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The Great Epoch: An Exploration of the Psychology of Desistance from Offending.

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The Great Epoch: An Exploration of the Psychology of Desistance from Offending.

A Thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Masters of Arts in Criminology.

by

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September 2013

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters in Criminology is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate: _____

To Lily

*"The great epochs of our life
are at the points when we gain courage
to rebaptise our badness as the best in us"*

Friedrich Nietzsche, 1886/2003, p. 97.

Abstract:

This research is an exploratory study aimed at examining the psychological processes underlying desistance from offending based on the lived experience of seven ex-offenders. A phenomenological approach was chosen and the research used qualitative semi-structured interviewing in order to collect rich data regarding the self-narratives of participants. Research findings confirmed several themes already prominent in the desistance literature including the importance of psychological maturation, the role of choice, the importance of the individuals' self concept, the role of 'making good' and cognitive change in the area of thought processes and attitudes to offending. In addition several themes emerged which are under-discussed in the contemporary desistance literature including the relationship between the psychology of addiction recovery and desistance, the evolution of empathy and the importance of identifying, experiencing and expressing emotion. The dissertation concludes by discussing the relevance of the psychology of desistance in terms of penal measures and the reintegration of ex-offenders along with making a number of recommendations for further research.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction & Defining Desistance

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending behaviour by examining the lived experience of seven desisting former offenders. The introductory chapter presents an overview of the thesis, explains the context of and rationale for the research and outlines the research aims and objectives. The chapter concludes by discussing the various ways in which desistance is defined throughout the literature in order to select a suitable definition of desistance for the purposes of this study.

1.1 Thesis Overview

The remainder of this chapter discusses the context of and rationale for the research outlines the research objectives and examines the issues surrounding the definition of desistance. Chapter Two provides an overview of the existing literature on the topic with particular reference to the psychological processes underlying desistance. Chapter Three describes the research methodology chosen for the study and explains why a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate in order to achieve the research aims and objectives. Chapter Four presents the research findings. Chapter Five is the concluding chapter which discusses the core findings of the research guided by the theoretical framework laid out in the literature review. The final chapter also outlines the implications of the study in terms of penal measures and offender reintegration and makes several recommendations for further research.

1.2 Context and Rationale

The concept of desistance from crime has traditionally been relatively neglected within mainstream criminology in favour of examining the variables which influence the onset of criminality. In the past two decades, researchers in the field of criminology have increasingly turned their attention to the study of *why* and *how* an individual makes the choice to cease offending and more importantly, how this choice is followed through behaviourally and maintained over time.

Early research examining the phenomenon of desistance was largely ontogenic, focusing on the manner by which an individual ‘grows out’ of offending (Glueck and Glueck 1940, 1945). The previous two decades have seen an increase in sociogenic theories of crime such as Sampson & Laub’s (2001, 2003) ‘Life Course Theory’ whereby stronger social bonds (for example employment and marriage) develop over the life course providing sufficient incentive and motivation to desist from offending. Researchers such as Giadorno, Cernovich and Rudolph (2002) turned their attention to more internal cognitive shifts that enable individuals to avail of what they call ‘hooks for change’ (e.g. education or employment); explaining that opportunities that support desistance are only meaningful if the offender is cognitively ready and able to avail of them. Others such as Maruna (2001) explore changes in the sense of self, whereby the desisting self-concept evolves to such an extent that a return to criminality becomes unthinkable to the ex-offender. Despite these contributions, the focus of much contemporary desistance research has returned to external factors such as the role of probation supervision and it is this gap in the literature that the study aims to fill.

This research will explore what relevance, if any, the desistance literature has to the lived experience of seven desisting offenders. In keeping the focus of the research centred on internal psychological processes rather than external variables, a detailed insight will be gained into the concept of psychological maturation, the role of choice and motivation, the individual’s sense of self and the role of cognition and emotion. Finally, as the internal, subjective and psychological processes underpinning the desistance experience may not be apparent or easily accessible to policy makers or to practitioners in their day-to-day work with current and ex-offenders, it is hoped that this dissertation will have practical implications for offender re-integration and supporting desistance from crime.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the psychological processes which underlie desistance from offending behaviour by examining the lived experience of seven ex-offenders. The majority of research in the field of desistance has focused on objectively measurable correlates of desistance such as age, employment, marriage and parenthood which have all been shown to positively influence the likelihood of desistance. Much less attention has been paid to subjective, internal psychological processes underlying desistance from offending behaviour and it is this gap in the literature that this study aims to explore.

The key research question is; ‘what are the psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending?’

One of the objectives of the research is to examine the participants’ lived experience of making a choice to desist and how this choice is borne out through action and maintained over time. A further aim of the study is to explore what changes in self-identity accompany desistance from offending behaviour and how these changes are rationalised within the individual’s ‘self-narrative’ – that is the story we tell ourselves to make sense of our lives. The research is particularly concerned with examining Maruna's (2001) concept of the 'redemption script' - the concept that it was necessary for the reformed offender to go through a period of criminality in order to reform and repay society by ‘giving back’ or ‘making amends’ - what Maruna terms 'making good'. In making good, the experience of criminality uniquely equips the ex-offender with the skills necessary to prevent others from making the same mistakes. In addition, the research aims to explore the nature of psychological maturation and its relevance to desistance and the cognitive processes underlying desistance for example, changes in thought processes, attitudes and beliefs. Finally the research aims to investigate the emotional landscape of the desisting offender and the role of emotion in prompting, facilitating and maintaining desistance.

1.4 Defining Desistance

One of the recurring challenges in the study of desistance is the absence of a clear and consistent definition of the phenomenon under examination. Within the literature, desistance is variously described as a singular termination event (e.g. Weitekamp and Kerner, 1994) or as an ongoing process of maintaining a crime-free way of life (e.g. Maruna, 2001). With echoes of rational choice theory desistance (conceptualised as an event) is defined by Shover as “the voluntary termination of serious criminal participation” (Shover, 1996 p. 121). Research employing the definition of desistance as a termination event tends to focus on turning points (e.g. a period of imprisonment), significant life events (e.g. marriage or parenthood) or the individual’s experience of a subjective ‘conversion experience’ which leads them to commit to a new way of living. Critics of the ‘termination event’ definition highlight that criminal behaviour, by its very nature, is sporadic and as Maruna puts it; “termination takes place all of the time. For example, a person can steal a purse on Tuesday morning, and then terminate criminal participation for the rest of the day. Is that desistance?”

Is it desistance if a person does not steal another purse for a week? A month? A year?" (Maruna, 2001, p. 23).

Maruna's point highlights the importance of drawing a distinction between 'true' and 'temporary' desistance from offending. Researchers such as Graham & Bowling (1995) use a year of crime free living as sufficient evidence that the individual has desisted. Others such as Farrington, operate on a principle of 'persisting until proven innocent' proposing that "even a five or ten year crime free period is no guarantee that offending has terminated" (Farrington, 1986, p. 201). Researchers applying the concept of desistance as termination event generally imply that such an event marks a permanent cessation of offending behaviour; however such permanence can only be determined retrospectively. As Farrington puts it "the true age of desistance can be determined with certainty only after offenders die" (Farrington 1997, p. 373). In the evaluation research on recidivism the generally accepted follow-up period for the capture of recidivism is a period of two years except in the case of sexual offences where recidivism and reconviction can occur after significantly longer periods (Cann, Falshaw and Friendship, 2004).

Maruna (2001, 2006) draws an important distinction between primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance, according to Maruna, involves any meaningful cessation of criminality during the life of a persistent offender. Secondary desistance, of more relevance to the present study, involves an ongoing process which demands a "fundamental and intentional shift in the person's sense of self" (Maruna, 2001, p. 17) to the extent that the resumption of offending behaviour is no longer a conceivable option within the individual's reconstructed self-concept. In this way, secondary desistance is the study of an ongoing process of change which enables once persistent offenders to develop and maintain a crime-free way of living. Similarly, Sampson and Laub differentiate between termination as "the time at which criminal activity stops ... [and] desistance ... the causal process that supports the termination of offending" (2001, p. 11).

The lack of a consistently applied definition of desistance is a significant limitation within the existing literature and a challenge for researchers approaching the topic. Sampson and Laub (2001) contend that an objective definition of desistance cannot be formulated and the definition employed will reflect the particular aims and objectives of the research in question. As this research is concerned with psychological shifts that scaffold 'secondary' rather than

more behavioural 'primary' desistance, the following definition was adopted; *participants will be considered desisting when they report two years since last offence, express commitment to desistance and report significant broader lifestyle change*. In adopting this definition, the research reflects the literature recidivism (two years since last offence), while incorporating other elements of desistance as a 'process' rather than a 'termination'. Namely, that individuals report that they have no intention of committing crime in the future, and along with a minimum two year cessation of offending, report significant broader lifestyle change for example, meaningful employment, recovery from addiction or the formation of new social circles.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

As referred to in the opening chapter, desistance from offending behaviour has historically been relatively neglected within mainstream criminology in favour of examining the variables which influence the onset of criminality. Matza (1964) was amongst the first to highlight that the phenomenon of desistance, whereby the vast majority of offenders reliably cease offending in later life, presents a challenge to traditional, deterministic theories of crime wherein criminality is seen as a permanent, defining quality of the individual as opposed to something an individual may 'drift' in and out of over the course of life. In the past two decades, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the question of *why* an individual makes the choice to stop offending and more importantly *how* that choice is followed through with action and maintained in the long-term. This chapter will review the emergence of desistance as a concept and summarise some of the classic studies of the desistance phenomenon. The chapter will then move to discussing in more depth what the literature tells us about the psychology of desistance with a particular focus on the role of agency and motivation to change, the evolution of the individual's self concept, links between addiction recovery and desistance and the role of emotion and cognition.

2.1 Discovering Desistance

Longitudinal studies of crime over the course of life consistently reveal that criminal behaviour tends to peak in adolescence and declines into young adulthood. This 'age/crime curve' predicts that by age 28 most offenders have ceased involvement in criminal behaviour (Bluemstein & Cohen, 1987; Farrington et al.2006). That is to say; "desistance from crime is the norm rather than the exception" (Healy, 2010a, p. 4). The phenomenon of desistance is not easily accounted for in traditional deterministic theories of crime which would suggest that the presence of biological, psychological or sociological factors pre-dispose an individual to a life of persistent offending from which they can not easily extricate themselves.

Early explanations of the desistance phenomenon were largely ontogenic, centring on the concept of 'maturational reform' (Goering, 1919), whereby the individual simply 'ages out' of crime in a biological process not unlike puberty. In their pioneering longitudinal study of the prevalence of crime across the life course, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck concluded that "*aging is the only factor which emerges as significant in the reformative process*"

(Glueck & Glueck, 1937, p. 105). In later works, however, the Gluecks (1940, 1945) expressed discomfort with biological aging alone as sufficient explanation for desistance and added an element of emotional or psychological maturity to the concept of maturational reform. This component was underdeveloped in the work of the Gluecks and recognising this shortcoming they urged for more research to “*dissect maturation into its components*” (Glueck & Glueck, 1940, p. 270).

Building on the concept of maturational reform, researchers in the 1970s and 1980s began to examine what other components of maturity (aside from the physical) were linked to the individual ‘growing out of crime’. Knight and West (1975) examined the disintegration of peer groups as a pre-cursor to desistance while Osborn (1980) found that leaving the city where one grew up was associated with a reduction in subsequent offending. However, recognising that desistance was not merely related to objective changes in the circumstances of offenders, other researchers such as Meisenhelder (1982) and Shover (1983) began to turn their attention to shifts in the desisting offender’s self identity, for example the impact of becoming a parent or role model. Others began to look more closely at the emotional experience of desisting offenders such as the development of a sense of shame at one’s past behaviours (Leibrich, 1993) or fear at the consequences of persisting with offending (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986).

In a further attempt to deconstruct maturation, Sampson & Laub (1993, 2001, 2003, 2005) revisited 52 of the Gluecks’ original participants and examined their patterns of offending up to the age of 70. Their findings led them to develop one of the most enduringly influential sociogenic theories of desistance; ‘Life Course Theory’, which emphasises the importance of social bonds (which can be strengthened or weakened over the life-course) on the individual’s propensity to commit crime. Sampson and Laub argue that the development of social controls (for example, employment and marriage) alter patterns of offending behaviour by providing individuals with a ‘stake in conformity’ and sufficient motivation to maintain desistance on an ongoing basis. Although focused largely on external variables, Sampson and Laub also acknowledge the importance of *agency* - a more internal and subjective force which enables a ‘knifing off’ from offending behaviour and facilitates the establishment of the social bonds necessary to maintain a crime free way of life (Sampson and Laub, 2003). Critics of the life course approach argue that the role of agency is understated and strongly disputed the idea that “jobs somehow attach themselves to individuals” (Gottfredson &

Hirschi, 1990, p. 118). Furthermore, Sampson and Laub formed their theory of informal social control based exclusively on a sample of white male offenders who came into adulthood in the 1950s and thus their findings may not be generalisable to female or minority offenders or indeed to those who came of age within contemporary and more individualised social and economic environments. Though acknowledged in life course theory, the concept of agency (an internal subjective force for change) was largely neglected by early ontogenic and sociogenic accounts of desistance.

