in figure 8. The contexts within which current action takes place are both the unacknowledged and unintended consequences of past actions (Archer, 1995: 155). Thus, agency is always embedded in a social context constituted of structures which always precede action (but which have emerged from past actions), and which are reproduced or transformed by actors to establish the context for future actions. These contexts condition (but do not determine) agency, and hence action, but it is action that reproduces or transforms structures, establishing a ‘new *milieu* for the next stage of action’ (Cruickshank, 2003: 110 emphasis in original). In other words:

... social structures are created by the actions of individuals and then these structures become real in their own right, and exert a conditioning influence over individual agents (Cruickshank, 2002: 60).

Figure 8 The transformational model of social activity (TMSA)



Adapted from: Bhaskar, 1993.

Therefore, this avoids reification to voluntarism, because proper consideration is given to the enabling and constraining properties of the structural context. This context can provide opportunities for individuals to establish meaningful social attachments, to make choices about which goals and objectives they wish to commit to, and to decide upon the best possible means of achieving them. This is the argument proffered by Archer (2007), where she states that structural and cultural factors can enable and constrain individuals' actions as individuals undertake particular projects. Of course, structural factors can influence individual motivations and decisions to undertake projects in the first instance, but individuals may not be aware of the influence of such factors, or else there would be no such thing as 'unacknowledged conditions', and 'all those conditions need to do in order to shape a subject's motivation is to shape the

situation in which she finds herself' (Archer, 2007: 17). The relevance to desistance rests on the assumption that desistance is not, as Laub and Sampson (2001) argue, the outcome of a series of 'side-bets', but rather that it reflects "deep and lasting interests" and is held as a concern by those who aim to achieve it. Indeed, as Maruna (2001) argues, desisters 'had a plan and were optimistic that they could make it work' (2001: 147).

6.2.2 Structure and agency as manifested in action

Archer pays considerable attention to the role of human reflexivity in the process of structure-agency interaction (Elder-Vass, 2007b). Reflexivity, essentially, enables an exploration of why individuals in similar positions act differently. In the absence of reflexivity, researchers are left with probability statements about what most people in particular situations do most of the time, and such empirical generalisations offer little by way of explanation of individuals' actions. This is not to argue that subjectivity is altogether ignored in explanations of human activity, but rather, she writes, that theorists have most often imputed responses to such explanations as a 'dummy for real and efficacious human subjectivity' (Archer, 2007: 14). For example, rational choice theory imputes utility maximisation as the only explanation of individual projects and actions, and Bourdieu argues that it is people's positions that create dispositions to act in certain ways that reproduce those positions (Archer, 2007: 14).

The incorporation of reflexivity is offered, therefore, as a solution to overcome the homogenisation of objectives and actions to particular groups, and explains how the causal powers of social structures are mediated through human agency. This approach provides an

opportunity to explore the ‘black box’ of Probation (Farrall, 2002: 87) by locating experiences of supervision and interventions within the wider personal and social contexts of individuals’ lives. Such reflexivity, as discussed in the previous chapter, takes the form of an internal conversation, within which individuals consider themselves in relation to their social situations. This is always fallible, incomplete, and is necessarily in individuals’ own terms, as this is the only means of knowledge available to subjects and the only means by which decisions about how to act can be made. Therefore, a more precise explanation of thoughts and actions is possible, as opposed to statements about empirical generalisations, and an exploration of how social structures condition some and not others to act in particular ways (Archer, 2007: 15-16). Thus, individual action is a manifestation of the interaction between structures within particular social contexts, and the role of agency in making choices in relation to certain goals and objectives.

6.2.3 Conceptualising primary desistance in a CR framework – Research questions 1 and 2

Archer’s critical realist approach to action is, clearly, relevant to the study of desistance, and to primary desistance more specifically, as it allows for an exploration of how individuals mediate their social situations in relation to what they want to achieve and how they decide to act. As primary desistance is a transitional phase, wherein individuals can dedicate themselves to trying to sustain longer-term desistance and achieve other goals, an exploration of individuals’ subjectivities at this moment in time can offer an insight into how primary desisters decide what it is they want to achieve and how they want to do it. Further, such an approach can explore how structural factors are received by different individuals in similar positions, and how these are then mediated such that certain structural factors can influence a particular course of action for one

individual, and a (potentially) very different course of action for another. Indeed, Archer (2007) states that:

1) Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to;

2) Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social (2007: 17 emphasis in original).

This perspective clearly reflects the two related concerns that are central to the study of primary desistance: how/why did the individual commit to desistance in the first instance? And, how/why do they intend to sustain it? If structure, as I have argued above, has a real existence that shapes individuals' existence and conditions their behaviour, then it would be expected that certain structural arrangements influence the transition towards primary desistance. However, as I have argued, such structural arrangements can only facilitate desistance if the individual considers desistance to be a viable objective at that particular moment in time. Thus, they must possess a certain arrangement of subjective factors that are congruent with their structural circumstances in determining that desistance is both possible and desirable. This leads to the first two research questions:

1) What factors are relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards primary desistance?

1a) To what extent is personal agency relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

1b) Are structural factors influential in primary desisters' initial transitions towards desistance and, individually, which structural factors are of most importance in influencing individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

2) How do primary desisters understand desistance prospectively, and how does this influence their strategies for sustaining desistance?

2a) How are structural factors relevant to primary desisters' strategies for sustaining the transition towards desistance?

2b) How relevant is personal agency to the formulation of individuals' strategies for desistance?

6.2.4 Conceptualising Probation contexts in a CR framework – Research question 3

This thesis is also concerned with the approach to re-offending formulated by New Labour.

Earlier in the thesis I discussed how New Labour's approach to reducing re-offending is underpinned by a discourse of agency that presents the individual as responsible for their own desistance. Recent developments have acknowledged the influence of a number of structural disadvantages that many offenders are likely to face, and individuals are assessed in relation to a range of "criminogenic needs". However, assessing individuals in this manner assumes that individuals with similar needs will share the same motivation and willingness to challenge them as those who are doing the assessing (Maguire and Raynor, 2006a).

Further, interventions which target these needs are located within a framework of individualism as they are often directed at improving individual capacities, such as skills and qualifications. An example of this is the primary objective of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), which is to 'increase employability and thereby reducing re-offending' (National Audit Office, 2008b: 5), whereby the emphasis is clearly upon the manipulation of agency as opposed to

addressing structural factors. Thus, while approaches have been introduced aimed at exerting an influence over agency, the mediation between an individual's agency and the impact upon their structural context has been neglected. New Labour has consistently exclaimed a commitment to evidence-based policy, but the focus has been upon clearly measurable performance indicators (Hale and Fitzgerald, 2007), and the demonstration of the outcome effects of interventions (Hollin, 1999). Various meta-analytic studies have also sought to identify particular interventions that reduce re-offending (Antonowicz and Ross, 1994; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Lipsey, 1992, 1995; McGuire and Priestley, 1995), yet the conclusions from these analyses tend to focus upon the intervention content, rather than exploring how individuals receive them.

Thus, New Labour's approach to reducing re-offending has been premised upon the manipulation of agency, but with little concern for how such manipulation impacts upon how individuals then act within their social contexts. This is, in part at least, a corollary of New Labour's emphasis upon a "weak" discourse of social exclusion, where 'solutions lie in altering these excluded people's handicapping characteristics and enhancing their integration into dominant society' (Veit-Wilson, 1998: 45), and 'it is the weak thesis which has by far the widest political currency' (Young, 2002: 459). This claim is evident within Probation's current focus upon reducing levels of risk, predominantly through altering cognitions, attitudes and behaviour, in order to provide offenders with the opportunity to become 'homo prudens' (Kemshall, 2003: 6) – that is, the aim is to inculcate the marginalised into society by encouraging them to become mainstream, rather than challenging the structural factors that marginalise them in the first instance.

As suggested earlier, this thesis builds upon the work of Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2009). Like their work, this thesis argues that New Labour's approach to Probation and reducing re-offending is focused upon manipulating agency (or, as they argue, 'human capital'), to the neglect of challenging structural barriers (or, 'enhancing social capital'). I have argued that this is the case for two predominant reasons. First, is the emphasis upon the responsabilisation of individual offenders, which is evidenced by tougher community penalties, risk assessment which targets "criminogenic factors", and the premium attached to cognitive behavioural programmes designed to realign individuals' attitudes and thinking to fit with dominant society. Second, is the rise of 'bureaucratic positivism' (Whitehead, 2007) within the Probation Service, which has led to practitioners becoming detached from much of the face-to-face work which characterised more traditional forms of Probation, and which is widely recognised as being central to supporting desistance (Barry 2000, 2007; Burnett and McNeill, 2005).

Farrall's (2002) argument proposed the idea that Probation interventions help to develop human capital, but that they do not enhance social capital. Building on this, and central to McNeill's (2009) argument, is the assertion that Probation should help to develop bonding capital (close ties to family and friends) and bridging capital (connections to wider community networks) in order to facilitate desistance. This, he argues, would enable Probation to provide individuals with the opportunities to perform the generative activities that would help 'them to see themselves as positive contributors to communities' (2009: 35), and achieve a sense of 'redeemability' (Maruna and King, 2008). If, as I have argued above, individuals determine their objectives and goals in relation to the (perceived) opportunities available within their social context, then the "type" of

Probation that individuals receive will almost certainly influence the goals that they set. Further, Archer (2007) writes that:

Courses of action are produced through the *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances (2007: 17 emphasis in original).

Probation will perhaps, albeit temporarily, constitute a relatively significant aspect of an individual's 'objective circumstances', and it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the courses of action that individuals decide are appropriate to achieve their goals will be influenced by the Probation that they receive. For some, Probation may initiate a transition towards desistance, while for others it may contribute to their prospective strategies for sustaining desistance. Therefore, this thesis builds upon the conclusions of Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2009) by exploring how Probation, with an emphasis upon the manipulation of agency, influences primary desisters strategies for sustaining their moves away from crime. As such, research question three is:

3) How is contemporary Probation practice relevant to experiences of primary desistance?

3a) In what ways does Probation enable/constrain the transition towards primary desistance?

3b) Which factors in contemporary Probation practice are relevant to the subjective experiences of primary desisters, in relation to desistance?

6.3 Research Framework

The discussion thus far has conceptualised primary desistance in Probation contexts within a critical realist framework, as shown in figure 9. This enables the exploration of how individuals experience Probation supervision and interventions, in conjunction with their personal and social contexts, in relation to primary desistance. I have argued that this framework enables the exploration of individuals' prospective accounts of desistance, encompassing the aims of identifying how/why individuals commit to desistance in the first instance and how/why they intend to sustain it.

Figure 9 illustrates that past structures, which may be unobservable, provide the present circumstances for human action and, therefore, condition individuals to act. As such, structural properties enable and constrain the range of possible courses of action available to certain individuals, and condition each individual to act in a particular way. Thus, it is the unequal distribution of structural properties between individuals in society that explains how some individuals may have a broader range of options than others. In relation to desistance, most offenders are likely to experience disproportionate inequality and disadvantage, and this is likely to constrain their activities and limit the range of possible courses of action available to them. In other words, past structures of inequality and disadvantage are likely to provide a social context which conditions the individual towards re-offending. This aspect of the figure is summarised as the first stage of Archer's (2007) model.

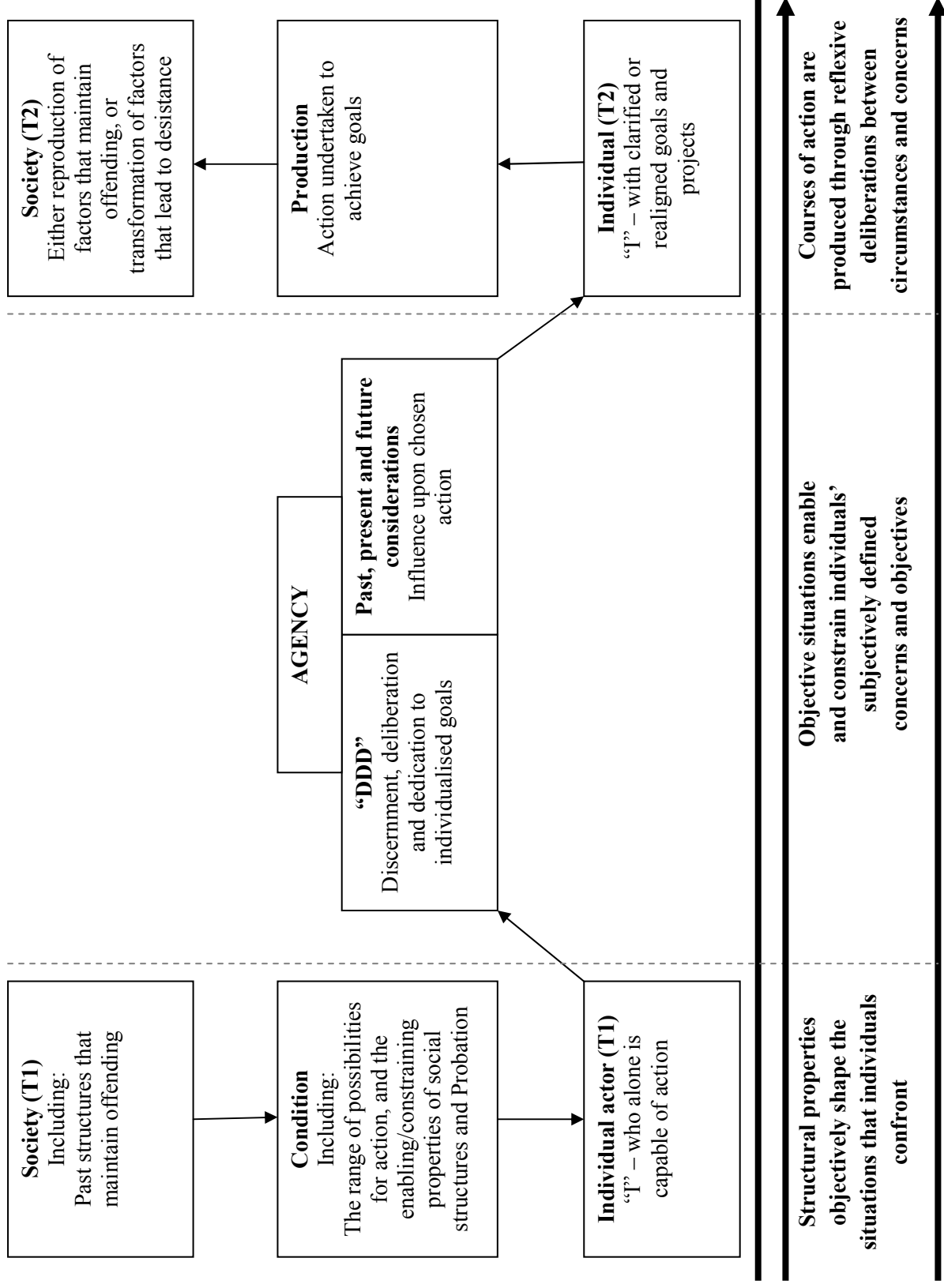
In the stages between “Individual actor (T1)” and “Individual actor (T2)”, the individual clarifies their objectives and the courses of action that they deem to be appropriate to achieve them.

Crucially, this process, it is argued here, is mediated through the manner in which individuals exercise agency. First, individuals will undertake an inner dialogue in order to determine what it is that they want and how they think they will achieve it, in relation to “who they were” (“Me”) and “who they want to become” (“You”). Second, the course of action that the individual decides upon will be influenced by the temporal orientation of agency at the moment that they determine what action to take. This aspect of figure 9 reflects stage two of Archer’s (2007) model.

The final stage illustrates the action that the individual takes, and the effect of this action upon the structural properties in their social context. These properties will most often be reproduced, but occasionally transformed, to provide the context for the next stage of action. In relation to desistance, it is likely that individuals will need to transform the structural properties that maintain their own re-offending, in order to provide a social context which enables them to sustain desistance. This aspect is summarised as stage three of Archer’s (2007) model.

This research is concerned, primarily, with how individuals approach desistance prospectively and, therefore, is focused upon exploring the central element of figure 9. That is, how do individuals approach the structural properties of their social contexts, and how do they exercise agency in deciding to desist and their plans to sustain desistance, in relation to these social contexts? The following chapter provides a discussion of the approach taken to achieve this.

Figure 9 A critical realist framework for studying primary desistance



Summary

Figure 9 illustrates the theoretical conceptualisation of agency in this thesis as being the mediating element between an individual's personal and social context, the future objectives that they hold, and the actions that they deem appropriate to achieving these. Farrall (2002) argues that the existing research agenda for reducing re-offending has been inadequate:

The simple focus upon “what works” has not served us well. It has failed to embark upon a thorough enough investigation of personal and social contexts, become overly reliant upon official data sources and official definitions of “success” and “failure”, and has had a tendency to analyse data in ways which can only be described as “static” (2002: 226).

In addition, it was shown earlier in the thesis that New Labour's approach to reducing re-offending has been underpinned by a discourse of agency that responsabilises the individual. Thus, most interventions have been targeted at manipulating agency (or building human capital), although this has been shown to be empirically problematic. This thesis attempts to address these issues by investigating how individuals experience Probation in relation to their personal and social contexts, and how this, in turn, influences their prospective intentions to sustain desistance. This is sustained by a critical realist methodology that allows for the investigation of structure-agency interaction by examining individuals' objectives, the projects they deem necessary to achieve them, and the socio-structural factors within their objective circumstances that enable and constrain these determinations. The following chapter provides a linkage between the theoretical framework outlined in chapter five, the critical realist framework presented here, and the data collection and analysis methods employed in the research.

7. DATA COLLECTION, SAMPLE AND ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The overall research thesis and main research questions were delineated in the previous chapter, and it was argued that this exploratory study of primary desistance transitions can be located within a critical realist framework which gives consideration to the interaction between structure and agency in particular contexts. More specifically, the thesis was located within the critical realist framework introduced by Bhaskar (1975, 1979, 1993), and developed by Archer (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007). This discussion suggested that structure-agency interaction in transitional phases of the life-course can be explored by exploring individuals' concerns (overarching objectives and goals), projects (means to achieve concerns), and the socio-cultural contexts within which these reflections occur. It was argued that this approach also reflected a concern for the empirical and theoretical concepts discussed earlier in the thesis. This chapter provides a linkage between the methodological issues discussed in the previous chapter and the methods employed for data collection, sampling and analysis.

7.1 Data Collection Methods

One of the primary concerns of this thesis is the exploration of the role of agency in primary desistance. As 'qualitative data expose human agency in the process leading to individual change' (Laub and Sampson, 1998: 229), a qualitative approach was deemed relevant for this study, and in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were selected as the appropriate method. This follows the advice of Morse and Richards (2002) who argue that the research question and the data required demand particular methods (2002: 25-26), and because:

the standard approach to interviewing [structured, closed question, survey methods] is demonstrably inappropriate for and inadequate to the study of the central questions in the social and behavioural sciences' (Mishler, 1986: ix).

This is because such standardised interviews entail a data collection process and an analytical framework that decontextualises responses and thus fails to address how participants give meaning to phenomena in relation to certain circumstances. When responses are reassembled in accordance with particular categories, such as age, class, gender and so forth, they produce 'artificial aggregates that have no direct representation in the real world' (Mishler, 1986: 26). The research agenda for this thesis entails an exploration of primary desistance transitions by employing a research design which elucidates how individuals' understand and perceive Probation, their wider personal and social contexts, the relationship between the two, and the subsequent impact upon their prospective accounts of sustaining desistance.

It is acknowledged that alternative approaches could have been employed in this research. For example, narrative method has been utilised elsewhere in criminological research (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000), and within the desistance literature by Sampson and Laub (1993). However, a narrative approach was discounted here on the basis that such a method tends towards the interpretivist paradigm (Riessman, 1993; Freeman, 2004). Further, it is better suited to retrospective methodologies, as it is a means by which social actors retell experiences as a 'chronicle' of events in their lives (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 68). As such, a narrative approach does not adequately address the research questions in the manner which Morse and Richards (2002) suggest. However, selection of methods depends not only on research questions, but also on the research situation and the likely participants, and what will work best under those conditions to obtain the data required to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2005: 91-93). Consequently, this research needs to consider the most effective means of exploring primary

desistance transitions in relation to Probation experiences. The example of direct observation illustrates this point.

As Farrall (2002) highlights, despite the fact that very few individuals will complete a sentence within the Probation Service without experiencing one-to-one supervision, very few studies have gone beyond a rudimentary account, leading Hedderman (1998) to write: ‘we know little about the content of one-to-one supervision’ (1998: 1). As a result, little is known about the nuances of Probation supervision in individual cases (Farrall, 2002: 25). To rectify this, direct observation could be undertaken to explore the content and nature of one-to-one supervision *in situ*, complemented with follow-up interviews to explore the impact of supervision sessions or to discuss in greater detail issues raised from the observation. However, this could influence the interaction between officer and offender during the period of observation, and could also, more importantly, harm future work. Therefore, while a combination of direct supervision and one-to-one follow-up interviews may be highly appropriate in terms of answering the research questions, such methods are unsuitable when the research situation and likely participants are considered.

Desistance research has, generally, been conducted within one of three research designs.

According to Brame *et al* (2003), the dominant method of studying desistance is to employ approximate desistance models, which measure offence frequencies and use single measures (such as number of arrests). As a result, desistance is often measured in relation to changes in arrest and reconviction over time (Le Blanc and Frechette, 1989; Le Blanc and Loeber, 1998; Nagin and Paternoster, 1991; Nagin and Farrington, 1992; Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996).

There is also a tendency for researchers operating within this tradition to examine the relationship between official offending data and demographic variables, such as age, gender or class (e.g.

Wikstrom, 1987), or against social processes, such as marriage or employment (e.g. Kruttschnitt *et al*, 2000). Research of this type utilises official data on rates of arrest and reconviction, which, as argued earlier in the thesis, are somewhat unreliable given the nature of crime reporting, recording, and criminal justice priorities. Indeed, official datasets may reveal more about the organisations collating statistics than about the actual reality of crime, as Francis *et al* (2004) argue:

official rates of crime are produced according to *the actions actually taken by persons in the social system*, actions that define, classify and record certain behaviour as a crime. For example, if the police are very active then there will appear to be more crime – even though the actual amount of criminal behaviour may remain the same (2004: 53 emphasis in original).

A second approach to desistance research has been to employ survey methodology, examining self-reported changes in offending (e.g. Warr, 1998). Similarly to those which study official data, self-report surveys often measure changes to offending behaviour over time. These methodologies are capable of modelling offending in relation to a greater number of types of criminal behaviour than the dichotomous variables used in other studies (e.g. Farrington and Hawkins, 1991; Loeber *et al*, 1991), as well as in official datasets (Massoglia, 2006). Although self-report surveys avoid the biases and methodological difficulties associated with using official reconviction data, they do not capture the subjective experiences of individuals who are attempting to desist from crime.

The third approach does capture these subjective accounts, often through the use of narratives or in-depth interviews to capture individuals' accounts in their own words. This approach to desistance research has become more common in recent years (Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Giordano *et al*, 2002; Maruna, 2001), and the rich data collected has provided a

detailed insight into the processes and challenges associated with desistance. Research within this paradigm has been criticised for its lack of generalisability beyond the sample of interviewees (Massoglia and Uggen, 2007), yet its suitability is often when situated within exploratory studies, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue:

The most compelling argument [for qualitative research] emphasizes the unique strengths of the genre for research that is exploratory or descriptive, that accepts the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under study ... A study focusing on individual lived experience typically relies on an *in-depth interview strategy* (2006 : 55 emphasis in original).

In the previous chapter it was argued that the overall research thesis is focused upon individual subjective experiences of Probation in relation to both personal and social contexts, and in relation to primary desistance. Thus, there is a clear linkage between the research framework (critical realism as an exploratory framework for primary desistance transitions) and the choice of methods (in-depth interviews), given the discussion presented above, as shown in table 13. In-depth, and particularly face-to-face, interviews have developed as the most common type of method used to explore peoples' experiences in particular contexts, both within desistance research and the wider social research agendas. This has largely been in response to alternative approaches which have employed survey-based methodologies or research which has '... relied predominantly on data derived from official sources ...' (Farrall, 2002: 4).

Table 13 Qualitative research genre characteristics and linkage to research thesis

Genre Characteristic	Research Linkage
Exploratory	Primary desistance transitions
Context	Personal and social circumstances
Setting	Probation
Deeper understanding of lived experiences of the phenomenon under study	Structure-agency interaction in primary desistance

The methodological limitations of official data sources were discussed earlier in the thesis, and structured methods have also attracted much criticism from the broader social research literature. Such approaches assume that structured questions will carry the same meaning for numerous individuals within a sample, and also that the closed nature of questioning employed in many surveys ‘delimit[s] a horizon of thought’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 8). Indeed, quantitative approaches more generally can be criticised for ‘imposing a limited worldview on the subjects’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2006: 54); the way in which the data collected can conceal individual’s experiences (for example, from a feminist perspective: Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991: 89); and, the manner in which values can derive from ‘highly problematic and unreliable concepts’ in the pursuit of measurable phenomena (Silverman, 2006: 42).

This is not to argue that in-depth interviews are not problematic. Indeed, there exist a range of issues in relation to *interviewing* as a method in the social sciences that can impact upon the gathering of data, the analysis of data, and the reliability and validity of data (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). There remains a largely unchallenged assumption that interviewees will be willing and able to ‘tell it like it is’ in much qualitative, interview-based research (Hollway and Jefferson, 2001: 105). Thus, where in-depth interviews are regarded as providing an insight into authentic

experiences, there is an assumption that the participant is both willing and able to convey these experiences (Silverman, 2001). Further, interviews rely on self-report data, and so the researcher must concede that for participants there may be a 'gap between word and deed' (Bryman, 1984: 81). However, this issue can be resolved (in part, at least) by triangulating self-report data with responses from others discussing the same events or processes. There may, of course, be disagreement between two parties, as different individuals have different perspectives on certain issues. If there is significant variation at the aggregate level, however, then this could be seen as a threat to the validity of the study (Farrall, 2002: 56).

However, these limitations aside, it is argued here that in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate method for this research thesis. This is because a reliance on the, generally, quantitative methods employed in collecting most current (particularly official) data conceals the interaction effect between probationer, supervising officer and wider circumstances (Farrall, 2002: 19-20). Further, the qualitative method employed here is most appropriate for a research thesis which considers agency as the capacity to make choices (albeit constrained by social structure), and which is manifested in action (as the previous chapter discussed). In order to explore the interactions described above and in the previous chapter, the study must be able to elucidate how individuals understand and perceive the various factors involved in such interactions. Therefore, in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were chosen.

7.2 The Interview

An initial interview schedule was produced which highlighted the key issues for exploration, based upon the research questions, and existing empirical and theoretical knowledge. The

schedule was designed so that the interviews would be open-ended to encourage participants to discuss issues in a manner which was most meaningful to them, and also following two pragmatic concerns raised by Farrall (2002). First, the interviews would need to be flexible enough to accommodate a range of offence types, offender characteristics, obstacles and challenges, and desires, goals and objectives. Second, the interviews would need to be adaptable to suit a range of abilities with respect to literacy (2002: 55).

Before interviewing began, meetings were held with the three Probation teams who participated in the study, to recruit participants for the study and to discuss the various issues that had arisen from the literature review and the design of the research questions. These meetings acted as pseudo-focus groups and were used as an approximation of ‘interview trialling’ (Gillham, 2000), in order to highlight key issues and to make alterations to the interview schedule as necessary. The meetings were also an opportunity to ratify the issues in the interview schedule as appropriate for further discussion with probationers. The meetings were particularly insightful in relation to sampling and recruitment issues, to be discussed in the following section. The issues covered in the interview schedule related to particular stages of the critical realist model discussed in the previous chapter, and are highlighted in table 14, below.

Table 14 Interview themes in a critical realist model

Critical Realist Framework Stage	Interview Themes
1) Structural Properties	<p>Overall experiences of Probation, including supervision sessions; relationship with supervising officer; any additional requirements, such as programmes; previous experiences of Probation; and, whether there were any differences between current and previous experiences, including why previous sentences had not resulted in desistance.</p> <p>Details of the offence which had resulted in the current sentence, including the circumstances that had surrounded the offence and brief details of previous offending.</p> <p>The personal and social circumstances of the probationer at the time of interview, and whether these had altered since beginning the current sentence (prompts to be given in relation to: employment; education; family and relationships; drug/alcohol use; finances; attitudes and behaviour).</p>
2) Subjectively defined concerns	<p>The probationer’s motivation and capabilities to stop offending, including any people or events that might assist.</p> <p>Future plans or ambitions (prompts to be given in relation to: employment; education; family and relationships; drug/alcohol use; finances; attitudes and behaviour).</p>
3) Reflexively determined courses of action	<p>How the individual planned to sustain their moves away from crime, and why they thought this was the most appropriate strategy.</p> <p>Particular problems or difficulties that the probationer was experiencing at the time of interview; whether these had changed at all since beginning the current sentence; the extent to which the probationer believed these would need to be overcome in order to stop offending; and, whether the probationer had made plans for overcoming them.</p>

A small number of structured questions were asked of each probationer at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix A), in order to gain some brief details about each participant.

Practitioners were asked about similar issues as those outlined in table 14, and also about their role and their understandings and experiences of Probation. While practitioners were asked

questions about their cases who had been interviewed, they were encouraged to draw upon experiences or examples from other cases wherever appropriate. In part, practitioners were interviewed to triangulate the validity of the data (as discussed above), but also to provide an insight into the role of Probation from the practitioners' perspective. Interviews were conducted at the Probation office that the probationer would normally attend, and were tape-recorded and transcribed with the informed written consent of all participants. Interviews ranged in duration from approximately 25 minutes to 105 minutes.

7.3 Sampling Process

Sample criteria were formulated from the research questions and existing empirical and theoretical knowledge. Participants had to be considered to be primary desisters, and this entailed a conceptualisation of primary desistance in relation to the measurement of re-offending and the duration of non-offending. Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) distinguish between 'official desistance' and 'behavioural desistance' – the former is measured by officially-recorded reconviction data and the latter by self-report data. To mitigate some of the methodological issues, discussed earlier in the thesis, associated with officially-recorded data, participants were selected on the basis that they had not re-offended according to both official and self-report data.

