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Dimensions of desistance : a qualitative longitudinal analysis of different dimensions of the desistance process among long-term prisoners in the Netherlands

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Jennifer Doekhie

Dimensions of Desistance

A qualitative longitudinal analysis of different dimensions of the desistance process among long-term prisoners in the Netherlands.

DIMENSIONS OF DESISTANCE

A QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF THE DESISTANCE PROCESS AMONG LONG-TERM PRISONERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

J.V.O.R. Doekhie

colofon

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DIMENSIONS OF DESISTANCE

A qualitative longitudinal analysis of different dimensions of the desistance process among long-term prisoners in the Netherlands

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

In the past decades a growing body of literature has been dedicated to explain desistance from offending behaviour, or to answer the question why some offenders quit crime and others do not. From a classic biological approach, desistance can be explained by processes of maturation (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Moffit, 1993; Matza, 1964) and sociological theories contributed a great deal to the desistance framework by focusing on changes in social control or bonds and on the effects of important life events in the journey away from crime (Hirschi, 1969, Sampson & Laub, 1993).

While research in the past has predominantly focused on the effects of external social factors and life events that trigger and foster change, currently more psychological explanations infuse a prominent line of research emphasizing the importance of subjective, individual factors coming from within the offender, such as cognitive shifts and developing a new sense of self-identity (Maruna, 2001; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Also, because it remains difficult if not impossible to determine when criminal behaviour has permanently ceased, more scholars are approaching desistance first and foremost as a developmental *process* instead of 'an event that happens' (Maruna, 2001, p. 17). The process is considered to develop gradually, the frequency of and variety in crime may decrease, and it supports the subsequent termination of offending and maintaining a state of non-offending (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Loeber & LeBlanc, 1990; Maruna, 2001). In addition, since any process of change is complicated and highly individualized, desistance can also be viewed as "a journey of growth which comprises a multitude of pathways, turning points, dead ends and relays" (Phillips, 2017, p. 6). In this context, Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes and Muir, (2004, p. 383) contemplated that "people oscillate on what we might visualise as a dimension, or continuum, between criminality and conformity".

When considering desistance as a continuum or a process with different dimensions, criminologists increasingly study the role of identity and its link to the process of (behavioural) change. This is of importance since an individual's actions of behaviour can be regarded as an expression of identity as people tend to behave in a way that aligns with their identity, and try to relieve dissonance felt between conflicting identities (Festinger, 1962; Foote, 1951). In the desistance field,

ending a period of engaging in crime (*primary desistance*) is associated with being able to identify with a life without crime and internalizing behaviour that fits the *role* of a non-offender identity, a 'changed person', which Maruna & Farrall (2004) refer to as *secondary desistance* to solidify the fragile state of crime-free breaks in *primary desistance*. The idea is that when a person experiences a change from an offending to a non-offending identity, crime will be perceived to be incompatible with the 'new' identity which will add to the gradual distancing from a past identity (Vaughan, 2007). A new identity does not have to be completely 'new', it could also entail a reconstruction of a 'good core' self that was hiding in the individual all along (Maruna, 2001). In sum, it seems important to study the contribution of identity to desistance as it motivates and guides human behaviour, and thus, also criminal or non-criminal behaviour (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Aside from non-criminal behaviour and identity, another dimension was recently added to be important in studying desistance as a 'relational' process: social support from others for attempts at (primary and secondary) desistance, which is called *tertiary desistance* by McNeill (2016b). This dimension appeals to an individual's sense of belonging, and support could be experienced from informal and formal 'others': family, partner, friends, employers, criminal justice social workers, and the wider community. McNeill (2016b) argued that to secure desistance, change also has to be recognized and supported by the wider community.

Recently, Nugent and Schinkel (2016, p. 3), refined this existing desistance framework of secondary, primary and tertiary desistance. They challenged the implied ordering in time and importance, and introduced the terms *act-desistance* ("non-offending"), *identity desistance* ("internalization of a non-offending identity") and *relational desistance* ("recognition of change by others") to describe the different dimensions of desistance. According to Nugent and Schinkel (2016, p. 3), these terms refer to the "world outside, within ourselves and in relation to others". Rather than being a linear process, desistance progresses in these different spheres, possibly at the same time, hereby acknowledging the 'multitude of pathways' in the desistance journey. In other words, an individual can already make attempts at identity desistance while still offending (no act-desistance) or receiving recognition for successful attempts to refrain from crime (relational desistance) without making progress at the level of identity. The two theoretical frameworks of primary, secondary and tertiary desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2016b), and act-, identity and relational desistance (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) have the notion in common that the process of desistance is presumed to entail different dimensions: non-offending, identity change and support and recognition from others in attempts to quit crime. Yet, whereas the former one posits sequencing in time of the different

dimensions of desistance, meaning secondary desistance can only be followed by primary, the latter framework questions this temporal ordering implying that each dimension can progress simultaneously.

While theories on desistance have become more prominent in the criminological literature and many empirical studies on desistance have already been carried out, still various questions remain unanswered. First, much is still unknown about what can be viewed as identity and which aspects of identity may be important for desistance. Although the notion of identity seems to be associated with refraining from crime in the desistance literature and is increasingly being studied, it is still a difficult and complex concept to disentangle. Identity can be a quite vague and hollow term which is explained and operationalized differently by scholars. This may generate inconsistent findings and will hinder attempts to move forward in what we know about desistance (see Kazemian, 2007). Second, as will be shown below, most prior empirical studies do not meet the necessary criteria to study the different dimensions of desistance *over-time*. Research is often cross-sectional and retrospective which can be complicating when it concerns identity *change* and desistance as a *process*. Third, as also will be shown below, most previous research incorporating the role of identity is based on participant populations that have not necessarily experienced imprisonment or that were already released when data collection started. Since imprisonment is the most severe punishment in Western society, prisoners constitute a complex and specific group of high-risk offenders. More than 10 million people are held captive in prisons worldwide (Walmsley, 2016). Almost all these individuals will be released at some point and a part will be released on parole after serving a prison sentence.

The central aim of this study is therefore to gain more insight into the different dimensions of desistance, relating to primary or act-desistance, secondary or identity desistance and tertiary or relational desistance among prisoners transitioning to society. A qualitative longitudinal research design is used in which a sample of Dutch prisoners, who were serving relatively long prison terms and were supervised in the context of parole after release, were interviewed multiple times starting in prison and following them up to a year after release.

1.2 THEORIES ON DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

Explanations for understanding why and how some offenders quit crime and others do not, can roughly be distinguished into three theoretical perspectives: ontogenic, sociogenic and identity theories (Graham & McNeill, 2017). Ontogenic approaches comprise classic biological deterministic explanations of desistance being a product of ageing and processes of maturation (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Moffit,

1993; Matza, 1964). Yet, age as the sole explanatory mechanism of why individuals disengage from crime seems to neglect other factors that come with age and could possibly explain change. Sociogenic theories revolve around the 'structuration' of desistance by focusing on changes in social bonds and on the effects of important life events explaining the cessation of crime (Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Hirshi, 1969, Sampson & Laub, 1993). These developmental processes include the commitment to a spouse instead of peers, engaging in stable employment, and life events such as having children and thus becoming a parent. Sociogenic theories emphasize that desistance occurs as a result of external, social factors.

Over the past two decades, the literature on desistance from crime has been advanced with important theoretical ideas. Identity theories postulate that an individual has its own contribution to desistance and therefore highlight more individual factors coming from the offender, such as cognitive shifts and the development of a coherent pro-social identity (Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Understanding "changes in people's narratives and personal and social identities" plays a central role in the identity perspective (Graham & McNeill, 2017, p. 6). The basic assumption is that people are active in shaping their own world and that cognitive shifts precede actual changing behaviour. Thus, a change in how one sees oneself and the sort of person one wants to be, could play an important role in actively taking steps towards a life without crime. In these theories long-term desistance requires a "fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self" (Maruna, 2001, p. 17). The present study predominantly draws on notions from identity theories to explore this 'sense of self' more in depth with regard to desistance. Moreover, the theoretical ideas of Maruna (2001), Giordano and colleagues (2002) and Paternoster & Bushway (2009) are discussed to frame the present study.

Maruna's framework of 'making good' (2001) has taken a central place in the literature on desistance, especially the role of fashioning an alternative, pro-social identity for the purpose of making sense. He claimed that individuals who were going straight created a story about their new identity to make sense of their place in the world and to help people and society understand who they are now and why. In some cases, a good character trait or aspect of one's core self which was 'hidden' for a few years or was only present in childhood, is being used to express an image of oneself that, according to them, was actually there all along. In this *narrative of desistance*, the emphasis is on a coherent pro-social identity that cannot exist alongside a criminal identity and dissociates the individual from the past criminal life. Note that the ideas of Maruna and colleagues (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Maruna & Roy, 2007) postulate that offenders do not go through an actual *change* in identity, but rather discard their criminal identity in favour of the 'good person', 'the real me' they were all along. Their

criminal past is not being silenced, but used in a positive way through the so-called 'redemption script'. In contrast, the accounts of offenders who persisted in their criminal behaviour were characterized by a 'condemnation script' in which they felt doomed to a life of deviance and helpless in overcoming re-entry obstacles.