2.2 Choice, Agency and Change

Though the importance of purposive human agency or the will to change was alluded to in early theories of desistance, the concept was largely underdeveloped and remains vague in much of the contemporary literature on desistance (Healy, 2010a). Earlier accounts of the role of agency in desistance were influenced by rational choice theory and highlighted that desistance involved an element of volition or choice on the part of the individual (Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). Though making a choice to change or ‘desistance intentions’ (King, 2012) are undoubtedly an important element of the psychological processes underlying desistance, choice alone is not sufficient.

In addition to the role of choice or intention to change, the belief that one has the capacity to change is vital for desistance. In a key study Burnett (2004) followed 130 prisoners from pre-release to a 10 year follow up. Burnett found that while 80% of the sample expressed a desire to avoid re-offending, almost half felt that it was likely that they would re-offend. Importantly, participants who expressed confidence in their ability to sustain desistance from crime were less likely to have re-offended at the time of the ten year follow up. This finding suggests that along with desire or intention, a belief in one’s capacity to bring about change plays an important role in creating and maintaining desistance.

Coté’s (1997) research on agency is relevant to the study of desistance though it was not developed with ex-offenders in mind. Coté proposes that as a result of the individualisation of contemporary society, people increasingly rely on their own inner resources and skills to assist them in life. According to Coté, individuals who take a ‘default’ individualisation route are more inclined to be led by external circumstance and passing impulses while those who follow ‘developmental’ individualisation are more likely to carefully consider the options available to them and act in a way that will facilitate self-improvement - that is to say they

exercise agency. Using a measure of agency that included sense of purpose, resilience, self-esteem and locus of control, Coté found that university students who scored higher on agency were more likely to experience life success in terms of job satisfaction, personal development and goal attainment as measured at two year follow up. Similarly, along with the desire to change and the belief that they can change, those who successfully desist from criminality must have the capacity and determination to follow choice with action.

Despite increased attention in recent years, the concept of agency, like desistance itself, is not yet clearly defined. Contemporary studies revisiting the role of agency in desistance such as King (2012) and Le Bel, Burnett, Maruna and Bushway (2008) highlight the interaction of subjective agency and external social opportunities for change. Consensus has not been reached on the role of agency in motivating and sustaining desistance. For example, in a study of Irish probationers, Healy and O'Donnell (2008) used a definition of agency employed by McAdams (1993) which encompasses elements of self-mastery, status, achievement and empowerment and, contrary to other research in the area, found little evidence of agency in the narratives of probationers. However participants in their research were in the early stages of transition to desistance and Healy & O'Donnell acknowledge that the sample displayed a general ambivalence about reform which would preclude a strong sense of agency.

2.3 Remaking the Self

If, as proposed by Lemert (1967), the process of becoming criminal requires the 'reorganisation of the self' around the deviant label, the process of desistance must involve a remaking of the self. Qualitative research into the subjective experience of desistance such as that of Maruna (2001) and Farrall and Calverly (2006) has indicated that choosing and adapting to a crime free way of living does indeed involve deep and substantial change in the way that former offenders conceptualise themselves. Importantly, these studies examined the individual's self narrative - that is the story we tell ourselves about ourselves - in order to gain insight into the individual's sense of self. As Giddens declared "a persons identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going" (1991, p. 54).

In the Liverpool Desistance Survey, Shadd Maruna (2001) interviewed 65 individuals to gain an insight into their subjective experience and understanding of the process of desistance and

compared the accounts of those who had maintained a crime free way of life for in excess of one year with those who were still actively engaged in criminality. Maruna examined both the personality traits of his sample (considered to be fixed over time) and their self-identity which, he proposed, is more fluid and changeable over the life-course. Interestingly Maruna found that both desisting and persisting offenders shared similar personality traits including low levels of conscientiousness and agreeableness. Where his samples differed was their self narrative, with persisting offenders adhering to what Maruna termed the ‘condemnation script’ - viewing life as a hostile and negative experience with little scope for change. Those who had desisted, though sharing many ‘criminogenic’ personality traits, did so through their adherence to a ‘redemption script’ in their narrative construction of self. In the redemption script the individual is seen as inherently good with their previous offending arising from being a victim of society and circumstance. In the redemption script the criminal past of the offender is viewed as a necessary evil which led to their current phase of life whereby they can make amends - what Maruna called ‘making good’. Through generative work in parenthood, as a role model for others or as ‘wounded healers’ helping those caught in the trap of offending as they once were, the ex-offender achieves redemption. Importantly in Maruna’s account, the ex-offender does not construct a ‘new self’. Rather, what emerges during the process of desistance is their true self - the person they *really are* and despite their transgressions, always have been.

Maruna’s account of the evolution of the self concept in desisting offenders has been challenged more recently by Paternoster and Bushway (2009), who argue that desistance requires individuals to discard their own identity in favour of an alternative self. Paternoster and Bushway propose that the offender starts with a conception of a ‘working self’ - that is the self that they are faced with in the present. From this base they construct two alternate selves; the deterrent ‘feared self’ - that which they may become if they continue to offend and the motivating ‘possible self’ - that which they may become if they make the required changes to their lifestyle.

“Persons are committed to their working selves until they determine that the cost of this commitment is greater than the benefits. A perception that one may in fact turn out to become the feared self ... provides the initial motivation to change ... This initial motivation brings with it a change in preferences and social networks that stabilize the newly emerging self.”

Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, p. 1103

In this way, Partnoster & Bushway propose, the process of desistance does not involve an evolution of the individual's self concept but rather the feared self motivates change which, when scaffolded by social supports, facilitates the abandonment of the working self and the development of a new and distinct desisting self.

Though ex-offenders may internally 'remake' their selves to the extent that recidivism is no longer a viable option within their self concept, this evolution is not always recognised or facilitated by wider society. The literature on labelling theory (Becker, 1963; Downes, 1979) and stigma (Goffman, 1963) demonstrates that society may be hesitant to disregard the deviant 'master status' of ex-offenders and adheres to a view of 'persisting until proven innocent' in order to manage risk. This issue is particularly pertinent in this jurisdiction where (despite some progress¹) Ireland remains the only country within the European Union without legislative provision for convictions to become 'spent' after a period of time. Though having subjectively discarded the deviant sense of self, ex-offenders may be repeatedly reunited with the stigmatised deviant self when vetted for employment or education opportunities.

2.4 Cognitive Transformation: Thought, Attitude and Belief

The role of cognitive transformation (that is changes in the individual's style of thinking, attitudes and beliefs) was given increased attention after the emergence of the theory of social control as theorists recognised that not all individuals respond to available opportunities for change (e.g. employment or new relationships) in the same way despite a shared desire to reform. Working from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Giordano et al. (2002) developed a theory of cognitive transformation as a counter point to Sampson and Laub's theory of social control. Giordano et al. distinguish four types of closely related cognitive transformation that accompany desistance from crime, namely;

- a) A general cognitive openness to change
- b) Exposure and positive reaction to a potential 'hook for change'
- c) The ability to envisage a replacement self
- d) A transformation in the way the individual perceives deviant behaviour.

¹ For further discussion on the progress and limitations of the Spent Convictions Bill 2012 refer to Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2012 and Irish Human Rights Commission, 2012.

In the theory of cognitive transformation wider social context plays a secondary role by providing the opportunity for cognitive change to develop in a way that will facilitate desistance from offending. Thus ‘hooks for change’ (for example employment), are only relevant if they are seen as meaningful and realistic by the offender.

The Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS: Walters, 1995) was developed to measure eight cognitive thinking styles that support criminal behaviour;

1. Mollification (justifying/rationalising norm violating behaviour)
2. Cut-off (rapid elimination of psychological deterrents to criminal action e.g. fear)
3. Entitlement (an attitude of ownership or privilege)
4. Power orientation (using outward aggression to control/manipulate others)
5. Cognitive indolence (an inclination towards lazy thinking, short cut problem solving)
6. Discontinuity (difficulty following through on good intentions because of inadequate self discipline)
7. Sentimentality (self-centred attempts to atone for criminal acts through good deeds)
8. Superoptimism (overestimating one’s chances of avoiding negative consequences)

Employing this tool, Healy (2010b) used a mixed methods approach to study the interplay between nuanced cognitive shifts and social circumstance in a sample of 73 Irish offenders in the early stages of the transition to desistance (one month free from offending). Along with age and age at onset of offending, Healy identified that ‘criminal thinking style’ characterised by the eight features above is an important predictor of primary desistance however its role in secondary desistance is less than clear. Some elements of the PICTS (e.g. sentimentality) reflect thinking styles commonly identified in studies of long-term desisting offenders such as the Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna, 2001). This suggests that the relationship between thinking style and secondary desistance may be more complex than that of primary desistance. In addition to thinking style, Healy examined the role of attitudes to offending and did not find evidence that pro-criminal attitudes were a predictor of primary desistance. However, working under the framework developed by Giordano et al., change in the perception of deviance may be more important in the maintenance of secondary desistance than the achievement of primary desistance.

The role of cognitive processes remains unclear in much of the desistance literature. Pro-criminal attitudes have been shown to be a strong predictor of recidivism (Gendreau, Little and Goggin, 1996; Andrews and Bonta, 2006). However, the process of change in attitudes

towards offending is not clearly defined. In their analysis Merrington & Stanley (2004) argue that training offenders in cognitive skills, while producing a significant short-term effect, has little impact on long term recidivism.

As discussed earlier within the concept of agency, the belief in one's ability to reform is a significant predictor of successful desistance. More recently, led by research in the field of desistance from drug use (e.g. Chu 2007), researchers have turned to the question of spirituality and whether the belief in a higher power can impact on an individual's capacity to desist from offending. In their qualitative study of retrospective narratives of change, Schroeder and Frana, propose that 'spirituality/religion is used by men currently undergoing change as a form of emotional comfort, a distraction from current stressors, and as a factor demarcating the transition from deviance to a more conventional life' (2009, p. 718). This suggests that developing or nurturing spirituality can act as an additional support in the process of desistance.

2.5 Addiction Recovery and Desistance from Crime

It is widely acknowledged that persistent criminal offending is, in many cases, closely linked to issues of addiction and substance misuse. In a survey of the psychiatric status of Irish prisoners, Kennedy et al. (2005) found that 59% of prisoners were drug dependant while 45% had an addiction to alcohol. Only 26% of prisoners in the study had neither a drug nor an alcohol problem. Recently, research has emerged which begins to draw parallels between the processes of recovery from substance misuse and desistance from crime. Healy (2010a) proposes that offenders who have refrained from offending even for long periods are vulnerable to relapse and (as in the literature on addiction recovery), relapse should be considered a normal part of the desistance process. In a fascinating paper, Marsh (2011) investigates the intersection of narrative identity change in the criminological literature and the well known blueprint for change laid out in the '12 steps' (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001) advocated by recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. In a small sample of Irish desisting offenders Marsh identifies several themes in the experience of desisting offenders that adhere to both the 12-step model and desistance literature including addiction as a lack of power, recovery as processes of maintenance, and the importance of generative work. In his analysis, Marsh suggests that the 12 steps can be a

valuable tool for identity reconstruction for those involved in the interlinked process of addiction recovery and desistance from offending.

2.6 The Role of Emotion

In the words of Stanko (2002, p. 367) “criminology as a discipline is seeped in the emotionality of its subject”. The ‘hurt’ of the victim, ‘contempt’ of the perpetrator, ‘fear’ of the public and ‘regret’ of the authorities are to be found in all aspects of the study of crime. Katz (1999) explored the powerful role of emotion in ‘seducing’ individuals into deviance however much less attention has been paid to what role might be played by emotion in motivating individuals out of deviance and into a life of conformity.

Farrall and Calvary (2006) provide an insightful account of the role of emotion throughout the desistance process from the early stages when hope can act as a powerful motivating force, to the later stages when individuals come to regard their past with shame and guilt (thus changing their attitude to offending behaviour) and finally to a sense of pride and accomplishment in how far the desisting offender has come and how much they have achieved. Pride encourages further investment in the remade self and acts as a further barrier to recidivism.