The timeframe for desistance is an issue of much debate in the existing literature (as discussed in chapter four). Moreover, as primary desistance is a relatively unexplored phenomenon there are few guidelines as to the duration of time required to have passed for an individual to be considered as a primary desister. Suffice to say that the duration of time in question will be significantly less than many other studies of desistance, such as Mischkowitz (1994), who stated that for desistance to have occurred the individual concerned needed to have committed their last

offence prior to age 31, and be free from conviction or incarceration for at least 10 years. Healy and O'Donnell (2008) suggest that a one month period of non-offending should be used as a measure of primary desistance. This thesis expands on this by suggesting that an individual should be crime-free (either officially-recorded or self-reported) for a period of at least one month, but not more than one year. This ensures that a significant time has elapsed since the last offence, such that a period of non-offending has been measured, while retaining a prospective outlook, such that the timeframe under observation can be considered to be a period of transition.

An upper-age limit was not imposed, but participants had to be 18 or over for a number of reasons. First, at this point of the age-crime curve many individuals have either ceased or have significantly reduced offending (see also Bottoms *et al*, 2004). Second, it is from this age that individuals begin to make the transition into adulthood, and it is reasonable to assume that transitions to desistance may accompany transitions into adulthood. Third, as most adolescent offenders do not continue to offend in adulthood, it is argued here that data from youth offenders is of little theoretical interest to this particular thesis. Indeed, many studies have focused upon youth transitions and much policy has been directed towards youth offenders. In order to address this imbalance this thesis retains a central focus upon desistance transitions among adult offenders.

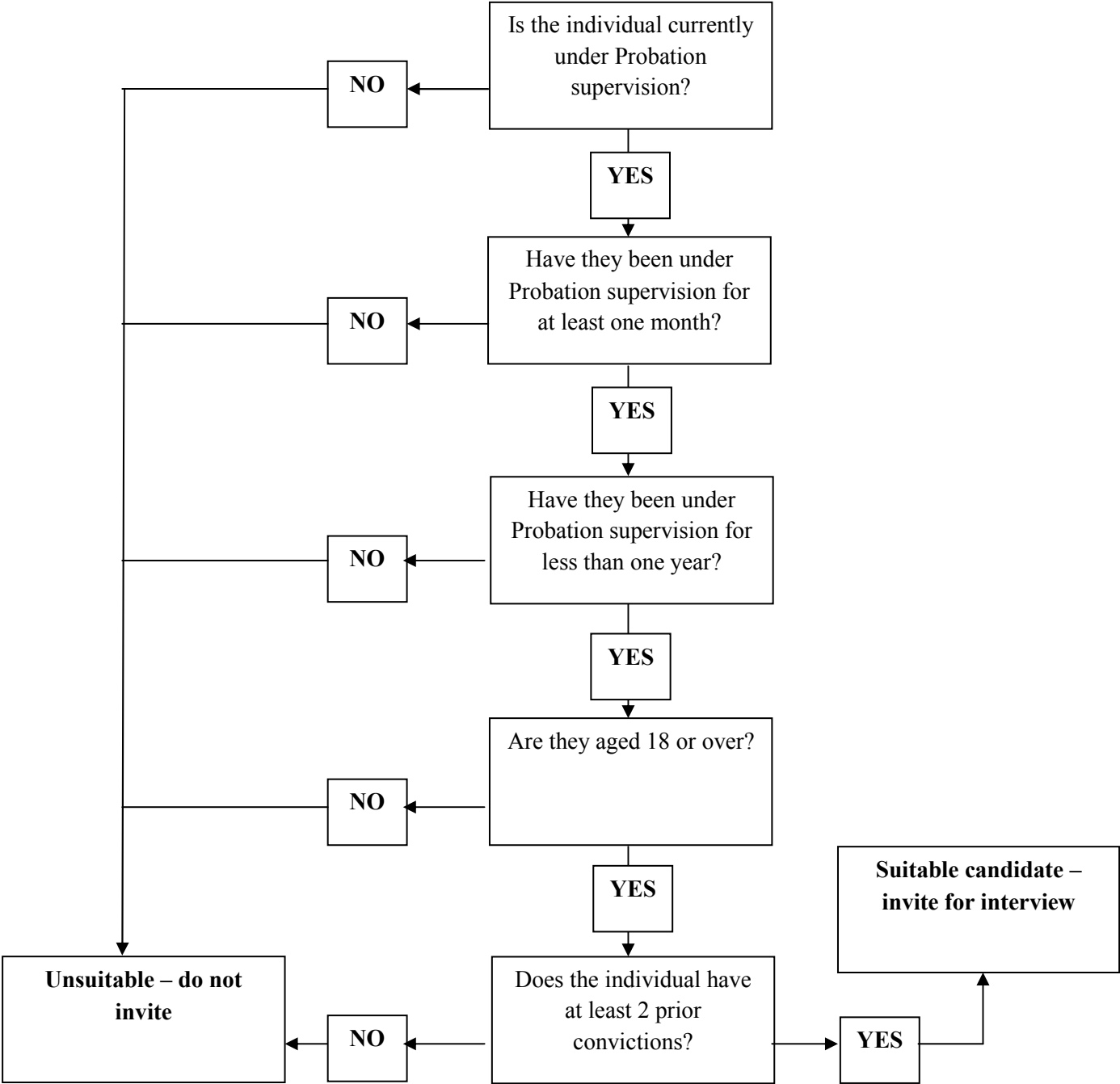
Participants had to be under Probation supervision at the time of interview, predominantly because the research design is prospective rather than retrospective. Indeed, data were required from individuals discussing their current experiences and future outlooks, and the impact of Probation upon transitions. The meetings with Probation teams mentioned above provided an additional aspect to this sampling criterion. Discussions revealed that many practitioners believed

probationers were considerably more enthusiastic during the first or second supervision, and that these sessions usually entailed the practitioner outlining obligations in relation to the sentence. Thus, it was decided that a better reflection of peoples' experiences might be achieved if the sample had experienced at least one month of Probation.

Most commentators argue that desistance can only be studied with individuals who have a history of multiple acts of offending (e.g. Laub and Sampson, 2001; Serin and Lloyd, 2009). The rationale for this in terms of sampling is to eliminate one-off or occasional offenders. It is argued that these individuals are likely to have higher self- or social-control (Kazemian, 2007: 12), as well as fewer criminogenic needs and less risk of future offending. This thesis follows Bottoms *et al* (2004), whose sample includes individuals who have at least two convictions on their criminal record. This would allow for a broader sample of individuals, while omitting first-time offenders and those who had committed only minor offences which resulted in warnings or fines.

Finally, while some studies have explored particular offence types (for example, Shover, 1983), the sampling criteria for this research allowed for the inclusion of all offence types. Additionally, individuals from all risk categories – both OASys and NOMS Tiering framework – were eligible for inclusion. This would have the effect of allowing for the exploration of similarities or differences between individuals depending upon the seriousness of their offence and the likelihood of their future offending. Following the formulation of these sampling criteria, a recruitment algorithm (see figure 10) was constructed which would serve as an easy reference tool for Probation practitioners to use when considering potential research participants.

Figure 10 Sampling criteria algorithm



In total, five practitioners (including Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers) volunteered to participate in the study. Other than being employed within the Probation area that was the site of the research, no criteria were imposed on the participation of practitioners. This was primarily to ensure a sufficient number of individuals participated in the research, and also to ensure that probationers would be recruited from a variety of sources. It was agreed with Senior Probation Officers that practitioners would recruit participants from their own caseloads, and practitioners were asked to follow the criteria from the recruitment algorithm when considering potential participants, but were also encouraged to ask a variety of cases to participate. They were also provided with an information sheet about the research that they could share with potential recruits, so that individuals had some prior knowledge of the research focus and what the interview would entail before they were interviewed (see appendix B). No payment or inducement was offered to individuals for their participation.

I acknowledge that the recruitment process involves some degree of selection bias, particularly by virtue of the fact that the only practitioners involved were those who volunteered, and the potential group of probationers involved was, therefore, limited to those who were supervised by these practitioners. However, I suggest that this is a largely unavoidable facet of this research, insofar as “gatekeepers” were required to recruit probationers for the study. As a result, selection of participants necessarily involved a certain degree of choice on behalf of the supervising officer. Moreover, I argue that the absence of any payment being offered, and the use of the recruitment algorithm, minimised the impact of the selection bias within the sampling process (see also below: “Sample Profile”).

7.4 Sample Profile

In total, 25 probationers and 5 practitioners agreed to participate in the research. All of the practitioners were interviewed, but five of the probationers either withdrew or were not used in the analysis stage. Two withdrew prior to interview and two after interview. The recruitment process only resulted in one female agreeing to participate in the research, so it was decided to proceed with a male only sample. Participants were asked a number of structured questions at the beginning of the interview (see appendix A), which provided some data on the sample characteristics (as shown in table 15). Consistent with much previous research (Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Rex, 1999), responses suggested that participants experienced a range of personal and social problems, with many (n=13) experiencing multiple (three or more) problems. Most (n=14) were unemployed, and two of those who were working were doing so within informal labour markets. Participants ranged from 18 to over 50 years of age, with a mean age of 32.8 years. The most common offences involved violence, drugs and theft. All 20 had a supervision requirement as part of their order. Collectively, interviewees had experience of 7 of the 12 requirements available to sentencers at the time of interview (see: Ministry of Justice, 2007a: 14).

More than half (n=12) had to complete an accredited programme, and 18 of the participants had experience of supervision plus at least one other requirement. The majority of interviewees were originally sentenced to orders of 24 months or longer (n=14), only one interviewee was sentenced to less than 12 months, and 4 had had their orders extended while under Probation supervision. Almost half (n=8) of the interviewees had been in custody prior to interview, and durations ranged from 3 weeks to 3½ years. Of the remaining 12 interviewees, 9 received Community Orders (CO) and 3 were given Suspended Sentence Orders (SSO).

Table 15 Sample profile at time of interview

Age	18-24 6 (30%)	25-29 4 (20%)	30-39 5 (25%)	40-49 3 (15%)	50+ 2 (10%)			
Employment	Unemployed 14 (70%)	Informal 2 (10%)	Formal 4 (20%)					
Accommodation	Private rent	Social Housing	Owner-occupier	Living with others	Residence (part of order)			
	4 (20%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)			
Self-Reported Problems	Employment	Housing	Finance/debt/money	Drugs/alcohol	Relationships	Attitudes/decision-making	Health	3 or More Problems
	14 (70%)	3 (15%)	12 (60%)	4 (20%)	6 (30%)	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	13 (65%)
Sentence Requirement	Supervision	Accredited Programme	Unpaid Work	Residence	Prohibited Activity	Exclusion	Curfew	
	20 (100%)	12 (60%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	
Time on Probation at Interview	1-3 Months 6 (30%)	4-8 Months 4 (20%)	9-12 Months 10 (50%)					
Current Offences	Violence	Theft	Drugs	Sexual	Robbery	Criminal Damage		
	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)		
Most Common Previous Offences	Assault	Theft	GBH	Criminal Damage	Affray	Motoring	Drugs	
	12 (60%)	5 (25%)	4 (20%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	

Given that the sample was recruited through a third party (in this case, the supervising officer), there is a risk of bias or misrepresentation in the study. It could be argued, for example, that practitioners could “cherry pick” the most cooperative probationers in order to try to obtain a positive representation of Probation practice. Also, it is possible that the most amenable probationers might naturally be selected given their proclivity towards compliance. It could be argued that this could bring the validity of the study under scrutiny, as it is possible that those individuals who participated could provide more positive responses to particular questions about Probation practice. Finally, it is also possible that those practitioners who volunteered could be more dedicated to the humanistic core principles of Probation, and may be more likely to offer desistance-focused practice.

If this is the case then this may be reflected in probationers’ responses, thereby offering an overly optimistic account of Probation practice. This has obvious implications for the data analysis, as it could be suggested that the possible selection bias in the method of participant recruitment employed here could lead to skewed interview data. It should be acknowledged that the possible issues involved in the recruitment of participants, described above, could influence the data that is obtained and, in this case, that this could entail a more positive portrayal of Probation.

However, as I argued in the previous section, the means by which individuals were recruited was an unavoidable aspect of the sampling process. Characteristics of the sample profile were compared to national data (where available), and there is broad consistency between the two (see table 16), which suggests that the sample obtained was reasonably representative. I argue that the possibility for selection bias in this study is largely unavoidable, given the nature of the recruitment process, but that the checks implemented during recruitment (through the use

of the algorithm), and after (through comparison with national data) ensure a broadly representative sample and help to uphold the validity of the study. Given the relatively small sample size, the results of the analysis cannot be generalised beyond the sample frame.

However, as an essentially exploratory study, generalisability was not a concern.

Table 16 Sample characteristics and national data

	Sample	National*
Community Order (as % of all court orders)	80	71
Suspended Sentence Order (as % of all court orders)	20	29
Average length of Community Order (months)	21.6	15.4
Average length of Suspended Sentence Order (months)	22.5	18.5
Age groups (%)		
18-24	30	36.2
25-29	20	18.3
30-39	25	25.5
40-49	15	14.8
50+	10	5

* National data from Ministry of Justice, 2009e.

7.5 Data Analysis

Interviews were fully transcribed, manually coded and analysed in relation to the critical realist framework outlined in the previous chapter – “concerns”, “projects”, and “enabling and constraining structures”. The analysis design was based upon the use of “thematic networks”, which were used to organise, structure, illustrate and represent the themes within the data (Attride-Sterling, 2001: 387-388). As such, transcriptions were coded to identify events, thoughts and biographies of the decision-making process and initial transitions towards

desistance. Coding categories were constructed in relation to the critical realist framework and the empirical and theoretical themes identified earlier in the thesis.

This echoes Miles and Huberman's (1994) recommended method of coding data. They advise that researchers create a provisional list of codes before fieldwork, generated from the literature, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, research questions and so forth. Such coding categories were formulated prior to data collection, and were supplemented and amended during and after this phase of the fieldwork. These categories provided a coding framework from which the analysis could take place (Schmidt, 2004: 255). Coding can perform a range of functions within qualitative research (see, for example: Basit, 2003: 144; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 187; Fielding, 2004: 301; Seidel and Kelle, 1995: 53), and has been defined as 'the analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 101).

This approach resonates most clearly with grounded theory, the proponents of which argue that theories can emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Indeed, some have argued that thematic analysis is essentially an inductive approach, allowing both dominant and minor themes to emerge from the data (Sanders, 2007: 80). However, analysis (like all aspects of research) cannot take place in a theoretical or epistemological vacuum (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84), and accounts which describe themes as "emerging" from the data are inherently flawed as they deny the active role played by the researcher in the identification of such themes. Such accounts suggest that themes already exist in the data, and that analysis is simply a process of unearthing them. However, 'if themes "reside" anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them' (Ely *et al*, 1997: 205-206).

In addition to this, the research is approached from a critical realist perspective which, as discussed in the previous chapter, contends that there exist unobservable underlying structural dimensions which condition social action and interaction. Therefore, the knowledge produced from qualitative research must be theoretically grounded, as Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argue:

An important feature of situations ... is the submerged nature of their crucial determining dimensions which often cannot be directly observed. Since through our interviews we seek to uncover ... precisely these dimensions, the terms of our knowledge have to be theoretically grounded (2006: 489).

This is in contradistinction to the interpretivist and the grounded theory approach. The former posits that knowledge produced from research is only ever interpretive and that reality can only ever be 'superficially touched by research' (Holliday, 2007: 6), while the latter presupposes explanations of reality can be produced solely from the individual experiences that emerge from the data (Mason, 1996: 142). By contrast, thematic analysis has developed increasingly as a realist methodology (King, 1998: 118) that 'works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81). Thus, while thematic analysis shares some techniques with analytic induction (Sealey, 2009: 121), it provides a greater correspondence with Blaikie's (2007) notion of 'retroductive reasoning' as a method for developing explanatory accounts of underlying mechanisms which is generally situated within the realist paradigm. Therefore, thematic analysis provides a linkage between the methodology and methods employed in this research.

The interview data were coded in accordance with two sets of thematic categories which had been discerned from prior theoretical and empirical knowledge. The first of these related to agentic themes, and the second to structural themes. It was important, in this stage, to not simply identify topics based upon the questions asked, but to explore: whether the participants

actually discussed the terms of these questions; what meaning they ascribed to the terms; whether there was any elaboration; which they denied or omitted; and, what new topics occurred in the data, which were not anticipated from the prior empirical and theoretical knowledge (Schmidt, 2004: 254). Agentic themes were drawn from the work of McAdams (1992, 2001), Maruna (2001) and LeBel *et al* (2008). Structural themes were drawn from the existing desistance literature and findings from official government reports (Farrall, 2002; National Audit Office, 2002; SEU, 2002; Raynor, 2007a). The coding framework is represented in table 17, and was refined as themes were subcategorised primarily using *in vivo* codes, reflecting interviewees’ own expressions (Flick, 1998: 180). This was intended to retain the contextuality of the data, and to allow the individuals’ “voices” to be heard through the interview data.

Table 17 Analysis coding framework

Critical Realist Framework Stage	Coding Categories	
	Agency	Structure
1) Structural Properties		Employment/education/training Family/relationships Alcohol/drug misuse Finance/money/debt Accommodation Probation experience
2) Subjectively defined concerns	Discernment Deliberation Dedication	Employment/education/training Family/relationships Alcohol/drug misuse Finance/money/debt Accommodation
3) Reflexively determined courses of action	Hope/self-efficacy Shame/remorse Internalizing stigma Alternative identities Self-mastery Status/victory Achievement/responsibility Empowerment Generativity	

7.6 Ethical Issues

The research raised a number of ethical issues which are frequently encountered when conducting research, particularly of a qualitative nature, with offenders (see Noaks and Wincup, 2004: ch. 3). There were three specific issues pertinent to this research: confidentiality, risk of harm, and written informed consent. These were attended to by the use of pseudonyms and instructions that details of the interview would remain confidential unless a serious risk of future harm to the individual or others was suspected. Participants agreed with written consent (see appendix B), and the research received approval from the University of Birmingham's Research Ethics Committee.

The use of supervising officers to recruit probationers as research participants raises some ethical issues in relation to matters of confidentiality and anonymity. For the most part, the information that probationers shared within the interviews would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were used and personal information which could be used to identify the individual was changed or deleted during the transcription stage. However, given that supervising officers were aware of which probationers from their own caseloads participated in the research, it could be argued that it may be possible to identify some individuals (with a greater or lesser degree of certainty) from the quotes used later in the thesis. In this respect, the anonymity of participants could be compromised.

I have argued earlier in this chapter that the recruitment process was necessary in order to obtain a sample for this research, but that this entails some potentially negative implications in relation to selection bias. There are also ethical issues to consider in relation to participants' responses. Whilst I have tried to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout, it must be acknowledged that this cannot be fully guaranteed for all participants. All reasonable measures were taken to conceal individuals' identities, and all participants were fully aware

that their supervising officers knew that they were being interviewed for the research and that their responses could be published in this thesis (and possibly elsewhere besides). I ensured that participants were fully aware that this was the case, as part of the fully informed written consent that was obtained from every participant prior to interview.

In this respect, I argue that within desistance research (and criminological research more generally), researchers should acknowledge where confidentiality or anonymity could be compromised and should ensure that participants are made fully aware of how this may be the case, as part of the process of obtaining informed consent. In other words, although certain research processes may create particular ethical issues, this does not mean that the research cannot be conducted in an ethical manner.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the methods employed for data collection and analysis within this research thesis. It has provided a linkage between the research questions and framework provided in the previous chapter and the data collection undertaken. The thesis is concerned with exploring the role of agency in primary desistance transitions, and there is, therefore, an emphasis upon exploration, description, depth, understanding and experience. This necessitates a qualitative research methodology, and the most appropriate methods for the research questions and the research situation are in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews.

In total, 25 people were interviewed (20 probationers, 5 practitioners) for the study, with interviews lasting between 25 and 105 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full. The analysis design was based upon the six stage process of thematic networks provided by Attride-Sterling (2001). As the research is located within a critical realist

methodology, this approach to analysis is highly relevant as it enables the use of prior theoretical knowledge of typically unobservable phenomenon to be studied in greater detail. Such phenomena provide the material conditions within which individuals can exercise agency, leading towards desistance from or persistence in criminal activity. Thematic analysis can explore the nature of this agency, while also giving consideration to the structural factors that condition it. Thus, there is a linkage between research thesis, methodology and methods described in this chapter which provides an appropriate and relevant means of answering the research questions. The next section of the thesis is divided into three chapters, each providing an analysis of the data in relation to the research questions.

8. ANALYSIS PART ONE - PRIMARY DESISTERS' TRANSITIONS TOWARDS DESISTANCE

The previous chapter provided a profile of the 20 research participants who were considered to be primary desisters, according to the conceptualisation of primary desistance discussed earlier in the thesis (chapter 4). In brief, each participant had ceased offending for a period of at least one month, officially recorded or self-reported, since their last offence (see also: Healy and O'Donnell, 2008). The sample reflected a range of offence types, length of criminal career, number of previous offences, level of risk (according to OASys and the Offender Management Tiering Framework), experience of custodial sentences, and prior experience of Probation. Thus, while all participants met the requirements of the sampling framework, the characteristics and experiences of the individual participants were varied, suggesting similarities and differences in experiences of offending, desistance, and decisions to desist. However, a number of common themes were apparent in the interview data.

This chapter presents the interview data to show prominent themes within the interview transcriptions, and similarities between participants' interviews are explored. As such, Part One moves beyond a mere description of desistance decisions, instead presenting a discussion of the key themes identified in relation to the individual's initial transition towards desistance. This chapter is concerned with exploring the dynamics of this process, and it shows that, while there is some evidence of structural influence upon initial transitions towards desistance, overwhelmingly it is personal agency which exerts most influence over this process.

Part One of the analysis explores these common themes in detail, to provide an account of the decision-making process undertaken by primary desisters, and the initial moves away from crime. In doing so, Part One explores research questions 1a and 1b:

What factors are relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards primary desistance?:

1a) To what extent is personal agency relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

1b) Are structural factors influential in primary desisters initial transitions towards desistance and, individually, which structural factors are of most importance in influencing individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to incorporate structured questions to elicit individuals' stories about their decisions to desist and initial transitions towards desistance, while retaining a degree of flexibility required to allow individuals to talk as freely as possible. Part One of the analysis is divided into 3 sections. The first provides a discussion of how the analysis is built around the agentic themes discussed in chapter 5, and the structural factors frequently identified in the literature and discussed in chapter 5. In the second section agentic events in the transition towards desistance are explored, and similarities between interviews are identified. This section, therefore, relates specifically to research question 1a. The third section identifies structural factors that were evident in participants' discussions of their initial transitions towards desistance, thus relating to research question 1b.

8.1 Desistance Transitions – Analysis Process

In total, 106 subcategories were used, and the number for each agentic and structural theme are shown in tables 18 and 19. The use of agentic and structural themes as coding categories during the analysis entails that the data presented is not merely a descriptive account of the interviews, but rather the research processes are explicitly guided by prior empirical and theoretical knowledge. Thus, the themes may be seen as heuristic devices, insofar as they are utilised to answer the relevant research questions described above.

The coding categories were utilised to construct the thematic networks illustrated in figures 11, 12 and 14, following the analytical process described by Attride-Sterling (2001) and discussed in the previous chapter. This allows for an exploration of the interaction between agency and structural factors, and of how this interaction relates to individuals' transitions towards desistance and their strategies for sustaining them.

Table 18 Agentic themes and coding subcategories

Theme	Coding subcategories
Self-confidence/self-efficacy	8
Moral Agency	13
Good father/good partner identity	10
Empowerment	11
Self-control	6
Personal achievement	4
Total	52

Table 19 Structural themes and coding subcategories

Theme	Coding subcategories
Family/relationships/peers	9
Risk	7
Accommodation	3
Neighbourhood/Locality	9
Employment	16
Probation	10
Total	54

8.2 Agentic factors in the transition towards desistance

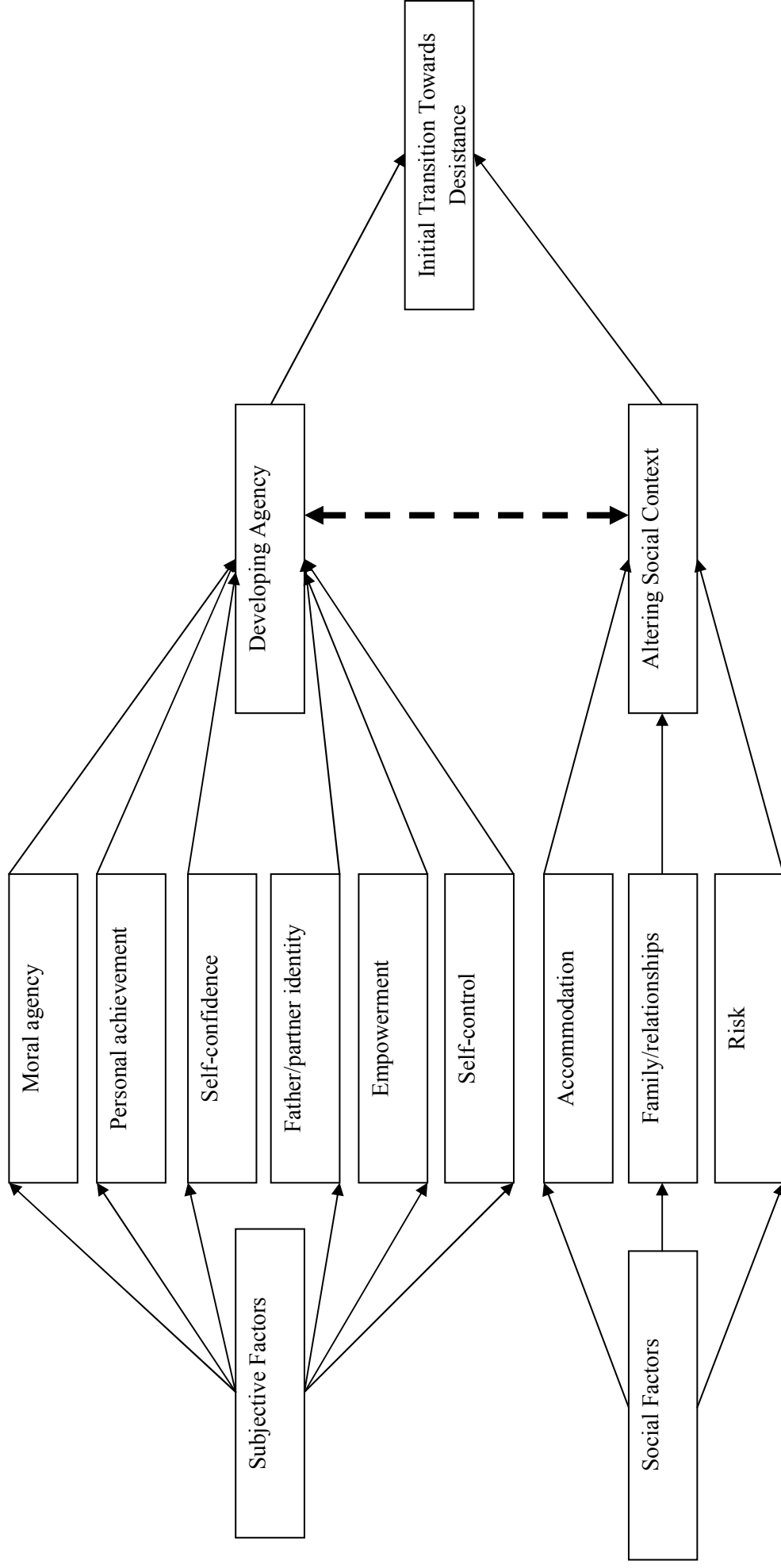
This section provides an analysis of the subjective factors identified in the interview data which have been identified as enhancing the individual's ability to exercise transformative agency. Individuals often displayed multiple subjective factors when discussing their decision to desist, and their perceptions and orientations in the aftermath of making this decision. A smaller number of structural themes were also identified as being influential in this process. These structure and agency themes are illustrated in the thematic network of this stage of desistance, as shown in figure 11.

8.2.1 Self-Confidence/Self-Efficacy

In response to interview questions drawn from previous research by Burnett (1992) and Farrall (2002), participants all stated that they wanted to desist. Interviewees were further asked: "Do you think you'll be able to move away from crime?"; "How likely is it/how confident are you that you can stop offending?"; and "Do you think you will be able to resist an opportunity to offend in the future?". The vast majority responded that they were very confident that they would be able to stop offending, indicating correspondence with previous findings on this issue (Farrall, 2002; Healy and O'Donnell, 2008), and typical statements included: "100%, I won't offend again", and "I will stop offending":

I know I won't offend again. I've made my mind up and nothing's going to change that. Erm, I've been involved with criminals for quite a long time, but now I just want to live my own life, get on with things. I won't offend again. Definitely (Dean).

Figure 11 Thematic network of initial transition towards desistance



The passage above also indicates high levels of self-confidence in an individual's own ability to desist, and this was also apparent throughout the interview data. Responses suggested that individuals believed that they were capable of moving away from crime on their own, and individuals also suggested that desistance would be achieved by simply the avoidance of potentially criminal situations:

I'm just not going to let myself get into those situations again. In the past, I let myself get into the kind of situation where something bad could go down. Now, I'm not going to let myself get into that kind of situation, I just won't let it happen. If it looks like something might happen, or could happen, I'll walk away from it. I won't have anything to do with that no more (Brian).

In this respect, individuals showed both the desire to desist, and the perceived ability to achieve desistance. This echoes Burnett and Maruna's (2004) conceptualisation of the term "hope" as an agentic phenomenon, which they found to be correlated with successful desistance. My interview data suggests that this is also the case for primary desisters, where high levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy were present in individuals' accounts of their decisions to desist and in their initial transitions from "offender" to "desister".

Interestingly, unsuccessful past attempts to desist were sometimes linked to an apathetic approach towards crime cessation:

SK: So what do you think happened that led to you offending again?

Alan: Apathy. Pure apathy. I could be wrong, but I've never done well at trying to give up crime.

This suggests that individuals believe that they are in control of their own desistance, and that making a decision to actively engage in the desistance process will increase the likelihood of successful desistance. This echoes Burnett's (1992) finding that individuals who

demonstrated greater motivation are more likely to desist successfully. The relationship between motivation, confidence and self-efficacy is unclear from the interview data, but it is reasonable to assume that greater levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy will help to maintain motivation, particularly during challenging times, setbacks or relapse.