Giordano and colleagues (2002) proposed a theory of cognitive transformation in which an individual first needs to experience a cognitive shift and be open to change. This then enables offenders to grab onto possible turning points (Sampson & Laub, 1993), or what Giordano et al. (2002) called 'hooks for change' (p. 1000), such as a job or meeting a potential partner. These hooks create opportunities to move into more conventional roles. Then, fashioning a new replacement self which casts off the old identity ("someone like me does not do something like that") is the next step and finally, there is a shift in how one perceives the criminal lifestyle. For example, robbing people is not seen as 'cool' anymore, but as hurting. This is a cognitive process of identity change that leads to refraining from criminal behaviour. According to this theory, the change in identity only takes place after the offender is involved in conventional hooks for change which he or she feels more or less drawn to depending on the openness to change.[1]

The Identity Theory of Desistance (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) postulates that a change in the criminal identity is fuelled by the image of a desired and future pro-social identity. These 'possible selves' represent individuals' ideas of "what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus & Nurius 1986, p. 954). The *feared self* (what they are afraid of becoming) can lead to a rejection of the criminal identity and stimulate an offender to work towards a *future self* that is not involved in criminal behaviour (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). This will only happen when offenders come to realise that their failures or losses in the criminal world are due to their own behaviour, instead of being plain bad luck. Furthermore, they have to link these past failures to possible failures or losses in the future to initiate a move towards changing their identity and life.

Despite differences in these theoretical frameworks, all assume that the role of (future) identity or the 'self' in the desistance process is highly important. In fact, although the different scholars use a variety of terms and labels, their ideas and concepts have much in common. For example, Paternoster and Bushway's notion of the *possible future self* seems to be similar to Giordano and colleagues' *replacement self* and Maruna's *real me;* although the first two are essentially different from the

1 In 2007, Giordano, Schroeder & Cernkovich (2007) revised their theory of cognitive transformation by adding the concept of the 'emotional self' (p. 1611). Furthermore, in their revision, they awarded a greater role to social processes contouring motivation to change.

person's previous identity, while Maruna's concept of 'true self' allows the person to undertake "what he or she was always meant to do" (2001, pp. 87-89). Furthermore, in all these theories the idea of a 'conventional' or 'pro-social' self is key. Maruna (2001) concluded that individuals in the process of desisting from crime were adopting more conventional identities such as a family man or a good parent than the active offenders did. Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1001) even noted that a conventional identity would be "fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation".

Primary, secondary, tertiary desistance and act-, identity and relational desistance

Many theoretical attempts have been made to provide clarity to the concept of desistance as a process in which an individual gradually disengages from crime. As mentioned before, Maruna and Farrall (2004) advanced existing desistance theories by introducing the terms primary and secondary desistance. Grounded in the work of Lemert (1951) on primary and secondary deviance – primary deviance referring to experiment with deviant behaviour and secondary deviance referring to internalizing deviance, becoming part of the individual's identity –*primary desistance* refers to a period in which one does not offend (behaviour), while *secondary desistance* entails a "reorganization based upon a new role or roles" (Lemert, 1951, p. 76). In the case of desistance this could be the role of a person who has changed and is maintaining a state of non-offending.

In general, the focus in the desistance field has mostly been on the end state of secondary desistance. Primary desistance was viewed by some as a topic of little theoretical interest, because after all, every offender experiences crime-free breaks from time to time (Maruna, Immarigeon & LeBel, 2013). However, the frequently made linear distinction in primary and secondary desistance offers little insight into how the transition from primary to secondary desistance might be achieved or why some individuals might achieve secondary desistance but then return to offending again (Healy, 2010; King, 2013). The categorical distinction of primary, secondary and tertiary desistance implies that an individual goes from one phase to the other. In addition, by proposing that secondary desistance solidifies behaviour in primary desistance, it also implies that the next phase is of more importance than the previous one.

Instead of viewing desistance as a linear process, Nugent and Schinkel (2016, p. 3) made an attempt to delineate different 'spheres' of desistance which do not suggest importance in sequence or time. Put differently, the desistance journey entails different dimensions and each can progress in its own way and at its own pace. The term act-desistance refers to the absence of offending, identity desistance entails internalizing the identity of a non-offender and relational desistance includes the support and recognition of change by others (called tertiary desistance by McNeill,

2016b). Note that the first two dimensions of desistance can be achieved by the individual himself (although partly dependant on others), but relational desistance is outside the individual's control. In other words, an individual needs others to achieve relational desistance.

Furthermore, these different dimensions exist parallel to each other so an individual can, for example, make attempts at act- and identity desistance at the same time, approaching desistance as a more holistic, but also more complex, process. Nugent and Schinkel (2016) argued that success will be limited or fragile, when one or more of these dimensions are not in place. Although they provided new insight into the process of desistance and how these different terms might relate to each other, they did not add new information to the 'identity desistance' term in an attempt to flesh out the concept of identity. Since the present study examines the dimensions of these theoretical frameworks, a brief discussion of what these dimensions entail according to the literature will follow below.

Primary or act-desistance

Since it remains difficult (if not impossible) to determine when someone has truly and permanently disengaged from crime, the absence of criminal behaviour as referred to might possibly be temporary. A certain period without criminal behaviour can (theoretically) either be 'real' desistance as much as it can be a mere lull between offences (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001). Various scholars have therefore also raised questions about the reduction of the seriousness of offending and the amount of criminal behaviour to make up for (attempts at) desistance (Bushway et al., 2001; Uggen & Massoglia, 2003). For example, one of the four elements as described by Loeber and LeBlanc (1990) in order to elucidate desistance is called de-escalation: reducing the seriousness of criminal behaviour.

The operationalization of desistance has been challenging and for a long time it has been based on the absence of official numbers on (re)conviction, new offenses or arrests during a specific amount of time (see Kazemian (2007) for a review of definitions being used in the past). Also, self-report is being used to determine desistance; individuals who identify themselves as ex-offenders refraining from crimes (e.g. Maruna, 2001; Warr, 1998).

Secondary or identity desistance

A non-offending identity often seems to go hand in hand with a conventional identity – one that is incompatible with continued crime- since the search for a conventional or pro-social identity is the common theme that appear to link the desistance theories framing the current study (Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). In this context, the various roles a person (aspires to) fulfil(s) in society – e.g. parent, employee or partner- add to the construction of identity.

Identity change also seems to incorporate a future element involving thoughts or cognitive shifts in the way someone perceives his current self and a self which is projected in the future (Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). According to Farrall (2005), a successful desistance journey comprises existentialist elements of a sense of what might lie ahead in the future and which steps might lead to the realization of that future. What individuals think and expect of the future to come then, guides and motivates behaviour (Atkinson, 1964; Meisenhelder, 1985; Rotter, 1966). Thus, expectations of a future self frame the forward-looking dimension of identity in the desistance process based on the psychological idea that individuals project their self into the future and then act on it. The process of identity change then also entails concrete actions towards a (future) self-concept. This relates to the concept of *agency*, which is a term frequently used in criminological discourse, yet a clear definition lacks. Different definitions and measures are used (and sometimes mentioned in one breath with identity), but agency seems to encompass a few aspects: being goal oriented, the ability to influence and adjust your choices and believing in the desired outcome of your actions (Bandura, 2006). Individuals who see a certain desired outcome as attainable will strive for this outcome (and act more agentic) and when it is seen as unattainable, people will withdraw and not put effort into it (Scheier & Carver, 1992).

Tertiary or relational desistance

Aside from shifts in behaviour and identity, an individual must also receive recognition and support in their desistance journey to accumulate a 'sense of belonging' (McNeill , 2016b, p. 201). Relational or tertiary desistance then is rooted in a symbolic interactionist perspective in which change or reform is 'negotiated' through interaction of the offender with significant others (Shover, 1996). It is based on the idea that the perception of other people interacts with, for example, the confidence of being able to maintain a certain identity (Ebaugh, 1988). The source of support is based on three levels: the micro-level involves the direct surroundings of the individual, the meso-level relates to the wider community, and society as a whole is integrated in the macro-level (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Although individuals are able to gain support for their efforts at change from their significant others (micro), it is suggested that support experienced from criminal justice agents or employers (meso) or the way society deals with ex-offenders in general (macro) can also contribute to relational desistance. This turn our attention to the role of the criminal justice system, specifically parole supervision, in the desistance and reintegration process.