The role of hope is apparent in Maruna’s (2001) desisting sample and he describes them as displaying an exaggerated sense of control and optimism over their futures compared to the pessimistic assessments of the persisting group. Interestingly, given the considerable barriers to reintegration amongst ex-offenders, Maruna suggests that the out-look of persisters may be closer to reality while the desisting participants employed a useful cognitive distortion borne more out of emotional hope than any rational assessment of their situation.

The founding father of restorative justice Braithwaite (1989), discusses two types of shame relative to recidivism; ‘reintegrative shame’ (where offenders regret their criminal act but maintain a sense of internal worth) and ‘stigmatizing shame’ (where both the act and the self are sources of shame). The former, argues Braithwaite, can facilitate desistance while the latter can foster resentment, defiance and further acts of offending. The concept of reintegrative shaming and its role in desistance has received some support in recent desistance research, for example Le Bel et al. (2008) identified that a sense of regret about one’s past behaviour contributes positively to the desistance process while a sense of being

stigmatized was a predictor of reconviction and reimprisonment even when other social problems were controlled for.

Once the ex-offender has moved through the phases of desistance tied to the emotions of hope, shame and regret they can feel a sense of immense pride in their transition, their new sense of self, their generativity ('giving back') and/or the achievement of their goals, sentiments expressed by a participant in the research of Farrall and Calvary (2006);

“I’ve got him (points to baby), I’ve got (partner) I make sure me bills are paid, me shopping’s on, me foods in the table. I’ve got me employment ... I haven’t got much but what I have got I can say I worked for. It’s not as if I’ve stolen anything. I’ve bought and paid for it, I’ve worked hard for it”
Participant Tony

Farrall and Calvary, 2006, p. 123.

2.7 Conclusion

Despite the valuable contribution of the research and literature described above it is important to acknowledge that desistance is still, to some extent, on the fringes of mainstream criminology. Tellingly, there is no reference made to desistance in the indices of some of the best-selling undergraduate text books in the discipline (for example Newburn, 2007, 2009). The focus of emerging contemporary research in desistance had returned, by and large, to the impact of external factors such as probation supervision (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; King, 2013), culture (Calverley, 2012) and the influence of space/place in fostering and supporting desistance (Flynn, 2012). For this reason, this dissertation is guided primarily by theories such that of Maruna (2001) and Giadorno et al. (2002) which are over a decade old. It is hoped that this research will go some way towards bridging this gap in the literature by giving a contemporary account of the role of internal and subjective factors in the process of desistance.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Methodology

The following chapter describes the research methodology used to answer the research question; namely ‘what are the psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending?’ In addition, the chapter provides a justification for why these particular research methods were chosen. The research design and methodology employed are described and the chapter also examines issues of sampling and access, ethical considerations and methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes by considering the strengths and weaknesses of the research design and chosen methodology.

3.1 Research Design

A phenomenological approach to the study of the psychological processes underlying desistance from offending was employed. The phenomenological approach is one that seeks insight through examining the lived experience of research participants and as such, is ideally suited to an exploratory study of personal, subjective and intangible psychological processes. The primary purpose of phenomenological research is to obtain in-depth reflections by participants regarding their experience of an identified phenomenon (in this case desistance from offending) to gain a better understanding of their subjective, personal experience (Creswell, 2007). A fundamental tenant of the phenomenological approach is that different individuals exposed to the same set of environmental circumstances will experience, interpret and react to these circumstances in different ways. "Each individual extracts a subjective psychological environment from the objective surroundings and that subjective environment shapes both personality and subsequent interaction" (Caspi and Moffitt, 1995, p. 485). Because the purpose of this research was to collect rich data on the 'psychological environment' of desisting offenders (as opposed to some objectively measurable truth), a phenomenological approach was deemed the most appropriate in this case.

The ‘self-narrative’ has played a key role in the study of desistance since Maruna’s seminal *Making Good* (2001). Following in this tradition, this research employed a narrative approach to the study of lived human experience. The narrative approach is particularly relevant to the study of the desistance phenomenon because, as highlighted in the literature review, the nature of the individual’s ‘self-story’ can have a significant impact on their ability to achieve and sustain desistance from crime. For desisting offenders, the self narrative is not only a tool to make sense of the past but is also thought to have “significant effects in the present and

toward the future by eliciting appropriate responses that condition the agent's current disposition" (Vaughan, 2007, p. 399). This dissertation used qualitative, semi-structured interviewing to collect rich data regarding the self narratives of seven desisting offenders. In doing this, the research examines what participants' lived experience can tell us about the psychology of desistance in terms of their experience of maturation, choice, sense of agency, self-identity, cognitive transformation and the emotional experience of desistance from offending.

3.2 Research Methods

The most common research design for a phenomenological approach is qualitative (Wilson, 2002). The potential relevance of qualitative research methods to the study of criminology was established by the ethnographic studies carried out by the Chicago School in the 1920s and 30s and reinforced by the contribution of seminal studies such as Howard Becker's (1963) study of marijuana use which led to the development of the hugely influential 'labelling theory' of criminality. Though a quantitative approach would be appropriate in studying the more external correlates of desistance (e.g. marriage, employment, probation supervision etc.) this research aimed to explore the subjective psychological processes underlying desistance from offending and thus a more flexible, qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate. Though quantitative measures undoubtedly provide an insight into objectively measurable correlates of desistance, a quantitative approach offers little insight into *why* and *how* offenders reform and rebuild their lives, what Healy (2010a) refers to as the 'black box' of desistance. This research aims to open that 'black box' by eliciting detailed personal narratives from participants.

The choice of a qualitative interview approach is backed up by the research methodology literature. Robson (2002) outlines several scenarios where a qualitative research interview is most appropriate including "where a study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants ... [and] where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed" (2002, p. 271) - in this case the phenomenon of desistance. Interviewing is the data collection method of choice because, as Fontana and Frey put it, "interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (2000, p. 645). Each of the three types of interview (structured, semi-structured and unstructured) have their strengths and limitations and after careful consideration, the semi-structured approach was considered most appropriate for this

study. The researcher was concerned that the use of structured interviewing would not allow the study to adequately capture the complexity of each individual participant's unique self-narrative. Selecting the semi-structured approach maintained the flexibility and natural flow required to adequately reflect each participant's subjective lived experience. At the other end of the spectrum, an unstructured interview would limit the ability of the research to focus on internal psychological processes (as opposed to the influence of external factors) in achieving and sustaining desistance. Underlying psychological processes can at times be less than obvious, even to the participant themselves, and so some degree of structure was deemed necessary to maintain focus on the internal experience of desistance wherever possible. Adopting a semi-structured approach led the researcher to design an interview schedule (see Appendix C) structured around the key themes that emerged as significant in the literature review while still taking sufficient care not to lead interviewees in a way that would detract from their individual self-story. Interviews were structured using main, open-ended questions followed by probes and invitations which allowed the researcher to gain additional information and expansion on certain key points where necessary. In addition, the researcher was at all times conscious of allowing participants the space to tell their personal narrative freely. Finally, the adoption of a semi-structured approach allowed for some degree of comparison between the responses of participants which may not have been possible if an unstructured interview technique was employed (May, 2004).

3.3 Sampling and Access

One of the major challenges in research into desisting offenders is that of access. Desisting offenders by definition are not a homogenous group but a 'hidden population' who no longer engage in the criminal behaviour that once labelled them 'offenders'. This difficulty is by no means exclusive to desisting offenders, for example Best et al. (2008) discuss the 'intrinsically problematic' recruitment of participants for studies of long-term addiction recovery because such individuals have developed a wide variety of life courses and identities and in many cases may not wish to expose or revisit their past. In the case of long-term desisting offenders, many are no longer linked in with criminal justice agencies such as probation or offender reintegration initiatives. Desisting offenders progress their lives in as many diverse directions as individuals in the general population and as such access can be particularly problematic. As Maruna explains; "taking a 'random' sample of career criminals or desisting people is impossible, as the universe from which it would have to be drawn is unknown and unknowable" (2001 p. 44).

Given these difficulties, probability sampling was not a feasible approach and this research does not attempt to present a randomised sample or generalisable findings. As an exploratory study, the research employed a targeted, purposive sampling technique in order to gain access to individuals who have a history of persistent offending, who report no involvement in criminality for over two years, have expressed confidence in and commitment to the cessation of offending and have experienced broader lifestyle change along with desistance from criminality. Faced with these same challenges of access and sampling, other contemporary researchers in the field of desistance have employed purposive approaches for example, Marsh (2011) used personal and professional contacts to secure a small sample of long-term desisting offenders who were also in recovery from addiction and Healy (2010b) studying the early stages of desistance sampled ex-offenders who met several defined criteria from the client list of five probation teams in Dublin.

The researcher employed three distinct methods in order to get access to the target sample. Firstly, the researcher used pre-existing personal and professional contacts from her experience working with ex-offenders in the community and voluntary sector in Dublin to gain access to desisting offenders. Secondly the researcher sought referrals from those working in an education and employment support capacity with ex-offenders in particular staff of the Local Employment Service Network and the Pathways Project (an outreach initiative of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board working with prisoners and ex-prisoners). Finally the researcher employed a 'snowball sampling' technique where by potential participants were suggested by others participating in the research. One of the significant benefits of snowball sampling is that it allows access to traditionally hard-to-reach populations (Noy, 2008) and this was certainly the case in the current research where an initial sample of three participants expanded to seven through the use of participant referrals. A brief profile of each of the seven research participants is laid out in section 4.1. Despite the success of the snowball sampling technique, the sample size remains small and findings are far from representative of all desisting offenders however this limitation is balanced by the ability of the study to provide rich, detailed self-narratives which may not have been possible with a larger sample given the limited timeframe in which the research was conducted.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This research dissertation will adhere to the codes of ethics set out by the British Society of Criminology and the Psychological Society of Ireland. As with any research involving the disclosure of sensitive personal information by participants, the issue of full and informed consent was of utmost importance. Participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purposes of the study (see Appendix A) along with a copy of the research proposal. Each participant indicated their agreement to take part voluntarily by means of completing a consent form (see Appendix B). Furthermore, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and to have all data held regarding their participation destroyed.

A second key ethical concern within the present research was that of ensuring confidentiality for participants. The Psychological Society of Ireland emphasise the importance of securely holding information in their code of ethics, committing to “store, handle, transfer and dispose of all records, both written and unwritten ... in a way that attends to the needs for privacy and security” (Psychological Society of Ireland, 2010, p. 6). With a view to ensuring confidentiality for all participants in the current study, interview recordings were held securely with appropriate encryption and destroyed after transcription. All participants were fully informed of the procedures for storing and destroying data. Pseudonyms are used for all participants and extreme care was taken to ensure that no potentially identifying information appeared in the final dissertation. Thus while interviews were transcribed verbatim, the sample interview transcript included in Appendix D has been further edited to remove any potentially identifying details.

The British Society of Criminology’s code of ethics (2006, Section 4iv) states that; “offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law: researchers should therefore consider the circumstances in which they might be required to divulge information to legal or other authorities, and make such circumstances clear to participants when seeking their informed consent”. For the purpose of this study, confidentiality was assured to participants except in the case of information relating to (a) potential harm to self or others, (b) child protection concerns or (c) previously un-reported illegal behaviour. Because all participants in the study had, by definition, committed crime (some of which may have gone unreported) the third criteria was of particular concern within this study. In order to avoid a scenario where the researcher was put in a position of having the report previously unreported offences,

participants were fully informed of the ethical responsibility of the researcher to report such disclosures and interviews were structured in such a way as to focus primarily on the individual's experiences since desisting as opposed to their particular offending history.

In the British Society of Criminology code of ethics concerning responsibilities towards research participants, the society "recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research". (British Society of Criminology, 2006, section 4i). Due to the highly personal and sensitive nature of the information that was the focus of the present research, there was a possibility that participants could experience a negative emotional reaction to their involvement. To counteract this, the researcher closely monitored the reactions of participants over the course of the interview and was willing to pause, redirect or end the interview if it was felt that a participant was experiencing a negative emotional reaction to the line of questioning. In addition, participants were fully informed of their right to decline any questions that they were not comfortable answering and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage during the process. All participants in the research took part in a post-interview de-brief and did not report any negative emotional or psychological effects brought on by their involvement. All participants interviewed were happy for their responses to be used in the final dissertation.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection took place over a two-month period in July and August 2013. Potential interviewees were initially contacted by phone or met in person and the researcher outlined the aims and objectives of the research. Participants then received a written copy of the research proposal, an information sheet on the research and a consent form. Interviews took place at several quiet and private locations which were the choice of the participants. Interviews ranged between 35 minutes and 1 hour 32 minutes in duration with an average length of 53 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of participants and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. None of the participants in the research expressed reservations regarding their interviews being recorded and the recording of interviews was not found to impact on the quality of data collected as, after several opening questions, both interviewer and interviewee became unaware of the recording equipment. The process of transcription was arduous and time consuming with each 60 minutes of digital recording taking up to 8 hours to transcribe. Though undoubtedly labour intensive, the

transcription process had significant benefits in ensuring maximum familiarity with the data collected prior to analysis.