8.2.2 Moral Agency

The data showed correspondence with the themes of “regret”, “shame” and “remorse” from the existing desistance literature, and also in relation to the delineation of “offenders” as “others”. Interviewees expressed high levels of regret, most often reflecting a perception that past offending had not been worth the trouble they experienced as a consequence. Typically, individuals described experiences of “loss” as a result of their offending, such as losing contact with, or missing the birth of, a child:

I love my kids to bits and I've missed out on no end of stuff. I've missed birthdays and Christmas, I couldn't even send them a Christmas card. I've got stuff, clothes and toys, for my son and I can't even give it to him. I don't want no-one else to give it to him, cos I want to be there to see him when he opens it, but I can't so it's just sitting there. They're just down the road, but I can't see them, I'm not allowed near them and it's heartbreaking really, to think of them growing up and I'm not there to see it, it's horrible ... And it's all cos of this that I've lost out on seeing my kids, if I hadn't have done it then I wouldn't be here now, I wouldn't've missed all this (Ken).

Interviewees also explained that their involvement with offending had entailed their foregoing of alternative opportunities, which suggests that individuals are aware that criminal behavior may incrementally “mortgage” future life chances through the negative effects of offending (Sampson and Laub, 1995: 147). Dean's offending history had revolved around his involvement in the drugs scene, and he was a drug addict himself for many years:

I never thought I'd see the day when I packed the dope. But it's just another burden int it? That £30 or £40 or £50 you'd spend on dope every week, if you

didn't spend that you could've had a totally different life. You're spending that every week, and it's gone for good. It's a mortgage ain't it? I've lost all them chances I have (Dean).

Interviewees also stated that they felt ashamed of their past actions. For younger participants this was often related to a belief that they had "let down" a parent. Interestingly, many individuals were also keen not to apportion any blame to others for their actions: "I'm ashamed at myself ... There's no excuse for what I done" (Kev). Feeling ashamed was less apparent than feelings of regret, but such sentiments were evident among participants of all age groups, offence types and lengths of criminal career. Where interviewees expressed feeling ashamed at their past actions, this appeared to follow a period of personal reflection: "Obviously looking back now it was not the best thing to have done" (Chris).

Decisions to desist were also influenced by expressions of remorse for the victims and others who had been affected by past offending. Often this entailed feeling sorry for individuals who had been physically, emotionally or financially hurt by the individual's actions:

I felt very remorseful for the people that I caused injuries to. Obviously I can't talk to the people, but if I could see them I'd say sorry to them (Josh).

I've hurt a lot of people in the past, robbing off 'em, beating 'em up, whatever, and, when you understand that, it's a good feeling knowing that people aren't being hurt by you no more (Kurt).

The importance of remorse in influencing an individual's decision to desist is that an individual reflects upon their past actions, and re-interprets these actions as an affront to their morality. As discussed in chapter 4, Paternoster (1989) found that changes in morality had an effect upon desistance for certain types of offence, and Shover (1996) also argued that desistance followed the 'acquisition of an altered perspective on their youthful self and activities' (1996: 131). In Liebrich's (1993, 1996) study, remorse was found to be 'the

primary reason' behind making a decision to desist. By contrast, Giordano *et al* (2002) suggest that remorse is associated with a repudiation of past actions, and that this forms the final stage in making a decision to desist, with its importance realised only after an offender is presented with an opportunity to change and has a subjective attachment to that opportunity. The findings from my interview data suggest that the decision to desist from crime is influenced by a reorientation of moral agency, 'triggered by an individual offending against their personal morality – coming to think that their offending was wrong' (Weaver, 2009: 18), and prior to any perceived opportunity to change.

Finally, it should be noted that guilt, shame and remorse should not necessarily be considered in isolation from one another. Rather, these agentic feelings are likely to interact to produce a particular form of personal agency that both acts as a deterrence from future offending and a motivation to make the transition towards desistance:

I don't want to go prison, I don't want to do anything like this again. For a few weeks I just didn't want to admit to myself that I'd done it. I don't want to be in that situation again, I don't want to hurt my partner, I hate what I did, I don't know why it happened, I'm not a violent person and I don't want to be in that situation again (Chris).

The concept of "othering" has been explored elsewhere in criminological analyses (Hudson and Bramhall, 2005: 737) and has emerged in some recent accounts of desistance (Murray, 2008, 2009). The concept of othering within the wider process of desistance can be understood as a means by which individuals are able to distance themselves from current offenders, and typical responses in the interviews included: "I'm not like them". Furthermore, individuals also othered their past selves with responses such as: "I'm not like that anymore", and "That's not me anymore". In this respect, othering influenced the decision to desist as individuals re-interpreted their past selves as being different to the people who they wanted to become:

I've decided I'm not going to [offend again]. I've made my mind up, I don't want to be like how I used to be, do you know what I mean? I just don't want to be like that no more. I want the normal life now, you know? What I used to be like, I want to be totally different to that now. I don't like who I was, I'm not proud of what I done, so I want to be different from now on (Charlie).

The concept of 'othering' within desistance is not new. Indeed, the assumption of a 'non-offender' role as qualitatively different from an offender identity is at the heart of the notion of secondary desistance (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). However, within my research, the process of 'othering' needs to be considered within the context of individuals' descriptions of making the transition towards desistance. In turn, this needs to be seen within the context of the individual's attempts to disassociate themselves from offenders, particularly peer groups who continued to undertake offending or anti-social behaviour. Past offending was frequently associated with a particular group of friends or acquaintances and individuals often referred to specific peers, with whom they had associated in the past, in relation to offending:

SK: Why do you think you weren't able to stop [offending] at that time?

Ryan: Just the crowd I was with. I know the people I'm with now wouldn't get me into any trouble. But back then, it was just everyone I was with was up for it, and you couldn't not go along. When I did this offence, I was with the same crowd.

Much of Dean's offending history was related to relationships forged through the use and supply of drugs. He associated his offending in large part to these associations and was keen to distance himself from this peer group, which he referred to as 'them criminals':

They're ruthless, heartless people... They tried to get to me and get me involved, with, "When we get out, we're going to do this and we're going to do that Deano. Are you interested?" And I says, "Look, I've had my day. You do what you wanna do, but I've had my day and I want nothing part of criminal activities in the future"... Rob places, sell cocaine, sell crack, sell

heroine... Or break into places, whatever they've done in the past that's what they're talking about. Laughing about it, bragging about it. I don't want that. I ain't going to be no part of their silly little laughs (Dean).

Interviewees were, thus, keen to distance themselves from the actions of offenders, and offending or offending-related behaviour was frequently described as “daft” or “stupid”.

Furthermore, interviewees often spoke about offenders in somewhat derogatory terms, as the following passage illustrates:

And [I want to stop because], it's just fucking daft, ain't it? There's one guy, he's a bit younger than me but I've known him for years. A couple of weeks ago he'd been up town shoplifting, he does that a lot. Anyway, he's telling me how he'd took it round [acquaintance] to flog it, and [he'd] offered him like 30 quid the lot. This guy says, “fuck off pal, this is worth at least 50”, and then he's telling me how he started punching him and kicking fuck out of him, like it's something to be dead proud of. I'm just thinking, “you're a twat, why would you be saying that like it's something special?” And that's happening all the time, and I don't want no part of that (Kurt).

In constructing such narratives individuals establish a clear distinction between what it means to be an “offender” in contrast to a “non-offender”. In doing so, individuals affirm that they want to desist, and that they are willing to commit to that goal. Sometimes individuals ‘othered’ particular types of criminal, distancing themselves from what they perceived to be more serious offenders. Individuals who made these assertions were not trying to disassociate themselves from peer groups, rather they suggested that they wanted to disassociate themselves from people whose offending had escalated towards serious crimes. Furthermore, the ‘othering’ of more serious criminals involved identifying such individuals as lacking the personal agency necessary to desist from crime, insofar as they were ‘born’ to be in trouble:

The people in there [prison], there's people in there who are serious criminals, people who are robbing or shooting or killing, and I'm in there just for fighting, just for doing what I like doing. I was listening to people in there, and people were like, “I'm looking at 7 years for having a loaded gun in the house”. Another guy was looking at 12 years. There was one guy on a

murder charge. I'm looking around thinking, "I ain't like that". I don't want to go around shooting people, why would I want to shoot someone for? Why would I want a loaded gun in the house? And people who are talking about robbing a post office, and that ain't me. There was part of me that was thinking, "I shouldn't even be here, this place is for people who do big crimes". Mine was just a stupid little fight. It ain't for me. Some people are just born to go in and out of prison, just born to always get into trouble (John).

For these individuals, 'othering' did not represent an *in toto* identity change as delineated in the concept of secondary desistance, which would suggest that the individual would distance themselves from their own past identity. Rather, these individuals appeared to divorce their present identities from what their future identity could potentially become if they did not desist – that is that they did not want to become a more serious offender.

For those individuals who 'othered' criminals including their past selves and past peer groups, the personal transformations that they envisaged often involved reference to non-criminal social contacts, which were either prior or subsequent to offending. These included friends (known prior to offending), religious contacts, and partners. Moreover, this involved individuals becoming allied to the values and behaviours of these social contacts, and this, in turn, led to a series of perceived rewards to be gained from sustaining desistance.

8.2.3 Good Father/Good Partner Identity

Some individuals envisaged new, general non-offender identities that they wanted to assume – "I don't want to be known as a troublemaker no more" (Leroy) – while others were more specific about "who" they wanted to become – "I just want to be a family man" (Robert). Indeed, typically, future identities involved becoming a "good father" or "good partner", by making statements such as, "I want to look after my kids", or "I want what's best for my girlfriend", and individuals regarded these identities as incongruent with offending behaviour. This finding echoes Giordano *et al's* (2002) finding that desisters adopt a new, pro-social

identity that is ‘fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation’ (2002: 1001). They argue that such identity change is prompted by the process of re-assessment of one’s life and the presence of opportunities to change within the social environment. The conceptual definition of secondary desistance (as discussed in chapter 4) is that desistance occurs over time as individuals develop a new identity as non-offenders. However, my data suggest that primary desisters are agentic in envisioning a new identity that they aspire to adopt. This was particularly the case for Brian, Chris and Josh, who were expectant fathers, who all explained that the primary reason for their decision to desist had been the desire to be a good father and a good provider for their children. They had determined that offending was incompatible with the identities that they wanted to commit to:

Obviously I don’t want to be in prison with a kid. Also with a kid on the way you have to be a lot more mature, you have to think I’ve got a kid on the way, I have to think about my partner, making sure she’s going to be ok. I have to make decisions that will be good for them as well. You have to look after your finances a lot more. If you’re going to be a dad then you can’t afford to be mucking about making stupid decisions, you’ve got to act more responsibly. Cos what you do will affect your kid, so that’s what I want to do, to be a good dad and look after my family (Chris).

8.2.4 Empowerment

The interview data suggested that primary desisters are empowered in both making a decision to desist and in the early transition towards desistance. Empowerment here follows McAdams (2001) conceptualisation of empowerment as an agency theme. For McAdams (2001) empowerment occurs where an individual (including their agency) is enhanced by someone or something larger than the self. In this respect, this does not necessarily suggest that individuals gained more power than they had before, but rather that perceptions or orientations had been enhanced by someone or something else to the extent that desistance appeared to be a more feasible objective.

Most instances of empowerment occurred when a supervising officer helped the individual to gain a new insight into their life, and typical responses included: “[PO] has helped me to think about my life in a different way”. Moreover, supervising officers were often identified as enabling an individual to reflect on their lives to a greater degree, and to adopt a more future oriented perspective:

They [PO] have made me see things differently, and I will do, that won't change. A lot of people do it for 5 minutes and then go back to their old ways. Just cos I won't be in probation after August doesn't mean that I won't look at life the same as when [PO] sat me down and spoke to me and thought things through. I'm going to be thinking, am I doing the right thing here? And I'll think to myself, nah. If I don't feel right, I'll turn around and go home. It happened before my birthday. We were up town as couples and a bunch of them wanted to party, and I said to the missus, “I don't want to, I'd rather go for a meal” (Josh).

Indeed, most interviewees cited their supervising officer in relation to empowerment, but for two individuals in particular (Dean and Raj) empowerment resulted from religion:

Becoming a Christian as well, that's changed me as well, see? I know what it's like to be on the receiving end of this hurt. Whether it's something to do with stealing off somebody, if I stole off somebody, what would it be like if someone stole off me? You then put yourself in these positions. And it's like the drugs, you've gotta kinda think “What about the mam and dad of a son who's 30 years of age, and you're selling the dope to him, or speed”? If I was a father, would I want my son to go through what I was putting him through? He might've been stealing to pay for his habit, so I've learnt a lot, you know? And to be on the receiving end, I've thought, put myself in that position and it's made me think a lot about what I've done wrong in the past. And that's why I intend never to go back there (Dean).

It's helped me so much. I've totally cut down on intoxications, I've totally cut down on going out. I was a violent person before, I used to do boxing, kickboxing, weightlifting, I used to work on doors, and it was just in my nature to be aggressive. But, in the last 6 months it's totally changed. Because I've become religious (Raj).

The findings from my interview data contrast with Healy and O'Donnell's (2008) study of primary desisters in Ireland. The authors found that 'very few spoke about empowerment' (2008: 34), whereas empowerment was a relatively common theme throughout my interview data.

8.2.5 Self-Control

Most often enhanced self-control entailed overcoming or managing a drink or drug habit, while some described taking control of anger issues that had previously contributed to offending. Individuals related drink and/or drugs to prior offending, and thus identified overcoming these issues as a key factor in primary desistance. Some suggested that they had been able to completely refrain from drinking or drug-taking:

SK: Do you still do drugs now?

Leroy: No I don't. I've been off them for about 17 months, from being in there [prison] ... I'm not bothered about doing 'em anymore, I'm over all that. Obviously when I was doing them I was getting into trouble, and like I say I was high when I done this offence, so coming off 'em has to be a good thing really. And like I say, I'm done with 'em and I'm not really interested in going back to 'em.

Other individuals explained that they had significantly reduced their alcohol or drug intake, and they suggested that the level that they had reduced their usage to was negligible in impacting upon the potential for re-offending (an assessment that was supported by the supervising officer). Individuals who had taken greater control described how they had first come to realise that their drinking or drug-taking was problematic:

That's the type of thing that you do, when you're under the influence, whether it's driving or fighting or thieving or whatever it might be. It's about a careless attitude, and once you get to understand that it was quite easy for me to stop drinking, virtually (Tom).

In some cases, the data suggested that, while individuals stated that they had been able to take control of a drink or drug habit, they also lacked confidence in their ability to sustain this. Words like “hopefully” were common in participants’ explanations of increased self-control, which suggests that individuals did not feel entirely in control at the time of interview. Most likely, for these individuals, they would need to experience further successes during the desistance process to be more confident in their actions and to commit further to desistance:

That’s been a problem throughout my life, yeah. Like I say, I genuinely can’t think of a case where I’ve been in trouble with the police without it being me drinking. So that’s the root of it all I think. Hence, stopping and not drinking no more, so hopefully I won’t get in trouble again. Never say never, but I’m hopeful (Nath).

For many individuals, the decision to desist followed the realisation that there existed a problem, and the initial transition towards desistance was accompanied by enhanced self-control. It is likely that enhanced self-control will lead to success in the early transition towards desistance and this success, in turn, will secure greater commitment to the longer-term desistance process. The references to self-control from the individuals in my sample resonate with McAdams (2001) conceptualisation of “self-mastery” as a component of agency (see chapter 5), which can be expressed by the individual through increases in self-awareness and understanding, and an enhanced sense of control.

8.2.6 Personal Achievement

This theme is distinct from self-control, where the achievements were more personal accomplishments such as overcoming a drug habit. For some individuals, achievements involved enhancing their education or skills, and this was often undertaken during time in prison:

I trained up for agricultural mechanics; light vehicle body repairs; gardening; computer maintenance and building; and art, I've got certificates in art. I've got all what I need, you know, for the outside world, you know? (Dean).

Others identified the completion of particular requirements of their sentence as a personal achievement, and this most often involved the successful completion of an accredited programme:

At the moment actually I've just finished a course on IDAP, which is an Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme. I finished that 4 months ago. I completed that successfully, which is good, and that's helped me, so I'm pleased with that (Robert).

What might be considered "lesser" accomplishments were also identified by interviewees as achievements, including completing the sentence without breach at the time of interview and maintaining all appointments that were required of the individual. As I have already mentioned, these may be considered to be "lesser" achievements, but in a context where desistance is conceptualised to be an ongoing process characterised by incremental success and accomplishment, such smaller events are likely to be influential. Moreover, it is important to consider the importance of "lesser" achievements for individuals who are, perhaps, unaccustomed to performing relatively routine activities:

Well there's actually quite a lot to do for Probation, it does take up a lot of your time. It's hard, cos even though you might only be here for 30 minutes or whatever, less sometimes, it might take you an hour, hour and half to get here, same to get back, that's your morning done. I've been going to the Job Centre, I'm just trying to keep my appointments ... So far I haven't missed one, touch wood. But I do find it hard cos I've never had to do it before, do you get me? (Kurt).

Nath described how he had started his own business, running a garage, while he had been under Probation supervision. This is not only an example of personal achievement, but also

shows increased levels of self-efficacy, self-control and responsibility in a man who identified himself as an alcoholic, and who had lost 2 previous jobs through drinking:

Nath: The chance of getting the garage came up and at the time it came up I was really positive. There was a time when a similar garage came up and I couldn't be bothered.

SK: Prior to the garage becoming available were you in employment?

Nath: No, I wasn't in employment, but I was doing bits and bobs, but nothing you could actually call in employment. I was in employment about a year previous, which ended through drink. But then I sort of fell a bit, I went through a rough patch with my partner, we split up once, separated, and just became a bit of a sort of recluse I suppose, a bit down, and I didn't bother doing anything, just wasting my life.

In a similar respect to “self-control” as described above, personal achievements were identified as being influential in the early transitions towards desistance. The importance of achievements would be realised after a decision to desist had been made, as it is unlikely that personal achievements would prompt a decision to desist. It is not necessarily the case that personal achievements correspond with goals or objectives set by the individual concerned, but it is likely that achievements will be more influential if there is correspondence with specific goals. Achievements, as described here, resonate with McAdams (2001) third agentic theme, “Achievement/Responsibility”. In McAdams vision, the individual will feel proud, confident or successful in overcoming certain challenges, meeting particular goals, or achieving a certain standard of excellence.

8.3 Structural factors in the transition towards desistance

8.3.1 Family/Relationships

The negative impact of past offending on relationships was a prominent theme in the interview data. Past offending had often led to the breakdown of relationships with family members:

Cos of the way I've been, I ain't known my mum since I was about 15 ... My mum threw me out when she found crack in my bedroom. A lot of crack in my bedroom. I got thrown out. We spoke on the street, but I didn't call or nothing, and cos of that my other sister didn't talk to me, and cos of the other one's old man I never spoke to them (Martin).

In a number of cases, family members had offered the individual a "second chance" to restore these relationships. Furthermore, this second chance had entailed family members offering the individual support in the form of practical assistance and encouragement, with the proviso that the individual would complete their Probation requirements and attempt to desist. Thus, structural changes to the individual's relationships had led to the decision to desist:

I come out of jail and they're all helping me... It's nice to have family around, but not just because they're helping me, it shows they care. I've always worked for myself, and lived with my girlfriend and that. I've done what I wanted to do myself, I've never listened to no-one. I wish I had done now (Martin).

I'm chuffed right now. My mum and dad are my best mates. They've done so much for me they have. So much ... My nana's done a lot for me. And my mam's been a main one as well. If I've been in debt, or if I've been in trouble, she's been there to help me out. She's lovely ... it's helped. Since I've done this crime, I'm back with my dad, back with all the others, and it's great. I'm not doing anymore [offending] (Charlie).

For some, however, experiences of Probation had prompted certain aspects of agency, notably regret, shame or remorse, and these had led the individual to make changes to their

relationships. This was the case for Dean who, following a period of reflection, had decided to desist and had determined that this could be facilitated by severing ties with former associates in the drugs scene and re-establishing older peer groups that he had associated with prior to his involvement in offending. Demonstrations of support from these older networks had also engendered feelings of confidence and motivation:

... I can beat it. With the help of my friends what want to help me. You know, my friends what I met out of the drug scene, years ago. I've never had so many people show support for me. It's amazing really (Dean).

There were a minority of cases where unexpected positive outcomes had resulted from behavioural changes, as Nath described it: "... it turns out me changing some of my ways has made her [his wife] happier and made our relationship better". For most, however, a decision to desist was undertaken with the expectation of particular rewards, including the restoration or development of relationships with significant others. This was particularly the case for Martin, Charlie, Brian and Terry. Martin's son had been born while he was in prison, and at the time of interview he had still not met him as a result of the prohibitive requirements of his sentence. He explained that he wanted to prove to others that he had changed, and that the reward would be being allowed to develop a relationship with his son:

I'm not allowed [to see his son] until I can prove I've sorted myself out ... That's my aim, to show everyone else I'm sorted out, and then they'll think yeah he's changed let's give me a chance. Unless you try it... you're not going to sort it out for him ... Everything I'm doing at the minute is geared towards that. That's why I'm trying to get Probation behind me saying, "Yeah he's done well, he's changed", and that, they'll look differently at me, not just think, "Oh, he's violent, he's done this" ... They'll think, "He's changed it". They're all good people to have behind you if you're going to try and get your son for custody, they're genuine people like (Martin).

Underpinning this was a perception that sustaining desistance would earn the trust of others, and this was particularly the case for a number of interviewees who suggested that, by desisting, their supervising officer would trust them and that this would be reciprocated by the issuing of rewards, such as: the removal of certain sentence requirements; or help with particular issues, including employment, housing and debt. Interviewees stated that the prospect of such rewards made attempts to desist more worthwhile, as one person said: “I feel, if they’re going to go out of their way for me, I’ll go out of my way for them” (Raj).

8.3.2 Risk

Various risks associated with offending were highlighted during the interviews, and structural changes to the nature of such risks were influential in making the decision to desist.

Prominent amongst these was the threat of a custodial sentence, or the risk of a longer custodial sentence for those who had been in prison before. This confirms the findings of some early desistance research, discussed in chapter 4, that the real or potential negative outcomes from crime can lead to a decision to desist (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986: 74; Maruna, 1997: 78; Hughes, 1998: 147). It has also been suggested that individuals can make the decision to desist if the possibility of longer or more punitive sentences becomes more likely, what some have referred to as criminal justice system ‘burn out’ (Shover, 1983; Burnett, 1992). Some of the individuals in my sample expressed relief that they had been placed under Probation supervision, rather than being given a prison sentence. For these individuals, the potential costs involved with going to prison were clear, and they appeared to significantly contribute to the decision to desist:

Obviously I’ve got a criminal record for the rest of my life, probation for 2 years, and if I do anything wrong in the next 2 years I go straight to prison for 10 months ... I thought when he said 10 months imprisonment I thought the rest of my life’s over now, and when he said suspended over 2 years I was

relieved. If I'd gone to prison I'd have lost my job and everything. Luckily I didn't go prison. I feel quite good about that, that I didn't go jail (Chris).

Among those in the sample who had served a custodial sentence, the experience of prison was a reminder of the costs associated with offending. Prison had prompted a re-assessment of the costs of crime, and the choice between prison and desistance had become an easier decision to make:

It's not much of a choice. Being in a cell 23 hours a day, trapped behind a steel door with some stupid bloke in there, shitting and pissing at the end of the bed, it's horrible (Josh).

Leroy's case highlights how an individual can make a decision to desist while they remain in custody, and develop a growing awareness of the probable consequences of continued offending:

SK: Was there any point when you thought, I don't want to do this anymore?

Leroy: Only when I ended up inside. I just started thinking, it's not worth coming in and out of here all your life. It's just a one-way street if you carry on like that ...

SK: Are you confident that you won't offend again?

Leroy: Yeah ... Well, like I say, I don't want to spend my life in and out of jail. I know that if I carry on then that's what my life'll be like. Just in and out.

However, it was often not the case that the actual lived experience of prison was particularly deleterious, as a number of those who had served custodial sentences described how 'prison's easy'. Indeed, some suggested that they would not be deterred by prison, provided they felt the offence was justified:

If I do it for no reason I'll be gutted, cos I'll be thinking, what have I done that for, why did I do that? But, if I done it for a reason, like if someone started it, or someone said something to me or whatever, then I'd think fuck it, send me prison, I don't care. Cos I'd've done it for a reason (Ryan).

Rather, it was the realisation that further offending would cause the individual to become ensnared in the “revolving door of prison and Probation” that prompted a re-assessment of the costs of crime. Furthermore, the threat of longer sentences also initiated such a re-assessment:

Last time I was in there [court] he said to me, I'm getting sick of seeing you in here, next time I see you in here you're going down for a long time. That did shit me up a bit, I must admit. I don't want to waste my life inside (Kurt).

Often individuals described how offending had become more commonplace, or more serious, and this had influenced their decision to desist from crime: “Up town, you've only got to look at someone the wrong way and you get a glass in the side of the face. My mate got stabbed, up town, for nothing” (Josh), or: “You don't know what someone's going to be carrying now” (John). Whether or not the seriousness or dangerousness of offending in the local area had actually increased is unknown, but it is not the factual accuracy of these statements that is important. Rather, it is the perceived structural change in the seriousness of offending that encouraged individuals to desist.

In some cases, changes to the nature of risk followed the initial decision to desist. Often this involved risks, to the well-being of the individual concerned, that were associated with offending. Following his decision to desist, Dean remarked that he was: “glad to be ... free of not having to look over my shoulder every day”, as had been the case previously when he had been involved in violent offending. For others, changes to the nature of risk entailed a reduction in the risks posed to others as a result of the individual offending. An awareness of the impact of offending upon victims, and knowing that cessation of offending meant that

they were no longer victimising others, appeared to offer the individual encouragement and motivation:

SK: What else do you talk about with [PO]?

Kurt: Just about victims and that kind of stuff really. It's good to be aware of the people you've hurt, and it's nice to know I'm not doing that no more. I've hurt a lot of people in the past, robbing off 'em, beating 'em up, whatever, and, when you understand that, it's a good feeling knowing that people aren't being hurt by you no more.

Thus, structural changes in the form of reduced risk following a decision to desist appeared to support that decision, encouraging the individual to sustain the transition towards desistance.

8.3.3 Accommodation

For 2 of the individuals in the sample, accommodation was a prominent example of structural change influencing the early transition to desistance. Dean and Ken had both found new accommodation since being under Probation supervision. Both reflected that finding accommodation was an important part of their initial moves towards desistance, and that Probation had helped them to facilitate this:

SK: How has getting a flat helped?

Ken: It's been great, getting a place of my own, helping me start getting back on my feet. That's what I want to do, I don't want to get in trouble again, but I know I need to get back on my feet if I'm going to have a chance of doing that. [PO] helped me get that sorted, and she says she'll carry on helping me with it, and, erm, I can't complain. She's been 100% and it's made me positive about things, so I'm going to keep going and see what else I can get out of it [Probation supervision]. And all this has been after a few months really, imagine what I could achieve in 2 years.

Dean had been living in a Probation hostel for the first 2 months after his release from prison, and he described how Probation had helped him to move into a council flat and that this was helping him in the early stages of desistance. He explained how getting a flat of his own would help by allowing him to cut ties with delinquent peers and also by giving him a sense of self-worth. He described how he felt that the help he received from his supervising officer and the local authority in obtaining his flat in terms of someone taking an interest in his well-being:

When I applied for me flat, I told the council how sorry I was for what I'd done, and the actual woman who I spoke with on the phone said "Look, Mr. Robinson. You've done your time, you've paid for your crime. So don't keep putting yourself down for it, feeling sorry or whatever. You've done your time, you've paid for it. You've lost everything you'd got. Why should you keep on losing? Or paying for it?" And that's a nice feeling, I thought when I come out [of prison] everyone'd be against me, so (Dean).

Later he described how having a sense of self-worth and a positive attitude was helping him to abstain from drink and drugs, and that he believed that enhancing these feelings would help him to make further progress. Ken was homeless when he began Probation and similarly explained how Probation had helped him to find a council flat and that this too was helping him to desist. Ken described obtaining accommodation as helping to get his "life back on track", and Dean stated that it had given him "a boost". They both stated that finding accommodation had improved their confidence and given them a positive sense of well-being. Thus, while both of these participants demonstrated personal agency in their decisions to desist, structural changes appeared to be instrumental in helping them to act upon these decisions and also appeared to further enhance their personal agency.

Summary

High levels of correspondence were found with many of the agentic themes identified by McAdams (1992, 2001) and LeBel *et al* (2008), while more limited correspondence was observed with structural factors (although many structural factors noted in the existing literature were absent here). Therefore, the analysis presented here shows that individuals are agentic in the initial transition towards desistance. The evidence suggests that individuals reflexively consider their social contexts in relation to what they want to achieve in the future. This indicates that primary desisters adopt a projective dimension of agency, as they begin to imagine possible future trajectories in relation to their social contexts. The following chapter will explore the objectives that individuals deem to be necessary to facilitate desistance, and the strategies that they employ in attempting to achieve them.