When individuals return from prison to society, their desistance pathways may be affected by the criminal justice system which plays a role in the process of reintegration. Note that although processes of desistance and reintegration are

inextricably linked to each other for individuals released from prison, desistance is not synonymous with reintegration. For example, it could be possible that someone returning from prison to society is reintegrating well, but is not making attempts at identity desistance (suggested to be a part of desistance). Or that one is refraining from crime (primary or act-desistance), but still has difficulties to adjust to life outside prison walls (LeBel et al., 2008; McNeill, 2006). So although the present study focuses on the process of desistance, it inevitably overlaps with the process of reintegration and rehabilitation of prisoners who are returning to society. Therefore, examining how ex-prisoners' supervision assists or hinders attempts at primary/act and secondary/identity desistance, and how it possibly contributes to tertiary/relation desistance, is of greatest importance for prisoners returning to society.

1.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

Research in the field of desistance has made enormous progress in the last decades, yet there is still ground to cover. In this paragraph, an overview of previous research concerning desistance will be provided. Since the literature on offending and non-offending (primary or act-desistance) is enormous and overlaps with general criminal career research (see e.g. Blumstein et al., 1986; Bushway et al., 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993), it will not be discussed here. The focus, therefore, will largely be on research done on the topic of identity. Also, prior research on (parole) supervision in the context of desistance will be considered. The discussion below is by no means an exhaustive overview, but meant to highlight some important findings in light of the focus of this study.

Previous research on secondary or identity desistance

Since Maruna's influential study (2001) there has been increasingly more research devoted to study the concept of identity in the desistance process, although it is not always labelled as such and the conceptualization of identity differs, which makes it challenging to compare. Some research examines identity for example by measuring personality characteristics such as being a good person, being kind or having self-esteem (Na, Paternoster & Bachman, 2015; Rocque, Posick & Paternoster, 2016; Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, O'Connell & Smith, 2016). Others have created specific deviant identities such as a 'thief', being violent or a 'hustler' (Crank, 2016; Irwin, 1970). In general, qualitative studies show that offenders who successfully desisted seemed to experience a shift in their identity which supports the theoretical idea that identities play a significant role in het desistance process (e.g. Aresti, Eatough & Brooks-Gordon, 2010; Dufour & Brassard, 2014; Harris, 2011; Schinkel, 2014). Quantitative studies show that most prisoners have (high)

expectations to desist (Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne & Travis, 2004; Crank & Brezina, 2013; Dhami, Mandel, Loewenstein & Ayton, 2006; Zamble & Quinsey, 1997), but that, when these aspirations are followed over time and after release from prison, only those identifying with a pro-social role such as a 'family man' appear to be associated with non-recidivism (Burnett, 1992; 2013; LeBel et al., 2008). Others have offered evidence that it is (also) possible to refrain from offending for lengthy periods of time without the internalisation of a non-offender identity (Bottoms et al., 2004; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), and that persisters may continue offending despite a positive and pro-social identity (Liem & Richardson, 2014). Most of the existing studies have a cross-sectional design, but a few have a longitudinal design and are thus more adequate to capture the process of identity change. Below, the discussion of previous research first concentrates on cross-sectional designs that examined factors that seemed to be associated with prisoner's future expectations, followed by longitudinal research which was able to link pre-release expectations to behaviour, and finally, longitudinal research providing insight into the movement from a criminal to a conventional identity.

Future expectations

A few cross-sectional studies have zoomed in on prisoner's own pre-release expectations (presumed to reflect identity) by examining which social or individual factors (excluding pre-prison factors) seem to be related to these expectations (Crank, 2016; Dhami et al., 2006; Van Ginneken, 2015; Visher & O'Connell, 2012). Dhami and colleagues (2006) showed that, from a range of factors, the perceived return to family/friends upon release was related to lower forecasts of recidivism among a sample of UK and US offenders approaching release. They illustrated that social bonds can be a source of social support depending on the perceived strength and quality of the bond. Similarly, Visher and O'Connell (2012) demonstrated that being a father, being married, experiencing family support and higher levels of self-esteem were related to optimistic pre-release expectations among a sample of US prisoners. From a more qualitative perspective, Van Ginneken (2015) interviewed 30 offenders approaching release and observed that offenders with a positive outlook on the future in general were characterized by having goal-oriented thoughts, concrete plans to achieve certain life goals and motivation to do so, in line with elements of Snyder's Hope Theory (1994). Crank's research (2016) among 700 prisoners illustrated that expectations of a 'straight' future were more likely among prisoners who did not identify themselves with a deviant identity such as a thief or being violent. However, over half (56.7%) of the prisoners who could identify with a violent identity also reported future expectations to desist.

Longitudinal studies using a follow-up to explore how expectations link to primary or act-desistance, suggested that individuals with future expectations to desist from crime seem more likely to be successful in overcoming re-entry challenges (Burnett, 1992; Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Howerton, Burnett, Byng & Campbell, 2009; LeBel et al., 2008; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Visher et al., 2004; Souza et al., 2013). For example, in a qualitative study on short-term 'revolving door prisoners (Howerton et al., 2009), participants who were optimistic about their chance in society to be crime-free, appeared to be more successful in their endeavours to find a job, which they felt was necessary to be able to refrain from crime. Shapland and Bottoms (2011) found that participants who made a decision to desist were more often actively seeking support from pro-social bonds such as partners and parents. However, while most prisoners in these studies expressed (high) expectations to desist, most of them were re-arrested, reconvicted or re-imprisoned again at the follow-ups. For example, 56 percent of the 113 young adult (age 19–22) male prisoners in the research of Shapland and Bottoms (2011) said at the time of the first interview that they decided to quit crime in the near future. An additional 37 percent wanted to quit but did not know if they were able to. Nonetheless, after three years, 90 of the 113 young men (79.6%) were reconvicted. Similarly, while 80 percent of Burnett's research (1992) 130 offenders claimed a desire to desist, 82 percent of the sample had reoffended at the 10-year follow-up (Burnett & Maruna, 2004).

Moving from a criminal to conventional identity

Longitudinal research exploring shifts in identity predominantly uses a quantitative approach, sometimes supplemented with a (cross-sectional) qualitative subset or some open questions in the structured interviews (Na et al., 2015; Rocque et al., 2016; Bachman et al., 2016, Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Visher & Travis, 2003). Overall, quantitative longitudinal research illustrates that individuals who envision a conventional alternative identity, might be more likely to desist and that a successful transition to a pro-social, non-criminal world seems to include identity transformation. Burnett (1992; 2013) made an early attempt to produce a typology of desistance identities drawing on 130 prisoners' accounts and their motivation to change. In brief, 'converts' moved to conventional identities and said they were changed, 'avoiders' were deterred by the future costs of crime, and 'non-starters' felt that crime was just a misstep in their non-criminal life. It appeared that only the 'converts' were confident they would never engage in crime again, while the other types were ambivalent about reoffending because of being drawn to opposite goals; conventional and criminal (Burnett, 2013). LeBel and colleagues (2008) managed to do a criminal records check 10 years after release of the original 130 repeat offenders' of Burnett's study (1992; Burnett & Maruna, 2004) and found that identifying with the

role of a 'family man' was positively related to the absence of criminal behaviour. Conversely, feelings of being 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna, 2001) were related to recidivism (reconviction and re-imprisonment).

Seven longitudinal studies attempted to gain more insight into the movement from a criminal to a conventional identity change by (also) adopting a qualitative approach across the multiple interview waves (Farrall, 2016; Farrall, Hunter, Sharpe & Calverley, 2014; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; [2] Healy, 2014; Irwin, 1970; Nugent, 2017; Opsal, 2012; Soyer, 2014). Irwin's classic and cogent account of *The Felon* (1970) presented an array of criminal identities. Drawing from interviews with 41 prisoners before release and re-interviewing 34 in the first months after release while they were on parole, various types of criminals were identified such as the 'Thief', the 'Man in the lower class', and the conventional 'Square John'. Types differ in their outlook on life, what it entails to be 'doing all right' and consequently in how they deal with life after release. However, Irwin (1970, p. 7) also outlined that "not all felons have a criminal identity". Contrary to Irwin's criminal identities, Healy (2014) focused on non-offending identities. Her analysis of 73 male probationers in Ireland (re-interviewing 14 of them after 6 years) resulted in three types of desisters, which she referred to as: 1) authentic desisters, who were able to transform a visualized identity into a meaningful crime-free identity 2) liminal[3] desisters, who are in between social worlds and develop a substitute self while working towards a desired future self, and 3) imagined desisters, who imagined a future non-offending self, but felt this identity was not attainable given the current situation. While the first two types were more or less refraining from crime, the third type did not; although they could be involved in less frequent and less serious offending. The third type resonated with the concept of 'imagined desistance' apparent in the narratives of the 23 young offenders (15–18 years old) in Soyer's research (2014) who each were interviewed at least five times. The youngsters felt somewhat disillusioned in thinking that juvenile incarceration would give them tools to actively build a crime-free life and work on the non-offending identity they imagined. This non-offending identity could be for example, the 'adult' identity as the young individuals (16–21 years old) in Nugent's qualitative longitudinal research (2017) envisioned when trying to desist after a limited offending career. Originating from disadvantaged backgrounds, the 'adult' identity was something felt beyond reach for these individuals. Although almost all

2 Although Bottoms and Shapland (2011; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011) conducted a largely quantitative research, they added a few open questions at each interview wave, creating some opportunity for participants to elaborate on their views and to reflect. This is why their research is included in this section.