It is imperative to note the importance of reflexivity on data collection. Within qualitative research the researcher is the tool of data collection and their presence and demeanour can impact on the nature and quality of data collected. If one acknowledges that the self-narrative of the individual is a construction, it is also important to acknowledge that the presence of the interviewer and the structure of the interview can have a significant impact on how the narrative is constructed and relayed in that particular situation (Bryman, 2012). The effects of this phenomenon were minimised wherever possible within the current research by the avoidance of leading questions and prompts and by building rapport with participants. Because four of the seven participants were unknown to the researcher prior to the interviews taking place, rapport building was of particular importance with this study given the sensitive nature of the information being discussed. Patenaude (2004) refers to the considerable importance of rapport building when it comes to qualitative data collection and argues that rich and useful data cannot be gathered without some degree of affinity and connection between interviewer and interviewee. The researcher built rapport with participants through making them feel at ease, providing a non-judgemental response, use of humour and by emphasising to participants that they had valuable insight and experience to contribute to the research. Similarly it was important that the researcher fostered a degree of 'legitimacy' in her own role because, in recruiting participants and ensuring their optimal participation in the interview process it is vital that participants feel that the researcher is someone worth sharing their experience with (Patenaude, 2004).

3.6 Data Analysis

This research adopted the grounded theory strategy of qualitative data analysis developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Grounded theory can be defined as "theory that was derived from data, systemically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, theory and analysis stand in close relationship to one another" (1998, p. 12). Two core features of the grounded theory approach are that it is concerned with the formation of theory from data and that it is recursive, so data collection and analysis occur in tandem referring back to each-other (Bryman, 2012). In adopting the grounded theory approach, the transcription and analysis of interviews previously carried out informed both the structure and analysis of subsequent interviews.

An important tool of the grounded theory approach is the method of coding of transcribed data into common themes or areas of interest. This allows the researcher to examine what are the dominant themes emerging from the data and to explore similarities and differences in the participants' responses to interview questions. After transcription, the data was carefully analysed and coded into key concepts and themes. Data was coded under five primary themes which had consistently emerged as important within the desistance literature, namely (1) psychological maturation, (2) the role of choice (3) remaking the self (4) cognitive transformation and (5) the role of emotion. Because of the flexible nature of the qualitative, semi-structured interview approach several other thematic codes including (i) the evolution of empathy, (ii) the professional ex-offender and (iii) anger and fear were identified during analysis and these are discussed in the following chapter. The emergence of sub-themes that were not originally identified in the review of the literature is testament to the appropriateness of a flexible, qualitative research design for the purposes of the current study.

3.7 Strengths and Limitations

This research benefits from many of the advantages of employing a qualitative phenomenological approach including richness and intensity of detail, insight into psychological experience and answering questions of self-narrative and subjective meaning. Nonetheless as with much research at Masters dissertation level, the research was limited by both time and word count allowed. In addition, the small sample size and non-representative nature of the sample means that the research findings are not by any means generalisable to all desisting offenders. This limitation is balanced by the opportunity afforded to the researcher to conduct a deep and thorough examination of the subjective experience of research participants in a way would not have been possible with larger sample given the limited scope of the present study.

The psychological processes under examination are not empirically observable phenomena therefore the research relied exclusively on the self-reported experience of participants. One notable limitation of studying personal change retrospectively is that people's recollections of past events are influenced by post-event rationalisations, unconscious distortions and memory failures (Farrall, 2006). Therefore self-stories such as those explored in this study represent personal perspectives and 'theories of reality' not necessarily objective truth (Epstein & Erskine, 1983). However, located as it is within the phenomenological paradigm, this

research proposes that understanding the way an individual understands him or herself can be as insightful and valuable as any empirically measurable phenomena.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Research Findings

As described in the methodology chapter, interview transcripts were thematically analysed using the theoretical frameworks laid out in the review of the literature. Though each of the participant's narratives were uniquely personal, a number of primary and sub themes emerged which are laid out in the following chapter. Before discussing these themes a brief outline of profile of research participants is given in section 4.1.

4.1 Participant Profile

Seven participants took part in interviews for this research. Of these, three were previously known to the researcher either in a personal or professional capacity. As outlined in the introduction, participants were deemed suitable to take part in the study if they met the following criteria; that it was a minimum of two years since their last (self-reported) involvement in criminality; that they expressed a commitment to living without involvement in crime and that they reported significant broader lifestyle change for example, recovery from substance misuse, securing alternative education or employment, building new social circles etc. A brief profile of each participant is presented in the table below. In order to assure anonymity each of the participants has been allocated a pseudonym.

Table 4.1: Participant Profile

Participant	Age	Desistance Years	Broader Lifestyle Change
"John"	36	7	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction and is currently employed in a supportive capacity with individuals in recovery from addiction
"Laura"	29	3	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction and is returning to education to study childcare
"Michael"	27	2	Participant has completed an educational course in health & fitness and is currently job seeking in this area
"Tom"	58	17	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction, has undertaken a variety of educational courses and is currently working in an educational support capacity with ex-offenders

“David”	35	10	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction and has engaged in a variety of educational courses. He is currently working in a supportive capacity with ex-offenders
“Christian”	50	5	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction and is currently embarking on an educational course in the legal field
“Darren”	47	12	Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction and is currently working in the performing arts

Though not initially a target group for the study, all bar one of the participant’s reported that at one time they experienced addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling and the links between desistance and addiction recovery emerged as a significant theme within the study discussed in section 4.4.

Each of the participants reported having at one time been a ‘persistent’ offender. The nature of their offences varied greatly from low level theft in order to sustain a drug addiction to more serious violent offending, involvement in organised crime and drug-trafficking. With the exception of one participant, all had served a custodial sentence with sentence severity ranging from a period of several months to seventeen years. Three of the participants interviewed are currently working in a supportive capacity with ex-offenders or substance misusers and so their perspectives on desistance were informed by both personal and practitioner experience. In addition, several participants had completed educational courses in the area of psychology, criminal justice and the social sciences and their familiarity with desistance theory added an additional layer of depth to their interviews.

4.2 Psychological Maturation

The concept of psychological maturation, first alluded to in the work of the Gluecks, emerged as a significant theme throughout the interview process with four of the participants directly referencing a consciousness of their age or a new found sense of maturity as a preventative factor in returning to criminality.

Before like jail was an occupational hazard like, you get caught - you get caught. Where as now the thoughts of doing ten years like ... I'm getting on like (laughs). I'm thirty five like, the thoughts of doing another ten to fifteen like ... Do you know what I mean? ... You get a bit old for jail and the jail becomes full of like younger kids, it's a young mans game basically, you know? I'm gone too old for jail. You become conscious of that.

Participant David

In addition, several participants referenced their youthful foolishness as a pre-cursor to their involvement in crime and expressed a sense of being far removed, even judgmental of their youthful selves.

When I look back you know it was crazy, I didn't have a clue, never thought things out, you know? I would have grown up an awful lot since then. Looking back you know I just think 'what a fucking eejit'.

Participant John

I was just a stupid young fella wasn't I? I thought I was the business. I'm not making excuses now here but when I think back I hadn't a clue what I was doing. I never used my head. I just did what I wanted and fuck everything else ... I wasn't thinking you know?

Participant Michael

In terms of deconstructing psychological maturation two key sub-themes arose during the analysis of the data; an increased stake in conformity and a more evolved sense of empathy for others.

4.2.1: A Stake in Conformity

A heightened sense of psychological investment in one's new way of living was a recurring theme, particularly for those who had a higher number of desistance years. This fear of loss or returning to old ways was particularly evident with reference to family relationships. Participant Laura spoke of the impact on her daughter if she were to return to offending;

I couldn't do that to her. Not after everything she's been through with me. (Pause)
No way. I wasn't always there for her when she was real little and all but I'm trying, you know? I'm trying me best to make up for that now. Just to be there for her and do me best ... that's all I can do now.

Participant Laura

Other participants spoke of the difficulty of re-establishing their family relationships after a period of imprisonment and the threat to those relationships were the individual to return to crime.

I would be in situations I suppose where it would feel great just to you know, get into a row with somebody and I don't ... and there's lots of reasons why. I suppose one of the biggest reasons is that I have a responsible job and I would lose an awful lot and I've grandchildren now ... and I would spend a great deal of time with them and that makes me life, all the much better and I wouldn't like to lose that.

Participant Tom

The four participants who were employed at the time of interview spoke at length of how they felt rewarded by their careers and those involved in working with ex-offenders indicated that working with this client group kept the nature of offending 'relevant' for them and increased their awareness of how much they stood to lose should they return to criminality.

4.2.2 The Evolution of Empathy

A second sub-theme which emerged within the concept of psychological maturation was the widening of social circles to include individuals from all walks of life and with this, an ability to empathise with different types of people (for example, authority figures) which would have eluded them in the past.

That gave me an understanding not only of meself but of other people. So, for the first time in a lot of ways, I was empathizing with other people other than me family, say. So I can empathise with a guard or a prison officer or ... you know?

Participant Tom

Well empathy means that I, that I can actually deal with what the other person is feeling when I'm doing something to that person. If I'm trying to you know manipulate someone or if I'm trying to force someone to do something that they don't want to do or if I'm threatening someone, or I'm being abusive towards them, that I can actually feel the pain that they're feeling, if the shoe was on the other foot.

Participant Christian

An increased insight into the feelings and perspectives of others combined with a ‘slowing’ of thought processes and increased awareness of the consequences of one’s actions (discussed in section 4.7) were key components identified by participants in the process of psychologically maturing out of crime.

4.3 Choosing Change

Each of the research participants felt that they had made a conscious choice to change their lives. Reflecting the concept of desistance as a process rather than an event, several participants described the choice as a gradual process, with academic success or receiving the correct support at the right time fortifying their initial decision to search for a new way of living. For others however, the element of choice was quite sudden and definitive with participant Christian describing it as a “white light” or “an epiphany”, while participant Darren described a period of serious ill-health after which he found the transition out of addiction and criminality relatively straightforward. Interestingly, it emerged within several of the narratives that, while feeling they had made a conscious choice to desist, several participants did so at a time when they felt there were no other alternatives available to them.

A choice ... yeah ... definitely I did. But then again things were so bad that there was no other choice ... It was a choice ... It was definitely a choice but it was a choice with no other option. It was that or back inside or into the ground. That was my choice.

Participant John

The concept of agency (the force that sustains the will to change) was as elusive and difficult to define for participants within their own experience as it often appears to be within the research literature. One participant described the gulf between choice and sustained action as the ‘million dollar question’. One aspect of agency that did emerge as significant within the narratives of participants was an increased sense of self-efficacy and sense of internal control over their decision making and behaviours. As participant Christian describes; “today I can actually be mindful and make the choice, because today if I choose to act out, I can act out you know and the joy of that is that I know the consequences”.

4.4: Desistance and Recovery

Because six of the seven participants reported experience of addiction or substance misuse, the interconnectedness of the psychology of addiction recovery and desistance was a recurring theme during the interview process to the extent that it was difficult, at times, to untangle the two within the narratives of participants. Participants who had experience of both addiction and offending tended to discuss recovery from addiction and desistance from crime as one singular experience rather than two distinct processes. Participant Laura made a direct link between the onset of her addiction and her involvement in criminality;

It was me addiction that made me do...made me rob and all. It was just feeding me habit was all really at the end of the day. I'm not some big criminal, if I hadn't got involved with the drugs and that then there's no way I would have done what I done - no way.

Participant Laura

For other participants their involvement in criminality pre-dated their issues with addiction and substance misuse, though their substance misuse was described as a contributory factor in enabling them to behave in a manner not consistent with their inner sense of self

In a way that sense that I've had of meself has always been the same. What's different is how I behave. I've always had that good feeling about meself inside but then once I took drink or drugs I lost the run of meself.

Participant Tom

In addition, two participants directly referenced the 12 step programme (Alcoholics Anonymous 2001) as a significant contributory factor in both their recovery from addiction and their desistance from crime. Throughout the interview process the parallels between the psychological experience of recovery and desistance were clearly evident in the narratives of participants with previous experience of addiction.