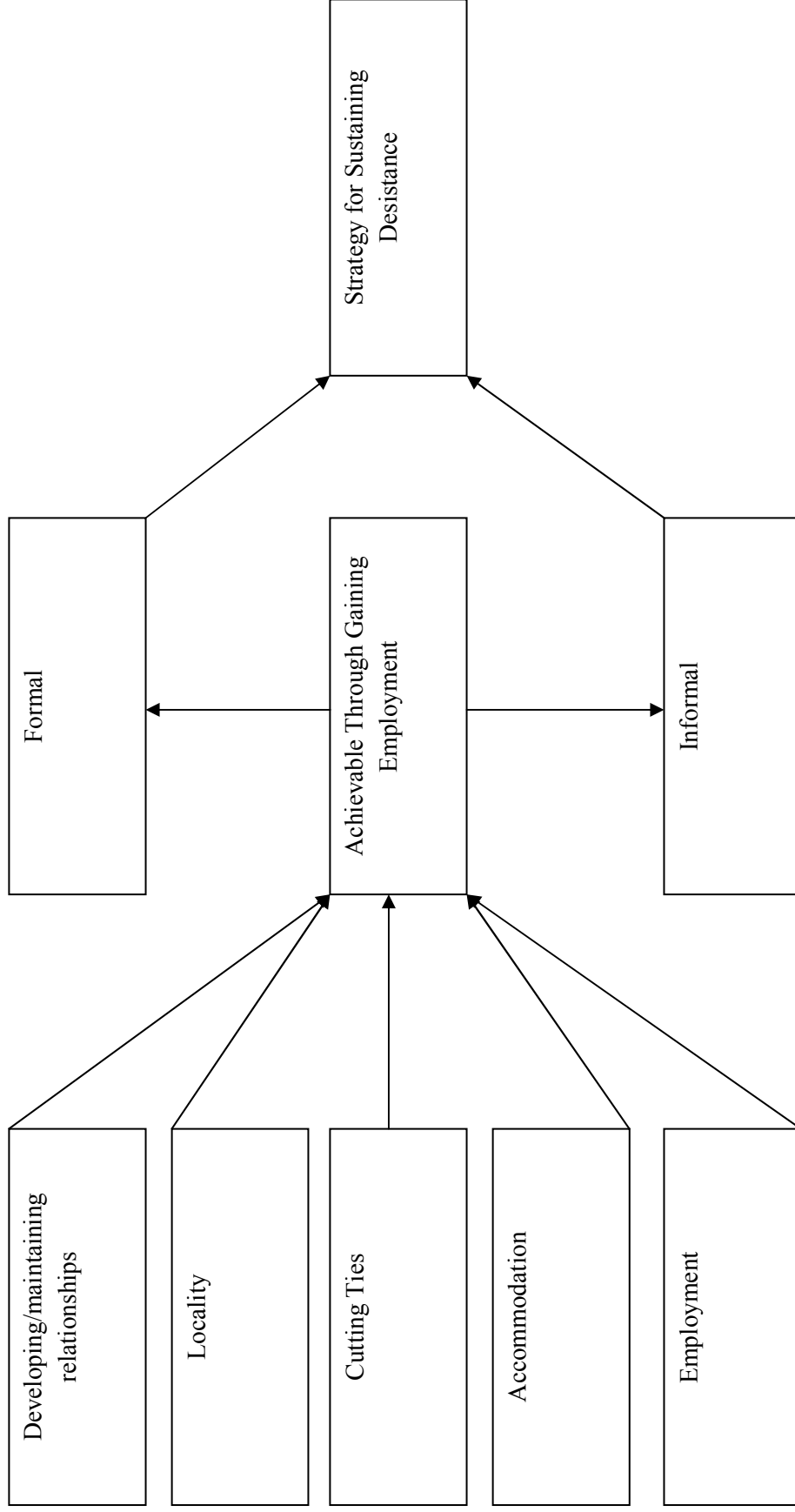
9. ANALYSIS PART TWO – PRIMARY DESISTERS’ STRATEGIES FOR DESISTANCE

Part One of the analysis explored individuals’ decisions to desist and their initial transitions towards desistance. It was shown that agentic themes were highly prominent in these processes, and that individuals could be characterised as “active agents” in the initial moves away from crime. This would appear to correlate with late-modernity theses which suggest that life-course events, which were once normatively structured, are now dependent upon individuals’ own decisions, rendering the individual responsible not only for making decisions about the course of their life but also for the consequences of their decisions, whether good or bad (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2001). Part Two builds upon this by exploring the next stage of desistance, whereby individuals formulate strategies which they believe will enable them to sustain desistance. The same analysis process used in Part One was applied to Part Two, with interview transcriptions being coded in correspondence with the agentic and structural themes discerned from the relevant existing literature, and the network of these themes is shown in figure 12. In formulating these strategies, individuals begin to revert to a practical-evaluative agency, reflecting significantly more upon their social contexts and the constraints that places upon possible courses of action. Part Two is divided into 4 sections, reflecting the structural factors that interviewees discussed, and agentic themes are discussed where relevant to each structural theme. In doing so, Part Two relates to research questions 2a and 2b:

2a) How are structural factors relevant to primary desisters’ strategies for sustaining the transition towards desistance?

2b) How relevant is personal agency to the formulation of individuals’ strategies for desistance?

Figure 12 Thematic network of strategies for desistance



There was correspondence between the areas of improvement that individuals related to their strategies and the 7 key areas highlighted in the literature (SEU, 2002; NOMS, 2005; Raynor, 2007a), perhaps unsurprisingly given the extent of personal and social problems experienced by the interviewees (see chapter 7 for details regarding the sample). Of particular importance to the individuals in my sample were: issues in regard to relationships; accommodation difficulties; alcohol and drug taking; finance and debt problems; and, mental and physical well-being. The identification of overcoming such issues as necessary for sustaining desistance has been highlighted within the literature (Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Byrne and Trew, 2008), so this finding merely supports existing knowledge. However, the findings from my data show that individuals highlight employment as an overarching concern, whereby gaining employment is often identified as a means of achieving a number of other objectives.

9.1 Employment as a general concern

While the participants in my sample discussed paid work as a necessary condition for achieving relationship, locality and accommodation concerns, employment was also described as a general concern that would facilitate desistance, independent of these other objectives. Typical responses included: “I’ll be sorted if I can get a job”; “I’ll stay out of trouble if I’m working”; and, “Work is the number one priority”. The frequent occurrence of employment as a general objective is, perhaps, unsurprising given that more than half (n=14) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview. In the majority of cases, the objective was “general employment” – that is, individuals did not specify a particular type of work, or that the type of work was not significant per se:

SK: What kind of job would you look for?

Charlie: I'm not bothered. Not bothered. I just want to do the norm from now. That's what I want.

Employment was explicitly related to income, and the interview data suggested that individuals perceived increased income to be synonymous with enjoying a greater range of opportunities. In this respect, participants identified a lack of income is a significant structural barrier to achieving a range of concerns:

When you've got a job and you've got money, you can do what you want, sort of thing (Leroy).

Furthermore, work was also associated with "keeping busy", insofar as employment would provide the individual with a structured routine which would preclude opportunities to offend:

Well, as long as I can get work up here, a proper job I mean, and keep working then I should be ok cos it'd keep me busy, I'd be making money and everyone'd be happy (Martin).

However, it was apparent that benefits from increased income or altered routines were not the primary considerations. Rather, it was the association between employment and non-offending that was most significant for participants in my sample. Interviewees remarked that the relationship between offending and employment was such that they were less likely to offend during periods of employment, as John succinctly stated:

If you ain't got a job you'll get into trouble, if you've got a job you won't get into trouble, I see it like that (John).

It is argued here that individuals approach a particular situational context, that of becoming a desister, with a pre-existing definition of employment as being both pro-social and normative

– that is, that the condition of employment is fundamentally incongruent with offending behaviour, and that sustained desistance is dependent upon sustainable employment. Of course, this is a fallible definition, not least because this would preclude all manner of white-collar crimes, but also because a substantial number of crimes are committed by individuals who hold legitimate forms of employment, and because many unemployed individuals lead law-abiding lifestyles. However, such a definition would explain why employment is of such significance within the interview data, and why the individuals in my sample regarded gaining employment as a necessary event for the accomplishment of other objectives. This is further supported by responses which included references to friends and family members, their employment status and their tendencies towards offending-related behaviour:

As it happens, within two days of me getting done, he was done – a mate of mine. And, you know... he lost his job... and now he's still around, moping around town without a job, and doing nothing except drinking and getting up to no good (Tom).

Indeed, employment was held to be of such significance that individuals remarked that all other concerns could be achieved if employment was gained. Aside from the specific concerns that individuals held (to be discussed below), interviewees stated that employment would enable them to accomplish goals more generally, and that the absence of employment would preclude all other efforts to desist:

If I can't get a job then I'm, basically, I'm fucked. Cos what else can I do for money. Forget about buying drugs, how am I going to buy a fucking cup of tea? I need a job, cos that's what you do ain't it? You get a job and everything else follows that (Kurt).

9.2 Employment as a relationship concern

Interviewees suggested that “relationships” could help to facilitate desistance in 2 key ways:

(1) by developing or maintaining positive, pro-social relationships with significant others, and

(2) by cutting ties with criminogenic peer groups. For each of these, employment was cited as necessary for the relationship objective to be achieved and sustained, and, in turn, for desistance to become more likely. The benefits to be gained from employment in economic and routine activity terms were frequently cited as being influential in helping to achieve the relationship objective, while social control was less frequently mentioned but was still a central theme for a number of participants. Typical responses included: “I need a job to provide for my kid”, and “If I’m working I won’t be hanging around with them”.

9.2.1 Developing, Maintaining, Restoring Relationships

Individuals suggested that developing new relationships, maintaining relationships, and restoring relationships would help them to sustain desistance. For many interviewees, relationship concerns were identified as long-term, ongoing objectives, the achievement of which was dependent upon gaining and sustaining employment. Individuals stated that the objective of improving relationships would instil motivation and an incentive to stay away from crime. Individuals also identified relationships as a means of: altering their routine activities; providing the impetus for attitudinal/identity change; developing a support network; and, offering a stake in society. Fundamentally, relationships were regarded as a means of moving away from crime as they offered a different perspective on the future, encouraging the individual to “settle down” rather than lead a chaotic lifestyle involving offending:

All my mates, they’re my family, cos none of my mates have got family either. All of us are like a tight bunch, obviously I want my own family though. I want a big family. Cos when you’ve got kids all you think is, I want the easy life now, I don’t want no more of this mayhem and messing around. So even though I’m only 20 I wouldn’t mind settling down now (John).

Often, the adoption of developing relationships as an objective to facilitate desistance resulted from the perceived positive impact that relationships had upon peers. Individuals spoke about

friends who had developed relationships with a spouse or girlfriend, and occasionally children, and how this corresponded with their adoption of a pro-social lifestyle:

Yeah, I'd like to meet someone, a nice bird, someone I could maybe settle down with. I see some of my mates and they've got wives, girlfriends, kids and whatever else, and they're doing alright now. Maybe something like that's what I need, give me a push. Get me moving in the right direction, instead of messing about and that (Kurt).

Developing relationships with children was also a prominent theme for those participants who either already had children, or who were expectant fathers. For these individuals, developing relationships would help to facilitate desistance because they would be encouraged to adopt a new role or identity, often of "good father" or "provider". Interviewees believed that the demands of these identities were incongruent with offending behaviour, they wanted to ensure that their children would not be involved in offending behaviour and that their upbringing would be different:

I don't want my kid having my sort of lifestyle, I want the kid to have the sort of lifestyle I always wanted but that my dad couldn't provide for me. I want my kid to have the life I wanted, not the life I was in ... I wanted to be a race car driver, that's part of what made me steal cars. I was so passionate I just thought, I've got to have one. I didn't have no money or nothing, I just went out and got one. Driving along the roads it just felt so nice, I even knew the road signs and everything, I was indicating and everything all right. I thought, why can't this be for real, why can't I do all this properly [legitimately] ... I wanted a lot of money, the job I wanted. But I never got on at school. That's what messed it all up. I got no qualifications or anything. So that's what messed me up, and I don't want my kid to go that way. Basically I want him to be a success, but I want him to do it properly, you know what I mean? (Brian).

Individuals were also concerned that the threat of custodial sentences would leave their children without a father, and that this was a motivating factor in attempting to desist:

If I offend again, I will lose everything that I've got. I'll lose my girlfriend, my daughter, I've got a son on the way. I've already been in prison once when my daughter was born, I can't let that happen again. Plus, if I go inside again it's going to be for a lot longer and I can't have my kids growing up with a dad in jail. I'll lose all of that, cos women can only take so much. If I go back in prison again she's off, I've been warned. She's said, if I go back in prison again she won't hang around again (Josh).

The risks involved with further offending, in terms of threats of violence as well as the possibility of custodial sentences, were too great to jeopardise the relationships that interviewees wanted to develop. At the time of interview Brian, for example, was experiencing some difficulties with a group of drug dealers, and he explained that previously such problems would have been resolved through resorting to violence. However, he stated that he did not want to follow this course of action, because of the risk involved in relation to his future relationships:

But right now there's crackheads and smackheads, coke dealers and whatever all over. I can't take them on, cos at the end of the day I don't want my kid growing up without a dad. You know what I mean? It could be jail for me if I did, or it could be worse. You get me? It could be a lot worse. So I ain't getting involved with that (Brian).

Employment was regarded as necessary for these relationship concerns to be achieved, most often because of the economic benefits:

I need a job, I've got nothing coming in right now really, and I've got the house to pay for, plus bills and all that. I've also got to make sure my kids are looked after, you know? I need to be able to provide for them, I'm a good dad, I've always looked after them and I'm determined to carry it on like that (Kev).

Interviewees also suggested that employment would enable them to demonstrate to others that they had changed, and that they were able to live a life away from crime. In this respect, developing or restoring relationships appeared to be dependent upon the individual being able

to show that they were capable of desisting, as merely asserting that they had changed would be insufficient to convince significant others. This is one of the conundrums of desistance, insofar as a desister needs to prove that they are no longer offending by abstaining from a particular activity (Maruna, 2001). In this respect, the demonstrations of change that my participants sought through employment appear to mirror the ‘certification’ from others, reported by Meisenhelder as the final stage in desisting from a criminal career (1989: 784) – that is, that primary desisters may need to “certify” to others that they have changed, in order to receive the benefits that those individuals can offer:

SK: How important is work to you at the moment?

Ken: Very. If I can get a job then I can start getting back on my feet. Erm, like I said, I’m only on the social so I ain’t earning much, so it’d help me out no end there. But also, it’d help me to look after my kids, and if I can get a job and hold it down it’s all going towards showing people that I’ve changed and that I want to become a better person.

Martin described how sustained employment would help him to see his son:

But this’ll all help as well with seeing my son, if I can start this job working with my sister and her old man, and if I can stick it out, make a go of it, then that’s going to help me cos they’ll say, “he’s doing alright now”, and that’s when people start trusting you, so that’d be good (Martin).

Individuals also suggested that increased “self-efficacy” and “self-control” were required in order for relationships to be improved, often suggesting that changes would be dependent upon individual change:

It’d be better for them [the children], to see me more, to see me laugh. I’ve got to make changes to make things better between me and my kids, I know that, it’s just about being able to put it into practice, do you know what I mean? ... They’re getting older, and I’m missing out on so much. If I carry on the way I am then I’m going to miss out on them for good, so I need to

take control of things. It's down to me to make life better, to get back normal, make my family normal again (Terry).

9.2.2 Cutting Ties

Individuals also stated that changes to relationships would need to be made with respect to cutting ties with offending peer groups, in order to sustain desistance. Frequently, this objective resulted from a belief that past attempts to desist had been frustrated by the maintenance of peer group associations (as discussed in chapter 8, above):

SK: Why do you think you weren't able to stop [offending] at that time?

Ryan: Just the crowd I was with. I know the people I'm with now wouldn't get me into any trouble. But back then, it was just everyone I was with was up for it, and you couldn't not go along. When I did this offence, I was with the same crowd.

Moreover, some individuals explicitly stated that they would not be able to move away from crime without cutting ties with their peer groups:

I want to stay away [from previous peers]. I do like them, but I just can't hang around with them without fighting... I know if I get mixed up with the wrong crowd I'll be straight back into trouble again (Ryan).

Peer group networks were frequently associated with other criminogenic factors, such as: alcohol/drug use, unemployment, and neighbourhood dimensions. Awareness of the connection between peer group association and offending behaviour was often instigated by the supervising officer, who suggested that the individual would be less likely to re-offend if they severed contact with delinquent peers:

SK: Do you think that your relationship with your Probation Officer has had a direct impact on your attitudes and behaviour?

Tom: Yeah. Particularly drinking. And realising the associations I had with other people, sometimes of less than reputable character. That was caused through just pubbing it all the time. I remember, years ago, my dad saying to me “Never take work out of a pub”. And it’s true. I mean someone’ll offer you a job in a pub and you either don’t get paid or you only get half of what you should’ve got. They’re schisters. You shouldn’t do it. But I was doing it, and therefore, you put yourself in a position of “I want that money I’m owed”, but how are you going to get it? ... If you go and knock on their door, that might bring you all kind of trouble. That’s the cycle. That’s what happens. You either have to back down, or do something you shouldn’t do, and still not get your money. So is it better to keep out of that sphere or not? I think it’s better to keep out of it. I think it’s better to do a job for a reputable person.

Tom’s interview illustrates how formal, legitimate employment was considered to be necessary in order to cut ties with delinquent peers. He had spent almost his entire working life engaged in what he called “pub jobs”, whereby he would accept work from individuals who drank in the pubs that he would frequent. Thus, Tom’s working history was located within the informal labour market, predominantly as a labourer undertaking cash-in-hand jobs. The nature of his work was directly related to certain offences, notably violent crimes that he had committed in an attempt to recoup the earnings that he had been promised but which had not been delivered. These types of job had also allowed Tom to sustain his drinking habit, which had led to other offences, such as drink-driving:

I mean, I used to go to the shop myself, it opens at half past 6, used to leave the door about 7 o’ clock, get baccy stuff like that, he’d [a friend] bowl up in the van half a dozen cans of beer to take to work with him. Then he’d be out [at the pub] at dinnertime, or work through dinner and leave at 2 o’ clock, and start boozing again until 11 at night. I used to be the same, start drinking early, while you’re on the job almost, and then finish early so you can get in the pub. You can get away with it, see, cos no-one’s keeping an eye on you, no-one’s going to discipline you, yeah you might get a bollocking, but everyone’s in the same boat so most often you’d just carry on as you are (Tom).

With respect to cutting ties, employment was regarded as necessary due to the impact working would have upon routine activities. The interview data suggested that a number of offences

(notably: theft, shoplifting, and drug-taking) were related to the routine activities of time spent with a peer group who were largely unemployed. Many interviewees made reference to time spent with friends “hanging around” in the town centre or on street corners:

SK: Where do you spend your time, if you’re never at home?

Ryan: Like I said, a lot of the time I’d just be round my mate’s house smoking weed, but we can’t always do that so we just hang around the estate or go up town. There ain’t much to do up town, it’s shit, but it makes a change from hanging round the estate, so. I prefer to go round my mate’s house, but we’d be hanging round the estate quite a bit as well, there ain’t nothing else to do.

Interviewees suggested that if they were able to find employment then they would not be able to participate in these activities:

SK: Are the people you’re referring to there criminals?

Brian: Yeah, obviously. They still are now. I mean, I was once like that, but my life’s changed. They just want to hang about town, see what girls are about. People like that don’t have ambition, they just want to meet up and smoke weed outside McDonalds till 6 o clock then go home. I don’t want that lifestyle, I can’t do that no more so I just have to keep myself to myself. Get myself a new place to live for my girlfriend and the baby, get a job. I’ve changed anyway, but if I had that then I wouldn’t be able to do that anyway cos I’d just be at work all day then home to my family, spend time with them.

Furthermore, individuals supported these claims by suggesting that periods of time where they had not offended had coincided with time spent in employment:

SK: Do you think that a job and a house would change your life?

Charlie: Yeah, cos I’d be doing something all day and I’d just come home, have my dinner, chill out and go bed. I wouldn’t get into no trouble then. I wouldn’t get into no trouble. Like when I was working in them two years I didn’t get into no trouble at all. When I work I work, I graft my arse off.

However, it was also apparent that individuals believed that peer group association was something that they could control, demonstrating “self-efficacy”:

SK: Do you still hang around with the same people now?

Leroy: A mixture, sort of thing. I’ve got quite a few different mates. I don’t hang around with the same people all the time, you know? At the end of the day, it’s up to me who I hang around with, ain’t it? If I thought that hanging around with them would get me in trouble then I’d stay away from them, but I’ll hang around with whoever I want.

Some individuals suggested that changes in peer group association had “empowered” them, and that they felt more confident about implementing strategies to sustain desistance. Dean, in particular, described the positive effect that had resulted from re-establishing relationships with non-offending peers:

... I can beat it. With the help of my friends what want to help me. You know, my friends what I met out of the drug scene, years ago. I’ve never had so many people show support for me. It’s amazing really (Dean).

For some individuals, however, offending was not related to peer group associations, and they suggested that further offending was not dependent upon the people that they spent time with, but rather with their locality, and this is discussed further in the following section.

9.3 Employment as a locality concern

The locality was a prominent theme within the interview data, in relation to both past offending and the likelihood of either future offending or sustained desistance. Although it is not exactly clear from the interview data what “the locality” can be taken to mean, interviewees frequently spoke about their “neighbourhood”, “estate”, or “area”. In this respect, “locality”, for this thesis, is taken to mean the public estate within which the

individual lives. Some participants referred to the “town”, which was intended to mean the city centre. A small number of interviewees actually lived within the city centre, and in these cases “locality” and “town” are synonymous.

Individuals frequently associated the area that they lived in with their offending. They described these areas in terms of high unemployment, a lack of employment opportunities, prolific drug use, poverty and high crime. Moreover, many individuals discussed these characteristics as being a “normal” condition of the area within which they lived:

Where I’m living now it ain’t the best of places to bring up kids, and it’s a council estate, that says it all really don’t it? Don’t get me wrong, I ain’t ashamed of where I live, put it this way I’d rather live there than anywhere else, but when I’m older, when I move out of there I want to tell my kids what it was like and how I got out of there, and how my mum, she done the best she could bless her. Always food on the table a roof over our head. I can’t complain where I come from, but it’s just people around me, all drug dealers and that ... Like I say, it ain’t the best of areas, but it’s like everyone who lives round my way is in the same position, you know? Hardly no-one’s working, there’s a lot of people up to no good, and everyone pretty much is either taking drugs or selling drugs (John).

Therefore, for individuals such as John, for example, locality was regarded as being more important to the desistance process than peer group association, as discussed in the preceding section. However, it was interesting to observe that this point of view was not shared by his supervising officer:

The people I hang around with I’ve known for years, I’ve known since I was like 9 years old so obviously I’m going to be with them and listen to them rather than [PO]. They’re all close friends... I’ve been through a lot of things with them so I ain’t going to change for no-one (John).

I know what he’s like when he hangs around with them. He can be doing so well, but with them he just gets carried away or caught up in it, and he just seems to forget everything that we’ve worked on and all the progress he’s

made. I try to encourage him not to see them so much, but I don't think he takes much notice (PO4).

Sustained desistance was considered to be more likely if the individual was able to distance themselves from the area which had previously contributed to their offending. Individuals suggested that if they returned to this area then they would be more likely to re-offend:

Well, I'm not too bothered [about returning to my old neighbourhood]. I am because, obviously, I have got my mum down there, and all my mates are there and everything. But in another aspect I'm not because I was selling drugs before I went down anyway and that's all I need, to get back down there. I ain't got no money, do you know what I mean? I work for family, so I don't get paid a lot, I'm always skint, so I'd end up getting some [drugs], cos you'd end up getting it on the tick and selling it, and that's all I need isn't it? Just bomb out and end up back in jail for a few more years, I can't be doing with that (Martin).

Interestingly, two individuals (Martin and Dean) had lived in Probation hostels as a requirement of their sentence, and they stated that, having been away from their neighbourhoods, they believed that staying away would help them to desist. Ryan also stated that moving away from the area he lived in would be of benefit to him, but he qualified this by stating that he did not have any opportunities to move elsewhere as the only areas he could realistically move to were similarly rife with drugs and unemployment. Rather than formulating a future strategy for overcoming this problem, he appeared to be somewhat fatalistic about his prospects:

I don't plan cos it just fucks up. So I just take it day by day. Everyone says that, if "you plan it fucks up" (Ryan).

For Ryan it would appear that he was unwilling to determine a project/set of projects which would enable him to achieve this goal. This would substantiate the prominence of agency in desistance, as it suggests that Ryan chooses not to make plans in relation to employment or his living arrangements. However, Ryan also suggested that he was somewhat reliant upon his

locality to provide him with work. Previous work had been gained through contacts in his locality, and he suggested that this would be the most likely source of future employment opportunities:

SK: Do you have any ideas about how you might get into that [line of work]?

Ryan: Probably just ask people around my way. Someone'll probably have some work going and if I can show that I'm an hard worker then I should be alright.

Therefore, Ryan was able to identify the area that he lived in as being problematic, and that moving away would be likely to facilitate desistance, but his locality also provided him with realistic work opportunities. This suggests that Ryan was agentic in terms of reflexively deliberating over his circumstances, and that he adopted a practical-evaluative orientation towards determining his course of action, which in this case appeared to be to maintain the status quo.

Generally, the participants in my sample identified employment as a means of moving away from the locality, such that fewer offending opportunities would present themselves. Typical responses included: "Getting a job means I can get out of here", and "If I have a job I can move somewhere nicer". Individuals were keen to stress the reality of what could happen if they were unable to secure employment that would enable them to move, and stay, away from the area that was associated with past offending:

SK: Is there anything that could lead you to re-offend again?

Martin: Well, as long as I can get work up here, a proper job I mean, and keep working then I should be ok cos it'd keep me busy, I'd be making money and everyone'd be happy. If I can't get work then I don't know what I'll do. I'll probably end up moving back down

there [to his old neighbourhood], and there's a good chance I'd get back into my old ways.

As mentioned above, individuals described their locality in somewhat negative terms, and spoke about moving "somewhere nicer". Moreover, this was also frequently related to relationship concerns, most often in relation to the upbringing of children. As discussed above, some interviewees held concerns for being "good fathers" and wanted to provide their children with an alternative lifestyle to that which they had experienced. The interview data suggest that an individual's locality is a structural barrier to being able to adopt the identity of "good father". The participants in my sample suggested that they would be less likely to be a good parent if they remained in the locality:

It becomes a vicious circle if you're not careful. I mean, my mum done the best she could, I can't complain at all, we always had food on the table, roof over our heads, but it's just being round there you're bound to get up to no good. It would've been a lot easier for my mum if we lived somewhere nicer, I can guarantee that. That's what I want for my kids, somewhere nice where there's no chance of them getting into trouble. If I stay where I am, I'm more likely to get into trouble, and if you've got kids what see you getting into trouble, they're just going to copy you, ain't they? And that's what I mean, it's a vicious circle (John).

Again, the importance of employment was evident in the interview data, in relation to the desire to be a "good parent" and the belief that improving the locality was a means of achieving this:

Eventually, [the plan is to] move to [South Africa] ... Me and my girlfriend are thinking about it. We're planning on going on holiday there when my Probation's up. We can't go now cos I've got to come here obviously, but we'll go when this is finished and see what we think of it. If we like it and I can get a job sorted then we'll move there, the whole family. I just want to start a new life, start fresh, and give the kids somewhere better to grow up... I'd've done it before, but being on Probation stopped me. That's my main goal in life, to get my family out there. Other than that, if it don't work out, buy a nice house here. I'm on a good wage, I can afford it. I'm lucky I'm in work the way things are at the minute [referring to "credit crunch"] so I can't

complain. If it [the move] don't work out then at least I've got a job here and we can set up somewhere fresh in this country instead ... My main goal is to look after my family, keep out of trouble (Josh).

Many interviewees identified their locality as problematic and a barrier to desistance, but a significant number had not formulated strategies to alter this. Often this was because individuals perceived few employment opportunities away from their locality and, therefore, possible courses of action were limited. By contrast, individuals (such as Josh) whose employment was not linked to the locality perceived a greater range of possibilities.

9.4 Employment as an accommodation concern

Some participants suggested securing accommodation of their own, as they were living in temporary accommodation at the time of interview, would be part of their desistance strategy. While for others the concern was with finding more suitable accommodation. Many of the interviewees experienced temporary living arrangements, often spending short periods of time living with friends or family – what Charlie described as “sofa surfing”. Indeed, one of the individuals who withdrew from the study told me that he did not want to attend the Probation office as he did not have a fixed address, and he was apprehensive about seeing his supervising officer because he believed that he could be taken back to court for breach of his licence conditions.

Typical responses included, “I want to settle down now” and “I want to stop relying on other people all the time”, which tended to reflect a belief that, in relation to desistance, finding accommodation of their own would instill greater responsibility, independence and stability in otherwise chaotic lives:

I'm second on the list for a council flat, so that's great. So I just want to sort my head out, and get some responsibility. I am sick of counting on other

people to help me out all the while. So I want to start helping myself out (Charlie).

Others wanted to obtain more suitable accommodation, and this was often related to providing a better home for partners and children (see above, “relationships”). Moreover, some individuals equated dissatisfactory accommodation with anger management issues, stating that frustration with current circumstances contributed to the perpetuation of these personal difficulties. Such individuals explained that anger and frustration had contributed to their offending in the past, and thus felt that improvements in their housing situations would help to alleviate these issues:

No-one’s coming to me saying, “oh I heard you’re looking for a place”. None of that. No-one’s telling me anything, no-one’s even said any of that. And, this place [Probation] expects me to come down here all the time expecting everything to be fine. But I’ve got to go back to that place [flat]. [PO] has even come down and said it’s not nice, it’s not right. She’s even said that. It’s not nice for my girlfriend, or for myself. It’s not suitable (Brian).

As discussed in Part One, Dean and Ken had both found new accommodation since being under Probation supervision, and both explained that this change had helped them to make the initial move towards desistance. For these individuals, further improvements to their accommodation were regarded as influential in helping them to be able to sustain desistance:

She’s [PO] helping me out with some forms to try and get some furniture, cos I moved into a flat in December with absolutely nothing. I’m hoping to get something out of that, cos I’ve moved in there now but it’s absolutely horrible not having anything to sleep on or sit on, so I just need a bit of help and that’s what she’s going to give me. I’m grateful for that cos, erm, I’m sure that that’s going to help me, it’ll make me a better person as well (Ken).

Most individuals, however, were less optimistic about their accommodation prospects, partly because of a lack of housing opportunities in the local area and partly due to a lack of income. Lack of income was a result of individuals’ employment circumstances, which situated

accommodation as a second-order concern that could only be achieved once employment had been gained:

SK: Whereabouts are you living at the moment?

Raj: I'm living with my parents at the moment. But when this business kicks off, I'll move out. I'm ready for it now. I want to move out, have a bit of independence. I just need to get the money together and then I can get my own place.

SK: Have you got any plans for this?

Raj: Just rent to begin with. Once the business is up and running, and money starts coming in, then I'll be able to do it. It should be fairly straightforward, doesn't need much planning.

While individuals suggested that improved accommodation circumstances would follow employment, many were pessimistic about the likelihood of this occurring, in the near future at least, and the reality of future living arrangements was perceived to be both temporary and unstable:

SK: Have you thought about where you might live after Probation?

Kurt: Once I get out the hostel I'll probably stay with some friends, I haven't got anything set up but, erm. I don't think I'd get another council flat cos of what happened before [Kurt wouldn't say what had happened, but he had been evicted from his flat]. If I could get a job then I could probably find my own place after a while, but I don't think that'd happen anytime soon, so yeah, it'd probably be mate's places for a bit. Back on the sofa! I don't mind though, it's better than sleeping rough.

Improving accommodation circumstances, therefore, was regarded as an event which would both facilitate relationship concerns and help to develop an individual's agency, in terms of improving self-confidence, independence, responsibility and self-efficacy. However, individuals were structurally constrained, most notably by poverty and a lack of income, and

employment was regarded as a necessary objective for accommodation concerns to be realised. Not all interviewees held employment as a concern which needed to be achieved before improvements to accommodation circumstances could be made. Rather, these individuals described being similarly constrained by socio-structural factors (including income), but they suggested that they were dependent upon the actions of others to overcome these:

SK: Is there anything you can do to improve your living arrangements?