3 The term 'liminal' was used by Turner (1970) referring to individuals who find themselves in between two different worlds.

participants remained confident to achieve their (conventional) goals, some also scaled down on their aspirations and in the months that followed, most of them retracted from social life since conventional aspirations such as obtaining a job and settling down seemed faraway. Desisting participants seemed to exchange a sense of belonging, status and respect derived from criminal world, for a legal, but limited existence due to the lack of fulfilling a pro-social identity. This illustrated the importance of chances to fulfil other, pro-social identities.

Bottoms and Shapland (2011) made a considerable contribution to the desistance field interviewing a sample of 113 serious young offenders up to four occasions. In the end, 97 men participated in either the third or fourth interview. Although they utilized a predominantly quantitative research design, they also added a few qualitative questions at each interview wave. Their findings provided evidence that persistent offenders also have strong conventional values and revealed how most individuals deploy various strategies to be able to resist the temptation of crime, introducing the term 'diachronic self-control' into life-course research. Participants in their research for example mentioned to sit at home, watch TV and playing videogames all day: "very boring, but not offending" (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011, p. 274), which could be seen as being in a similar vein as the 'limited existence' found in Nugent's research (2017).

The extensive study of Farrall (2002) followed a sample of 199 UK probationers over the course of 15 years in five sweeps starting in 1997. He succeeded to re-interview 177 (89%) individuals at least once, 105 of the original sample could even be retraced and interviewed at the fifth interview wave (Farrall, 2016; Farrall et al., 2014). Originally set out to understand the role of probation in supporting desistance, Farrall (2002) concluded that desistance was an interplay between motivation rooted within the individual and social interaction. One of the conclusions regarding identity was a gaze directed towards the future to guide behaviour, and the importance to assist ex-offenders in creating plans for a desired future self. One avenue facilitating the construction of a pro-social replacement self, was for example, finding legitimate employment, hereby linking social factors to identity. In similar vein, Opsal (2012), who started with 43 just released US parolees and managed to interview (only) nine of them three times in the 12 months after the initial interviews, discovered that when the imagined pro-social identity could not be solidified by for example, experiencing difficulties in finding a job, some parolees started to reengage with their past criminal selves. Aside from identity desistance-related insights, the studies of Farrall (2002; 2016) and Opsal (2012) also provided mixed findings about the role of probation or parole supervision in the desistance process.

Previous research on tertiary or relational desistance and the role of supervision

Since the terms tertiary or relational desistance have been introduced recently (McNeill, 2016b; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), research on the topic, particularly on the meso-level, is limited. However, earlier studies focusing on experiences of individuals being supervised have already shed more light on the contribution of supervision to the desistance process in general. Yet, they are mostly cross-sectional.[4]

An early study of Leibrich (1993), who interviewed 48 probationers that remained crime-free for three years, illustrated that the relationship with the supervising officer was experienced for most to be significant in supporting the desistance process by treating them with respect, care and trust, while only half actually mentioned supervision to be helpful for their desistance journey. Rex's (1999) 60 probationers in England and Wales appreciated probation officers that were experienced as being reasonable, fair and encouraging. She concluded that these perceptions could facilitate commitments to refrain from crime. The nine men on parole after a long-term imprisonment in Schinkel's research (2014; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) were able to achieve some success in relational desistance at the micro-level since there was family or a partner from whom they experienced support and recognition for trying to turn their lives around, expressing belief in them. However, since six of these nine men were living an isolated life because of the fear of temptation, contact with the outside world was mainly facilitated by the check-ins they had to attend with the criminal justice social workers that were monitoring them. These men reported some experiences that "their criminal justice social worker was a source of hope and motivation" (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016, p. 6). Although being cross-sectional, the studies mentioned illustrate that supervising agents could make a valid contribution to relational desistance, hereby 'assisting desistance' (Farrall et al., 2014).

Apart from the cross-sectional studies mentioned, only three longitudinal studies in the context of parole or probation and its contribution to desistance have been done. The first, done by Farrall (2002; Farrall et al., 2014), provides a 15-year examination of 199 probationers over five sweeps of interview and illustrates the indirect impact of the correctional system on desistance. While half of the sample was making successful attempts at desistance, only a few mentioned the role of probation in this process (direct impact). However, Farrall (2002) noted that probation, contrary to prison, did not restrict opportunities regarding housing, employment and relationships, hereby enabling the desistance process to develop and progress. In addition, he observed that it was more beneficial for desistance

4 For a more extensive review of cross-sectional studies into supervision and desistance, the reader is referred to the review of Weaver & McNeill (2010).

when the supervisor and the probationer were working in a partnership, but also, that the value of probation could be experienced only years later, when life events were starting to unfold and the advice of the probation officer suddenly seemed to make sense. The fifth sweep of interviews indicated that while the thought of change or the desire to change came only years later after probation had ended, the advice given by their probation officer during supervision still seemed to play a part in the process of change, increasing its impact (Farrall et al., 2014).

The second longitudinal study on parole possibly contributing to desistance was done by Opsal (2009; 2015). She conducted a qualitative analysis of 43 US parolees, of whom she managed to interview 30 in the second wave and only nine in the third wave. She described that her participants felt they were only monitored by their supervisor rather than receiving assistance in the reintegration process. A few, however, mentioned the positive function of parole by providing an explicit direction and structure in a chaotic life. One of the main conclusions of the longitudinal data was that parole was experienced to hinder efforts at identity desistance, particularly in the fulfilment of roles, such as becoming an employee, a mother and other social roles because of parole conditions and governance. For example, since parolees in the US are not allowed to have contact with others on parole, this was felt to be unhelpful in facilitating social relationships which could provide them: "with a sense of belonging, emotional support, and motivation to stay out of prison" (Opsal, 2015, p. 199). Or in other words, to achieve relational desistance at the micro-level. The study suggested that parole officers could pay more attention to conflicting conditions and the impact of these conflicts.

Thirdly, the Returning Home Study (Yahner, Visher & Solomon, 2008) focused on reintegration, but their quantitative longitudinal data of 740 former US prisoners provided insight into the possible contribution of parole to desistance. While participants varied in their belief whether parole would help not to engage in crime again, findings also showed that nearly all participants felt they were treated with respect and a quarter mentioned that the most helpful thing in their view was that their parole officer had provided encouragement. Only 6 percent explicitly mentioned their parole officer to be a "source of strength in helping meet their biggest challenges after release", which for most part was to find a job and go straight (Yahner et al., 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, parole was associated with a higher chance to return to prison in the year following release due to technical violations of parole conditions, and parolees who had positive feelings towards their parole officer were less likely to be imprisoned again than participants who felt less positive.

Main shortcoming of previous research on desistance

While appreciating the value of the amount of research done on the process of desistance, it remains an enormous challenge to deconstruct the concept of identity and the change herein, and previous research in this area also has its limitations. First, most of the studies adopt a cross sectional approach (e.g. Harris, 2011; King, 2013; Liem & Richardson, 2014 Schinkel, 2014) which, although providing important insights, does not allow to study change. Second, a substantial amount concerns studies adopting a quantitative longitudinal approach (e.g. Rocque et al., 2016; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Na et al., 2015; Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Yahner et al., 2008). These studies are able to describe change, but leave ample room for participants to reflect on their decisions and considerations which seem important to understand the process of desistance in greater depth. Third, most prior studies focus on specific offender populations, such as revolving door prisoners, young offenders, probationers (e.g. Farrall, 2002; Healy, 2014; Soyer, 2014). Relating closely to this point, participants in most studies have not been incarcerated or were not interviewed in prison, but after release (Farrall, 2002; Healy, 2014; Hucklesby, 2008; Opsal, 2015; Vanhaelemeesch, Vander Beken & Vandevelde, 2014). Given the fact that prisoners constitute a complex and specific group of high-risk offenders and face many re-entry challenges upon release (Petersilia, 2003), it is of great value to include the experiences of prisoners when they are approaching release and follow them during their transition to society. Fourth, existing research reporting on experiences of supervision typically portray 'front-door' practice populations instead of early release 'back door' schemes (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Tonry, 2003). Front-door practice refers to offenders doing community service or being supervised in the context of a conditional sentence, mostly referred to as being on probation. Most of these individuals did not come from a prison setting which accounts for a different dynamic. Studies examining 'back door' practices, referred to as parole, are mostly cross-sectional (see Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; Schinkel, 2014) and therefore do not allow to follow participants through the process of re-entry. In addition, previous research in this area has tended to rely on parolees who were invited by their supervising officer to participate in the study, were identified to be committed to desist, who eventually desisted or were seen as successful in their supervision endeavours (see for example Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; King; 2013; Leibrich, 1993; Rex, 1999; Schinkel, 2014). Therefore, current knowledge is primarily based on selective and more successful samples of parolees/probationers. Fifth, the large majority of these desistance studies originate from Anglo-Saxon countries (e.g. Maruna, 2001; Bottoms & Shapland, 2011; Farrall, 2002; Healy, 2014; Hucklesby, 2008; Opsal, 2015; Harris, 2011; King, 2013; Liem & Richardson, 2014; Schinkel, 2014), and it is unclear how these findings translate to other non-Anglo-Saxon countries and the Dutch context.