4.5 Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin: Desistance and the Core Self

One of the most consistent themes to emerge within each of the participants self narratives was the sense of a core self, a positive inner self that was always within, even when their behaviour was not consistent with the nature of that self;

I knew that I was, I was too soft to be a drug dealer I was too soft ... You know? I'm a sucker for a sob story, you know what I mean? You need to be a cold hearted bastard to get on with it. If someone owes you two grand and they don't have it, well 'you have to have it' ... that fucking thing, you know what I mean? You have to have that thing and you can do it for a while but it gets to the stage..."

Participant David

It wasn't all I did you know. I was always into me sports and keeping fit and that so it wasn't the only thing in my life even when I was [involved in crime]. Even when I was messing about that wasn't who I was, you know ... inside. There's good parts to me too and there always have been"

Participant Michael

Yeah, I always like that [kind to people] only I'd rob you as well. You know? I'd help you cross the road but I'd rob your bag when I get you across you know ... You know that type - I was a robbing pig! But I was always well mannered, I was always respectful to people, like older people, like sitting on a bus if a woman got on I would be the first to jump up, you know?

Participant Darren

In reconciling this good core self with previous violent and criminal behaviours that would have been at odds with this sense of self participants displayed a variety of techniques including normalisation ("if you're in a housing estate where normality is that you know your Dad comes home drunk every night, everybody robs, you know it's normal to dislike the police"); justification ("I believe all this happened to me because I was never taught how to be a person. You know from the time I was a child I was taught how to read and write and so I could get a job so I could do, clean the bins and aspire to a certain level in society and no more") and rationalisation ("I never killed anyone and you can rationalise it and justify it well I was I was only selling ... 'but I wasn't selling outside of schools' or...I wasn't selling on the fucking street' do you know what I mean, I was moving boxes"). In addition there was significant evidence of a 'redemption script'; the sense of it being necessary to have gone through their particular journey in order to reach their current stage in life. It is possible that the redemption script is employed as a means of reconciling the past criminal behaviour with the core 'good self'.

I'm not really ashamed of it, I'm not proud either but I'm not ashamed of it. It is what it is, we are where we are and if I hadn't of went through what I went through it wouldn't have made me the person I am now and I'm quite happy in meself these days, you know?

Participant David

Overall, participants displayed a strong sense of having an evolving core self. Discussing the possibility of returning to old ways, participants generally distinguished between feared possible behaviours, distinct from a potential change in self, which they generally viewed as consistent throughout periods of offending and desistance.

4.6 Making Good

The importance of ‘giving back’ and helping others was a significant theme across each of the seven interviews. Three of the participants were employed in a professional capacity working in a supportive role with ex-offenders or those in recovery from addiction. A fourth participant worked in an advocacy capacity with prisoners and ex-prisoners. The other participants each described a wish to ‘give back’ or prevent others from making the same mistakes either through parenthood, peer support or working with young people.

4.6.1. The Professional Ex-Offender

The three participants who were employed in a supportive capacity with ex-offenders/addicts expressed that they were drawn to this field because it enabled them to make use of their past experiences in their professional capacity; “you have the stigma of having a conviction as well then that holds you back whereas here it actually goes for me” (Participant David). Participants also felt strongly that having genuine lived experience of addiction, offending, imprisonment and barriers to reintegration made them more competent in their profession as it gave them increased levels of empathy with their clients and an ability to meet clients ‘where they are at’ rather than coming to them with their own progression agenda.

I try not to have an attitude, you know at all. I suppose I try to, [look at clients] like a blank slate and all...I'd try to just meet them where they're at. A lot of them are soft you know, they're not evil people they're not bad people and that, they're just caught in a situation and they can't get themselves out. I couldn't see it, you know, when I was in it.

Participant John

I've a friend who is a psychotherapist and she's the best person she's amazing but because she hadn't got that sense of what it's like in prison I've a little bit of an edge on her. Not much.

Participant Tom.

In addition to feeling more competent in their roles, participants expressed a genuine pride and feeling of fulfilment at seeing their clients' progress, potentially heightened because of their first-person lived experience of the barriers faced by their client group.

Some days I come home and some days it's real rewarding and I come home thinking I could have actually helped that chap go through that or pointed someone in the right direction and I get a kick out of that, so it's sort of like a selfish thing too because I get a kick out of that.

Participant David

4.6.2: Authenticity and Respect

Of the participants not professionally involved in support work, several expressed an increased sense of respect for support workers who had a similar background to themselves and they reported placing a greater value on their dealings with professionals who could relate to them on the basis of shared experience.

You know if I'm sitting in a room with a girl who has come out of college and em, she's done addiction studies and she's learned all the buzzwords for addiction and she's sitting there and she's never used a drug in her life ... She has no concept of what it's like to be an addict. Whereas if I'm sitting with a person who's gone through it for twenty or thirty years or five or six years, whatever and gone through the emotions and the feelings and everything else that's gone with it and knows and then ... well I know I can't sit there and bullshit him or her but I know I can sit and bullshit you, if you've never been an addict

Participant Christian.

The identification of this sub-theme within the broader theme of generativity and 'giving back' suggests that the role of the desisting offender as a professional may be mutually beneficial in terms of maintaining the 'wounded healer's' own fulfilment and stake in conformity and also increasing the legitimacy of the support they provide in the eyes of their client group.

4.7: Cognitive Change: Thought, Attitude and Belief

Participants displayed an awareness of having experienced significant cognitive shifts, most particularly in the areas of a 'slowing' of thought processes, changed attitudes to offending and, for some, a developing sense of spirituality or belief in a power greater than themselves.

4.7.1 Thought Processes

The slowing or calming of thought processes was identified as a strong theme within the research. Several participants identified one-to-one counselling as the means by which they achieved more effective ways of thinking about and reacting to situations while others cited peer support, or prison based therapeutic initiatives such as the 'Alternatives to Violence'

programme. In several cases, participants felt that this learned ability think more deeply and rationally when confronted with a given situation had equipped them with the ability to form more appropriate reactions than they would have previously had.

Talking to people especially the people in [offender reintegration programme] who had come before me around ‘think before you act’ and they used to say ‘think -think-think-think react’ so you’d think-think-think-think before you react
Participant Tom

I understand meself a lot more but I’m still the same hot head, I’d still see red and all and want to burst someone but I suppose the at least I’d take the time to figure out *why* I want to burst someone now (laughing) and I don't ... I suppose that’s important too (laughing).

Participant John

4.7.2: Attitudes to Criminality

In terms of attitudes to criminality, participants were generally non judgmental towards those who are still involved in crime. Their description of friends and acquaintances still involved in criminality were largely characterised by pity and a sense of frustration rather than any negative judgement on their continued involvement in crime. Participant David recounted a visit to share his story in St Patrick’s Institution for young offenders and his impression of the inmates there;

The last time I went in I was like ‘I can’t identify with this’ and they’re there and they’re like (puts on accent) ‘I’m going to get out and I’m going rob this and that’ all kind of gangster talk and I just think ‘yis poor little fuckers’ (laughs). Do you know what I mean? (laughs) That was me twenty year ago running around ...
Participant David

Interestingly, several participants made a distinction between two distinct ‘types’ of criminal offender; one type of offender (like themselves) that has the ability to desist and another type of ‘vicious’, ‘dangerous’ or ‘violent’ offender whose chances of successful desistance and reintegration were less in their eyes.

4.7.3: Belief Systems

Two of the participants in the research described themselves as conventionally religious while an additional two identified as atheists. The remaining three participants spoke more generally about a sense of spirituality, a connectedness with others that they feel developed in tandem with their desistance from criminality.

I started to feel, this gut feeling that it had something to do with spirituality and it had something to do with my sense of being connected to the world because that was my biggest problem. I wasn't you know. I lived my whole life, had a wife and kids and I didn't feel connected for some reason

Participant Tom

Though none of the participants identified spiritual belief as a key factor in achieving primary desistance, several participants mentioned developing spirituality as a source of comfort and fulfilment in their current life stage. In this way, for some ex-offenders, spirituality may act as a factor in supporting secondary desistance from crime.

4.8: Desistance and Emotion

When exploring the emotional landscape of the desisting offender one of the strongest themes to emerge was a certain level of difficulty in identifying and naming the emotions the participants were feeling at any given time as illustrated in the quotes below;

I struggled even identifying emotions rather than struggled with emotion, I struggled even identifying what they are to me like, 'is it?' ... Em I just, feeling sad or am I feeling insecure? Am I feeling fearful? I struggled separating what emotion is what if you understand.

Participant Christian

I went for counselling, and she started explaining to me and she'd ask me 'how are you feeling?' and I'd say 'what the fuck do ya mean how am I feeling? I'm feeling alright' and she started to put words on how I felt and letting me feel it and so that time I felt really sad, I could identify it

Participant Tom

4.8.1: Anger and Fear

When asked to think back over their experiences and identify any particular emotions that stood out in their minds, four participants identified the emotion of anger as playing a dominant role in their offending and the management of anger as crucial to their ability to desist from offending. Participants spoke of anger as being a 'default' emotion which they turned to in response to a difficulty in identifying or naming other, more subtle emotions that they might be experiencing. Linked to this within several participant narratives was a level of discomfort at experiencing or expressing vulnerability.

I don't like to hear meself saying 'well you're afraid' you know what I mean? Because I don't feel like I'm afraid but like, I know that all my stuff comes up in is anger and it's still today

Participant Christian

Participant Tom in particular made several references to an ability to accurately identify and express emotion (in particular fear) as being crucial to his personal development and continued desistance from crime. In one anecdote he recounted a surge of interlinked anger and fear in the early days of his release when there was an apparent problem with his temporary release paperwork;

This female guard there and she said 'there's something wrong with the TR form and you're going to have to come here' and the hairs just stood up on the back of me neck at the thought of being put back into a cell and em I felt like killing her. I knew then that I didn't ever want to go back inside if that was the way I was going to react to this person who was just doing her job. So me thinking was an awful lot better. Before I'd have fucking whacked her.

Participant Tom

My vocabulary changed completely and because of that rather than reacting, I could use some of my vocabulary to tell people how I felt or say 'no I don't want to go in there and I don't mind waiting for you but I'm not going in there because eh I'm fearful of going in there'.

Participant Tom

4.8.2: Shame and Pride

Several participants, when discussing the role of emotion in their particular journey, identified a sense of shame or remorse, and this was particularly linked to hurt caused to loved ones in the past.

Ashamed, yeah I do feel ashamed, yeah, when I think back, I've done a lot of things wrong and I hurt my family, I was really ashamed of that. The way I treated Mam and all, that would make me ashamed.

Participant Laura

Other participants referred to a continued sense of shame when confronted with the judgement of others or when applying for employment and completing garda vetting forms, an experience described by one participant as "traumatic". In several participant narratives, the sense of shame was tempered to a certain degree by the 'redemption script' (mentioned in section 4.5) - the sense that to some extent, past mistakes or poor decisions were justified and necessary in order to bring the participant to where they are today.

Shame (Pause) well I do and I don't yeah, I'd take some of it back so I would but, at the same time it made me who I am. So yeah, I do wish it was different but what's the point you know. You just get on with it, you know. I don't really think much about it these days. What's the point?

Participant Michael

All participants interviewed expressed a degree of pride in their achievements and how far they had come in their lives since ceasing involvement in criminality. However some expressed reservations about becoming complacent or overly self-congratulatory.

I am, I suppose, proud when I think back on it all, I wouldn't say now that I'm over the moon with meself or anything. It's just being like everyone else where I am now. I don't want any pats on the shoulder. You know? Maybe if I hadn't been such a thick young fella I'd have gotten here sooner but it is what it is. But proud ... I don't know about that, I've put the work in and I would have done a lot to get where I am but, I'm not going to sit around clapping meself on the back all day or blowing me own horn or whatever.

Participant John

I do [feel proud] yeah, yeah and in the beginning, for a while, I didn't like admitting that for a while cause it was like I'll fucking jinx it ... 'look at me' and it's not a thing like that either but I am like, I suppose. I am yeah proud. Proud but not complacent I suppose.

Participant David

Despite these reservations, participants were overwhelmingly positive in terms of their current life stage and expressed hopefulness and optimism regarding the future.

I feel even more proud [when] I think of all the different things I've done since I got out of prison. and eh the changes that I've had in my life, I have a respectful job, a reasonable salary eh lovely friends in here, better relationships with me family, em much more adventurous without wanting to go wild ... So life is, life is good. That thing of getting up in the morning and knowing something nice is going to happen even if it's an interview like this that will just let you reflect on all the changes in your life. That makes me proud.