Brian: Not really, no. Cos I've just got to wait for [PO] or the council or whoever to sort something out. Obviously I'm not working so there's nothing I can do about that, so I just keep asking them to help. They say they're trying to sort something out, but so far nothing.

9.5 Barriers to Employment

While it was common for participants to discuss employment in general terms, a number of individuals stated particular jobs or industries within which they would seek, or were seeking, work. Often this corresponded with previous work experience, which was often of a low-skilled, low-paid nature. Moreover, most of the participants previous work experience was located predominantly or exclusively within the informal labour market which, for the purposes of this thesis, is defined as employment which involves “cash-in-hand” jobs secured through friends [or family] and acquaintances’ (Fletcher, 2007: 83). Informal work experience was reflected in discussions about how future employment would be secured:

There's not much in the building. If you look in the papers for jobs, there's nothing in the construction trade. All my mates who work for [company] they're just not building houses. A lot of my friends have been working all their life, they're on the dole. Hopefully, if mortgage rates come down people'll buy and then there'll be work and a mate can send something my way ... In the [construction] trade there's always someone to help you out giving you work. You give it each other. Someone might need a carpenter for a week and they'll ask me ... Jobs on the side are good, cos you're getting

cash-in-hand, there's normally plenty of it going around, not at the minute there ain't, but, erm. So, that's what I'm hopeful of, once some of my mates get work then there'll be someone what can pass something my way. Like I say, I got offered that one job from a mate but I couldn't take it, but I'm sure there'll be something else before too long (Kev).

In part, this may explain why many participants were unwilling to engage in programmes which were intended to improve job prospects and create greater opportunities for employment:

Leroy: Like they said, "if you want help getting a job we'll help you". But I just said, "no I don't want your help thanks, don't worry about it".

SK: Why did you say that?

Leroy: I'd just rather do it my way.

Only a minority of participants stated that they would seek work in the formal labour market, and employment objectives tended to follow past experience, insofar as those who wanted to gain formal employment generally had worked in formal labour markets previously. These patterns are illustrated in figure 13. For those individuals who had experience of informal work, their employment history could be characterised as sporadic and temporary. Labouring or work in the construction trade was the type of employment most often undertaken, and interviewees described how work in the informal market was of an insecure nature:

I've been floating around [between various jobs]. I'm working for a firm now, but before I'd just pick up work on sites through friends, or a friend of a friend. It's good money doing that cos obviously it's cash in your pocket, and you just hope that a job'll last long enough 'til the next one comes round. I've been lucky, I've never really been without work, but you know plenty of people who can work for a bit and then get nothing for weeks at a time. It's better now cos I know I've got work, alright I pay a bit more to the taxman but at least I know I've always got money coming in (Josh).

It was clear that some individuals believed that their only employment opportunities existed within informal labour markets, and that they were dependent upon family and friends for work. This may suggest that many of the individuals in my sample were marginalised from the formal labour market:

SK: What type of work will you look for?

Kurt: For now I'm going to have to ask around, you know, my mates and that, see if anyone's got any work going. Like I say, I've done painting and decorating for mates before so I might be able to get back to that. You've got to be honest, who's going to give me a job? Criminal record, on Probation, fuck all education, I can't really expect too much.

This resonates with Fletcher's (2007) contention that offenders are often marginalised from contemporary formal labour markets, leading them towards a cycle of sporadic informal employment 'interspersed with spells of criminal activity and imprisonment' (2007: 81), and also with Niven and Stewart's (2005) finding that offenders most often obtain work through networks of family and friends. All of those participants who had experience of formal work in the past stated that they would seek formal work in the future. Interestingly, it was not the case that these individuals were intending to return to previous formal employment, but it appeared that they were more confident about following routes into formal employment than those whose experience was predominantly within informal labour markets:

SK: How will you go about getting a job?

Brian: You've just got to go out and ask. If you ask enough people eventually you'll get a job, if you're willing to do it.

It also appeared to be the case that those who had formal work experience, and those who were seeking formal work, were more active in their pursuit of employment. Those who were

seeking informal work were more passive, waiting for an opportunity to be offered to them as opposed to applying or asking for work:

I'm unemployed at the moment. I thought I had a job when I come out, but I didn't ... I had a job as a scaffolder for a few months with a mate, and then I worked with my dad for a few months and then I went inside. I thought I'd be able to go back to that, and he did as well. But obviously there just isn't any work at the moment so he can't take me on. Hard times isn't it? ... he's said as soon as there's work I'll be the first one to know (Leroy).

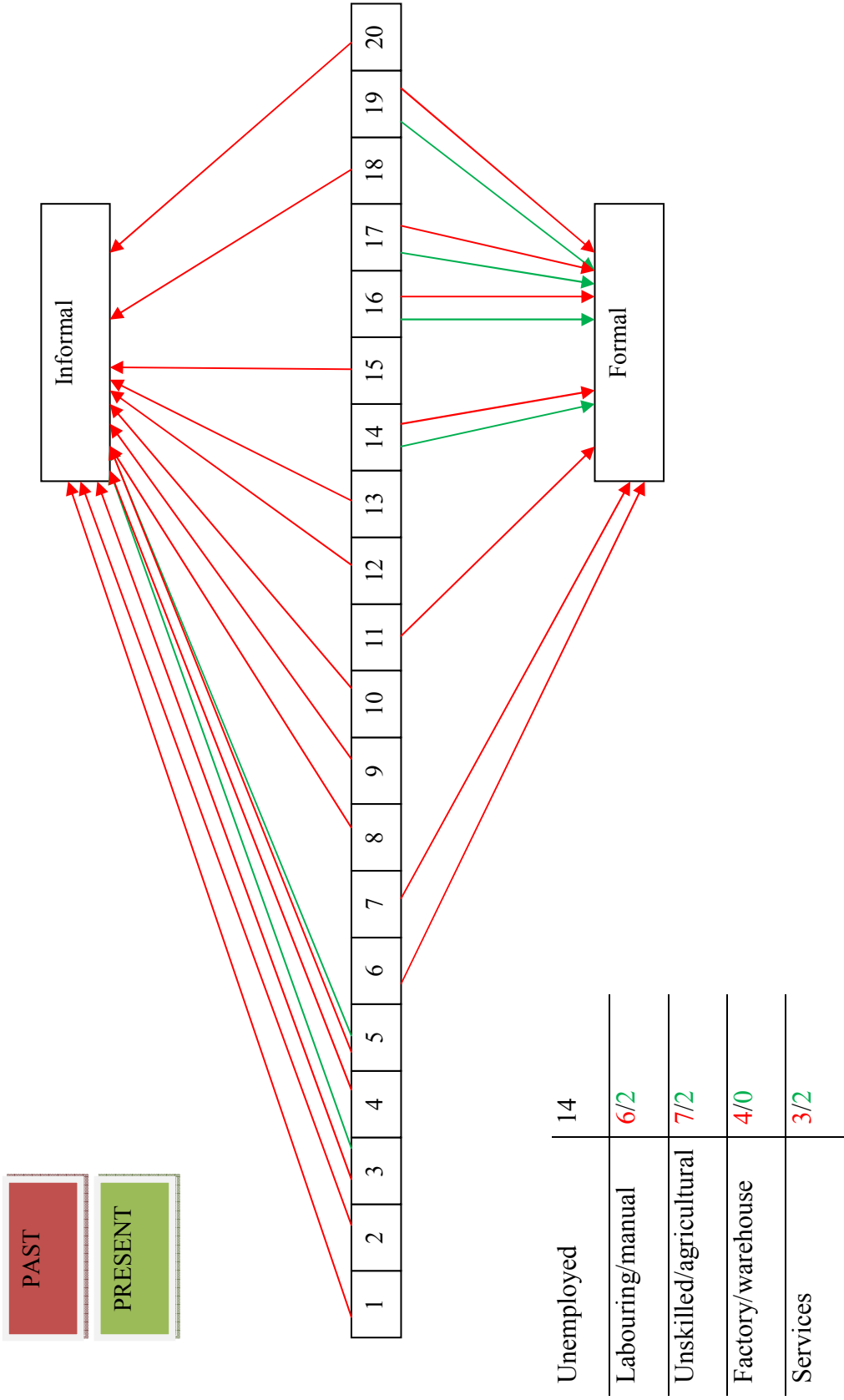
Thus, employment was recognised as a fundamental aspect of most strategies for desistance.

However, most participants' work experience could be located within informal labour markets, and this influenced the type of work that they would pursue in the future. The strategies for employment discussed by individuals were also often related to educational experiences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, educational attainment among my participants was relatively limited, experiences of school were often characterised in terms of truancy and exclusion, and these early experiences were often related to the onset of offending behaviour:

[School was] [s]hit. I hated it. I wasn't that good, like I didn't want to concentrate or nothing. So the teachers'd tell me off for not paying attention, or distracting other people or whatever. After a while I just thought, fuck it, I'll act bad. I'm not getting anywhere anyway, so I might as well do what I want. It just got to the point where I thought, I can't be done with this no more, and that's when I'd do something [antisocial/illegal] (Leroy).

Individuals were aware of the impact of their educational experiences upon their employment opportunities. Poor educational experiences had the effect of pushing individuals towards working in informal labour markets. A lack of formal work experience then compounded future opportunities, whether perceived or real, which maintained the individual's position at the margins of the labour market:

Figure 13 Past and present employment for interviewees



SK: So you left without any qualifications?

Ryan: Yeah, I left before all that.

SK: Did you start work at that point?

Ryan: No. I've never had a proper job. Just cash in hand. Removals, house clearing. If someones been evicted or whatever, we go in clear the house and do a bit of cleaning. Obviously, like I say, I left school with nothing and you can't really get a job without it, so, erm, I'm a bit stuck with that really.

In addition to the effect of past experience, participants identified a number of factors in their current situational context that acted as barriers to formal employment. Individuals appeared to be fully cognisant of economic conditions and, moreover, of the impact that this would have upon the likelihood of their gaining formal employment. This level of awareness had a particularly deleterious effect upon self-confidence:

I'm not [confident] at the moment. I'd like to be, but I'm not at all. You've only got to read the paper every day [to see why]. So I'm not. It's everywhere you look, there's no jobs for people who want one, and people who've got one are being laid off every day (Alan).

Awareness of economic circumstances contributed to the conditioning of individuals to seek work informally. Most individuals only had experience of informal work and were, perhaps, more likely to seek informal work in the future regardless of economic concerns. However, it is reasonable to assume that such concerns would condition individuals further towards work of an informal nature. Leroy, for example, had only ever worked with his dad or a friend, always cash-in-hand, and he explained that this would be the type of work he would seek in the future. In part, this was as a result of his past experience, but also partly because of the economic circumstances of the time:

SK: Are you looking for work?

Leroy: No. No point. I'll go work with my dad as soon as things pick up, so that's that.

Some individuals also suggested that their criminal record would deter them from seeking formal employment. Often this was because there was a perception that employers would not consider individuals with a history of offending, but it was also suggested that past experiences of disclosing criminal record information had been negative:

It was the first time I'd disclosed my offence anyway, so I'm nervous anyway. As soon as I disclosed to him he said, "could you just wait here?" He left the room, went upstairs, and came back with 3 other people, but as he left he got someone else to come and sit with me ... and one woman was the spokesperson and she said, "because of the nature of your offence it won't be feasible", and so on, and I thought, "it would've only took one of you, you know? This ain't no circus freak show, you know?" It only took one of them to say, "look we know you're looking for work, looking to train, but it's not practical that you get your training here", and that would have been sufficient and fine. We could've all shook hands and walked away. There's no need to treat it like a circus. And being the first time I disclosed, it did really knock my confidence (Ben).

Clearly this had a deleterious effect upon Ben's self-confidence, but it also conditioned him to seek informal work in the future as he dismissed the possibility of seeking work which entailed the employer asking for criminal record information:

You've got a lot of jobs around, quite a few that ask for CRB checks, which I wouldn't apply for anyway because I've got a criminal record, they'll see I've got a criminal record – I don't know whether it'd be worth applying to be honest ... But I tend to have the mindset that if they're asking for a CRB check they're not going to employ people with a criminal record, so that's limiting your options straight away (Ben).

This suggests that past structures of education and employment, and present economic and socio-cultural factors, constrain individuals' attempts to obtain work. Individuals were less

inclined to actively seek employment, and were more likely to look for work in informal labour markets.

Summary

Individuals identified relationships, locality, peer groups, accommodation and employment as key areas that would help them to move away from crime. These factors are all identified within the existing literature as factors which contribute to successful desistance, but what has not been explored in any significant detail thus far is how individuals plan to achieve these concerns. This section has shown that individuals regard improvements in these key areas as important for them to be able to sustain their decisions to desist, but that, fundamentally, employment is required to achieve these goals. This is not to argue that for all individuals employment is the most significant objective as, for example, some may regard accommodation or relationships as their ultimate concerns. However, where this was the case, employment featured in the strategies to achieve these concerns.

Personal agency remained a prominent theme within the interview data, insofar as individuals articulated a strong sense of understanding and awareness with respect to what action they would need to take in order to sustain desistance. This is evidenced in the way that interviewees actively constructed their own desistance biographies, both in relation to discussions of how and why they had offended (and also failed to desist) in the past, and in relation to how they planned to desist in the future. Initially, individuals appeared to demonstrate agency by suggesting that they were in control of the choices that they made. But, further discussion of their strategies revealed a sense of certain things being “impossible” or “not worth trying”, as a result of the extent of structural barriers.

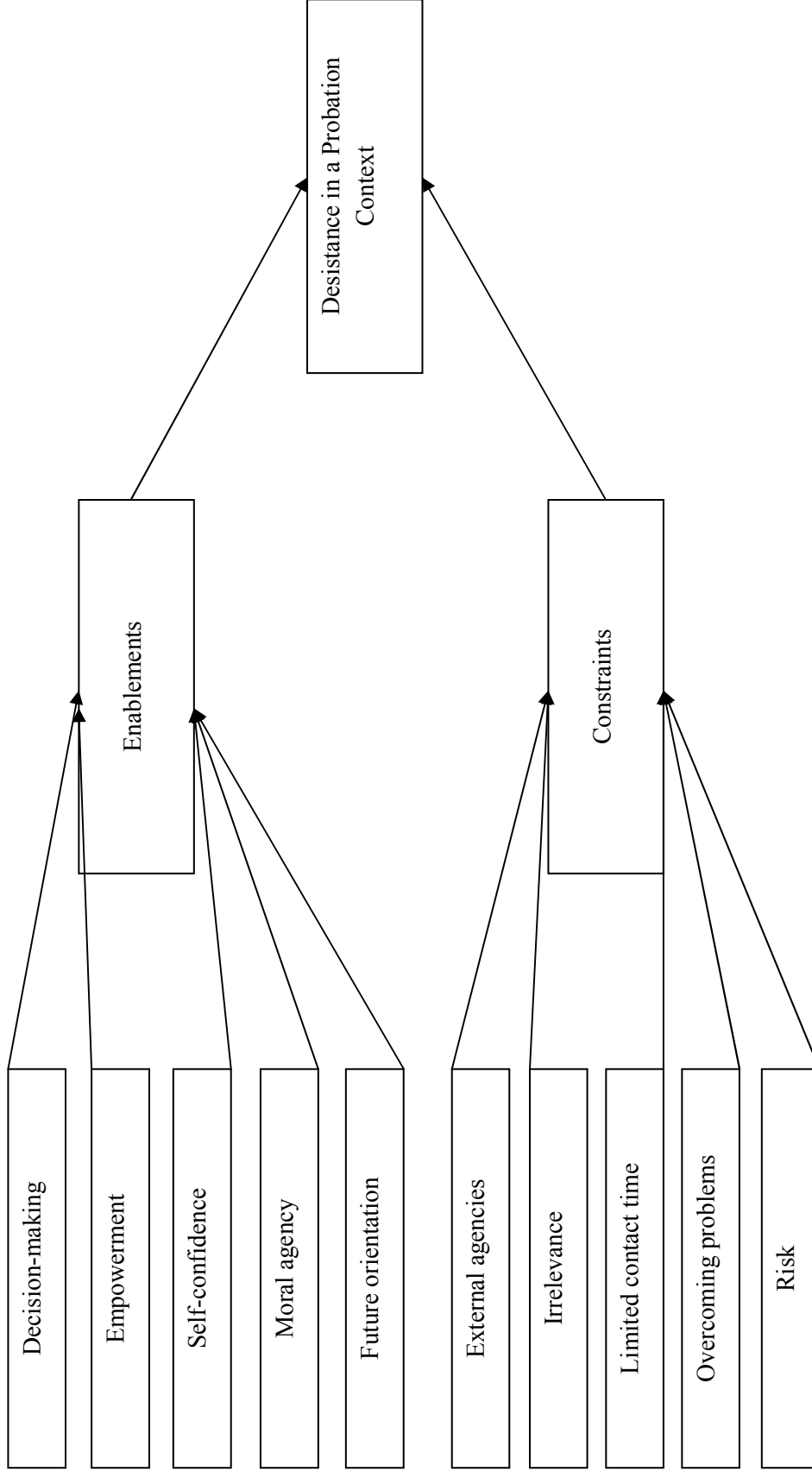
Individuals suggested that certain structural barriers limited the range of possible courses of action available to them, yet they were often still able to articulate the action that they intended to take in the future. In this respect, individuals' agency appeared to shift towards a practical-evaluative orientation as they considered particular structural barriers to their future goals. In some cases individuals appeared to adopt an iterational orientation of agency as they suggested that they would repeat past actions in light of these considerations.

10. ANALYSIS PART THREE – ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING PRIMARY DESISTANCE IN PROBATION

In Part Two of the analysis it was observed that employment was held to be the most important objective in desistance strategies, either as a concern in its own right or as a necessary condition for achieving other concerns. As was the case in Part One, agency was shown to be prominent in the construction of these strategies. However, a number of structural barriers were identified which conditioned individuals' strategies and coerced them into taking particular courses of action. In particular, a number of barriers to formal employment were identified which led many individuals to seek informal work. It was argued that primary desisters are willing to commit to a particular conceptualisation of mainstream society, but that inherent structures marginalise and exclude particular individuals from it.

Part Three builds upon this argument by exploring the role that Probation plays in enabling and constraining primary desistance, and the key themes in this process are illustrated in figure 14. This builds upon a small but growing body of knowledge, where the research focus is upon experiences of Probation in relation to desistance (for example, Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Rex, 1999). Part Three shows that the experience of Probation increases agency among participants, but that structural barriers to desistance remain largely unaffected. This discussion draws together the analysis from Parts One and Two, highlighting that Probation helps to develop individual agency, which can prompt the initial decision to desist, but that practical support in the aftermath of this decision is less forthcoming.

Figure 14 Thematic network of Probation context



The emphasis in this part of the analysis is upon the impact of Probation upon primary desistance. As such, the analysis relates to research questions 3a and 3b:

3a) In what ways does Probation enable/constrain the transition towards primary desistance?

3b) Which factors in contemporary Probation practice are relevant to the subjective experiences of primary desisters, in relation to desistance?

Part Three is divided into two sections. First, the enabling influence of Probation on primary desistance will be discussed. Here it will be shown that Probation plays a pivotal role in enhancing agency and equipping individuals with some of the personal skills required to attempt desistance. Further, it will be shown that Probation (in particular, supervising officers) facilitates the adoption of a projective orientation among primary desisters. A future outlook, or plan, has already been identified as an important aspect of successful desistance (Maruna, 2001), but here the role that Probation plays in helping to construct these plans will also be shown.

Second, the constraining effects of Probation will be discussed. In large part, this section of the discussion will relate to particular organisational or bureaucratic factors which restrict the functional ability of practitioners. However, it will also be shown that an outcome of this is that practical assistance is insufficiently available and that one-to-one discussions are limited to short durations of time. The consequence of this is that there exists a discrepancy between the planning of objectives and discussions of how best to achieve them. This leaves many primary desisters relying upon past experiences and particular definitions of situational contexts to decide what courses of action to take.

The interview data show strong correspondence with agency with regard to individuals' discussions of their Probation experiences. A number of agentic themes were found in the data as being enhanced through experiences of Probation, most notably: decision-making skills, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Although participants had experience of a variety of sentence requirements, the most prominent aspects of Probation in relation to developing agency were one-to-one supervision and accredited programmes.

More than half (n=12) of participants had to complete an accredited programme as a requirement of their sentence. Most participants spoke positively about accredited programmes and most described the experience as worthwhile, although Martin and Chris in particular described the programme that they were required to complete as "pointless" and "not for me". These negative perceptions of programmes will be discussed later, but most individuals suggested that the programmes had been beneficial, particularly with respect to developing personal agency. Typical responses included: "The programme has helped me to see what I was doing was wrong", "The programme has given me better knowledge" and "The programme has helped me want to change".

In accordance with the sampling criteria, all had a supervision requirement, and most (n=16) saw their supervising officer on a weekly basis. Further, most spoke positively about their experiences of supervision, although many suggested that their initial perceptions of supervision were negative. Again, supervision was generally identified as being beneficial with respect to enhancing personal agency. The interview data echo much of what has already been written about the qualities that probationers' value in their supervising officer, and officers were frequently referred to as being: "a good listener"; "good to talk to"; "non-judgemental"; and, "a friendly person" (see, for example: Rex, 1999; Burnett, 2004; McCulloch, 2005). Individuals valued honesty, openness, and reliability – also in keeping

with existing research – and it was suggested by some individuals that sustaining desistance was an important means of demonstrating to their supervising officer that they valued the relationship. However, the interview data suggest that supervising officers are not important simply because they are “friendly” and “approachable”, but that they are regarded as fulfilling an important role in the transition towards desistance. This section moves beyond a description of the core values associated with role of the supervising officer, and identifies the manner in which officers enable or constrain the transition and strategies of primary desisters.

10.1 Enablements in Probation

10.1.1 Decision-making skills

Participants generally stated that the work undertaken during programmes had helped to develop decision-making skills, and that this had made them more positive about the future and more confident that they would be able to desist. A patterned response in the data suggested that having an active role in the sessions was important. Tom, for example, described how performing role-playing games in some of the sessions he attended had helped to improve his decision-making skills:

House games, as it were. Roles. One be the husband, one be the wife. Both drive, say, but the wife takes the car to go to the mother, but the other kid needs picking up later on, can you pick him up. So you think about going to the pub about 2 o'clock, you have 4 or 5 pints, then you pick up your kid at 4, so you've got your own kid, plus other kids on the road, and you're putting lives in danger. You've got to substantiate why you went to the pub, and you can't. And it plays on your mind, and everything they've said is right. You've got no argument against it and after a few weeks it sticks ... It's all to do with decisions. What you see, what you hear, and what action you're going to take. So if a barman says leave your car keys, but you refuse cos you need your van for work the next morning. Nothing might happen, but something might happen, or you might get stopped in the morning. So it's all about making decisions (Tom).

Some individuals referred to improved decision-making skills in terms of having greater information, which helped to make better decisions. These individuals did not regard the programmes as facilitating a fundamental change to their character, but rather appeared to consider the programmes as having a more nuanced impact upon their attitudes and behaviour, as Robert explained:

I'm still the same person was before I got in trouble and when I got in trouble, I've just got more information. I could still kick off and attack anyone at any minute, but I know the consequences, I know I won't stand to gain anything, and better information helps you make better decisions. That's what it is, I've got better information. Like I say, doing the IDAP's opened my eyes up, and I've got better information from doing it. I've learnt from it (Robert).

Interviewees also explained that their experience of one-to-one supervision had enhanced their decision-making skills. Discussions during supervision sessions frequently involved the supervising officer presenting a hypothetical situation and asking the probationer to consider a course of action and to reflect on the potential consequences of that action. The officer would also offer suggestions for alternative courses of action, which the probationer would then consider in a similar way. Interviewees suggested that this was a helpful process as it enabled them to draw their own conclusions, rather than having ideas imposed upon them:

She'll ask me what I think I should do, I'll say something and then we'll talk about what might happen if I do that. It makes you think (Leroy).

To realise it yourself it's probably better because you can say, "alright, this is a problem. I'm not sure how to deal with it, but it gives you something to work with". You can then talk it through with others, get their opinions, take that on board, and work it through (Ben).

It was common for individuals who had a programme requirement to describe how their supervising officer would reinforce messages from the programme within one-to-one

supervision sessions. This was identified as a useful way of exploring some of the programme messages in further detail:

The IDAP's great. It does all different sessions about calming down ... They help me out, and then I can come here and talk to [PO]. So we'll talk about what I've learned, what did I think about it, how am I going to use that, that sort of thing. Sometimes she'll ask me if there's a situation that I could use it in, or she'll give me an example of something that might happen and I have to come up with a way that I can use what I've learned, that sort of thing. It's good, cos I'm not just taking bits from the IDAP and saying, "well, I don't need this, I don't need that", but [PO] is making me look at each bit and how it relates to me (Charlie).

Improving decision-making skills was regarded as an important aspect of desistance. For some, this was because they would be less likely to re-offend if they were in similar situations to those in which they had previously offended. For others, having improved decision-making skills increased feelings of self-confidence and motivation, which made desistance appear to be more achievable.

10.1.2 Self-confidence

Self-confidence was identified by many individuals as significant to the likelihood of sustaining desistance, which resonates with the work of Burnett (1992) who argued that desistance was more likely if individuals were motivated and optimistic. This also echoes Farrall's (2002) typology of 'desister types' (2002: 101; see also chapter 4, table 9). As it is now commonplace to regard desistance as a process rather than an event, it is reasonable to assume that sustaining confidence is more important than merely being confident at the beginning of the desistance journey. The data suggest that programmes help to develop agency by improving individuals' self-confidence, particularly with respect to being confident about the likelihood of not offending in the future:

SK: Do you think you might offend again in the future?

Ben: Erm. When I came out of prison I was unsure, I didn't want to re-offend, but I was unsure about the reasons why I offended in the first place ... But doing the SOTP course, Sex Offender Treatment Programme, it gives you chance to explore emotions and feelings around that time. That really helped with my self-confidence issues, like I say I was really low when I first came out and that was a real problem for me. But doing the course, I've had chance to look at why I did what I did, and to talk it through with people has been good. It's made me more confident about the future.

Improving self-confidence was also related to the work undertaken during one-to-one supervision sessions. Individuals suggested that their confidence had increased through discussions with their supervising officer, and this was explicitly related to the likelihood of future offending:

What we talk about mostly is how I deal with day-to-day situations, trying to increase my independence, improve my self-confidence, because I've highlighted that as a problem. Because if I fall into a low mood state again, the danger is that I allow myself open to the suggestion of the sort of feeling I had for [victim]. So it's all about keeping myself motivated, independent, and full of confidence (Ben).

10.1.3 Empowerment

Often individuals recited messages that they had learnt during programme sessions, and spoke about the goals of the programme and what it would achieve. Assuming that these individuals were not simply repeating what had been said to them, this suggests that individuals internalise the messages that come from the programmes. Furthermore, it shows that individuals adopt the stated aims and objectives of the programme as their own, and incorporate them into wider objectives and courses of action in relation to desistance:

It's about learning about yourself, why you did the things you did, and how to put them right. It's about recognising the signs of your temper building up, and doing something about it. You use a time-out, have a fag, nip outside whatever, until you've calmed down (Charlie).

Some individuals explained that they had been able to use some of the techniques that had been taught in the programmes, and that this had helped them during situations where offending had occurred in the past. As a result of becoming empowered by the programmes, therefore, some individuals were able to act differently and make better decisions in certain circumstances:

I've tried [the technique] a few times and it does work. I've even used it with my friends, they had an argument just before Christmas and I said to them, you go into that room and you go into that room and just take 10 minutes to calm down and think about what you want to say, then come back and talk it through, and it works, it does work. So I'm learning and I'm passing that on to other people as well ... They say it will keep getting better and better, so I'm just keeping it all in my head, take a time-out when I need one, and think positive (Ken).

Further, this shows that becoming empowered can lead to increased self-confidence and improved decision-making skills. Indeed, rather than being mutually exclusive it is likely that these three agentic elements are likely to interact and reinforce one another.

10.1.4 Moral Agency

In Part One it was suggested that changes in moral agency had an effect upon an individual's decision to desist, insofar as individuals reinterpret their past actions as being incongruent with newly acquired values and beliefs. The interview data showed that experiences of programmes impacted upon attitudes and values such that individuals regarded past actions as wrong and were keen to show their repudiation of them:

I just couldn't get my head round how unfair it seemed, I mean if you're married everything should be 50-50 down the middle. So that's what got me so angry cos I just couldn't see how she could do that to me. But now, since seeing the IDAP and coming here [Probation], I can see where she was scared and where the kids were scared. It makes me feel bad now, cos in my

eyes I was trying to do the right thing to get my stuff, but since going to IDAP I can see that the way I was going about doing that was scaring her and the kids. So it's been a bad patch, but I can see a way out now, I'm easing up a bit, and times come when I don't even think about it [aggression] at all, which is good cos I don't want to be like that no more, I don't consider myself a violent person and I don't want to be a violent person. It ain't the right way to be (Ken).

Similarly, discussions during supervision sessions were identified as impacting upon moral agency. Some individuals explicitly identified changes that had occurred in this respect over time as a result of discussions with their supervising officer:

I must admit, when I first started coming here I weren't too bothered about what I'd done, it didn't bother me. [PO] would be talking about what I'd done, but it didn't really bother me. But after a while I did start to listen and I did start to think about it, and now I don't really like what I done. I'm embarrassed by it to be honest (Leroy).

Discussions about the impact of offending upon victims were often cited as helping to develop moral agency in this respect, but more general conversations were also identified as impacting upon an individual's reinterpretation of past actions. These conversations had led the individual to determine that past behaviour was incongruent with their moral agency, and incompatible with the life they wanted to lead. Both offending and offending-related behaviour had been reinterpreted as a result of conversations with supervising officers, as Josh explained when he spoke about his alcohol intake, which had been instrumental in much of his offending:

When you first start probation, she sat down and talks to you, she explains things, what they call tasks. She makes you look at life how it should be, like when you go out and get drunk. And you do things, and you look back and you think, what a dickhead. You're above a cloud and you think you're untouchable ... After that I thought, yeah, there is life out there without getting pissed up every week, and driving cars without licences. I don't live like that anymore, and I won't go back. And she sees the changes that I've tried to make and she says, "yeah, you've done well, keep it up" sort of thing (Josh).