So, although the theories on desistance have become more prominent in the criminological literature, and a lot of empirical studies have been carried out, many important issues and questions remain open.

1.4 THIS STUDY

The current study seeks to contribute to existing knowledge of the desistance process – and to overcome some of the shortcomings of prior studies – by (a) conducting a qualitative longitudinal research design following 28 (conditionally released) prisoners from shortly before until a year after release and interviewing them at three separate occasions; (b) using unique information from a Dutch context; and (c) using multiple data sources to include different 'views', from the offender and from the parole officer.

Analytical framework and research questions

Figure 1.1 presents the schematic overview of the dimensions of desistance as studied in this thesis. The current study examines the process of desistance in a sample of Dutch long-term prisoners, by interviewing them three times: data collection started in prison with 28 prisoners, continued three months after release where 24 of the original sample could be interviewed, and 12 months after release 23 of these men were re-interviewed. In line with the above theory section, and thus current desistance literature, different but related dimensions of desistance are assumed to be important. Each of these dimensions can change over time, and changes in these concepts can be distinct but are probably related (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). First, primary or act-desistance is important, which can be examined by consulting criminal records, but also by studying self-reported crime. Second, it is presumed that secondary or identity desistance comprises the shift to a pro-social and *non-offending* identity which can be facilitated by the various conventional roles a person fulfils in society (e.g. parent, employee or partner). Thus, as it presumes to reflect a change towards a future identity, *expectations* for (non-) offending and *aspirations* to fulfil conventional roles are examined more in-depth. Thirdly, tertiary or relational desistance is perceived social support and recognition for efforts to change from family, partner, children and friends, and possibly from the criminal justice system, such as parole supervision (See Figure 1.1). Specific research questions are formulated to explore the interplay between changes in these dimensions, in particular the role of identity.

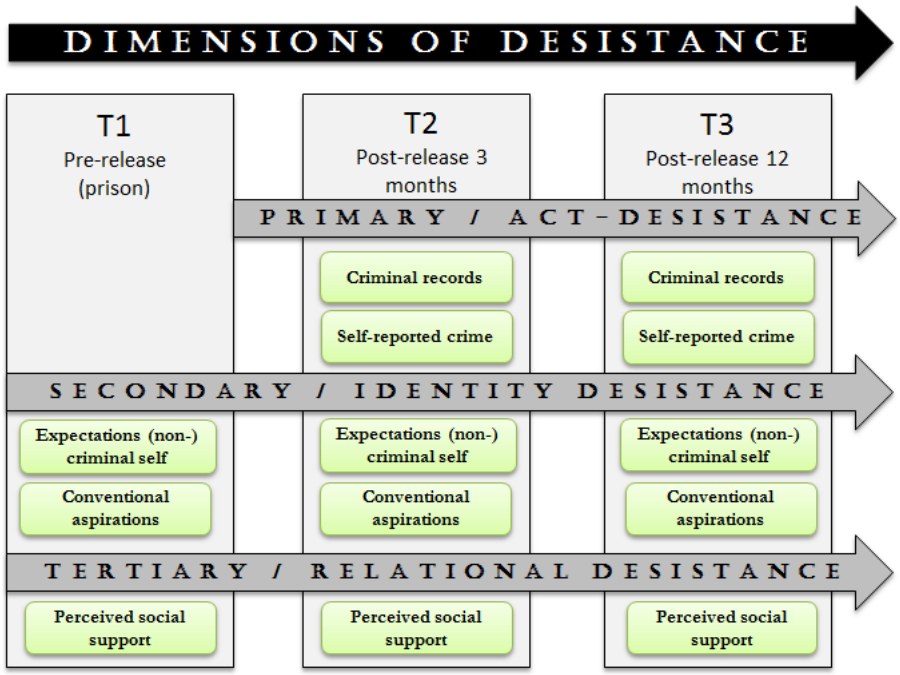

Figure 1.1 Schematic overview of dimensions of desistance as studied longitudinally in this thesis.

First, the current study focuses on a certain aspect of identity, i.e. future expectations for a (non-)criminal self. Using the interview data of the first round of interviews when prisoners were approaching release, it is studied what their outlook on life after release was, in particular regarding future criminal behaviour. Gaining insight into their future expectations regarding primary or act-desistance, and how they interact with early attempts at non-offending after release may enhance knowledge of the transition from prison to society and long-term desistance (see Apel, 2013; King, 2013; Souza et al., 2013). This study therefore first explores the pre-release future expectations regarding the (non-)criminal self and examines how social and individual (agency-related) factors, that seem to play an important role in the disengagement from crime, are linked to these future expectations. Following LeBel et al. (2008, p. 133),[5] the term social factors in the current study refers to the external social bonds such as employment, an intimate partner, children and parents, and the term individual – or subjective – factors refers to the way people experience and try to make sense of the world around them, such as goals, feelings of control

5 These two dinstinctions are sometimes referred to as external and internal, structure and agency and social and subjective (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009; LeBel et al., 2008).

and motivation to desist (Bandura, 1989; Burnett, 1992). Social bonds serve as a (potential) source for perceived social support, which then could relate to tertiary or relational desistance. So, to begin with this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1A. What are the pre-release expectations of prisoners regarding future criminal behaviour?
1B. How do social and individual factors relate to expectations of prisoners regarding criminal behaviour?

Second, the longitudinal design of this study allows to compare a specific aspect of identity, i.e. prisoners' pre-release expectations, with their primary or act-desistance after release. Furthermore, the reasons ex-prisoners give whether their expectations came true or not were explored, connecting to relational desistance and agency, leading to the following research questions:

2A. To what extent do prisoners' pre-release expectations regarding future criminal behaviour compare to their criminal behaviour after release?
2B. What reasons do ex-prisoners give for these expectations to come true or not?

Third, this study focuses on another aspect possibly reflecting identity change, i.e. the development of conventional aspirations. A recurring theme in the field of desistance is criminal versus conformist values, or living a conventional life that is not compatible with criminal values and lifestyles (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Maruna, 2001; LeBel et al., 2008). This involves for example to 'live a normal/regular life', 'be a family man' and 'be a good person' (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011, p. 262), but also a good parent or a 'worker' employee identity can help individuals to move away from their identity as an offender (LeBel et al., 2008; Opsal, 2012; Sampson & Laub, 1993). A shift in one's goals and aspirations, for example to live a conventional life, is viewed to a be an important element of the desistance process as it may reflect the process of identity change (Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996). Thus, focusing on another aspect presumed to reflect secondary or identity desistance, this study portrays the conventionality of (ex-)prisoners' aspirations from pre-release up to a year after release, and explores how these relate to primary or act-desistance. This study therefore addresses the following research questions:

3A. What is the nature and development of conventional aspirations of (ex-)prisoners?
3B. How do conventional aspirations relate to criminal behaviour?

Fourth and finally, to broaden the criminological lens beyond the micro-level, and to include the criminal justice system on a meso-level, this study also incorporated the role of parole supervision. The nature of parole supervision of Dutch (ex-)prisoners in terms of official conditions is studied, as well as the way in which parole officers and ex-prisoners navigate these conditions. The focus is particularly on how the release conditions and the interaction with the parole officer shape the parole experience. This study therefore explores how the men in the current sample experienced parole supervision in their conditional release and then, how the parole experience interacted with act, identity- and relational desistance. It focuses on answering the following research questions:

4A. What is the nature of parole supervision of Dutch (ex-)prisoners?
4B. How do (ex-)prisoners experience their parole supervision?
4C. How does the parole experience interact with dimensions of desistance?

Research design and data used

Since the above theory and literature section has shown that desistance is a process rather than a decision someone makes to simply 'desist', it seemed crucial to carry out multiple interviews with the same sample in order to truly advance knowledge on this topic. In line with research done by other scholars (e.g. Bachman et al., 2016; Opsal, 2012), desistance in the present study was studied in a timeframe of 12 months after release, which Maruna (2001, p. 48) referred to as "a significant life change worthy of examination". Although an extensive description of the research design and methodology used in this study will be presented in *Chapter 2*, to illustrate the strengths of the current study in addressing the research questions it is necessary to give a short overview here as well.