Participant Tom

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending in a small group of desisting ex-offenders. The following chapter discusses the research findings and draws conclusions from those findings with reference to how the findings sit within the existing literature on desistance from crime. The chapter concludes by making a number of recommendations in terms of how an increased insight into the psychology of desistance can assist in the promotion and support of desistance in terms of penal measures and reintegration as well as recommendations for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The over-arching message of this dissertation is a positive one as each and every participant in the research acts as a living testament to the ability of the individual to ‘rebaptise their badness’ and rebuild their lives, often in the face of considerable obstacles. Contemporary criminal justice, concerned as it is with the management of risk, promotion of behavioural compliance and the never ending quest to ascertain ‘what works’ with regard to offender rehabilitation, can be in danger of underestimating the scope for subjective psychological change within the individual and the significant impact this change can have in terms of promoting and sustaining desistance from crime.

By maintaining the focus of the research on the internal experience rather than external support/intervention, the research provides a rich insight into the psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending. One such process was that of psychological maturation, a form of ‘growing up’ mentally as well as physically which allowed ex-offenders in the study a sense of distance from their previous behaviour. In this research two sub-themes emerged as particularly significant within the concept of psychological maturation. The first, an increased stake in conformity (espoused by Sampson & Laub 2003), is a process by which desisting offenders develop a deep psychological investment in their new way of living and a fear of losing the lives they have built. The potential loss of interpersonal relationships and meaningful employment was a significant deterrent from recidivism. As well as support for ‘Life Course Theory’, evidence of an increased stake in conformity also somewhat supports Paternoster & Bushway’s (2009) concept of a deterrent ‘feared self’ promoting continued desistance within the sample. The second element of

psychological maturation was an evolution of empathy. This involved a level of psychological maturation that developed in participants enabling them to understand and respect a variety of perspectives outside of their own and provided an increased insight into the impact of their behaviours on others, which eluded them to some extent while involved in criminality.

The importance of choice was a significant theme in the research (as it is in the literature) with participants identifying choice as necessary though not always sufficient for achieving desistance. The process of how this choice developed differed between participants with some experiencing choice as sudden and definitive while for others, the initial tentative choice to change solidified with the scaffolding of appropriate support and the availability of meaningful opportunities for change. This finding supports Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory of cognitive transformation wherein 'desistance intentions' are scaffolded and reinforced by the availability of meaningful 'hooks for change'. The issue of choice was more complex for participants than a simple rational judgement call with some speaking of a choice without alternative - a choice that was to a degree forced in the absence of other viable options. The role of purposive human agency was elusive in the experience of participants as it is in the literature. However, an increased sense of self-control was highlighted as significant in bridging the gap between choice and sustained action.

Addiction recovery and desistance from offending were intertwined in the narratives of participants who had experience of substance misuse. The role of addiction was identified in some cases as core to their getting involved in criminality while for others substance misuse was a contributory factor in their behaving in a way not consistent with their core inner self. Reflecting the findings of Marsh (2011) the parallels between the psychological experience of recovery and desistance were clearly evident in the narratives of participants with previous experience of addiction.

The role of the individual's sense of self in promoting and sustaining desistance emerged as hugely significant both in this research and in the wider literature on desistance. Overall, participant's self narratives adhered far more to Maruna's (2001) account of an evolving core self than Paternoster & Bushway's (2009) theory of 'feared' and 'possible' selves and speaking about the potential for recidivism, participants referenced feared behaviours rather than a possible future change in self. In addition, the research findings provide support for

Maruna's (2001) concept of a 'redemption script', whereby the desisting individual's core positive self became freed from negative circumstance and behaviour and they became the person they were always meant to be, and to a degree always were inside. Giving back or making good was another key element within the self narrative of desisting offenders and it emerged that working with others facing the same challenges as they once did was very significant in the self concept of participants, whether in a professional or personal capacity. In terms of the ex-offender as a professional what Maruna, (2001) terms the 'wounded healer', this supportive role was particularly important in terms of their competency as a partitioner and personal fulfilment. In addition to this, a number of participants spoke of an increased sense of authenticity and respect for support professionals who had 'walked a mile in their shoes.

As mentioned above, the research provides broad support for Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory of cognitive transformation wherein a choice, or at least an openness to change, is met with meaningful opportunities or 'hooks for change' leading to more specific changes in cognitive process in terms of thought, attitudes and belief. The process of cognitive change was significant in participants' ability to desist from offending with the adoption of a more rational, measured and insightful way of thinking identified by several participants as key to managing their reactions and behaviours in a positive way. In addition, participants' attitudes to criminality had changed though there was a notable absence of negative judgement of those still involved in offending. By and large, participants expressed compassion and pity for persisting offenders, though this was tempered in the perspective of several participants who identified a particular category of offender, distinct from the nature of their offending for whom desistance was less likely, though not impossible. Belief systems, particularly conventional religious belief, did not emerge as particularly significant for participants. Despite this, a developed sense of spirituality or interconnectedness with others was identified by participants as a fulfilling aspect of their present life by a number of participants.

The final psychological process that emerged as significant was a shift in the ability of participants to identify, experience and express emotion. This was particularly evident in their discussion of the interconnected experience of anger and fear. A pre-disposition to revert to anger as a 'default' emotion was identified by several participants. However with counselling, self-help or therapeutic intervention, an awareness of this default was achieved

which several participants acknowledged as key to forming more appropriate reactions to challenging situations. This research found some support for Farrall & Calverley's (2006) account of the experience of emotion in desisting offenders, with particular emphasis on the role of pride in the latter stages of the desistance process.

Overall this dissertation has identified that there are indeed a number of extremely significant psychological processes involved in the individual's journey to desist from offending and build new lives outside criminality. Though each participant's narrative was distinct and uniquely personal to their subjective experience, a number of core processes emerged in the research. For this research sample, the processes of psychological maturation, the experience of choice and internalised control, the emergence of the core self, the ability to give back through generative work, cognitive change and finally the management and experience of emotion were the key psychological processes underpinning desistance from offending.

5.2 Recommendations

Though focused on the subjective experience of desistance, it is not the intention of this dissertation to understate the importance of external supportive factors in facilitating desistance from crime. Education, for example, emerged as a significant factor in prompting a re-examination of the self-concept in research participants. As referred to throughout this dissertation, the participants in this research are by no means representative of all desisting offenders nor are the findings by any means generalisable. Nonetheless, located within the wider desistance literature, the research does make some recommendations regarding how desistance can be promoted and supported in relation to penal measures and re-integration and also suggests some potentially fruitful areas for future research.

5.2.1: Penal Measures

Making the case for the adoption of a desistance paradigm for offender management, McNeill (2006) highlights the futility and counter-productiveness of penal measures that "label, that exclude and that co-locate offenders as offenders" (2006 p. 53). Such measures, according to McNeill, serve only to impede desistance by encouraging the individual to adopt a 'condemnation script' where their futures are beyond their control and at the mercy of infinitely more powerful external forces. Indeed the findings of this research, particularly with relation to the importance of redemption and 'making good', would provide support for the adoption of alternative penal measures.

One practical way in which this could be achieved is through an increased emphasis on restorative justice practices. Restorative justice practices, based on Braithwaite's (1989) concept of re-integrative shaming, offer the offender an opportunity to repair harm done in a process which disapproves of the criminal act but not the criminal actor. This element of restorative practice is particularly significant given the ability of participants in this study to separate their past criminal acts from their core, inner sense of self. Restorative justice practices are relatively new in this jurisdiction and primarily used with juvenile offenders however their potential value is increasingly being recognised (Seymour, 2006; National Commission on Restorative Justice, 2008). It is the recommendation of this research that restorative justice measures continue to be explored with a view to supporting desistance from crime.

5.2.2 Psychological Desistance and Re-integration

Barriers to the re-integration of ex-offenders, in particular ex-prisoners, are well known and well documented (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2010). A significant issue for participants in this research was that even though their self concept had evolved to the extent that recidivism was no longer a viable option, in the eyes of wider society they can still be considered as 'persisting until proven innocent'. This has specific implications with regard to generative work where previous convictions can exclude the ex-offender from professional and voluntary opportunities to 'make good' particularly with regard to youth work or working with vulnerable adults. It is the finding of this research that desisting offenders can and do make a valuable contribution in these fields and the need to manage risk must be tempered by the potential worth of this contribution. This research backs the Irish Penal Reform Trust's call for the introduction of robust and extensive spent convictions legislation to be enacted in this jurisdiction at the earliest possible opportunity.

Finally, the research identified that a support or mentoring relationship between desisting offenders and those in the early stages of reintegration can be mutually beneficial in terms of sustaining desistance and offering an opportunity to 'make good' for the giver of support and also in increased authenticity and value in the eyes of the receiver. On this basis, the research recommends that peer-support and reintegration initiatives where such relationships are developed and nurtured should be promoted and adequately resourced wherever possible.

5.2.3 Further Research

Based on the findings of this research and within the context of the wider desistance literature, the following topics are recommended for further examination:

- The interconnected relationship between the psychological experience of addiction recovery and desistance emerged as a significant theme within the present study. A full examination of the complexity of this relationship was outside the scope and capacity of this research. Further research, in particular comparative work examining the experience of desisting offenders with and without experience of addiction would provide valuable insight.
- Longitudinal studies which examine the changing psychological experience of ex-offenders at different stages within the process of desistance would be useful in terms of examining the evolution of the self narrative and the changing role of emotion and cognition over time
- The presence of ex-offenders employed as professional ‘wounded healers’ was a fascinating element of the present study. Further exploratory work with this sample would be particularly interesting in terms of examining their motivations, the role of their work in sustaining their own desistance and differences in competency in comparison to other professionals without lived experience of offending and imprisonment.
- Finally, the evolution of empathy and increased ability to identify and communicate emotion (particularly vulnerability or fear) emerged as significant within this research though not prominent within the desistance literature. On this basis, further exploration of these elements of the psychology of desistance is recommended.

5.3 Conclusion

This research has demonstrated the significance of the psychological processes underpinning desistance within the subjective lived experience of seven ex-offenders. In particular the research identified the processes of psychological maturation, choice, the sense of a core self, generativity, cognitive change and the experience and expression of emotion as particularly pertinent in prompting and maintaining desistance. The research recommends that the role of the subjective experience of desistance be considered in terms of penal measures and

reintegration and also highlights the value of additional research on the psychology of desistance.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear _____

My name is Triona O'Sullivan and I am currently carrying out a piece of research as part of a MA in Criminology with Dublin Institute of Technology. I wish to provide you with the following information to consider before you consent to your involvement in the research process.

Working Title: An Exploration of the Psychology of Desistance from Crime.

Aims and Objectives of Research: The research aims to carry out an exploration of the psychological processes underlying desistance from crime (that is the manner by which individuals stop being involved in crime and build a life for themselves outside of offending. The research aims to gather information about the lived experience of individuals who have desisted from offending in particular under the following areas:

- Psychological maturation
- Choice and motivation
- The individual's sense of self
- The role of thought processes, attitudes and beliefs
- The role of emotion

Research Process: If you choose to be involved in the research process I would hope to arrange a one-to-one interview at a time and location that is convenient to you. Interviews will be digitally recorded with your consent and these recordings will be held securely and not available to anyone apart from my self. All names will be changed and any identifying information will be left out of the final dissertation.

Ethics: This research adheres to the Codes of Ethics laid out by the British Criminology Society and the Psychological Society of Ireland.

Thank you for taking the time to consider involvement in this piece of research. Should you have any further queries I would be delighted to hear from you.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form: An Exploratory Study of Desistance from Crime

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to consider involvement in this research project. Please read the following information very carefully.

I have been informed of the nature and purpose of the research being conducted and hereby give my consent to participation. In signing below I indicate that I fully understand the following:

- The research is examining the thought, emotions and other psychological processes that accompany the cessation of criminality and the maintenance of a crime free way of life
- My interview will be recorded for research purposes only, will be stored securely and destroyed after the interview is transcribed. The recording will not be available to any third party.
- My name and other identifying information will not be available to anyone but the interviewer
- I understand that all information provided will be treated with the utmost confidentiality except in the case of revealing harm or potential harm to another person or previously unreported crime. In the event of this information being disclosed the researcher will be obliged to report such information to the relevant authorities.
- I understand that in the research paper my name will be omitted or changed
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent and have any information held about me destroyed at any time
- I understand that I can decline to answer any question posed during the interview.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

- Introduce research topic: establish consent
- Confirm Age
- Open with general question regarding current life
- Establish involvement in criminality and desistance years
- Establish commitment to desistance
- How has life changed overall

Choice, Agency & Change

- Do they feel they choose desistance? (If no what prompted change?)
- Examine agency – how did you turn choice/will into action
- Positively in early stages
- Optimism at present

Remaking the Self

- Do they feel like they are a different person now?
- In what ways are they the same/different?
- What qualities helped them get out?
- What qualities helped them to get in?
- Do they still possess these qualities?
- Helping others/ giving back – is this important?
- Ambitions/Goals

Thought Attitude & Belief

- General question: Under those three areas what stands out?
- Change in thought processes?
- Spirituality
- Attitudes to crime (those still involved)
- Self belief

The Role of Emotion

- Are any emotions prominent looking back on the journey?
- Shame/Regret
- Fear?
- Pride?
- Hope?