Josh's quote also illustrates how supervising officers certified positive changes by offering encouragement and praise. Encouragement and a supportive nature are valued as important traits in supervising officers, evidenced by my interview data and existing research (for example, Rex, 1999). However, certification in this respect is of greater significance than more general encouragement, as it is directed at particular actions that the individual has undertaken. Praising specific successes in this manner was something that a number of practitioners consciously tried to incorporate into supervision sessions:

I think one thing that everyone needs to take on board is, ok these cases have all got something wrong in their lives, something they need to change, but they've also got a lot of positive things going for them and if you just keep droning on and on about them then obviously it is going to pull them down, whereas I quite like to ... identify the positive things and kind of just praise the things that are going well as well. I think it's nice for them to hear that, because quite a lot all they've heard in their lives is negative comments all the time, I know 2 of them who've never had any positive comments from either school or family et cetera, so to kind of give them that praise from time to time I think is nice for them to hear ... One of my cases has regular drug testing and he produced a positive test the other day but out of the last 6 months that he's been released from prison he's only produced 2 positive tests, and compared to what it would've been a couple of years ago, I praised him and said yes you have produced a positive test but that's 2 out of a very long period of time which compared to the past you would have been producing probably a positive test every week. Obviously we don't encourage them to have positive tests, but I think he needed reminding that he's doing well by not producing a positive for a very long time (PO2).

10.1.5 Future Orientation

In Part One of the analysis it was observed that a more positive future outlook accompanied some decisions to desist, which for some was related to notions of empowerment. A general future orientation has been identified as a facilitator of desistance (see chapter 4). This suggests that an interaction between future plans, increased self-confidence, empowerment and motivation would be more likely to lead to desistance, although the impact of structural factors would also have an effect upon the likelihood of this. The most prominent theme in

the interview data, with respect to discussions of Probation experiences, related to the manner in which supervising officers helped individuals to think about the future and to formulate objectives that would help them to sustain desistance. The importance of this was identified by both officers and probationers alike:

That's one of the first things I do with my cases is identify what they want to do, or where they want to be in 5 years time, which is normally always going to be a long term goal, but then encourage them to set smaller short term goals (PO2).

For some, this collaborative approach to thinking about the future had led to the formulation of clear plans of what the individual wanted to achieve:

SK: Could you tell me any plans you have for the future?

John: What I want to do in the new year, it might sound a bit cheesy, but one of the sessions in here was about me writing a plan for what I want to do for the year, like a planning lesson. Like get a job what I know can take me through the year, maybe into next year. I want a qualification, you know something behind me so I'll always have work. I want to move out of where I am, maybe move out with my brother. Obviously I'd make sure my mum'd be ok as well, but me and my brother do everything together, so move out with him, find a nice place, somewhere nice ... I just want to work, earn money, have a missus and have some kids, and that's me done. I want to settle down now.

Individuals explained that these discussions had led them to see that they could have an alternative lifestyle, which did not involve offending. Again, these discussions of supervision relate to the agentic themes discussed earlier, insofar as individuals suggested that they were more confident and more self-efficacious as a result of their supervision experiences:

She's helped me to see that I can have a future, a different future, not falling back on drink, not getting into trouble, offending and what-have-you. And, erm, I've got a different outlook on life now, cos of her helping me to see things differently really, and it's good, I'm making different decisions, I'm

making things better for myself, and it's from talking with [PO] really what's done that (Nath).

While some individuals were able to conceive of future objectives without prompting from their supervising officers, many were reliant upon their officer to suggest possible objectives that would help them to make changes in their lives. In some cases these objectives related to drinking or drug-taking (notably for Tom, Dean, Alan, Kev, Charlie, and Kurt). Most often, however, proposed objectives tended to be related to employment, relationships or living arrangements. These objectives were discussed in Part Two of the analysis, where it was shown that individuals clearly associated the achievement of these goals with the increased likelihood of desistance. However, in discussions about Probation supervision it became clear that, for some individuals, objectives were directly suggested by the supervising officer:

Right, in one of the sessions we done she said to me, "where do you want to be in a year's time?" And I said, "I dunno, really. Not here!" And she said to me, "well, you could be in a job, earning some money on a regular basis, and you could be living in a flat of your own". I thought, yeah that sounds good. So, that's what we'll look at (Kurt).

This is not to argue that practitioners should not suggest objectives, or help to construct future plans, for their cases. Indeed, these factors have been shown to increase the likelihood of desistance, so the fact that practitioners are undertaking this kind of work with probationers is a positive message for those who would argue that Probation should retain a rehabilitative dimension. However discussions about how these objectives might be realised were largely absent from supervision sessions, which meant that individuals were more likely to have to formulate projects to achieve their goals on their own, which the following section explores in further detail.

10.2 Constraints in Probation

10.2.1 Overcoming Problems

Experiences of Probation varied considerably between participants, particularly in relation to supervision, although most spoke positively about this aspect of their sentence. However, it was apparent from the interview data that supervision sessions were not always helpful, in particular with respect to overcoming structural obstacles to desistance. While most individuals suggested that their supervising officer was “friendly” or “good to talk to”, there was also a suggestion that they did not provide much practical assistance:

She’s good to talk to, I just wish she’d do a lot more for me. Like help out a bit more. Cos I’ve asked her a few times if she’d be able to help me, sort something out that’ll help me get moved and that, help me get some ID and that. But she just says she can’t do that. All she wants to do is talk about how I’m feeling, what I’ve been up to and that, but I say, “look, I need help with this” and I get nothing. So, talking, great, but getting stuff done, nothing (Brian).

Some individuals did remark positively on assistance that they had received from their supervising officer. Where individuals did make reference to practical support from supervising officers, this tended to involve relatively menial tasks such as: form-filling, telephone calls, letter writing, and so forth. However, this is not to devalue the importance of such support, as individuals clearly stated that these tasks were significant and that, without assistance, they would have been a burden on time and finances. Further, they could act as a barrier to desistance, particularly in the early stages of transition when it is less likely for individuals to be fully committed:

They’ve been a big help. With all the phone calls they’ve made for me, it would’ve cost me a bomb if I tried to do it myself! So they’ve been very supportive to me getting these things sorted. If I had any hair I’d’ve pulled it out by now! (Dean).

Thus, there did not appear to be many opportunities for individuals to try and overcome certain difficulties within Probation. Rather, it was more common for individuals to be referred to external agencies for practical assistance.

10.2.2 External Agencies

Part Two highlighted the particular objectives that participants generally identified in their strategies for sustaining desistance. Thus far, Part Three has shown that these objectives were often formulated either through collaboration between officer and offender, or were suggested directly from the officer. Further, while probationers could identify various barriers to achieving these objectives, little practical assistance was forthcoming from the supervising officer. Rather, it was more common for individuals to be directed to external agencies to receive assistance:

SK: So you've mentioned to [PO] that you want to get a job, right?

John: Yeah.

SK: And have you discussed it any further with her?

John: No, basically she just said, "I can set up a meeting with APEX", who are there to help you find work, so we ain't really spoken about looking for work or how I'm going to do it or whatever, that's what APEX is there for.

External agencies were most often referred to in relation to employment and accommodation, although there were some examples in the data of referrals to external assistance with regard to alcohol or drug issues. Most individuals who had experience of external agencies suggested that they were unimpressed by the service that was offered. Typical complaints included: a lack of clarity regarding rights and responsibilities, including the disclosure of criminal records; weariness and frustration over the amount of time it took staff to perform tasks; a lack of assistance meeting individual needs; and, a lack of communication between staff and

supervising officers. Further, in being referred to external agencies for assistance, it was also suggested that individuals felt undervalued or neglected, and that it was somewhat burdensome to have to visit various places for help:

You're getting pushed from one side to another. I mean, I know they [agencies] are professionals, but your PO knows your offence. I don't know whether they [other agencies] know what problems arise from having a criminal record or not, but I'm pretty certain they could work a bit closer. Rather than just saying, "ok we've got these people to help you to find a job and that's that, you're dealing with them for that bit". And going from place to place requires quite a bit of effort. And, like I say, I haven't had much joy with them, so I've tended to say, "alright, I'll do this on my own" (Ben).

Practitioners, too, commented upon the lack of communication between agencies and Probation, suggesting that it constrained their ability to work constructively as well as having a negative impact upon the person they were supervising:

It's very hard to get any information out of them [APEX]. They're quite difficult to get in touch with or make an appointment with for your case, so you end up having to send them along blind really. And then they'll arrange whatever they can with them, and it can come back on you, because you don't know what they're doing and they end up missing an appointment with you because they've got one with APEX or whoever, and really that's a warning for your case (PO5).

Some probationers had also experienced difficulties in trying to make contact with particular agencies, which had clearly left them feeling de-motivated. Naz, for example, explained that he had tried to contact an agency he had been referred to for assistance with his accommodation:

I went to see them last week and I was there from twenty-past ten until the end of the day, and nobody came to see me. Then I was there again from about half nine until twelve-thirty and again, I saw nobody. We have no sofa no nothing. If you want to talk to them, you can call from six in the morning until six in the evening and you will maybe, maybe, get to talk to someone. It's very difficult (Naz).

Naz later explained that, as a result of his experience, he had decided not to try to improve his accommodation circumstances. For some, the assistance offered by external agencies did not appear to be responsive to their needs, and did not help the individual to overcome perceived barriers, in Charlie's case with respect to employment:

SK: Have you had any help from probation in trying to find work?

Charlie: Not directly from probation, but I went to a meeting with APEX, you know? Erm, they weren't really helpful to be honest, they were very friendly, but I don't think they really knew why I was there, it just seemed like they was trying to tell me about having a criminal record, not really talking about how to get a job or helping me find a job or whatever. I came out of it thinking, "that was a waste of time", so I never went back, I just thought, "I'll sort this out on my own".

Further, the data suggested that some individuals had relatively low expectations prior to visiting external agencies for assistance, anticipating that they would receive minimal support.

Ryan, for example, had a forthcoming appointment with an employment agency:

I don't really know what it'll be like, I don't know what it's all about. But I'll give it a go. I'll go along and see what it's all about. But I won't hang around if it's shit. If it's shit I'll do something else (Ryan).

Initially, this may suggest that individuals believe external agencies to be of little assistance because they approach situations with a negative mentality, a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. This may suggest that poor outcomes, with respect to assistance from external agencies, is influenced by personal agency, insofar as it is individual choice that determines whether to engage with, and when to disengage from, the agency. However, the interview data suggested that past experience of agencies had been unhelpful, and this had influenced their definition of the situational context, as Ryan suggested in relation to his interview:

I've been waiting for the Job Centre to set this [interview later that day] up. I was meant to have one before, but when I got there no-one had heard anything of me, so that was a waste of time. If they mess me around like that again I won't bother with them no more. It's daft really. A waste of my time, especially if I'm walking all the way from [AREA] (Ryan).

Therefore, probationers are frequently referred to external agencies for practical assistance to overcome or manage problems, and to remove barriers to desistance. Largely this is a corollary of the time constraints and bureaucratic pressures faced by practitioners, and the emerging inclination towards utilising external agencies to assist probationers. However, the interview data reveal a number of factors which limit the extent to which agencies help individuals to overcome certain difficulties. This is likely to have a negative effect upon transitions towards desistance, not least because particular structural barriers to desistance remain in place. The data suggest that individuals' experiences of agencies are detrimental to self-confidence and motivation, and that individuals are more likely to resort to past experience and pre-existing definitions of situational contexts to achieve particular objectives.

10.2.3 Perceived Irrelevance of Sentence Requirements

Participants generally spoke positively about all aspects of their sentence, although some suggested that certain requirements were less worthwhile or less helpful than others. Martin and Chris, in particular, suggested that their programme requirements were of little value. Chris explained that he did not actively participate in the group sessions on his programme as he did not believe that it was relevant to him. He was also keen to distance himself from others on the programme:

I don't really have much input, cos I don't really think I should be there. I'm not like the other people in there, with me it was a mistake, I know what I did was wrong, it won't happen again, it's not for me. It's good for the people that need it, but not for me (Chris).

Thus, Chris did not identify any meaningful outputs from the programme, as he perceived it to be irrelevant and he defined the programme as being intended for more serious offenders. In Martin's case, he did not regard the programme he was about to undertake as worthwhile due to his past experience of other interventions that had been intended to challenge his behaviour:

I don't want to do it, I don't think I need it. I've done courses like this before and it don't do nothing, there's no point to it. She says I need help with my anger and that, but I've changed, I'm not like that no more... But if I don't do it I go back to jail, I'll breach, so I have to do it! I've done courses like this before and it doesn't do nothing, I still think the same and do the same, but obviously I'm going to have to do what she suggests or it's back to jail (Martin).

One supervising officer offered an explanation for the apparent lack of engagement among some individuals on one programme in particular, the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP):

[The course] is intensive, it challenges the individual in their own domestic environment. A lot of the time they don't see themselves as an offender or a criminal because that's what they've done for years, some of them, and it's normal behaviour. So then when someone comes along and says, "what you're doing is wrong, you need to change this, this and this", they tend to be a bit stand-offish (PO5).

For these individuals, then, programmes were not defined as being integral to their desistance strategies, and this was reflected in their unwillingness to engage with the programme. Passive involvement in Probation is unlikely to be enough to achieve a reduction in re-offending, and offenders are more likely to succeed if they are committed to the objectives of their probation supervision and are motivated to benefit from the various elements of their probation order (see Mason and Prior, 2008 on engaging young offenders). Only one individual, Nath, had experience of one-to-one preparation work with his supervising officer

prior to the programme beginning. For Nath, this preparatory stage was valuable, both in terms of increasing his engagement with the programme and with respect to offering him some knowledge of what the course entailed prior to its beginning:

Erm, you know I'd got a good understanding of what the course was about before I went there, whereas some chaps went there completely blind. They didn't know what it were about and it was a bit of a shock when they realised what they were trying to teach us, basically. Whereas I'd done all this preparation with [PO] which was quite good. When I first got told I'd have to do this [IDAP] course I thought, "you're kidding me? No thanks" sort of thing, you know? But doing the preparation work really helped me understand what it'd be like before I got there. It was a bit intense, but I'm glad she did all that preparation work with me (Nath).

The importance of pre-programme work was also acknowledged by supervising officers. One PSO suggested that it was possible to distinguish between individuals who had experienced pre-programme work, and those who had not:

It's about getting them ready ... I think it's really important work, I don't think they'd be ready, sometimes the programmes start early and you don't have chance to do the pre-programme stuff and you can tell the difference (PO3).

However, such preparatory work occurs sporadically, which is largely a corollary of programmes running to fixed timetables, which means that the possibility of conducting pre-programme work is by virtue of their being enough time between the individual beginning their sentence and the next available date of a programme commencing for the preparatory work to take place. Further, this is driven by the target-oriented nature of contemporary Probation practice, as one Offender Manager suggested:

We're under a lot of pressure to get people started on [the programmes] as soon as possible. We do try to make sure people get the pre-programme work, but they're not always ready for it, and there often isn't enough time between them being sentenced and the start date (PO4).

Programme targets also impact upon whether or not an individual would receive a programme requirement as part of their sentence, which was recognised as problematic by one practitioner:

Where I used to work if we were recommending supervision we had to recommend a programme requirement as well unless the Assistant Chief Officer agreed it wasn't required, and that's 2 rungs above me. Here, they're looking into programmes at the moment, but it's better because they weren't picking holes in if you weren't proposing a requirement, or if you were only proposing supervision, so it's better. But it looks like they are picking holes in that here now. Maybe that's something we're going to have to do here, I don't know (PO1).

Practitioners discussed particular cases where the emphasis upon meeting targets for programme completions had had a detrimental effect upon the probationer, although these did not relate to any individual in my sample. Some targets are competing and a consequence of this is that some individuals receive, perhaps, unnecessarily burdensome sentences with numerous requirements. As a result, some individuals may be unable to complete all aspects of their sentence, because of the sheer volume of requirements:

The problem is that when the cases are running they're quite intensive and fitting the programme dates and times around your cases other commitments can be quite difficult sometimes, and I've had to take some cases back to court for that reason, because they simply can't fit it all in (PO2).

I've got one guy, I've had to ask the court to take off his programme cos otherwise he'd be here or somewhere to do with Probation every day of the week. I mean, it's ridiculous (PO4).

As discussed in chapter two, a plethora of targets has emerged in the Criminal Justice System more generally, and the Probation Service in particular, in recent years. In 2007-2008 the target for accredited programme completions was 17,319, which was surpassed by the

National Probation Service (NPS, 2008: 10). It was noted, earlier in the thesis, that such targets can be of an arbitrary nature, that there is a clear distinction between objectives, priorities and objectives, and that the target-oriented culture of contemporary Probation may create an unhelpful working environment for staff and probationers (see also: Whitehead, 2007: 40-46). The interview data reflect this aspect of Probation as delineated in chapter two, suggesting that some individuals receive a programme requirement when it may not be entirely suitable and that it is principally the completion of the programme that is of interest, as opposed to the positive impact upon the individual subjected to it. This is not to argue that programmes are not worthwhile, nor that they do not contribute towards the facilitation of desistance. My interview data clearly show that for most individuals programmes are a positive experience. The data do suggest, however, that developing the probationer's engagement is a crucial aspect of Probation practice.

10.2.4 Limited Time

In some cases discussions about the future were limited, and the emphasis was more upon the individual's activities in the time between supervision sessions. Naz, for example, explained that he wanted to go to college in order to train to be a car mechanic, but that he was not sure how he would achieve this. He was asked whether he had discussed this with his supervising officer:

SK: Is that something you've spoken with [PO] about?

Naz: Er, no.

SK: How come?

Naz: Actually because there are so many things to talk about that we don't have time. She asks me about everything. She asks me about my friends, my girlfriend. Every little thing. What I've been doing, where I've been, every little detail. I have to tell her everything

about what I'm doing every day. She's asking me if I'm getting into any trouble. There's no time to talk about anything else.

The quote from Naz suggests that discussions about future objectives, or how they could be achieved, were adversely affected by: (1) limited contact time with the supervising officer, and (2) a concern for public protection. Supervision sessions varied dramatically in terms of length of time, ranging from 5 minutes to over one hour, and this variation existed not only between individuals but also for each individual on a week-by-week basis. Probationers suggested that this variation depended on whether or not there was anything meaningful to discuss:

It does vary. Sometimes it's just, "hello", "hello", "is everything ok?", "yeah, fine", "work going well?", "yeah, great", "ok then, same time next week ok?", "yeah, see you then". Literally, 5 minutes. But other times, like I say, you might have more to talk about, or [PO] might have a task she wants us to work through, or we might have to talk about the IDAP, and then you might be here for half an hour or so (Chris).

However, practitioners suggested that the time they could spend with their cases was more dependent upon the amount of paperwork that they had to complete. Also, it was apparent that supervision sessions were explicitly linked to targets, and that meeting these targets was given greater credence than the work that was actually undertaken within the session:

[AREA] is really high performing and the focus of work in [AREA] is actually about meeting your targets and completing all your paperwork, and if you only spend 10 minutes with your clients then you do ... I mean there's targets across the board because they're national targets, but in [AREA] they up the ante so national standards say that you only have to see a high-risk case once a week, in [AREA] we have to see them twice a week. It's about visibility of the Service, doing something to protect the public virtually. If you see someone twice a week for maybe 10 minutes one session, what benefit is there from seeing them in that second appointment? When actually I could've spent longer with them in the first appointment and done some really good quality work, rather than trying to squeeze in more appointments in the week. I don't really see any benefit to doing that other than it looks good on paper (PO1).

10.2.5 Risk

Contact time between officer and probationer was affected by the importance afforded to public protection within the Probation Service, and this clearly had an adverse effect upon the work that practitioners were able to do with their caseload. The emphasis upon public protection also had a detrimental effect upon the supervision experiences of some of the individuals in my sample. Some individuals – notably, Raj, Brian, Robert and Nath – suggested that they had felt at times as though they were being judged, or that their supervising officer was sceptical of the responses that they provided. This had the effect of discouraging the individual from talking openly with their supervising officer, and also damaged the relationship between them. Although it is impossible to tell from this research, it is also reasonable to assume that for some individuals this could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, or what has been referred to as the ‘looking-glass self-concept’ (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell and Naples, 2004), which could lead individuals back to offending:

I thought she was just mental, she used to say: “You’re negative, you’re this, you’re that, you’ve got a bad attitude” ... And I used to think, she ain’t got any right to judge me like that. And that’s what it felt like, like I was being judged. She might be my PO, she might be here to help me, but she’s not helping me, she’s making me worse (Raj).

Practitioners frequently raised the issue of balancing the demands of public protection and law enforcement against objectives of facilitating desistance. The need to balance public protection with attempts to effect change can lead to conflicting messages for the probationer, and uncertainty about the nature of the officer-offender relationship. Public protection is a fundamental aspect of the wider risk management agenda that has emerged in Probation, and elsewhere, in recent decades, and the potential for risk management and rehabilitation ideologies to co-exist within the Probation Service has been discussed elsewhere (Robinson, 1999). This is not to argue that risk and rehabilitation are incompatible, but rather to draw

attention to a site of conflict specifically in relation to desistance, one which practitioners are charged with the responsibility of reconciling:

I think boundaries are really important, enforcing the boundaries definitely. And obviously it's part of our role, law enforcement, so we do have to do that. But at the same time I'm, the relationship's really about trying to facilitate change, so there are certain boundaries and enforcement procedures that have to take place, but essentially I'm trying to work with that person so that they can make changes in their life ... but sometimes you're the only person that they have ever opened up to or that's been consistent in their lives, so it is a sort of funny relationship really because you have such a big part in someone's life for quite a period, you talk about really personal things, and sometimes it's really hard for them ... It's really hard, because we do really dig deep and ... I don't think it's often clear, and it's obviously not clear to me, but I don't think it's clear to them what our relationship is supposed to be (PO1).

The emphasis upon risk management and public protection also impacted upon other aspects of practitioners work, in addition to the relationship between officer and offender. There was a definite sense that practitioners felt constrained by the prominence of risk management in their role, in terms of both bureaucratic pressures and public and media attitudes towards risk:

It is at the back of our minds. We're all just so worried about ending up in the papers, you just do everything you can to cover your back, and it's only after you've done that that you can start to think about anything else (PO4).

When we do the re-assessments, more often than not you won't lower the risk of harm, cos you don't want to be in a position where you've said, "he's less of a risk now", if he goes out and commits a serious crime (PO5).

Summary

This part of the analysis has explored the role that Probation plays in enabling and constraining primary desistance. The emphasis here has been specifically upon the relationship between Probation practice and desistance from crime, rather than exploring the more general role of Probation or individual attitudes towards it. Further, this part of the

analysis is not intended to be, nor should it be read as, an evaluation of Probation, supervision, accredited programmes or external agencies. The focus is, instead, upon individuals' experiences of various aspects of Probation in relation to their attempts to desist from crime.

The analysis has shown that Probation facilitates a development of agency, particularly in relation to enhancing decision-making skills and with encouraging a future-orientation. However, there was little evidence that Probation impacts upon the material experiences of participants' lives. Rather, structural barriers to desistance were largely unaffected, and where practical assistance was offered this tended to be of a more menial nature, or in the form of a referral to an external agency. Individuals were generally critical of the assistance they received from external agencies, often identifying particular causes of their dissatisfaction. This frequently resulted in the individual stating that they would attempt to overcome particular difficulties on their own.

It was shown that particular aspects of contemporary Probation practice – notably, bureaucratic pressures and target culture – restricted the functional ability of practitioners to provide practical support, and limited the amount of time that could be spent with each case. This not only left a number of structural barriers to desistance largely unaffected, but also led to a situation whereby individuals had adopted certain objectives but were left with little guidance with respect to how to achieve them. The consequence of this is that individuals tended to shift towards an iterational orientation of agency, such that past repertoires of thought and action informed the projects that individuals would dedicate themselves to. In other words, individuals became more likely to rely upon past experiences of action as a blueprint for future activity.

11. STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN PRIMARY DESISTANCE: ACTIVE AGENTS AND THE POWER OF STRUCTURE

The analysis presented in the previous three chapters (analysis Parts One, Two and Three) identified a number of structure and agency themes within experiences of primary desistance. It was shown that individuals exercise agency in making the decision to desist and in formulating strategies for desistance, but that structural factors constrain these strategies such that individuals revert to past experiences to inform their future actions. Further, a number of themes were identified from discussions of Probation experiences, and it was shown that these experiences may also constrain individuals' strategies for desistance. This chapter explores the relationship between structure, agency and Probation and relates these themes to the theoretical discussion presented earlier in the thesis.

11.1 Primary desisters as “active agents”

In Part One of the analysis, participants' initial transitions towards desistance were explored. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to discuss how and why they had decided to desist, and questions were asked to elicit information about early experiences of this transition away from crime. This part of the analysis was thus concerned with the first research question:

1) What factors are relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards primary desistance?

This question was designed to explore the particular contextual and individualised factors that prompt the initial transition towards desistance. As such, two subsidiary questions were asked, which structured the analysis in Part One:

1a) To what extent is personal agency relevant to individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

1b) Are structural factors influential in primary desisters initial transitions towards desistance and, individually, which structural factors are of most importance in influencing individuals' initial transitions towards desistance?

The analysis identified that primary desisters were “active agents” in both making the decision to desist, and in the early transitional stages of desistance. This was demonstrated by the recurring incidence of a number of “agentic themes”, which correspond with existing empirical and theoretical knowledge (see, for example: McAdams, 1992; Maruna, 2001; LeBel *et al*, 2008; and chapters 4 and 5, this thesis). These are somewhat in contradistinction to existing findings in relation to the experiences of primary desisters. Healy and O'Donnell (2008) found that primary desisters in their sample, while highly motivated to change, were ambivalent about the process of desistance and that the “‘language of agency’ appeared to be lacking’ (2008: 34).

As primary desistance is a transitional phase between offending and desisting, it is, perhaps, reasonable to assume that primary desisters would display only a tentative commitment towards the process of desistance. This is largely because the transition to desistance would require a shift in focus – from a concern for the factors that would maintain offending to a concern for the factors that would sustain change in their lives. Given that past experiences, including historical structures, would condition individual action, including routine activities, replacing offending-related factors with those which entail desistance is a considerable undertaking for an individual to embark on.

As a result, those who are in this transitional phase may display ambivalence because they are uncertain about how successful their efforts will be, and because the activities and values which they are required to commit to are likely to be fundamentally different from those which they have been previously conditioned by. Such a view corresponds with Laub and Sampson's (2001) contention that desistance is the indirect outcome of a series of 'side-bets' (2001: 51), as opposed to the purposeful action of the individual. Rather, within their scenario the accumulation of a series of pro-social, non-offending life-course events would lead to the individual establishing a new identity and a new set of commitments (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). The analysis conducted in Part One, however, illustrates more prominent displays of agency among primary desisters.

Healy and O'Donnell (2008) sought to identify, within their interview data, the themes of generativity and agency that Maruna (2001) employed in his study. While Maruna (2001) found that desisters were more likely than persistent offenders to demonstrate generative themes, Healy and O'Donnell (2008) found evidence of only a few such themes among their sample and, moreover, that there was little difference in the incidence of generative themes between desisters and persisters. There was, similarly, little evidence of generative themes in the analysis in this thesis, and where it did exist it appeared to be at a personal level, in relation to the upbringing of their own children. Thus, there is correspondence between the findings presented in the analysis and those of Healy and O'Donnell (2008) in relation to generativity among primary desisters.

Healy and O'Donnell's (2008) study also employed McAdams (2001) coding scheme for agency, as used by Maruna (2001), and found little evidence of agency among their sample. However, this analysis found dissimilar results to Healy and O'Donnell (2008) in relation to McAdams (2001) framework, with empowerment in particular being identified as a stronger

theme in this thesis. As Healy and O'Donnell remark, a strong sense of agency and generativity has been shown to be prominent among secondary desisters (Maruna, 2001), yet this was not shown to be the case for primary desisters in their sample. However, agency has been shown to be more significant among primary desisters in this sample.

However, this, it is argued here, is partly a result of Healy and O'Donnell's (2008) narrow conception of agency in their analysis of probationer's narratives. Clearly, it was not a concern of their study to explore beyond generativity and agency as employed in Maruna's (2001) study, but a wider consideration of subjective-level factors does, nevertheless, provide a greater insight into the phenomenon of primary desistance. For this thesis, the analysis of agency themes employed a broader conceptualisation of agentic factors, drawing upon a range of subjective-level themes identified in the desistance literature (see: Giordano *et al*, 2002; LeBel *et al*, 2008). Indeed, the primary desisters in my sample were keen to articulate that they felt in control of their decisions to desist and the initial transitions away from offending. This was, perhaps, most clearly evidenced by participants' expressions of self-confidence and self-efficacy (see chapter 8), insofar as individuals expressed both the willingness and the perceived ability to achieve their desired outcomes.

Part One also highlighted that several participants envisaged an alternative future identity. Often these were identified by primary desisters as being, as Giordano *et al* (2002) write, 'fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation' (2002: 1001). The assumption of a new non-offender identity is central to the concept of secondary desistance (Maruna and Farrall, 2004), yet my research suggests that primary desisters may regard such an identity as a future objective which can facilitate the transition towards desistance. Clearly, there is an argument to be made that many offenders may envisage alternative future identities, but that this does not entail that they will be able to assume them. However, LeBel *et al* (2008) argue

that envisaging identities such as these as future objectives can help to avert problems that may occur during the desistance process. Indeed, they argue more generally that a strong sense of agency can work both positively and negatively: a sense of agency that is motivated and committed to desistance will help the individual to overcome difficulties and gain from life-course events, 'while a negative frame of mind leads to drift and defeatism in response to the same events' (2008: 155). This is clearly inconsistent with Laub and Sampson's (2001) argument that a commitment to new roles and identities is the cumulative effect of a series of positive life-course events.

Laub and Sampson (2001) state that the desisters in their sample 'made a commitment to go straight without even realising it' and that certain roles altered 'short-term situational inducements to crime', while allowing for the development of 'long-term commitments to conformity' (2001: 51). The authors do suggest that the men they studied were active in the desistance process, thus acknowledging the role of agency, yet they also argue that new identities emerge following investment in, and the realisation of a commitment to, particular social roles. Part One of the analysis, however, shows that primary desisters envisage a new identity as a non-offender *prior to* investing in a social role and, further, display a willingness to assume such an identity.

It should be noted that Laub and Sampson's (2001) research reports findings from the narratives of secondary desisters who had assumed a non-offender identity and, moreover, that it is unknown how many of the men in my sample would make the transition from primary to secondary desistance. It should also be noted, however, that their research was conducted retrospectively, whereas the analysis presented in this thesis explores desistance prospectively. Therefore, it is possible that the men in Laub and Sampson's (2001) study envisaged a future non-offender identity, and then changed their identities over time as they

gradually committed to particular social roles. Indeed, several of the primary desisters in my sample envisaged specific future identities that they wanted to assume, most often that of “good father” or “good partner” (such as Robert, who stated that he wanted to become ‘a family man’, see chapter 8) . It is reasonable to assume that some of these men may, over time, develop long-term commitments to marriage or parenthood and assume the envisaged identities they referred to during the interviews.