This study was a sub-study of the Prison Project which targeted prisoners who were: men, born in the Netherlands and aged 18-65 (Dirkzwager et al., 2018). In addition to these criteria, the present study also focused on prisoners who (a) were imprisoned for a – to Dutch standards – relatively long time, i.e. between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release,[6] (b) were convicted for a criminal offence (not on appeal), (c) were not in an ISD or TBS programme[7] or a minimum security prison, and (d) were not convicted for a sex offence.

6 Sentence length was between 2,5 and 5 years.

7 ISD (in Dutch: Instelling voor Stelselmatige Daders) is a facility for so-called persistent´revolving door´ criminals and TBS is a court imposed detention under a hospital order. See Chapter 2, p. 31 for an explanation of this criterion.

To select new participants, the Dutch Prison Service in August 2014 provided a list of prisoners in all prisons throughout the entire country of the Netherlands, meeting the inclusion criteria and to be released between September 2014 and October 2016. By far the majority of the convicted individuals were still in appeal, and a large part had already left prison to spend the final phase of their prison spell elsewhere. As a result, the list contained only 84 eligible long-term prisoners held in 13 penitentiary institutions throughout the Netherlands.[8] The first round of interviews took place in prison approximately three months pre-release (T1) in the period June 2014 to October 2015; 44 men could be approached in prison and 36 were interviewed.[9] Eight interviews were excluded because of various reasons. In total, 28 men could be included as part of the initial research sample (*Chapter 4* is based on this sample).

The second round of interviews was carried out on average three months after release (T2) in the period March 2014 to May 2016. All 28 ex-prisoners could be located via the given contact information or via their parole officer. One was still detained since the first interview and three refused to participate in the post-prison interview when being contacted. In the end, 24 of the 28 participants were successfully interviewed at the follow-up (*Chapter 5* is based on this sample). The third wave of interviews was conducted a year after release (T3) in the period from May 2015 to January 2017 and 23 men consented to participate in the final follow-up (*Chapter 6* and *7* are based on this sample). A total of 75 in-depth interviews were carried out across all interview waves and 23 men could be interviewed on all three occasions resulting in 69 interviews.

The design of the in-prison and both post-prison interviews was semi-structured and included a broad range of topics from the literature and previous research. The topics in the interview were primary/ act-, secondary/ identity and tertiary/relational desistance oriented, but also included questions about experiences in prison and interventions. Questions concerned the meaning given to and experience of intimate relations, friends, children, parents, parole and employment (possibly contributing to tertiary or relational desistance), as well as questions about goals, obstacles, self-change, different selves (aspects of identity) and criminal activities (primary or act-desistance). The basic idea was to capture the meaning and perception of these topics at multiple stages, in prison and after release. Each interview also had a specific focus, mostly linked to the period in which the interview took place. The first (in-prison) interview for example, focused on future expectations after release. The second interview concentrated on the experience of the first fragile months after

8 For a detailed description of the selection of participants, see Chapter 2.

9 Participants refused to participate or did not show up (n=4); participants that could not be reached when visiting the prison (n=4), for example because they were placed in solitary confinement or due to administrative problems.

release and future plans, and the third and final interview revolved around reflection on the past year being out of prison. In addition, the final interview started the conversation with open questions about the participants' childhood and upbringing, how they entered crime and how it evolved into more serious crime.

Innovation

The current study, with its longitudinal design and focus on under-researched aspects of identity, addresses new and currently unanswered questions regarding desistance. In addition, the current study will overcome some important shortcomings of prior research. Therefore, it advances current knowledge in several important ways. First, by zooming in on aspects of 'identity' such as future expectations and aspirations, this study seeks to advance our understanding of identity change in particular and the desistance process in general. Gaining more knowledge about pre-release expectations, the extent to which these expectations are realised, and the factors playing a role in this process contribute to the core of the discussion about the link between subjective factors and behaviour. Second, the qualitative longitudinal design is particularly suitable to look at dynamics and change in the desistance process using the stories people tell (narratives) and the meaning they ascribe to them (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Maruna, 2001). Third, most longitudinal research fails to take the experience of persisters into account, magnifying success stories of desisters and disentangling why they desisted. The current research selected prisoners who met the criteria and was able to follow most sample members on their way out. This also allowed to include the trajectories of individuals who were less or not at all successful in or willing to refrain from crime. Fourth, obtaining self-reported crime from serious offenders, instead of merely official data measuring desistance, allows to examine (a part of) the criminal career instead of the *criminal justice career* (Bushway & Tahamont, 2016, p. 375), thereby including a fuller spectrum of criminal involvement, uncovering hidden crime. Fifth, most research in the area of desistance stems from Anglo-Saxon countries, yet recently there is some essential work on desistance coming from other countries in Europe (e.g. Cid & Martí, 2012; Carlsson, 2013). In the Netherlands, some explorative work was carried out in the southern part of the country in which desisters and persisters were interviewed using life narratives (Van Halderen, De Croes & Vogelvang, 2015). Although the study was designed to be longitudinal, only a few participants could be reinterviewed six months after release (6 out of 17 prisoners of the original sample). More recent work examined social factors in the process of desistance among Dutch female offenders (Rodermond, 2018). By linking longitudinal quantitative data to a cross-sectional qualitative subset, it is suggested that contextual factors and individual factors play an important role in the process of disengaging from crime, and social factors may support the process when it has already started from within

the offender. The findings provide tentative support for identity changes possibly preceding act-desistance (in line with LeBel et al., 2008). Other than these studies, the Dutch context remains largely neglected.

1.5 THE DUTCH PENAL LANDSCAPE

Prison rates, sentence length and conditions of confinement

The Netherlands are long known for their liberal penal climate which put rehabilitation at the core of policy since decades (Boone, 2011) and is mirrored in the mild confinement conditions and relatively short-term sentences. After a staggering increase in two decades time, the total number of prisoners quadrupling to 120 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005 (Downes & Van Swaaningen, 2007), the Netherlands experienced a significant decrease in the total number of prisoners from 50,650 in 2005 to 35,250 in 2016, a drop of 30 percent (CBS, 2017). The Dutch prison population currently ranks as one of the lowest in Europe, with 53 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants (Aebi, Tiago & Burkhardt, 2016). This decline has resulted in empty prison cells and in the closing of several prisons (De Looff, Van de Haar, Van Gemmert & Bruggeman, 2018).[10] Recidivism rates have also slowly been going down in the years 2002–2015, with 35.2 to 27.6 percent of all released offenders being imprisoned again within two years. However, 45 percent still comes into contact with the criminal justice system again for a new crime within two years, 35 percent even in the first year after release (WODC-Recidivemonitor, 2018, De Looff et al., 2018; Weijters, Verweij & Tollenaar, 2017). Statistics in other countries also demonstrate the importance of the first year after release. For example, US statistics show that recidivism occurring in the first year after release accounts for almost two thirds of all the re-arrests measured in the first three years, and almost half (21.5%) of all the reconvictions in three years (46.9%) take place in the first year (Langan & Levin, 2002). In England and Wales, 47 percent of all released offenders are reconvicted within one year of release (Ministry of Justice, 2013). In sum, national and international recidivism rates highlight the fragility of the first year after release, and therefore the relevance of examining this period.

Short-term sentences and short prison spells are typical for the Dutch penal climate; only 7 percent of all Dutch prisoners is sentenced to more than a year in prison (Kalidien, 2017). In contrast, this number is 68 percent in the UK (Allen & Watson, 2017) and 97 percent in the USA (Ann Carson & Anderson, 2016). In the Netherlands, the average time of imprisonment is 105 days and only 2 percent of

10 There is a proposal to close more prisons (*Kamerstukken II* [Parliamentary Papers] 2017-2018, 24 587 no. 725).

all prisoners is released after an imprisonment of two to four years (De Looff et al., 2018). For Dutch standards (but also for the majority of European countries),[11] being released after spending two to four years in prison is considered a long period of time. Although they are convicted for serious crimes such as armed robbery, violent burglary, extortion, assault and attempted homicide, little is known about the criminal pathways of these prisoners. It is important to gain more knowledge about this group since the crimes they are convicted for can have a devastating impact on the victims and also impact society and feelings of safety at large. In addition, re-entry challenges can be even more challenging for prisoners serving longer terms. Longer periods away from society could result in difficulties reconnecting to the labour market and weakening of social bonds while at the same time being exposed to deviant peers for longer periods (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

The Netherlands is further known for the humane and mild conditions of confinement when viewed from an international perspective. Prison uniforms are absent in Dutch prisons, cell sharing is limited and unsupervised visits are allowed (Tonry & Bijleveld, 2007). Furthermore, prisoners in the Netherlands are allowed to make formal complaints, they are able to send and receive letters and there are options to request leaves (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Molleman & Van den Hurk, 2012). Although the Netherlands can still be viewed as having mild confinement conditions, budget cuts and a growing punitive climate have contributed for example to limiting daily activities in prison and the introduction of a 'standard regime'.