Thank participant for their involvement

Open Ended Question: Anything we haven't covered?

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Transcript: Participant “Tom”

Age: 58

Desistance Years: 17

Broader Lifestyle Change: Participant has gone through a period of recovery from addiction, has undertaken a variety of educational courses and is currently working in an educational support capacity with ex-offenders.

Triona: Just to start off I wanted to thank you for being involved. The topic of the research, as I said, is the psychology of desistance from crime. So what I’m looking to find out is how people get out of involvement in crime and basically how they rebuild their lives outside of that. So I just wanted to start by confirming that you have consented to participate.

Tom: Yes

Triona: And that you’re happy for the interview to be recorded and held securely.

Tom: Yes. Yes.

Triona: And obviously as I said [you have] my contact details so if you have any concerns afterwards or if you want to withdraw you can get in touch with me. Em, so I just wanted to confirm firstly what age you are.

Tom: I’m 58.

Triona: 58 ok, and then just to open it up, just to ask you a bit about where you’re at in your life at the moment.

Tom: Well where I’m at. Eh I’m working in [offender re-integration programme] and eh prior to that I worked in a drug team in [name of area] and prior to that I worked for a crowd called [education initiative] and prior to that I would have been a participant at [offender re-integration programme where participant currently works]. So I came here in [year] and shortly thereafter I started on a CE scheme and I was sent on a number of different courses em, went to [name of university] in [year] to do a diploma in addiction studies and eh, I would have been in prison prior to [year] and while there I got help with reading, writing, eh was offered a couple of different courses in prison and did a very basic course in prison and eh, it would have been a struggle. I can remember doing my first essay and I’d never did an essay before and it was wonderful. Eh it wasn’t very good but any education I did would have been within prison and it helped because I went to a course that helps you with study skills and all that kind of stuff. Once I got that under me belt I was able to cope with stuff much better education wise. Em so I finished off my degree with the [university] eh, on a part time basis while working here and eh I set up a course called [name of course] that I got accredited by FETAC and eh taught that here for a good many years and I’m still teaching it. So it is a practical course.

Triona: Ok

Tom: And eh I really enjoyed teaching that. Lately I've diversified a little bit, I've moved down the scale, teaching Level 3 eh because [there are] a good few people coming in here and their reading and writing isn't great. Also I spend a lot of time with them on one-on-one work, just getting them used to reading again, get them used to writing again and eh and some you have to help them with spelling. So you start at the very bottom and it's just to get them ready to maybe move on to a level four.

Triona: Sure.

Tom: Or a level 5.

Triona: Ok so and it's mainly literacy you're doing at the moment?

Tom: Well it's a level 3 course so it's very kind of, standard. But we're looking at doing a level two which is where you, kind of, start off.

Triona: Ok.

Tom: So we've kind of started at 5 and were working our way back down where as the norm would be start at the bottom and work up. We've discovered that there is a need to lower the sort of classes that were offering.

Triona: Ok.

Tom: So that's very enjoyable and there's a lot of one-to one work eh [I] suppose the people that are coming in here most of them would have been in prison so we know what it's like so that's a big help to them. Eh, I suppose a big thing that we look for when were working with people here is to try and build their confidence. I mean they use an awful lot of video and we find that's great. That, they find that a bit terrifying at first, that thought of getting up and doing maybe a one-to-one or maybe a presentation on video but when they do it, it increases their confidence enormously and that's reflected then in the work that they do and it probably gives them the confidence then to maybe look at college and so we've an awful lot then of people going to college.

Triona: Ok and how important would you say it is for you to be working with people who are offenders or ex-offenders?

Tom: Em, it's really important because when you've been there, when you've come through it, when you're able to look back and reflect on that experience, there's a huge amount of learning involved. So anyone who comes in here, you know where they're at and as well as that, you also have the skills necessary to work with them. So an awareness of the wheel of change and where they're at and even basic things that move them along. And then there's lots of services here, we have addiction counselling, psychotherapy, eh and an awful lot of peer support so there's an awful lot of help here for anyone who wants it.

Triona: You talked a bit about the addiction side of things, that's obviously an interest of yours. Is that a background you have yourself?

Tom: Ah yeah, I would have got into an awful lot of trouble, eh all kinds of things, drink, drugs, gambling, you name it I've problems with it. Eh and I suppose the biggest problem I would have had and eh it's not common but would have been with poker machines.

Triona: Right.

Tom: I just lost everything. I lost sense of myself, I just fell in love with it, I loved it (laughs).

Triona: And when you think back to your own offending, was that very closely linked to the addiction side of things?

Tom: No, no. Eh I would have started I suppose at a very young age, loved breaking into cars, peoples houses (pause) eh the freedom that it gave you, the money that it gave you. Then I got married and eh tried to quieten down but I was there ... and I would have been involved with a gang and there was a certain amount of you know power involved with that eh I would have been very violent when I was young and eh (pause) I kind of dealt with all of that stuff but I loved fighting and em, you know, it didn't bother me that I was hurting people, or cut them up or whatever.

Triona: And is there any element of that lifestyle that would still attract you?

Tom: Yeah.

Triona: Yeah?

Tom: Yeah, I get it when I might be driving the car and eh (pause) I suppose it's usually when I see maybe somebody in uniform. And the temptation, it's there. [participant gestures about driving recklessly].

(Laughter)

Tom: It's there and I recognise it and I don't act out on it which is I suppose the big difference these days. Em and I would be in situations I suppose where it would feel great just to you know, get into a row with somebody and, and I don't and em there's lots of reasons why, I suppose one of the biggest reasons is that I have a responsible job and I would lose an awful lot and I've grandchildren now.

Triona: Right.

Tom: Yeah and I would spend a great deal of time with them and that makes me life all the much better and I wouldn't like to lose that.

Triona: Of course. So when you think back to then when you did make the change or started moving into education and training, what do you think was the precursor to that? Do you think it was a choice you made?

Tom: I would have got away with an awful lot you know, through luck and probably good planning when I would do stuff, jobs and then I got a prison sentence late in life and I was put into [name of prison] and eh, I thought I was going to die. I couldn't hack it you know and I

would have this you know mask on, walking around the yard and up and down the landing just looking at people ‘don’t mess with me’ and then I’d go into the cell at night and I’d be in bits. And eh after a while I said ‘hang on, I need to change something in my life’ so it was actually a prison officer a fella called [name] and he said to me why don’t you go up to the school and I looked at him and I said ‘what the fuck would I want to go up to the school for?’ You know?

(Pause)

Tom: I was so bored, you know? I was working in the carpentry shop during the day and one evening I went up to the school and the school was closed but they had one course on and eh it was learning how to draw (coughs) and it was an English guy and he said ‘come on’ and over a few months he taught me how to paint and eh it was the first time I’d created something it was a self portrait but it looked more like Freud so ...

(Laughing)

Tom: No, not Freud what’s that guy?

Triona: Picasso is it?

Tom: Yeah, Picasso, fella with only one ear. So I was amazed that I could actually do something like that so and eh, then, I don’t know if it was someone after taking pity on me but they said ‘look there’s a new prison after opening up called [name of prison] you’ll get much better visits’ and em I decided to go down and went down there and eh from being locked up in a small cell with very little freedom of movement went down to this open prison and I brought down me radio and me ten foot length of copper and I didn’t need it because they put me into a house and there was electricity and showers and your own room and I said ‘Jesus Christ’.

(Pause)

Tom: Part of the gig was that you had to work down there and I didn’t mind working but they also wanted you to look at doing education so they sent this guy from the Department of Justice down to see me and eh he wanted me to do a course. He said to me ‘have you been doing a lot of reading?’ and I had just been reading the bible because there was nothing and I couldn’t read it great cause, you know...Em so I said I’d give it a go so it took a couple of months to get ready. One of the probation officers used to come down to me and he’d help me with me writing and spelling and all that kind of stuff and then I got me first essay to do and everyone was helping me.

(Laughing)

Tom: One of the lads here [in offender reintegration programme where participant works] he was in with me at the time and he used to help me as well and I remember it was about a famine in Ethiopia or something like that and I hadn’t a clue but I eventually got it done and the excitement of having finished it and I sent it away and he said ‘now you’ll get it back in a couple of weeks with your marks’ and I remember I couldn’t think of anything else only waiting for this to come back and it came back and I got a 42 which is a pass and ‘Ah Jesus this is wonderful’ and I had been doing a bit of reading and it wasn’t great but I was getting

better. So that made a huge difference and so he was helping me and it was just a huge difference that sense of using me brain for the first time.

Triona: So was it a confidence thing do you think?

Tom: Ah well yeah. I didn't like school, never went to school I was always mitching eh, never read the papers never listened to the news - too busy messing.

Triona: Other things to be doing.

Tom: Yeah, (laughs) I suppose I think I was 42 years of age and I discovered I could do stuff and I just loved it and I kept at it. I kept at it doing bits and pieces and I had to do an exam and I had to do seven essays, I just barely passed them all and I had to do an exam at the end of it and it was em, a three hour exam and there was two prison officers in, kind of guarding me and I was writing away for three hours. I hadn't a clue what it was, when I was finished after three hours they wanted to have a look at it to see if they could help me (laughing) to check anything but I wanted it to be me own work. And again just barely passed - a 42.

(Pause)

Tom: But it gave me...the fella who paid for the course got on to me and asked me would I do another one and I did so I was doing little bits and pieces and that was the start of the change and there was another way of living and that guy from the Department of Justice and the probation officer they said to me 'look it if you keep going the way you are you might get a job' and I said 'fuck it, I'll keep going' and I did and just kept plugging away and I ended up here in [year] and eh just kept ticking away and it's been really enjoyable. Coming from I remember being in here [offender reintegration programme where participant currently works] in [year] and I was so lacking in confidence, my confidence was boosted when I was inside and when I came out there was nothing and it was difficult to get social welfare, all the usual shite. Offered loads of money to go back working and getting €60 off the social welfare or being offered €1,500 to do a bit of work but I kept at it.

Triona: What do you think stopped you?

Tom: Well I wasn't that long back in here when they asked me to go back into [name of prison] just to tell them about this place. I was about three months here and I really enjoyed, even though my confidence wasn't great [and I] went back into [name of prison] and all the lads coming up to me and saying 'ah come on down here' and em (pause) I was actually helping someone and I enjoyed that. Em, I remember a fella I knew come to see me and he said to me 'I'm just after being told that I've HIV' and I said 'Jesus', I said 'I don't know what to say to you'.

(Pause)

Tom: At that point of time I decided I wanted to get some sort of formal qualification because I said I can't be coming in and seeing something like this - I don't know what to say. So that's when I went to get a cert in addiction studies the diploma. And I was in and out of [name of prison] and working with guys and at that point in time I moved away from here and I went into the drug team up there for three years and loved it, you know

Triona: Ok and do you think that having kind of continued exposure to the prison environment and to the other side of things, do you think that helped keep you on the straight and narrow?

Tom: Yeah I remember I they I was on a years TR [temporary release] and I used to have to sign on every week and so I'm down in [name of area] and they don't know me and em I, I'd say they used to think 'when is he going to kick off again?' But they used to treat me ok and one day I went down and the usual lads weren't there. There was this female guard there and she said there's something wrong with the TR form and you're going to come here and the hairs just stood up on the back of me neck, at the thought of being put back into a cell and em, I felt like killing her. I knew then that I didn't ever want to go back inside if that was the way I was going to react to this person who was just doing her job. So me thinking was an awful lot better. Before I'd have fucking whacked her.

Triona: When you say about your thinking, what exactly changed?

Tom: Well em lots of experience of em, talking to people especially, the people in here who had come before me around think before you act and they used to say 'think-think-think-think react' so you'd think-think-think-think before you react. Em, I would have got an awful lot of one-to-one counselling and I would have dealt with an awful lot of stuff that would have made me so angry and that em ... That gave me an understanding not only of meself but of other people, so for the first time in a lot of ways I was empathising with other people other than me family, say. So I can empathise with a guard or a prison officer or, you know.

Triona: Do you think that was a learned skill?