There were some participants who did not envisage alternative future identities, but rather were keen to distance themselves from offending peers. They did not state that they were fundamentally different from these peers, nor that they wanted to be. Rather, they were more concerned with establishing a physical distance between themselves and other offenders, as they anticipated that continued association would lead to future offending. A good example of this is in the case of Ryan (see chapter nine), who did not give the impression that he wanted to adopt an alternative identity but stated that he would likely re-offend if he maintained ties with his previous peer group. He stated that he had already stopped spending time with these peers, and had established a new network of non-offending friends. This is akin to Maruna and Roy’s (2007) notion of ‘knifing off companions’ (2007: 108), who also argue that ‘knifing off’ can occur as a result of an individual’s own volition or as the result of structurally induced turning points, but that it is most often likely to occur through an interaction of them both.

While this transition towards desistance did not involve the envisaging of an alternative future identity, it is possible that a new identity could emerge over time as a result of a change to the structure of the individual’s social relationships. Baumeister (1994) argues that:

When all of one's social relationships remain constant, personality change is considerably more difficult, because people tend to assume that others' personalities will remain stable and consistent (1994: 283)

and so it is reasonable to assume that (accounting for other desistance-related factors, such as sustained motivation and social bonds to work or family) the individual might gradually assume the new identity of non-offender. This proposition appears to be aligned with Laub and Sampson's (2001) argument that desisters gradually adopt an identity of non-offender following a series of 'side-bets'. However, the findings from Part One also show that primary desisters create the structures that allow for the development of secondary desistance as a result of their own agency. This agency is evident in Ryan's decision to cut ties with his previous peer group, indicating that he made a choice from a set of possible courses of action which is: 'the central point that is implied in all definitions of agency' (Hays, 1994: 64). The argument that Ryan chose from a range of possibilities is reinforced by John's assertion that he would not cut ties with his peer group, despite his awareness that they were, at least partly, culpable in his offending (see chapter 9).

The choices that are available to individuals are, however, limited by the range of structurally provided opportunities, and it can be argued that structure creates the agency that primary desisters demonstrate. Both Ryan and John had served custodial sentences, they were of a similar age, and neither wanted to re-offend as they expected that they would be returned to prison. Thus, the structural deterrence of prison prompted a re-evaluation of their involvement with offending and this, in turn, encouraged each to consider how they would make the transition towards desistance. John appeared to be more confident about the possibility of gaining employment, he suggested that he was willing and able to move away from his locality, and stated that he wanted to start a family. Ryan, by contrast, had few job prospects and, instead, seemed to be almost resigned to claiming benefits, in the short-term at least. He

also stated that he was unable to move away from his area, and was unwilling to start a family.

Thus, the situational context of two different individuals had furnished each with a different range of possible courses of action, yet each was able to display agency in making the initial transition towards desistance and, therefore, trying to effect change in their lives. Moreover, while each was presented with a range of structurally provided opportunities (however limited they may have been), the origin of their decision to desist could be found in the structural effect of incapacitation. Indeed, this was the case for several participants (notably: Ryan, John, Leroy, and Josh), yet other structural factors could also be identified in the interview data which triggered particular displays of agency.

Echoing existing literature (Shover, 1983; Burnett, 1992), it was found that longer custodial sentences also prompted a decision to desist (see Kurt, chapter 8), and increases in the risk of harm from offending had a similar effect. Changes to the nature of relationships also triggered particular displays of agency among primary desisters, particularly where family members provided a supportive environment (see Martin and Charlie, chapter 8). This also resonates with McNeill's (2009) suggestion that desistance-focused interventions should encourage engagement with families of origin, and with the evidence from the wider desistance literature which suggests that family formation can facilitate longer-term desistance (Horney *et al*, 1995; Laub and Sampson, 2003). However, it is argued here that relationship changes can act as a structural trigger for particular aspects of agency that facilitate the initial transition towards desistance. As family members show support and encouragement, individuals may respond in an agentive manner by making particular decisions that lead to primary desistance. Finally, some participants suggested that structural changes to the nature of their

accommodation experiences had acted as a trigger for them to move away from crime, eliciting displays of self-confidence, motivation and a desire to desist.

Thus, structural changes both prompted individuals to make decisions to desist, and provided the impetus for particular aspects of agency to emerge which enabled individuals to make the initial transition towards desistance. In particular, structural factors involving relationships, risk (especially the deterrent effect of incapacitation), and accommodation were shown to be especially influential in enabling individuals to become primary desisters. These structural factors, therefore, 'offer the very possibility of human choice' (Hays, 1994: 65) but, moreover, they can enable particular forms of agency to emerge which represent a 'chordal triad' of agency involving engagement with the past, direction towards the future, and responsiveness to the present (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 972). The forms of agency displayed by the participants in my research did not emerge from nothing, but rather they are responses to particular situational contexts.

The initial transition towards primary desistance, therefore, is enabled by particular formations of social structure which prompt individuals to make a decision to desist. However, primary desistance involves more than a conceptualisation of agency simply as individual choice (Elster, 1989), but rather it is argued here that primary desistance is undertaken by "active agents" who display the 'creative or transformational power' of agency (Simmonds, 1989: 187). Primary desisters make a decision to desist, a choice which is made from a range of (albeit limited) possibilities, yet primary desisters also seek to change their situational context. For some this involves the envisaging of an alternative future identity to which they aspire, while others attempt to make changes to the empirically observable social structures that surround them.

It is argued here that primary desisters demonstrate a range of subjective factors and, moreover, that these subjective factors emerge as individuals actively seek to make changes in their lives and transform their social environments. Yet agency is only made possible by social structures enabling its activity, and it is always limited by the boundaries of structural constraint (Hays, 1994: 62). As a result, a particular range of possibilities will be available to each individual and they must not only choose a course of action from the available options at a given time, but must also utilise these enabling and constraining features to exert their agential influence over the course of action they decide upon. Further, it is argued here, a particular temporal configuration of social structures will trigger aspects of agency which are likely to lead to primary desistance. As mentioned above, incarceration influenced several participants to make a decision to desist. However, Probation was also influential in triggering particular aspects of agency which facilitate the initial transition towards desistance. In Part One it was observed that a number of individuals had altered their sense of moral agency and several had become empowered, following discussions with supervising officers.

Therefore, it is argued here that agency is highly relevant to primary desistance, yet that such agency is only possible as a result of the enabling and constraining properties of particular social structures. While the stories about transitions explored in Part One suggest that the initial transition towards primary desistance is an undertaking which is highly dependent upon individualism, it is important to note that particular structural factors allow for such individualism to emerge in the first instance. In particular, primary desistance can be facilitated by improvements to relationships, which resonates with McNeill's (2009) recommendation that desistance-focused interventions should involve the family of origin, and through interventions that target individuals' moral agency. Finally, Part One shows that primary desistance can be fostered by empowering individuals to undertake the transition towards desistance themselves, and this can also emanate from one-to-one contact with

supervising officers. The following section will explore how individuals make strategies to sustain their moves towards desistance.

11.2 Sustaining desistance: the power of structure

Part Two of the analysis explored how participants sought to sustain their initial transitions towards desistance. Individuals were asked about their experiences of a range of problems, and how they planned to overcome them. Further, individuals were asked about their future plans, both in general terms and specifically in relation to sustaining desistance. Therefore, Part Two of the analysis was concerned with the second research question:

2) How do primary desisters understand desistance prospectively, and how does this influence their strategies for sustaining desistance?

This question was designed to explore how individuals perceive desistance prospectively, reflecting the understanding that agency involves a ‘chordal triad’ of the past, present and future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This also reflects the assertion that to understand how individuals make the transition from primary to secondary desistance it is necessary to understand how individuals perceive desistance prospectively, rather than exploring individuals’ retrospective accounts of how they made such a transition. Thus, two subsidiary research questions were explored:

2a) How are structural factors relevant to primary desisters’ strategies for sustaining the transition towards desistance?

2b) How relevant is personal agency to the formulation of individuals’ strategies for desistance?

Part Two identified that primary desisters are also “active agents” in considering how they might sustain their moves away from crime. Participants were able to identify a number of

barriers that they would need to overcome in order to sustain desistance, and were also able to highlight several positive changes that they wanted to make in their lives which would also support their attempts to desist. Several references were made to overcoming barriers in the areas of individuals' lives which have been highlighted in the recent literature (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Raynor, 2007b; Byrne and Trew, 2008; see also chapter 5 this thesis), including:

- Employment
- Alcohol and drugs
- Accommodation
- Locality
- Family and relationships
- Attitudes

Responses showed, however, that participants perceived relationships, locality, accommodation and employment to be the most significant factors in helping them to sustain desistance. Moreover, for many individuals, employment was perceived to be necessary to overcome other barriers, or achieve other objectives, in relation to sustaining desistance. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, alcohol and drugs were not frequently cited as important factors that needed to be overcome, but this can be explained by the small proportion of the sample that were experiencing problems in this regard. Both Tom and Nath referred to themselves as alcoholics, and both regarded overcoming their drinking problems as a necessary and significant factor in sustaining desistance, yet there were few others who identified alcohol or drugs as obstacles. Thus, a range of structural factors were identified as being particularly important in relation to sustaining desistance. Further, in formulating strategies to sustain desistance, participants demonstrated similar aspects of the 'chordal triad'

of agency as depicted in their initial transitions towards desistance. Indeed, in identifying barriers to desistance that would need to be overcome and strategies to overcome them, Part Two of the analysis showed that primary desisters exhibit an orientation towards the past, present and future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971).

Most participants related the structural barriers that they would need to overcome to previous social contexts that had led to involvement in offending, to future objectives, or to both. Many individuals spoke about social structural factors that had influenced their offending in the past, notably in relation to the neighbourhood they grew up in (as also suggested by Webster *et al*, 2006) or family conflict (see also Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Graham and Utting, 1996). In turn, they stated that changes would need to occur in these areas of their lives if they were to sustain desistance. Many participants were also able to discuss why these social structural factors influenced their involvement in offending, most often related to environmental factors (high crime, drug use, unemployment), peer pressure, routines involving delinquent or antisocial behaviour, and a lack of stability in their lives. Similarly, many participants also spoke about why changes to certain structural factors in their social context would entail positive outcomes and help to sustain desistance. Often, particular changes were related to greater responsibility, increased independence, and a stable lifestyle (see John on “developing relationships” chapter 9.1.1, and Charlie on “accommodation” chapter 9.3).

Thus, there appeared to be a range of subsidiary factors influencing the structural aspects that participants identified as needing to change in order to sustain desistance. Participants, therefore, wanted to submit to certain structural changes in order to reduce their own risk of re-offending. Indeed, primary desisters variously stated that they wanted to settle down, move out of their neighbourhood, get a secure place to live, and find a “proper” job. Moreover,

responses suggested that these desired objectives are not simply “hard-wired”, normative goals, but rather primary desisters explicitly stated these objectives in relation to reducing their own risk of re-offending and increasing the likelihood of sustaining desistance. This desire to alter their situational context is a clear expression of understanding that their present circumstances are similar to those which previously led to offending, and that they wanted to commit to an alternative social structural environment in order to sustain desistance. Further, there is a clear consideration among primary desisters of the implications of maintaining their present situational contexts in relation to their sustaining desistance.

Participants were also future oriented in considering the changes that would need to be made to their present situational contexts in relation to the alternative future identities that they envisaged (see above and chapter 8). As mentioned above, several primary desisters wanted to assume the identity of “good father”, “good partner” or, more generally, “non-offender”. In envisaging such identities, many individuals spoke about the structural changes that would be necessary if they were to achieve them. For a number of individuals, assessments of relationships, locality and accommodation interacted in relation to the future identity they wanted to adopt. John, for example, described how he wanted to move out of the area he lived in, find a nice place to live, and start a family.

Bottoms *et al* (2004) write that conformity is both a lifestyle and a self-identity, and that one such conformity (which they refer to as the ‘English Dream’) involves a secure job in a stable company, ‘enough money’, ownership of consumer goods, attachment to an intimate relationship, and possibly children. They ask whether this is attainable, particularly for those with a criminal history, and whether alternative conformities exist for desisters today (2004: 384). Among the primary desisters in my sample, most held aspirations for a similar conformity involving: strong family-based relationships, stable accommodation in a nice area,

and a secure, reasonably well-paid job. Precisely where the commitment to this particular conformity emerges is unknown, but it seems reasonable to assume that an understanding of how past social contexts led to involvement in offending influences individuals towards seeking alternative lifestyles to conform to. The self-confidence, empowerment and future identity aspects of agency, that were shown to be prominent in Part One, allow for primary desisters to develop an initial desire and commitment to move away from crime. In reflecting on this aspiration, certain structural factors within each individual's social context condition future actions which formulate the strategy to sustain desistance.

In the strategies for sustaining desistance that many individuals articulated, therefore, there was evidence of the past, present and future orientations of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Moreover, there was evidence of a consideration of how past structures had influenced the present situational contexts individuals found themselves in and, in turn, how the present (unchecked) could affect their futures in relation to certain objectives. There is dissonance here between the accounts of primary desisters in my sample and the narrative accounts of desistance provided by Sampson and Laub (2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003). Sampson and Laub (2001) highlight the need to 'examine desistance as a process consisting of interactions between human agency, salient life events, and historical context' (2001: 4). The central proposition in their thesis is that desisters take on family and work responsibilities, which 'knife-off' the criminogenic environment, re-ordering 'short-term situational inducements to crime' (2001: 51). Over time, desisters occupy these roles which coerce the individual into acting in a particular manner, eventuating in long-term conformity (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 149). Their account of desistance is, therefore, essentially structuralist.

The analysis presented in Part Two, however, demonstrates that primary desisters may formulate strategies to sustain desistance that do involve the structural inducements to which

Sampson and Laub (2001) refer, and, moreover, that they establish an initial commitment to these structural ‘turning points’ in direct relation to conformity. Indeed, the evidence from Part Two suggests that primary desisters envisage a particular form of conformity in order to achieve ‘self-progression’ (Farrall, 2002: 225) in terms of sustained desistance. This suggests a more complex form of “active agency” to that which Sampson and Laub (2001) suggest, but one which both remains structurally induced and structurally conditioned.

There were clearly some participants who did not share the same strategies for sustaining desistance based on the conformity described above, or others for whom strategies for desistance included a commitment to conformity that also contained some internal contradictions (such as Alan, whose offending was drink-related, but he wanted to retain ties with people he drank with). While some primary desisters demonstrated commitment to some of the structural turning points referred to above, there were other aspects of their social context that they were unwilling to change. Further, some remarked that future offending could be justified under certain circumstances, or that particular “small crimes” were defensible due to a perceived lack of severity. John, for example, gave a clear account of the changes that were required for him to sustain desistance, yet although he stated that his peer group influenced his involvement in offending he was unwilling to sever ties with them. Largely, this was because he referred to them as his family, and they provided a social network within which he felt comfortable. This suggests that, while primary desisters are willing to commit to certain structures in relation to conformity, there are other structural factors that serve to constrain attempts to sustain desistance.

Bottoms *et al* (2004) argue, ‘there may not be one end-point of criminality’ and desistance may involve ‘a complicated oscillation’ between several end-points (for example, reduced severity, reduced frequency), ‘whilst moving in the main towards conformity’ (2004: 383).

The evidence from the primary desisters in my sample may suggest that this continuum of conformity, gradually resulting in desistance, may result from a complex amalgam of structural turning points to which individuals want to commit, and existing structural conditions which they either want to retain or are constrained by. This, however, is not the same as the ‘side-bets’ to which Sampson and Laub (2001) refer, as primary desisters consciously choose what they want to commit to, within the boundaries of structural possibility.

Overwhelmingly, however, the primary desisters in my sample identified a strategy for sustaining desistance that was based upon a commitment to a small number of structural turning points. This was similar to the ‘English Dream’ referred to by Bottoms *et al* (2004: 384), but Part Two shows that many primary desisters also hold employment as an overarching objective, necessary to achieve other aims. Often individuals spoke about: the need to provide an income, taking greater responsibility, providing stability and proving that they had changed in order to achieve various objectives, and that employment could fulfil all of these needs. This was in addition to employment being held as an objective in its own right by many of the sample. Thus, employment was regarded by many participants as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for their desistance strategies.

However, when discussing individuals’ future strategies for employment, the majority of participants suggested that they would obtain work informally. As discussed earlier, most of the sample was unemployed at the time of interview, and several had never had formal employment. Participants who did have experience of formal employment were more confident that they would be able to secure formal employment again in the future. Further, those with formal experience appeared to be more active in trying to obtain work, while many

of those with informal experience suggested that they would wait until a friend or family member offered them some work.

Several participants described their educational experiences with reference to truancy, exclusion and low achievement. As well as discussing how these experiences had influenced their initial involvement in offending, some also described how their lack of qualifications would prevent them from gaining formal employment in the future. It was, perhaps, somewhat surprising that many participants did not perceive their criminal record to be a barrier to gaining formal employment, especially given the wealth of evidence that suggests many employers discriminate on the basis of criminal record information (Metcalf *et al*, 2001; TUC, 2001; Boyle, 2007; Maley *et al*, 2007). However, among those, such as Ben, who had recently disclosed criminal record information, their experiences of doing so had led them to believe that their criminal record would prohibit them from gaining formal employment. Finally, several participants stated that they believed that current economic conditions limited their opportunities to gain formal employment, reflecting the structural constraints of rising unemployment at the time of interview (Autumn/Winter 2008/2009), which had reached between six and seven per cent (Hughes, 2009: ch. 4).

The effect of these structural factors led many to determine that they would need to seek work in informal labour markets. This suggests that participants' strategies for gaining employment involve agency factors in terms of a consideration of the past (previous experiences of employment), the present (qualifications, criminal record, employment opportunities) and the future (the most likely routes to employment), yet these considerations are significantly constrained by structure. There exists, therefore, a paradox between primary desisters demonstrating a desire and commitment to gain employment in order to satisfy other

objectives which they are also committed to, while being excluded from these structural turning points by the very nature of these structures.

Thus, to sustain desistance, agency is relevant insofar as primary desisters actively construct their own strategies giving consideration to the past, present and future. These strategies are purposefully devised in order to sustain desistance, and the structural turning points that are identified as future objectives are personally relevant to each individual. Collectively, these structural turning points create a particular conformity to which many primary desisters aspire, that is primarily based upon an alternative future identity and social context, and which generally requires employment to achieve. However, structure provides the possibilities for such a conformity, and it is structure that enables primary desisters to consider such a future orientation. Moreover, it is structure that constrains and limits the range of possible courses of action, and which guides individuals towards courses of action that, although they may be more familiar with, may not lead to the types of change initially envisaged.

For primary desisters formulating strategies to sustain desistance agency is relevant because many primary desisters are projective in the way in which they imagine their futures, and they are also evaluative in their consideration of available possible courses of action. The possible courses of action are conditioned by structure, and it is to these structures that primary desisters wish to conform. However, it is also the structural context that constrains primary desisters and excludes them from a range of opportunities. This illustrates the power of structure as individuals attempt to sustain desistance – structure both conditions the turning points to which individuals determine that they want to conform to, and it constrains the range of possible courses of action to achieve them.

11.3 The policy context: supporting desistance in Probation

Part Three of the analysis explored the role of Probation in supporting primary desistance, and its influence upon the strategies formulated to sustain desistance. Participants were asked about their experiences of Probation in general, and more specifically how Probation helped them to move away from crime. In particular, the research was concerned with exploring the impact of Probation upon participants' perceived structural barriers to desistance, and with the influence of Probation in collaboratively formulating strategies to sustain desistance. As such Part Three was concerned with the third research question:

3) How is contemporary Probation practice relevant to experiences of primary desistance?

The importance of this question is to emphasise the policy-oriented aspect of this thesis, in addition to the people-oriented dimensions which, while relevant to Part Three, predominated in Parts One and Two of the analysis. The third research question was designed to explore the ways in which Probation could facilitate and support primary desistance, and to examine whether Probation could hinder attempts to move away from crime. Although practitioners were interviewed, the emphasis was upon the Probation experiences of the primary desisters in my sample. As such, two subsidiary questions were asked:

3a) In what ways does Probation enable/constrain the transition towards primary desistance?

3b) Which factors in contemporary Probation practice are relevant to the subjective experiences of primary desisters, in relation to desistance?

Overwhelmingly, participants spoke positively about their experiences of Probation, particularly in relation to the relationship with their supervising officer. Part Three reinforces the positive messages that have been provided by studies which have explored the relationship

between desistance and Probation, particularly having someone who ‘believes in’ the would-be desister (Rex, 1999; Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2004; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). In addition to valuing various characteristics in their supervising officer, participants also described how Probation had improved their decision-making skills, increased their self-confidence, and altered their sense of moral agency. Further, individuals spoke about becoming empowered to make changes in their lives as a result of their experiences of Probation.

These factors correspond with the subjective factors identified in chapter five (McAdams, 1992; Maruna, 2001; LeBel *et al*, 2008), but the evidence from chapter ten shows that Probation facilitates this enhancement of agency during primary desistance. The aspects of Probation which were most beneficial to participants in this respect were one-to-one supervision and accredited programmes. Moreover, there appeared to be particularly positive developments where these two dimensions of Probation interacted. A good example of this is in the case of Charlie, who described how his supervising officer reinforced the messages from his programme and asked him to consider how various aspects of the programme were relevant to different areas of his life (see chapter ten). The evidence presented here, therefore, contributes to the relatively recent body of knowledge which suggests that the quality of relationships is important in supporting change (Barry, 2000; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Burnett, 2007). Further, this finding also builds upon McNeill (2006b), who argues that the hegemonic focus upon programmes may have ‘supplanted and marginalized’ the traditional role of individual relationships (2006b: 245), by suggesting that effective practice may be achieved through a closer integration of various aspects of individuals’ sentences.

Decision-making skills, self-confidence, moral agency and empowerment were all enhanced during primary desistance as the individual took an active role in their Probation sentence. This was prompted, in several cases, by supervising officers encouraging individuals to

contribute to discussions both during supervision and programme sessions. At times this involved exploring probationers' thoughts in relation to the impact of their offending on victims, possible responses to scenarios in their current everyday lives, and aspirations for the future. This suggests that Probation can provide a structural context that triggers certain aspects of agency that can facilitate primary desistance. The evidence indicates that this was most successfully achieved with those individuals who appeared to be most engaged with the supervision and programme sessions. This was achieved through the development of a strong "officer-offender" relationship, and through preparatory work undertaken before programme commencement (see chapter ten).

The most prominent theme in the interview data in relation to Probation experiences, and arguably the most significant, was in relation to discussions about future objectives. For some participants this was a collaborative approach to future planning (John and Nath, chapter ten), but for many others plans for the future were dependent upon the supervising officer proposing objectives in relation to employment, relationships (both developing family ties and disassociating from peers), and living arrangements (Kurt, chapter ten). This can be seen as a positive dimension of work with primary desisters as a future outlook can facilitate longer-term desistance (Maruna, 2001). Indeed, the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) showed that one of the key distinctions between desisters and persisters was the lack of a future-orientation among active offenders (Maruna, Porter and Carvalho, 2004). However, the data show an absence of discussions about how to achieve certain objectives, which renders many primary desisters with the responsibility of formulating projects to achieve these objectives. There are a number of possible explanations for this, which are discussed below, which leaves primary desisters with little support for the practical-evaluative dimension of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). It is argued here, however, that contemporary Probation

practice is relevant to primary desistance both in prompting the initial transition, and in triggering the projective orientation of agency.

Chapter ten identified various constraints within contemporary Probation practice that hinder the transition to desistance. Of particular prominence in the interview data were references to a lack of guidance in relation to achieving objectives, and a lack of practical assistance to overcome problems. These constraints not only left participants with the responsibility of formulating projects on their own, but also had deleterious effects in terms of self-confidence and motivation. Sustaining motivation and confidence, particularly during challenging times, is vitally important to the desistance process (Maguire and Raynor, 2006b: 25), and the primary desistance stage is likely to be especially characterised by ambivalence. There were other instances where practitioners demonstrated the belief in the individual that can contribute to desistance (McNeill, 2006b: 245), such as the Probation Officer who praised the case that had not had a positive drug test for a long duration. However, if supervising officers are not helping them to overcome problems, or providing specific guidance for how to achieve certain objectives, this may implicitly send a message that they do not “believe in” the primary desister.

There are a number of aspects of contemporary Probation practice that conspire to constrain desistance. The interview data suggest a focus upon particular sentence requirements, notably accredited programmes. Programmes have become a cornerstone of Probation practice since the rise of “What Works?” from the early- to mid-1990s. Chief among these have been programmes which are based upon cognitive behavioural approaches, designed to challenge attitudes and thinking. While several participants spoke positively about their experiences of programmes, some stated that they did not feel the programmes were personally relevant. There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, a lack of time to undertake pre-

programme work results in a lack of engagement. Second, the content of the programme challenges the individual in environments in which they are unaccustomed to being challenged (PO5, chapter ten). Third, the individual is sentenced to complete a requirement for which they are an unsuitable candidate, as a result of the ‘bums on seats’ demands placed on Probation areas (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 116).

The latter of these explanations resonates with the emergence of a “target culture” within contemporary Probation. In 2007-2008 the target for accredited programme completions was 17,319, which was surpassed by the National Probation Service (NPS, 2008: 10). However, ‘the initial targets for completion of programmes were based on negotiations with the Treasury in 1999 rather than on any measurement of the need for them or the numbers of offenders likely to benefit’ (Raynor, 2007b: 136). Clearly, there is a danger that emphasising completions instead of who is likely to benefit will lead to many individuals having a programme as a requirement of their sentence which is largely irrelevant. This is likely to result in a lack of engagement, a decline in motivation, and an unwillingness to participate in other activities that may support desistance.

Some practitioners also described the pressure to complete a certain number of sentence requirements, and the impact that this had on the people with whom they work. In some cases, the demands of sentence requirements placed extreme pressure on the individual. On the one hand, this can be regarded as a positive use of sentencing powers as there is a clear argument that a variety of requirements could provide the structure and routine necessary to develop conformity and a range of positive personal attributes. On the other hand, however, if sentence requirements are administered with little consideration for the individual receiving them then this is likely to be detrimental to the desistance process.

Desistance is also constrained by the demands of public protection and risk management, which produce considerable bureaucratic obligations. For example, it is estimated that the average time taken to complete an OASys assessment is two and a half hours (Raynor, 2007b: 136). In many cases, the practitioners who took part in this study stated that bureaucratic demands place a considerable demand on their own resources, as they are under immense pressure to meet targets and complete necessary paperwork. Targets take prominence because they are linked to budgets, and participants stated that there could be few excuses for not reaching targets. This has significant implications for the amount of time available for one-to-one supervision sessions, with some participants reporting that supervision can last for as little as five minutes.

One consequence of this is that practitioners are unable to develop agency among probationers to its fullest potential. As mentioned earlier, a corollary of this is that it remains unclear how the objectives, often proposed by practitioners, that are internalised by probationers can be completed. Farrall and Calverley (2006) argue that Probation can plant the seed of desistance that can gradually influence probationers towards long-term crime cessation. They argue that, 'the "seeds" will probably only be sown in one-to-one supervision' (2006: 66). It is argued here that there is evidence of the "seeds" being "sown" as Probation can both trigger primary desistance and encourage a projective orientation of agency. However, to continue their analogy, for desistance to flourish regular care, attention and nurturing will be required. That is, interventions to sustain desistance need to provide more one-to-one support with the individuals who are attempting to make the transition from primary to secondary desistance. The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that this is not currently the case, as primary desisters who undertake a practical-evaluative orientation resort to the familiarity of past experience (past structures), by re-positioning themselves to an iterative form of agency.

The lack of one-to-one time between officer and offender is also ‘the result of recent governmental pressure to contract out services’ (Vennard and Hedderman, 2009: 225). Responses from the primary desisters in my sample indicated that efforts to overcome problems (particularly in relation to accommodation and employment) tended to involve referral to external agencies. Most participants who had experience of external agencies spoke negatively about them, stating that they were unresponsive, time-consuming and poorly managed. Some individuals were apprehensive about being referred to external agencies due to negative experiences in the past (see Ryan, chapter ten). These experiences of external agencies were also damaging to self-confidence and motivation but, moreover, had the effect of primary desisters resorting to past experiences to determine how they would achieve certain objectives. This is exemplified in Ben’s case, whose experiences of external agencies were particularly negative, and this had led to him seeking work in informal labour markets.

Thus, Probation enables primary desistance by triggering certain aspects of agency to prompt desistance in the first instance, and in motivating individuals to attempt longer-term crime cessation. This is achieved through the highly important role of one-to-one supervision, and the positive characteristics of supervising officers described by participants in this study and elsewhere (Rex, 1999; McCulloch, 2005). Accredited programmes can also play an important role in the enhancement of agency, but it is argued here that this is more likely if engagement is secured and if individuals feel as though the programme is personally relevant. Further, programmes are likely to be more beneficial if they are integrated with supervision sessions so that messages are reinforced and probationers are allowed the opportunity to discuss particular aspects of programmes in greater detail away from a group environment. Probation also plays an important enabling role in primary desistance by encouraging a projective orientation of agency, which allows for individuals to envisage an alternative future. Often,

however, this future outlook is proposed by the supervising officer and accepted by the probationer.

While this can be regarded as an important dimension of supporting desistance, the contemporary structure of Probation, with its attendant emphasis upon targets and bureaucracy, reduces the time spent with individual probationers to the extent that ways of achieving objectives remain unaddressed. Rather, recent government policy has aggressively encouraged the use of external agencies to provide services which, it is argued here, creates a fissure within the officer-offender relationship. Negative experiences of external agencies are likely to lead primary desisters towards past experience to guide their thoughts and actions and, for many, this may lead to a resumption of offending behaviour.

11.4 Structure and agency in primary desistance

The discussion presented thus far has shown that Probation can play an instrumental role, both in prompting primary desistance and in facilitating strategies to sustain desistance. In exploring the initial transitions towards desistance and the subsequent formulation of strategies to desist in the aftermath of this transition, a range of subjective factors were identified which correspond with those identified in the existing literature in chapter five (LeBel *et al*, 2008; Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 1992). The broader conception of agency employed in this exploratory study of primary desistance, and the wider range of subjective factors identified in the analysis, identify a stronger sense of agency among primary desisters than that found by Healy and O'Donnell (2008). This sense of agency also suggests that primary desisters are more active in their transitions to desistance and plans for the future than suggested by Sampson and Laub (2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003). Whereas these authors suggest that desistance is achieved through a succession of 'side-bets' that gradually secure

conformity, the evidence presented here suggests that individuals are more active in envisaging an alternative non-offending future.