Since 2014,[12] a system of promotion and demotion has been introduced to the prison system in which prisoners who show pro-social behaviour and motivation to work on their future are 'upgraded' from the basic, sober regime they came in at the start of imprisonment to a so-called plus-regime. In practice, prisoners have to fill in a questionnaire, the so-called 'Reflector' which is a digital questionnaire aimed at inventorying prisoners' awareness of criminogenic factors, and to complete a Choose for Change course (in Dutch: Kies voor Verandering) to show their motivation to disengage from criminal life. The Choose for Change course revolves around three core mechanisms: cognitive transformation (identity, purpose in life), self-efficacy and (perceived) social support (Nelissen & Schreurs, 2008). Combining these mechanisms should lead to more *motivation to change*. In this course, concepts of identity are present as well. Elements of the course for example, dive deeper into past, current and future selves focusing on reflection, contemplation and thinking ahead (Nelissen & Schreurs, 2008). After completing the questionnaire and the Choose for Change course, prisoners can be promoted to the plus-regime which entails five

11 Prison terms in two thirds of 47 surveyed countries are on average shorter than 1 year (Aebi et al., 2016).

12 *Staatscourant*, 20 February 2014.

more hours for extra activities than the basic regime. Prisoners in the plus-regime are also allowed to apply for leaves, participate in behavioural interventions and apply for (practical) assistance with aftercare.

Assistance with aftercare is an important aspect of release preparations to reduce recidivism risks for which the Ministry of Safety and Justice [in Dutch: Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie] and the Association of Dutch Municipalities [In Dutch: Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten; VNG) have made agreements to ensure that every prisoner meets five basic conditions upon release: housing, income, obtaining a legal ID, debts and care (VNG & Ministerie van VenJ, 2014). More specifically, this means that the prisoner has a valid ID, accommodation upon release, income from employment or social benefits (and if not employed, some form of daily activities), insight into debts and access to care and insurance (Weijters, Rokven & Verweij, 2018).[13] Nevertheless, only 'motivated' prisoners, who completed the Reflector and the Choose for Change course, can use the four hours that are reserved for reintegration activities and apply for extra courses or extra assistance with aftercare (DJI, 2017). As a result, prisoners who do not show motivation to change their ways, have to spend time in their cells during the time reserved for reintegration activities.[14]

Conditional release and supervision

In the Netherlands, individuals sentenced to prison for two or more years are conditionally released after having served two thirds of their imposed sentence (art. 15 lid 2 Sr). Before the conditional release, prisoners are gradually prepared for resocialization by a system called 'phased re-entry',[15] which allows prisoners to gain more freedom up to the actual conditional release date, for example by going on leave and engaging in rehabilitation opportunities.

After release, offenders often have to adhere to the general condition of not committing any crimes until the actual (administrative) end of their sentence; in addition, specific conditions can be imposed aimed at reducing recidivism and

13 Although reports have illustrated that there are serious shortcomings in the system of ensuring aftercare (see RSJ, 2016; De Koning et al., 2016; *Kamerstukken II* 2017-2018, 28 719 no. 52).

14 Up until March 2014, *all* prisoners who served a minimum sentence of four months were eligible to enter behavioural and vocational courses to work on their rehabilitation in the context of the *Prevention of Recidivism Program* (Dutch Prison Service & Dutch Probation Service, 2007). This program was abolished in 2014 triggered by cutbacks and a more punitive penal climate focusing on pushing back recidivism instead of positive life in custody circumstances (see Bosma, 2017 for an evaluation of the programme).

15 A bill to replace phased re-entry by electronic detention (*Kamerstukken I*, 2014, 33 745, no. 1) was barely approved by the lower house of the Dutch Parliament in 2014, but then overruled by the Senate. The new Parliament has now agreed to maintain the system of phased re-entry.

protecting the victim.[16] Specific conditions may concern certain restrictions, such as attending check-ins and conforming to location bans, interventions facilitating behavioural change, such as drug bans and courses to improve vocational or cognitive skills, and professional help, such as seeing a psychologist or assisted living facilities. The Dutch probation service is given the task to supervise these ex-prisoners and monitor their compliance (Boone & Beckmann, 2017; Flight, Nauta, & Terpstra, 2011). For monitoring purposes, parolees can also be subjected to wear an ankle bracelet. If the parolee violates the imposed conditions, he or she can be sent back to prison.

1.6 SOCIETAL RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

The topic and findings of the current study are of societal relevance for criminal justice actors working with individuals in prison and (ex-)offenders, and for society at large for several reasons. First, much importance in rehabilitative interventions in prison and after release is given to cognitive shifts and aspects of identity transformation by paying attention to setting goals and making plans for the future, see for example the above mentioned Choose for Change course. This is done with the aim to increase motivation to change and facilitate behavioural change. In prison, this can get prisoners promoted to a plus-regime in which they get access to rehabilitation activities, and after release this is important for parole supervision showing that someone is motivated to change. But to what extent does setting goals and expecting and making plans for a crime-free life indicate change? And, how do returning prisoners deal with the increasing responsibilisation when opportunities to strive for goals and to realise plans to live crime-free are sparse?

Second, gaining a better understanding of factors contributing to desistance is highly relevant for correctional practice as it can offer guidelines for interventions within offender rehabilitation. For example, improving knowledge about which factors seem to be related to prisoner's pre-release expectations, and how these interact with behaviour after release can contribute to the advancement of early interventions in prison.

Third, examining in which way parolees' perceptions of supervision are experienced as helpful or not for the desistance process provides insight into the practice of supervision through the eyes of the ones 'subjected by it' (Robinson & McNeill, 2008). Gaining more understanding on how conditionally released offenders perceive the parole supervision, as well as why and how they experience it to be helpful may add to the practice of parole officers as this can be useful in their efforts to assist parolees towards a life without crime. This way, it may add to achieving

16 Aanwijzing voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling (2016A007)

some form of tertiary or relational desistance which is presumed to be important for the desistance process. Furthermore, it creates understanding for the difficult position the Dutch probation service finds herself balancing supervision tasks of protecting society and supporting rehabilitation efforts of offenders to reduce crime.

Fourth, although recidivism rates in the Netherlands are slowly going down, still 45 percent of all released prisoners comes into contact with the criminal justice system again within two years and a quarter is imprisoned again within this period (De Looff et al., 2018; Weijters et al., 2017), leading to high costs for society. The first year after release seems to be particularly fragile: almost 35 percent of ex-prisoners is rearrested in the 12 months following release (WODC-Recidivemonitor, 2018). This emphasizes the importance of gaining more knowledge on the first year of transitioning to society. In addition, the sample in this study consisted of serious offenders, the large majority responsible for violent (property) crimes, such as domestic and other robberies. Crimes that are known to have an enormous impact on the victim(s), their social environment and feelings of safety and security in society, and have been classified as High Impact Crimes (HIC; Ministry of Security and Justice, 2014; 2016). The dramatic increase in the number of violent robberies in the Netherlands (from 1,905 in 2006 to 2,911 in 2009), led to a special taskforce appointed to investigate this phenomenon (Taskforce Overvallen, 2010; Van der Mark, Van Nobelen & Mesu, 2014). Preventing and controlling these (future) high impact crimes (HIC), which also includes other violent crimes, was then given top priority by the Ministry of Security and Justice when a national action programme was launched in 2011 (in Dutch: Programma Gewelddadige Vermogenscriminaliteit PGVC), which for example resulted in intensified supervision after release for offenders convicted for a HIC crime. The first recidivism rates of this group of high-risk offenders illustrate that 57 percent of domestic burglars and 37 percent of robbers who were convicted in 2013, were convicted again for a new offence within two years of their HIC conviction (Beijersbergen, Blokdijk & Weijters, 2018). However, while the percentage for reoffending robbers seems relatively low, caution must be taken since this number may be affected by the fact that robbers are often given a longer term sentence, which adds to the relevance of the current study. Given the societal impact of these crimes, reducing recidivism among these serious offenders was given priority and still remains crucial to protect potential future victims for whom these crimes can have an unmistakable and devastating impact.

1.7 OUTLINE STUDY

The current study aims to understand the realities of prisoners' life pre-release and after prison and to capture different dimensions of the desistance journey, with a specific focus on the concept of identity such as expectations and aspirations.

Chapter 2 deals with methodology and presents the process of data gathering. From interviewing in prison, building rapport with participants to retracing participants after release and interviewing them again in different locations across the country. Also, information is presented about creating the interview schedules for the different waves, ethical considerations and how the data was analyzed afterwards. The secondary data sources will be described briefly before turning to the quality of the data.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the characteristics of the men in the sample concerning their social situation, judicial process and experiences during imprisonment. Data from the interviews and criminal records were used to describe the sample on several topics before, during and after imprisonment.