Tom: Ah yea definitely, I couldn't talk like this before I mean my skills were terrible I couldn't even have a conversation with ya like this. Em, so my vocabulary changed completely and because of that, rather than reacting, I could use some of my vocabulary to tell people how I felt or say 'no I don't want to go in there and I don't mind waiting for you but I'm not going in there because eh I'm fearful of going in there ok'. So I did psychotherapy as well which helped an awful lot but it took a lot of time it didn't happen overnight but that actual ability to use all these different words and communicate with other people made a huge difference.

Triona: Of course, Ok so I just wanted to ask you a bit then about your sense of self, do you feel like you are the same person now as you were then?

(Long pause)

Tom: In a way that sense that I've had of meself has always been the same. What's different is how I behave. I've always had that - a good feeling about meself inside but then once I took drink or drugs I lost the run of meself. But now, because of all the psychotherapy, I would have a much better understanding of how my behaviours effect other people. You know I remember looking at meself in the mirror for the first time. I'd been shaving all me life but I never looked at meself in the mirror. I remember a counsellor gave me an exercise one day they said 'go back home and look at yourself in the mirror and see what you think of yourself'. Because I always thought I was ugly. I don't know why but I always did. Em, I remember looking at myself that first time and I remember saying 'alright, this is what I've got, learn to love it ... and I did ... [I] learned to love the actual physical side of me. Because

back then I was locked in here [gestures to chest] and now I look at meself in the mirror and even though I've put on a bit of weight and that, that inner core, em has blossomed from not caring about anything, to absolutely loving other people and that's made a massive difference to me.

Triona: So those qualities that you have that helped you to get out of offending, they were always there, is that what you're saying?

Tom: Yeah, Yeah.

Triona: So how do did it come about that you tapped into them, no I haven't put that right (pause). If the qualities were always there what was the difference that made them ...

Tom: I think it was one, em I think it was one particular counselling session and we were kind of going back and em we went back to a period in my life where I had suffered abuse.

Triona: Ok.

Tom: and I didn't even know.

Triona: Sure.

Tom: So all of a sudden then, out of the blue, this fecking thing kinda [participant makes a gesture of an eruption coming from his chest] and I remember I cried for about two hours and I couldn't believe that I cried you know. The hardest I ever cried you know and then all of a sudden this thing comes from here [gestures to abdomen] and shot out of me you know.

(Pause)

Tom: I felt amazed afterwards, the fact that that thing happened, that I had a memory of something that I couldn't even recollect. Em and I suppose I felt light, [a] really nice love for myself and having gone through that, having experienced that meant an awful lot to me. So I suppose that particular moment in time was the first time that I felt clean, I'm not sure if I'm explaining it properly but I felt ... you know when you go into the confessional and confess all their sins, I felt, I felt a lightness. So that was then probably one of the big things that happened that really gave me a good ... the freedom to be me, you know?

(Pause)

Triona: That's so important, (pause). So just to move back for a moment to the idea of 'giving back', of 'making amends'; do you think that's something that you kind of, consciously set out to do?

Tom: Yea, you know, I'd often say to the lads, every morning when I wake up it takes me maybe a half an hour to an hour and a half to get me head together, just to feel ... 'Cause eh I'll go have me shower and that get into the car and I'm driving in, listening to whatever's on, the songs that are on the radio and knowing that I'll enjoy the day. That more than likely than not there will be the opportunity to work with somebody. Eh, I love nothing more than when somebody hands me their first piece of written work and I know that maybe in six weeks or six months time that that's going to be totally different. That person is going to have eh, a

respect for their own piece of work that they hand me. So you see the growth in, people in terms of never having done anything around education, or if they haven't done anything in a while, doing a piece of work and thinking 'it's ok', doing another piece of work six months later and it's amazing and that. It's so fulfilling you know, that you can create or help to create that change in the person that can lead to them maybe going to college or something like that in a few years time. It's slow, but it's very fulfilling.

Triona: And do you think that having that experience yourself makes you better at your job?

Tom: Definitely. You know I've really good friends that would have helped me, I've a friend who is a psychotherapist and she's the best person she's amazing but because she hadn't got that sense of what it's like in prison I've a little bit of an edge on her ... Not much.

Triona: It's very hard to learn that though.

Tom: It is, but we've all experienced prisons in one shape or another whether it's being in a relationship with another person or being stuck at home and that when you'd love to go to work you know.

Triona: In terms of your future and how you see your own life progressing, do you have any particular goals or ambitions?

Tom: Well I met this gorgeous

(Laughing)

Tom: This gorgeous blonde bird in [country participant visited recently], I'd love to go back.

(Laughing)

Triona: That's fair enough.

(Laughing)

Triona: Ok so the next area I wanted to talk to you about is around thought processes and attitudes and beliefs, is there anything around those three area that stands out for you?

Tom: Oh huge. Em, I never understood the world and my place in it and it was when I started doing my degree in social studies, I started to look at political science and history and liberalism and conservatism and all those other 'isms' and what it did for me was I was able to see 'well this is how I fit in this world', 'I'm liberal' and I love to be free to do what I want to do once it don't harm anyone else and that includes taking drugs and doing what I like and so for the first time, I knew how I sat in terms of everything else and eh, that made a massive difference and the more I studied the social sciences the more cultured I felt about the world. The more I was able to build up a vocabulary to explain to other people how I felt about the world and, and any of my students I hope they go on to do sociology (laughs) and go on to become liberals.

Triona: Em, would you say that you have a spiritual side to yourself?

Tom: Yeah - it's probably the biggest part of me and again, I didn't know I didn't know anything about spirit, I didn't know anything about feelings. I knew I was angry [but] I didn't know that you could be sad or you could be happy because I never, nobody ever talked to me about this kind of stuff and when I went for counselling, and she started explaining to me and she'd ask me 'how are you feeling?' and I'd say 'what the fuck do ya mean how am I feeling? I'm feeling alright' and she started to put words on how I felt and letting me feel it and so that time I felt really sad, I could identify it. After that particular event I felt happy and contented and I could put words to it. Then gradually I started to feel, this gut feeling that it had something to do with spirituality. It had something to do with my sense of being connected to the world because that was my biggest problem. I wasn't you know. I lived my whole life, had a wife and kids and I didn't feel connected for some reason, probably to do with that stuff that we talked about you know.

Triona: Ok, but when you talk about spirituality is it kind of about a higher power or ...

Tom: No it's eh that connection with people, like that connection with me and you just having this conversation. Em, it's me friends in here. It's my family, it's me extended family, it's me car, it's me bed eh it's me garden.

Triona: Experiences?

Tom: Exactly.

Triona: Ok (pause) what's your attitude to people who are still involved in crime?

Tom: Ah em, I have kind of separated them into two different categories, one who are violent and eh my attitude to them is that they should be, em especially people who are killing eh they should be treated differently and then people who don't commit those types of violent crimes should be treated more leniently so I was only saying to someone earlier [relation of participant] got 13 years for five million worth of coke I'd have just taken it off him and let him go. Because it costs so much to bang him up for that length of time, so I, I, I, I think there is an awful lot of people doing an awful lot of harm and that's what they should concentrate our resources, the limited resources that we have. So eh one of the biggest problems that we have is anti-social behaviour. It's a huge problem and the reason that we have that problem is that we don't have guards on the street because they're chasing these people doing drugs all the time. It's crazy.

Triona: So you'd be pro-legalisation?

Tom: Yeah, I would yeah.

Triona: Em do you think that anyone involved in crime could find a way out of it?

Tom: Em (pause) well I've a problem because of the different experiences I've had working in a lot of different areas working with paramilitaries both ... I've met people who've done anything and everything and I've helped them through it. With the proper help and support eh so I've, I've worked with people who've bombed Margaret Thatcher and I worked in family support and I think, usually, that you need to get hurt yourself maybe with a term of imprisonment and a period of personal reflection. That's what usually works. Em generally speaking, well we only really work with prisoners, em well I suppose we do, but most of the

ones who are doing well and making money don't care. It's when you get banged up that you have to start thinking 'well do I want to go on with this or do I want to change?'. So an awful lot of people can change yeah.

Triona: Do you think that most people wouldn't change if there wasn't the consequences involved like being locked up or whatever?

Tom: Yeah, Yeah.

Triona: That's interesting. (Pause). Ok, the last part then is just examining the role of emotion, so we kind of spoke a little bit about the anger and the fear and things like that, is there any emotions that would particularly stand out for you when you think back on the whole journey?

Tom: Em nothing, my, I only understood anger you know that was the only thing that, I lived normally, my kids loved me, my wife loved me. I think, but I'm sure because of the way I was, because I was so angry there must have been a part of them that was kind of concerned about me or eh they were afraid. I've never actually asked them.

Triona: Yeah.

Tom: Eh, it's something that I might do because I'm very close to them now. I've tried to make it up to them, make amends, em [I have] talked about me past and the whole lot. Eh not the whole lot of it you know, because me son is very respectable, he's a really good job, I think he'd be a bit shocked if I was to kinda tell him some of the things I've done. Me daughter would probably love it, she'd tell everyone.

(Laughing)

Triona: The glamour.

Tom: Yeah she'd have it up on Facebook.

(Laughing)

Triona: When you talk about your son there and that, do you ever feel ashamed about your past?

Tom: Eh I used to and I would often to talk to people here [offender reintegration programme where participant currently works] about it and you're always reminded of it, every time you apply for a job anywhere because you have to do garda checks and all that shit. You know? and I remember the time I had to do it for the first time and took months to try and remember all the different times, all the ... and that and I had to apply to the teachers council you know and I had to do a vetting thing for them and write about me different crimes and that was traumatic. Em (pause) but having done it, it was a release as well. At some point in time I left it there and I can't do anything about it. I did what I did, em and there was a time when I em couldn't look at the neighbours and they couldn't look at me. Now I have me head held high. You know? Because I know I'm not doing anything wrong, I'm doing me best. I don't know if there's an awful lot I can do about the past but I've noticed there's an awful lot more of

them saying hello to me (laughs). I wouldn't be very close to them or that but we get on ok whereas before there was kind of tensions there and that, you know?

Triona: Ok sure, do you ... I just wanted to ask you then about the emotion of fear. Do you think that was something that was a motivator for you to change? Was fear a driver for you?

(Long Pause)

Tom: Definitely. Em, I suppose you get humiliated when you are locked up in [name of prison]. It is disgusting, it's filthy and the smell of it is horrible. The noise is never-ending and the isolation is so hard and eh, you realise that eh (pause) you are afraid even though one of the things that I was insistent on I was never afraid, no one would come near me you know? All this kind of stuff, but I was terrified. Eh it was only when eh you'd be in your cell at night and I remember one of the times one of me best friends, we were in the cell together and he was snoring and eh I wanted to kill him because it was driving me mad and I remember I had a toothbrush and it had a blade in it and eh, I went through a traumatic night of crying and raging and crying and rage and him fucking snoring and I couldn't sleep (laughs) and eh anyway I didn't and I fell asleep and I woke up the next morning and I said 'this is fucking crazy' you know? 'I cant handle this'. And em when I did start talking to people in here [offender reintegration programme where participant currently works], em afterwards, they all went through stuff like that. So coming from that there is a huge fear in me about being locked up again and I never want to experience that in my life again.

Triona: So that fear is still with you?

Tom: Oh yeah, I would still have it because I'd be impulsive, I'd be a risk taker, I'd still look for a thrill but I get them thrills from driving now, in me heap of junk (laughs) eh ye have to just ... the fear is still there you know?

Triona: Ok last question, you'll probably be glad to know, is do you feel proud about how far you've come?

Tom: Yeah, and eh I feel even more proud I think of all the different things I've done since I got out of prison and eh the changes that I've had in my life, I have a respectful job, a reasonable salary eh, lovely friends in here. Better relationships with me family, em much more adventurous without wanting to go wild em actually, I went abroad for the first time loved the architecture. So life is ... life is good. That thing of getting up in the morning and knowing something nice is going to happen even if it's an interview like this that will just let you reflect on all the changes in your life. That makes me proud.

Triona: Oh ok, well that's the end of the more structured part of the interview but I just wanted to open it up at this stage to just ask if there's anything else you wanted to add or anything that you feel we didn't cover that's particularly important to you or ...

Tom: Em, this [offender reintegration project] is a very important place and a very special place and not that many people get to come to it. Em, most of the people that do come to it are sufficiently motivated to want to change their lives. And we can help people here so em, if we had a couple of more places like this around it could, it could make a huge amount of difference. Because of the huge drug problem we have in the prisons and the amount of people who want to get themselves sorted you know. So finger in dyke kind of stuff, harm

reduction, it's well and good but when people are ready and they come to a place like this it changes their lives completely, you know. It's a very special place.

Triona: It certainly is. Well that's it then if you have nothing else to add. Thank you so much for talking to me.