This thesis, therefore, follows the work of LeBel *et al* (2008), who argue that subjective factors emerge prior to structural changes in the social context in the process of desistance. During primary desistance individuals possess a strong sense of agency which involves the envisaging of alternative future identities, motivation, and a sense of self-confidence to be able to make changes in their lives. The work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) was discussed in chapter five, and they argue that different structural contexts can trigger particular aspects of agency and alter orientations of agency. The discussion presented here indicates that the structure of Probation generates a sense of agency through encouraging a reflection on past offending, to develop moral agency, and through discussions of the future, developing motivation and an alternative future outlook. This is not to argue that structures in the wider context of primary desisters' lives do not influence agency in similar respects. Indeed, the analysis in this thesis has shown that structural changes to individuals' lives, particularly in relation to their relationships, accommodation and experiences of risk, also activate certain aspects of agency.

The work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) has also been shown to be relevant to the discussion of primary desistance in contemporary Probation by drawing upon their notion of a 'chordal triad' of agency. As discussed in chapter five, Emirbayer and Mische identify a projective aspect of agency, which they write is the:

imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future (1998: 971).

It is argued here that primary desisters possess such a projective dimension of agency, and this has been shown in the strategies to sustain desistance that participants articulated during the interviews. Most often, these strategies are based upon the envisaging of alternative identities such as “good father” or “good partner”, and the adoption of future objectives in relation to having somewhere nice to live, starting a family, and securing employment. These objectives are similar to those outlined by Bottoms *et al* (2004), and may be considered to be normative “hard-wired” aspirations, but it should be noted that objectives were discussed explicitly in relation to sustaining desistance. Moreover, for a group of individuals who experience marginalisation and inequality in a range of areas of their lives, it is likely that the envisaging of such objectives will only be triggered within a particular social context.

The projective dimension of agency can be seen first within individuals’ descriptions of their initial decisions to desist, as many begin to consider how they would like to act in the future and who they would like to become. The projective dimension continues in individuals’ strategies for desistance, yet here there is also evidence of what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) refer to as the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, which entails the:

capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations (1998: 971).

Within this orientation of agency, primary desisters are able to consider their future objectives in relation to their present structural circumstances. It is at this point that the influence of Probation upon primary desistance begins to unravel. For many, the combination of a projective and practical-evaluative orientation generates the envisaging of a particular conformity to which they initially desire and commit to. However, upon deliberating about how it is possible to achieve this, many perceive various structural constraints which allows for the

emergence of an iterational orientation to agency, whereby they reflect on past experiences to reactivate past thoughts and actions. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) write that the iterational orientation of agency involves the:

selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time (1998: 971).

As a result of various bureaucratic pressures, the emphasis on public protection and increased government pressure upon contracting-out, the policy context of contemporary Probation practice limits the amount of time supervising officers can spend with probationers. It is argued here that it is this dimension of Probation that allows for the generation of a projective orientation among primary desisters, and that the continuation of regular one-to-one supervision is likely to facilitate efforts to sustain desistance. This is further hampered by the emphasis within Probation upon actuarial assessments of risk. As individuals demonstrate progress and a reduced risk of re-offending, the regularity of supervision decreases, firstly to fortnightly and then to monthly. This is unlikely to facilitate desistance, particularly when individuals encounter challenges and problems.

This was identified in the data as individuals suggested employment was the most important objective, yet a lack of support to overcome structural barriers led many to determine that informal labour markets would be their most likely pathway to gaining work. It is possible that this is partly a corollary of the need to satisfy ontological security (Giddens, 1990, 1991), as individuals revert to “what they know” in order to retain stability, sustain identities and engage in familiar interactions. However, the data suggest that primary desisters demonstrate transformative agency (Hays, 1994), as discussed in chapter five – that is, they want to make changes in their lives, they desire new interactions, and they aspire to new social contexts. As

individuals seek to make such transformations they encounter the constraining effects of past structures that furnish their present situational contexts with properties which serve to marginalise and exclude them from mainstream activities.

This argument can be enhanced with reference to Archer's (2003, 2007) theory of the interaction between structure and agency, as discussed in chapter five. Archer (2007) argues for a conceptualisation of human activity that incorporates structure, agency and the reflexive mediation between the two. She writes that:

- 1) Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to
- 2) Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social.
- 3) Courses of action are produced through the *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances (Archer, 2007: 17 emphasis in original).

Such an understanding of human activity can explain why primary desisters, in apparently seeking to transform particular aspects of their lives, resort to past experience to inform their actions. Individuals are projective in seeking to transform their social contexts, and adopt courses of action which they determine will enable them to achieve their projective aspirations. However, they are constrained by a lack of resources and, thus, the courses of action that they determine may be unlikely to enable them to achieve the overall objective of sustaining desistance. Archer (2003) explains this reflexivity as being underpinned by individuals undertaking an 'internal conversation', and argues that alternative forms of the conversation can lead to individuals either reproducing or transforming their social context (Archer, 2007). Crucially, for Archer (2003), whether individuals undertake transformative or habitual action, they remain reflexive and agential in both their thinking and activities. In this

respect, it is argued here, primary desisters do not seek to reproduce the familiarity of their social contexts, but rather that they do engage in creative transformative action, but their resources limit and condition what they are actually able to achieve. Thus, the contexts which they seek to change are, ultimately, reproduced.

This builds upon the argument presented by Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2006, 2009) who suggest that Probation helps to develop human capital in the form of motivation and personal capacities, but does not generate the social capital necessary for individuals to exercise new capabilities. It is argued here that Probation allows for the emergence of particular forms of agency in the form of motivation, self-confidence, moral agency and the envisaging of alternative identities. However, a lack of support at critical moments in the transitional stage of desistance then leads to a form of agency whereby individuals revert to past experience and familiarity, which is likely to hinder individuals' efforts to make the transition from primary to secondary desistance.

Summary

Exploring primary desistance in relation to the prospective viewpoints of individuals seeking to sustain their moves away from crime provides an insight into how primary desisters perceive the challenges they are likely to face. Moreover, this allows for an exploration of how individuals prospectively determine how to react to these challenges as they attempt to desist from crime. In doing so, this discussion has identified that primary desisters are "active agents" in making the transition to desistance, particularly in undertaking a projective orientation to consider how to sustain their moves away from crime. Various structural factors condition primary desisters to consider a particular type of conformity to which they aspire, and this stems, in part, from the role of Probation in proposing future objectives. However,

past structures furnish individuals' present situational contexts with constraining factors that they perceive will inhibit their commitment to these objectives.

As a result, primary desisters adopt an iterational orientation which leads them towards repeating past actions. In Archer's (2003) terms, this is no less a display of agency than individuals who are able to transform their social context, but it highlights, instead, the power of structure in both limiting the range of possible courses of action, and in conditioning individuals to resort to the familiarity of past actions. However, Archer's (2003) and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) explanatory accounts would suggest that as individuals undertake such deliberations they would alter their concerns, perhaps "lowering" their objectives as they determine that they are unattainable. Rather, the primary desisters in my sample appeared to retain their concerns despite the constraining aspects of their social contexts, but instead altered the projects that they believed would enable them to achieve such concerns. In doing so, individuals evidenced attempts to transform their situations, but were conditioned to formulate strategies for action that were informed by past repertoires of thought and action. The paradox here is that in attempting to transform their situations, many individuals faced with such structural challenges are likely to reproduce such situations, albeit unwittingly.

12. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to develop knowledge and understanding of the transitional processes involved in primary desistance, and it set out to do so by exploring three interrelated themes: the decision to desist and strategies for sustaining desistance; structure-agency interaction in the desistance process; and the impact of contemporary Probation interventions. This focus was chosen because the early transitional phase of desistance, or primary desistance, has been underexplored in the literature to date, and there has been a relatively limited amount of research conducted which explores the process of desistance within a Probation context. Desistance research is particularly relevant given the extent of re-offending, the costs of a rising prison population, and public and media anxieties about further offences being committed by those subject to Probation supervision. Further, given that the extent of changes within the Probation Service in recent years has led to a degree of uncertainty over the nature and scope of interventions to reduce re-offending, a research agenda which explicitly addresses the impact of interventions upon the early transitions towards desistance is particularly appropriate.

12.1 Summary of Key Findings

The research undertaken for this thesis has provided a number of key findings, summarised in table 20, which provide a greater insight into the dynamics of primary desistance. First, individuals exercise agency both in making the decision to desist and in the initial transition towards desistance. The findings here show that the decision to desist is often framed by an aspiration to improve the future lifestyle of the individual and their family, or through the acquisition of a prosocial morality that is incongruent with past offending behaviour.

Table 20 Three-stage model of interaction and summary of key findings

Model Stage	Data Collection Theme	Analytical Framework Theme	Summary of Key Findings	Temporal Orientation – Major (minor)
Concerns	Future goals, objectives and aspirations	Predominantly subjective model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Individuals chose to desist, predominantly, to distance themselves from their past and to make improvements for themselves and those around them. b) Individuals highlighted aspects of their lives that would require change. c) Limited recognition of structural constraints. d) Evidence of agency/responsibilisation resulted from suggestions of remoralisation. 	Projective (Iterational)
Enabling and constraining factors	Personal and social contexts	Predominantly social model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Structural constraints became more prominent in accounts of sustaining desistance. b) Correspondence between individuals' accounts and existing knowledge of barriers to desistance. c) Recognition of lack of available support, leading either to fatalism or individualism. 	Practical-Evaluative (Projective)
Projects	Prospective courses of action	Social-subjective model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Recognition of common pathways to achieving certain objectives. b) Limited evidence of the power of agency to overcome structural barriers to these pathways. c) Individuals resigned to inability to follow common pathways. d) Establishment of past repertoires of thought and action to inform future courses of action – therefore, original projects are altered. 	Iterational (Practical-Evaluative)

Evidence of the latter suggests that a process of “remoralisation” has occurred, and this was particularly apparent in discussions about programme interventions and one-to-one supervision.

Second, individuals identify a number of pathways to desistance, generally culminating in envisaging a lifestyle that will sustain long-term, or secondary, desistance, often related to a particular prosocial identity. Bottoms *et al* (2004) suggest that such a lifestyle may exist as ‘The English Dream’, suggesting that offenders who wish to move away from crime aspire to a lifestyle involving a steady job with a reasonable income, possession of some material goods, a partner and possibly children (2004: 384). Although they state that this particular set of goals is just one “dream” among numerous others, the findings presented here show that these constitute particularly important aspirations held by individuals that relate to desistance.

However, what this thesis has also shown is the importance of paid employment as a prominent pathway to desistance. Indeed, employment was regarded as a necessary (if not sufficient) factor in the desistance process by all participants in my research, either as directly leading to desistance or as a means to achieve other goals which were perceived to sustain desistance. Again, this demonstrates agency in the sense that individuals have the ability to define specified goals in relation to achieving particular ends, in this case desistance from crime. Further, that individuals exercise agency is evident in that they determine intended projects to achieve their goals, which relates to the third key finding from this research.

While individuals proposed what might be considered as normative projects to achieve their established goals, they were often cognisant of a range of structural barriers to pursuing these projects. Again, most prominent in these discussions was the goal of achieving employment and the range of difficulties presented by a lack of formal experience, lack of education, and

perceptions or experiences of discrimination (for example, in relation to criminal records). It was particularly striking that individuals articulated a sense of powerlessness in the face of such structural barriers, and participants appeared to be resigned to the inability to overcome them and, therefore, to being incapable of pursuing the pathways that they had previously suggested. However, rather than abandoning particular aspirations, individuals offered alternative pathways that were usually informed by past repertoires of thought and action. Typically these “new” pathways entailed the subversion of “mainstream” pathways to the achievement of prescribed goals towards the adoption of unconventional means, perhaps unlikely to result in the successful attainment of the desired objective.

This indicates both the real existence of structural factors in conditioning the range of possible courses of action, and the power of structure in influencing chosen courses of action, in two key respects. First, structural factors have been shown to diminish the range of perceived realistic courses of action for certain individuals. Second, structural factors not only determine the range of possibilities, but actually coerce individuals towards particular courses of action. The importance of this is that primary desisters are less likely to be able to fulfil their future objectives as the structural properties in their social contexts remain largely unchanged.

Where individuals did suggest that their original projects could be adhered to, this generally emerged with individuals whose past repertoires of action were congruent with common pathways to the objectives they held. This was most prominent in discussions with individuals who stated that employment was necessary to achieve desistance, and that they would seek formal employment – sometimes in a particular industry – to achieve this. Where others conceded that they would be unlikely to be able to follow this route due to various structural constraints, those with formal work experience were more confident that they would be able

to follow this course of action. This suggests that individuals with fewer structural constraints are more likely to maintain a projective orientation of agency.

Although participants suggested that Probation interventions had helped them to develop their decision-making skills and had given them the confidence and motivation to embark on the transition to desistance, particularly in relation to encouraging individuals to re-evaluate their offending behaviour, many remarked that Probation was unhelpful at helping to overcome structural barriers. This was most often attributed to a lack of time spent with the officer during one-to-one supervision, a lack of direct assistance from the officer, and the shortcomings of external agencies in providing assistance.

This clearly echoes the work of Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2009) who argue that Probation interventions help to develop human capital, 'including inner resources: self-determination, motivation, attitudes and beliefs, values and decisions' (Burnett and McNeill, 2005: 233), but do not generate the 'social capital which resides in the relationships through which we achieve participation and inclusion in society' (Weaver and McNeill, 2007: 7). I argue that in the absence of such social capital individuals determine unconventional pathways to being the most appropriate route to desistance available to them. The critical realist analytic of desistance transitions provided here suggests that by reverting to past repertoires of thought and action individuals will reproduce the structures that create their present social context, such that the same structures will pertain for future activity.

From this, I suggest that the reproduction of such structures entails that the factors which contribute to individual offending behaviour will endure, meaning that secondary desistance is less likely. Clearly the research is limited by the fact that it is not a longitudinal study. Of course, the most obvious limitation of this research is that it is unknown whether the

individuals in my sample maintained desistance or otherwise, and so the outcomes in respect of the critical realist approach adopted cannot be tested here. There are also some specific findings that a longitudinal study could offer a greater insight into, such as the suggestion that closer integration between programme delivery and supervision could achieve greater results. It was suggested that pre-programme work could be highly beneficial, but that the context of Probation constrained practitioners' capabilities to achieve this. As only one individual in my sample received pre-programme work, it would be necessary to achieve a sample with a more even balance between those who received pre-programme work and those who did not in order to explore this more fully. It was also suggested that engagement with Probation interventions had beneficial outcomes. This supports findings elsewhere which have suggested that engagement is an important aspect of work with young offenders (Mason and Prior, 2008). A longitudinal study may have been able to explore whether engagement impacted upon the desistance outcomes of the individuals involved in the research.

However, the aim of this thesis is clearly articulated as an exploratory account of primary desistance in a Probation context. As such, there is no suggestion that the thesis is intended to provide an account of whether or not experiences of primary desistance led to the individual sustaining their moves away from crime. The concern here is, instead, to introduce the notion that contemporary Probation policy is oriented in such a way that supports notions of individualism in social policy, with the effect that primary desistance, for many, is unlikely to offer a stepping stone towards secondary desistance.

It could also be argued that the study is limited by virtue of the sample profile. In chapter seven I suggested that the participant recruitment method employed could lead to a selection bias, through: (1) practitioners "cherry picking" the most compliant or "successful" individuals within their caseloads; (2) the most compliant probationers agreeing to participate;

(3) the most desistance-focused practitioners volunteering to participate; or some combination of these. This possible selection bias could influence the data analysis, as it could be argued that these individuals would be more likely to portray Probation in a positive manner, or that they would represent “the best” of what Probation can offer.

In chapter seven I argued that this recruitment method was largely unavoidable here, but it can also be argued that if this selection bias has influenced the data analysis then the findings within this thesis represent the most positive aspects of contemporary Probation. In other words, it could be said that this thesis highlights the best impact Probation currently has in relation to desistance. Therefore, it may be likely that in reality Probation offers a significantly less desistance-focused approach than that which has been reported here. Rather than diminishing the findings I have presented, I argue that this enhances them by virtue of the possibility that they offer a “best case” scenario of Probation practice.

12.2 Primary Desistance and Probation – Agency and Contexts

The argument that I have presented in this thesis suggests that Probation policy has emerged as an attempt to produce responsibilised citizens. Alongside this the aim of Probation is to control and manage risky populations, with the tasks of the individual practitioner, underpinned by a ‘surveillant managerial’ discourse (Nellis, 2005), delineated as: assessing risk; enforcing breach sanctions; and, challenging criminogenic deficits, all in adherence to centrally prescribed policy guidance and tools. These changes mark a shift away from welfare concerns towards a risk-based penology, as well as the emergence of rehabilitation *through* responsibilisation. As suggested above, this builds upon the arguments of Farrall (2002) and McNeill (2009) who argue that Probation helps to develop human capital, in the form of motivation or individual capacities, but neglects social capital, in the form of opportunities to exercise these capacities (McNeill *et al*, 2005: 32).

I have sought to develop this argument by suggesting that agency is multi-contextual – that is, that different contexts influence how individuals exercise agency by providing conditions which enable and constrain agency which, in turn, influences the possibilities of action for particular individuals at a given time. I have done this by arguing that the various contexts that would-be desisters encounter solicit alternative temporal orientations of agency which can enable, constrain, or suppress these possibilities of action. I would like to conclude this thesis by examining the nature of agency and context in relation to would-be desisters and the practitioners who are in a position to support them.

12.2.1 Offender agency and desistance

In this thesis I have argued that the contemporary Probation context facilitates desistance by developing agency in the form of confidence, motivation, decision-making, and a future orientation. However, I have argued that this is, somewhat, effaced by the lack of support in relation to individuals' broader contexts. In other words, Probation develops human capital but neglects the social capital required to make the transition towards desistance (Farrall, 2002; McNeill, 2009). The argument that I am making here is that this social capital is neglected *because* Probation policy is designed to produce responsibilised, remoralised, prudent citizens, *and* because it is designed to manage offenders through centrally prescribed processes. The dilemma here, I argue, lies within the proposition that agency is personalised, active, and dynamic (Archer, 2007: 22), and is, therefore, unsuited to the dogmatic actuarial and managerial nature of Probation.

Personal identities, comprised of individual goals and objectives, are what make us heterogeneous. Although individuals' objective positions may be similar, their subjectively determined ends may be radically different. Further, the personalised nature of agency means

that even where objective positions and ends are the same, the subjectively determined pathways to achieve them may also be different. It is reasonable to assume that a significant number of individuals under Probation supervision may not hold any aspirations to desist (at least at that moment in time). Indeed, some may have the objective of completing their sentence and then returning immediately to the life of crime they had before. Thus, although objective positions may be similar individuals' end goals may be radically different. However, among the sample interviewed for this research, all stated that they wanted to desist from crime, yet the goals which were identified as necessary to achieve this varied between interviewees. The point to be made here is that even where objective positions and subjectively determined ends may be similar, the pathways that individuals design for the achievement of these may also be radically different.

Agency is active in the sense that individuals can adjust their goals and pathways in light of incoming information and may change their preferences accordingly. Individuals continuously assess their social contexts in relation to their goals, and this may lead to a re-evaluation of these, such that a re-ordering of preferences takes place. It is, perhaps, unlikely that would-be desisters would retain the same set of goals over a long duration. They may hold some long-term objectives, or "pipe dreams" perhaps, but in the short- to medium-term at least their goals and, more importantly, their priorities are likely to change. For individuals who are making the early transition towards desistance this is particularly likely to be the case as they encounter new and unknown, as well as old and familiar, contexts. Each context is furnished with certain roles and resources (Bhaskar, 1979), and these actively produce different forms of agency from individuals, which leads to different forms of action.

Finally, agency is dynamic in that it is constantly exercised by active individuals, but also because it can radically alter as a response to particular contexts. In this regard, agency is

context dependent, and action that results from agency depends upon its contextual feasibility (Archer, 2007: 81-83). As a consequence, individuals may exercise agency in different ways as they encounter different contexts. A would-be desister, for example, might exercise a projective form of agency during conversations with their supervising officer, perhaps because this is a context within which they feel empowered to think about the future. While they are in their local community, however, they may revert to an iterational orientation, because their surroundings offer a “dire prognosis” (Maruna, 2001) for the future, or perhaps because they want to avoid being an “outsider” in their own neighbourhood.

There is also the possibility that different contexts could produce unexpected events and unrehearsed responses to them. An individual, for example, may hold employment to be the most important objective to achieve desistance. They may have also given proper consideration to how they can gain legitimate employment, visited recruitment agencies, and received information about the types of job they may be suitable for and what skills they can offer. As such, they have contextual knowledge of gaining employment and draw upon this in formulating their plans. This contextual knowledge might help them to gain an offer of work, but later they are told by their supervising officer that they cannot accept the offer as it involves working away from home for a certain period of time. The individual was previously unaware of this, and how they react upon receiving this information is likely to alter their future pathways, and possibly the success or otherwise of their desistance transitions. They might not, for example, follow the formal channels to employment again, if they consequently perceive their previous attempts to have resulted in failure.

Importantly, the multiple contexts within which agency is exercised are interconnected and the actions that result as a consequence of the interaction between context, agency and the individual are interdependent. Would-be desisters need to navigate multiple contexts:

employment, accommodation, community, and Probation to name a few. I have argued that conditions within some of these contexts produce different forms of agency, which leads to different intentions among similarly placed individuals. For desistance to be sustained, individuals will need to navigate these multiple contexts and ensure that the conditions within them are oriented away from those which are likely to lead to offending, and towards those which will sustain non-offending. Probation policy and practice in recent years has added further contexts to individuals' lives through the use of external agencies which, I have suggested, adds a further dimension that would-be desisters are required to navigate. If contestability is enhanced by future governments then this reinforces the need for further research to examine the contextual nature of agency in the desistance process.

This navigation of multiple contexts, I argue, is the root of the complexity of desistance transitions, and explains why desistance is plagued by ambivalence and uncertainty. Future desistance research needs to explore the interactive effect between these multiple contexts, and the effect on agency and attempts to sustain non-offending. The task for practitioners is highly complex because they operate in an environment which promotes technocratic, managerial solutions to the highly uncertain, multi-contextual difficulties of individuals' lives.

12.2.2 Practitioner agency and desistance-focused practice

Policymaking will continue to be heavily influenced by media and public anxieties about the problem of re-offending and the need for crime control which, in turn, is likely to necessitate increased risk assessment and offender management. The danger that this presents is that interventions will continue to be matched to offenders based on their criminogenic "deficits", with a relative lack of consideration for individual needs, contexts or aspirations. This, as I have argued earlier, contributes to the delimiting of agency to the iterational dimension, and to would-be desisters reverting to past repertoires of thought and action which is likely to

inhibit longer-term desistance. For frontline workers to deliver desistance-focused interventions, in the short-term at least, will require the individual practitioner to navigate any potential disjunctures, connections or possibilities that lie between centrally prescribed rules and guidance, and the conditions and contexts of individual cases. In other words, desistance will depend on the agency of the practitioner as well as the agency of the offender.

This may involve the practitioner making decisions about the rationing of time and resources which may, in turn, involve a contradictory decision between, for example, meeting key performance indicators or surrendering these to the achievement of one-to-one work with individual offenders (a point of tension that was alluded to in the fieldwork for this thesis). The choices that individual practitioners make will depend on how they exercise agency in determining the outcomes they want and the way in which they set out to achieve them. As I have argued, agency is enabled and constrained by an individual's personal and social contexts, potentially limiting or expanding what they perceive to be possible in the future.

Of course, this is in many ways drawing upon the notion of street-level bureaucracy developed by Lipsky (1980), but it is worth highlighting the possibility of alternative interpretations of the Probation context among frontline workers. This is an area which has attracted a small amount of recent attention (Deering, 2010; Gregory, 2010), who suggest that practitioners do resist some of the punitive managerial discourses and instead retain some more traditional ethics of Probation work through their reflective practice. Robinson and McNeill (2008) have also explored the notion that practitioners might be able to combine the logics of compliance and desistance in their day-to-day work.

A potential obstacle here is that practitioners may be constrained by fears of accountability if they deviate from centrally administered policy and guidelines, and there is an argument to be

made that such policy and guidelines intend to produce particular types of practitioner. These “types” relate to the intentions of policymakers and managers to produce individuals who act according to certain dispositions. For example, policies designed to initiate certain breach practices may be intended to produce practitioners who are “enforcers”, that is individuals whose disposition to act is more attuned to securing compliance. However, I have argued that agency can determine how individuals in similar positions act differently, and practitioners may interpret policy guidance in various ways, or may subvert certain policies to achieve alternative aims. Future desistance research should explore the contextual contingencies that allow for the flexible interpretation of policy, guidelines, and the role of “supervising officer”, such that Probation interventions become more desistance-focused.

12.3 Concluding Remarks

The desistance literature has developed considerably in recent years, providing a greater insight into the processes by which individuals come to stop offending. More recently, a body of literature has emerged which has begun to examine the impact of Probation on desistance. A consistent finding within this latter body has shown that sustained desistance is more likely where a relationship between officer and offender is developed that addresses individual needs in a collaborative and participative manner. This finding may suggest that longer-term desistance is more likely where practitioners exercise agency to subvert the existing policy framework which is designed to delimit practice of this nature.

I have suggested in this thesis that there exists a paradox where offenders embarking on desistance transitions wish to submit to the structures of mainstream society, but find themselves excluded by those same structures. There is also a paradox where, to support desistance, practitioners are required to adopt a flexible individualised approach to working with offenders, but operate within a policy framework that is rigid, technocratic and

managerial. Such flexibility is required if the type of relationship described above is to be developed to facilitate desistance. In its absence, would-be desisters are considerably less likely to be able to navigate the multiple contexts that constitute their lives. Policy should allow for a more flexible, personalised relationship between officer and offender, but this is unlikely, in the foreseeable future at least, given the media and public anxieties about crime and the hegemonic managerial ethos within public services more generally. Desistance-focused Probation practice lies within the subversion of this policy framework by individual practitioners. The best hope for advancing knowledge of sustained desistance, therefore, may depend upon the identification of the conditions which generate the possibility for practitioners to resist the wider emphasis on responsabilisation, control, and the management of offenders, and instead remain desistance-focused.

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APPENDIX A. STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW GUIDE.

Structured questions to gather information about:

1. Age
2. Employment status
3. Current living arrangements
4. Sentence requirements
5. Time on Probation at interview
6. Time remaining on Probation
7. Current offence
8. Previous offence(s)

Introduce Topic One

Introduce Topic One – Relationship to Probation Supervisor

So, I'm interested in your experiences of probation, so why don't you start by telling me about how probation's going?

How would you describe the purpose of probation? What do you think the outcomes of probation are supposed to be?

How would you describe your relationship with your probation supervisor?

Prompt, if necessary: listening, friendly, casual, etc.

What do you value most about the relationship between you and your probation supervisor?

Explore further: why do they value X? is there anything they dislike? if experienced probation before, is there anything different that they like/dislike now?

Do you think that the relationship between you and your probation supervisor helps you to deal with any difficulties in relation to reducing offending? If so, in what ways?

Introduce Topic Two

Topic Two – Past Offending

Can you tell me a bit about the conditions of your probation order?

What led to you receiving this order?

Have you received any other sentences in the past?

What circumstances do you feel led to offending in the past? Can you describe how these came about and in what way you feel they led to offending?

Have you thought about stopping offending in the past? Have you tried any approaches in the past? What worked? What didn't work?

Do you want to stop offending now?

Introduce Topic Three

Topic Three – Current Situation, Personal & Social Problems

Can you tell me a bit about your current situation – what's it like where you live? *Prompt further: jobs, friends, family, etc.*

Do you think that you are experiencing any personal or social difficulties at this moment in time? If so, can you describe them?

Prompt for: employment, housing, health, relationships, financial issues/debt, education/training, drugs/alcohol. Pursue each pathway until exhausted.

Have any of these been identified by your probation supervisor? Can you describe how these were identified (*e.g. by supervisor, or in collaboration with*)?

Do you think that probation supervision can help to overcome or manage any of these difficulties? If so, in what ways?

If any difficulties have been overcome, did probation help? In what ways? What methods were useful? What methods not useful?

Can you identify anything in your personal or social life that you think would act as a barrier to reducing re-offending? Can you describe the ways in which you think this could be a barrier?

Explore any possible external factors (e.g. criminal record requests on application forms).

Introduce Topic Four

Topic Four – The Future: Aspirations, Plans, Concerns

Can you tell me about any plans you have for the future?

Prompt for: employment, relationships, housing, etc.

Do you think that these plans might help to reduce offending, or stop offending altogether?

Explore further: why do you think this is the case? what is it about the plans that will reduce offending? are plans short-term or long-term?

Are you optimistic about achieving your plans? Do you think probation will help?

Do you have any concerns about the future?

Prompt for: employment, relationships, housing, etc.

End interview.

**APPENDIX B. WRITTEN CONSENT AND PARTICIPANT
INFORMATION SHEET**

Consent Form for Participants

Researcher name: Sam King

The research conforms to relevant ethical practices and has received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham.

Information given by participants will be handled in accordance with the relevant Data Protection legislation.

The researcher will respect the rights of individual participants.

Signed: **Date:**

.....

Participant name:

You (the participant) understand that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw at any time.

You understand that you may choose not to answer particular questions.

Any information you give may be used in the final report, although it will not be possible from this to identify you personally.

All information you give will be kept in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

Your participation in this research will not affect any of the conditions of your probation order, and is not related to any programmes or supervision that you may be undertaking.

Signed: **Date:**

Information for Research Participants

I am from the University of Birmingham and I am interested in learning about your experiences of Probation, and what you think helps or doesn't help with moving away from offending. This is part of a research project in progress, and a final report will be based on what I learn.

I want to conduct some interviews and would like to ask you to be involved with this. The interview would involve me asking some questions about your experiences of Probation, whether you think it helps to deal with problems, and if you think it helps with planning for the future.

The interview should last for about one hour, and it will be tape-recorded. However, it will not be possible to identify you from the interview as I will change all names and personal information that could be used to identify who is talking. Information you share will remain confidential, and I won't discuss it with your Probation Officer or anyone else. However, if an issue came up that suggested a person might be at serious risk of harm I would have to discuss the matter with a Probation Officer.

Your involvement in the research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your Probation Officer, who can contact me on your behalf.

I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

Sam King