The consecutive Chapters (4, 5, 6 and 7) use empirical data to examine the mechanisms as laid out above. *Chapter 4* starts with the examination of identity desistance by exploring the expectations of prisoners regarding their future criminal behaviour after release (RQ 1A) and the role of social and individual factors in these expectations (RQ 1B). Interview data from the first round of interviews (T1), which took place in prison, were used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 5 relates identity desistance to act-desistance by investigating to what extent prisoners' pre-release expectations come true or not after release (RQ 2A). In addition, the chapter seeks for mechanisms that possibly explain corresponding or non-corresponding expectations by examining the reasons given by (ex-)prisoners for continuing or refraining from offending behaviour (RQ 2B). Longitudinal interview data of two waves (T1 and T2) were used to compare expectations to self-reported offending behaviour and analyze the arguments given by the research sample.

Chapter 6 illuminates another concept relating to identity desistance by examining in more detail the nature and development of conventional aspirations in the research sample (RQ 3A) and how they relate to act-desistance (RQ 3B). Longitudinal interview data from three waves (T1, T2 and T3) were analyzed to capture the development of conventional aspirations and self-reported act-desistance.

Chapter 7 examines what parole supervision in the Netherlands looks like for this particular research sample of conditionally released prisoners (RQ 4A). The chapter continues with (ex-)prisoners' perceptions of parole (RQ 4B) and then analyzes the parole experience specifically on the level of act- identity and relational desistance (RQ 4C). To answer the research questions in Chapter 7, longitudinal interview

data from three waves (T1, T2 and T3) were used and also criminal records were consulted to capture act-desistance more fully. In addition, information from parole files of the research sample were investigated.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion and general discussion. It offers a summary of the key findings of the empirical chapters of this thesis, the answers to the formulated research questions and discusses how they advance existing theory and previous research. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed followed by suggestions for future research, and implications for policy and practice.

While the primary focus in the chapters is to answer the research questions concerning different dimensions of desistance and integrating the experiences of all sample members of this study, a few men have been portrayed more in-depth through a description of their life story. The aim of these life stories is to provide some contextual nature of the central topics of this study. This way, the reader is given more background information on different participants and the stories serve as a broad illustration of the findings in the chapters. Between each chapter in this dissertation is a life story of one of the sample members, six in total. The sources used to describe their stories are the interview data combined with data from parole files and criminal records (more information about the purpose and format of the life stories can be found in *Chapter 2*). The separate life stories serve as a bridge from one chapter to the next, illustrating how the key concepts of this dissertation work in practice given the context.

Table 1.1 *Outline of this thesis*

Chapter	Topic	Research questions	Interview data from X waves	Other data
1	Introduction	-	-	-
2	Methodology	-	-	-
3	The Men		T1 In prison T2 Three months after release T3 A year after release	Criminal records Parole files
4	Social and individual factors & pre-release expectations	1A) What are the pre-release expectations of prisoners regarding future criminal behaviour? 1B) How do social and individual factors relate to expectations of prisoners regarding criminal behaviour?	T1 In prison	
5	Pre-release expectations & post-release behaviour after release	2A) To what extent do prisoners' pre-release expectations regarding future criminal behaviour compare to their criminal behaviour after release? 2B) What reasons do ex-prisoners give for these expectations to come true or not?	T1 In prison T2 Three months after release	Criminal records
6	Conventional aspirations, identity change & desistance	3A) What is the nature and development of conventional aspirations of (ex-)prisoners? 3B) How do conventional aspirations relate to criminal behaviour?	T1 In prison T2 Three months after release T3 A year after release	Criminal records
7	Parole supervision & desistance	4A) What is the nature of parole supervision of Dutch (ex-)prisoners? 4B) How do (ex-)prisoners experience their parole supervision? 4C) How does the parole experience interact with dimensions of desistance?	T1 In prison T2 Three months after release T3 A year after release	Criminal records Parole files
8	Conclusion & Discussion	-		

CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Since desistance is a process of change, this study used a Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) design which is able to capture changes over time and an individual's understanding of these changes (Farrall, Hunter, Sharpe & Calverley, 2014). QLR collects data at multiple points in time of the same person in order to study change (Farrall, 2006). Interviewing individuals multiple times allows to create insight into dynamic mechanisms that play a role and also on how the individual gives meaning to these changes over time. Farrall et al. (2014) point out that QLR is of particular relevance to the study of desistance, since desistance is about change and QLR focuses on identifying changes within individuals over time.

Following other studies in this field (e.g. Healy, 2014; Maruna, 2001; King, 2013; Opsal, 2009; Schinkel, 2014; Van Ginneken, 2015), the primary data in this study are the stories of the participants to see "how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8). In this context, the aim is to create understanding or 'verstehen' (Weber, 1949). The meaning they ascribe to certain events and how they 'frame' these events (McAdams, 1985; Maruna, 2001) is examined through semi-structured in-depth interviews. This produces rich information on motives and ways of thinking.

To optimize the validity of the data several strategies were employed. First, different data sources were used to include different 'realities' and allow for triangulation. In addition to interview data, parole files and criminal records were consulted to increase validity of the results. Second, large effort was made to maximize the external validity by selecting participants from a national list based on release dates. This way, I strived towards a final sample in which each prisoner who met the inclusion criteria could be included in the study, although it was not the aim to make claims about the prison population in general. Third, external validity, or 'transferability' in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was optimized by making use of case-to-case transfer examples (Firestone, 1993). In the current study, this has been done by providing a 'thick description' of six individual cases to enable the reader to assess whether the conclusions described in the chapters can be drawn from these cases and to assess whether these conclusions can be

applied to other similar cases. This chapter presents an overview of the procedure, fieldwork, interview schedules, difficulties in and reflections on the interviews and the use of parole files and criminal records.[1]

2.2 POPULATION AND PARTICIPANTS

Population

This study was a sub-study of the Prison Project which targeted prisoners who were: men, born in the Netherlands and aged 18–65 (Dirkzwager et al., 2018). These selection criteria also meant that there was a selection of participants concerning gender, age and country of birth. Since the large majority of Dutch imprisoned offenders are male and aged between 18–65, country of birth probably had the most impact on this selection given the fact that 40 percent of the Dutch prison population is not born in the Netherlands (De Looff et al., 2017). This inclusion criterion was implemented in the Prison Project, because these prisoners could for example, return to their country of origin after release (Dirkzwager et al., 2018), which would be detrimental for the current study which aimed to follow all participants up to a year after release. However, second generation immigrants were included in the study.

In addition to the larger Prison Project-criteria, the present study also focused on prisoners who (a) were imprisoned for a – to Dutch standards – relatively long time, i.e. between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release, (b) were convicted for a criminal offence (not on appeal), (c) were not in an ISD or TBS programme or a minimum security prison, and (d) were not convicted for a sex offence. These extra inclusion and exclusion criteria in this study were selected for multiple reasons. Firstly, prisoners who had been imprisoned between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release were selected since these individuals can be seen as long-term prisoners in the Dutch context and were convicted for serious (mostly violent) crimes, often with a high impact on victims, feelings of safety and society at large (High Impact Crimes, Ministry of Security and Justice, 2014; 2016). More importantly, spending longer periods in prison means more possibilities for rehabilitation activities aimed at improving skills, changing attitudes and preparing for return to society. This is relevant because re-entry challenges can be even more challenging for prisoners serving longer terms. Longer periods away from society could result in a failed connection to the labour market and weakening of social bonds, while at the same

1 Because Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 have been published in (inter)national journals they all contain their own method section. These method sections are completely based on Chapter 2. However, numbers of participants may vary because data from different waves were used for the empirical chapters.

time being exposed to deviant peers for longer periods (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Sutherland, 1947). Furthermore, although the large majority of prisoners in the Netherlands is released within a year (De Looff et al., 2017), longer prison spells are more common in many other countries such as the UK and the USA (Allen & Watson, 2017; Ann Carson & Anderson, 2016). This means that, solely based on the length of imprisonment, the findings of this study have potential to transfer to international settings, certainly compared to other Dutch prison research which mainly focused on short-term prisoners.

Secondly, eligible prisoners had to be convicted and not in appeal. If their case was in appeal, this meant that the official end date of their imprisonment was uncertain and I needed an end date in order to follow participants through time. I also noticed, when interviewing a few prisoners of whom I thought they were not in appeal, but whose cases turned out to be in appeal after all, that their mindset was more concentrated in the present and not directed towards release and the time after release, which was essential for this study.

Thirdly, individuals staying in a facility for so-called 'revolving door´ offenders (In Dutch: Instelling voor Stelselmatige Daders, ISD) were excluded. This group differs from the prison population in general, because detainment in these facilities is legally not a sentence, but a custodial measure. Also, drug dependency usually plays an significant role in the criminal pattern of 'revolving door' offenders and is also treated separately. In addition, offenders with a court imposed detention under a hospital order (TBS) were also excluded. This is not an official 'punishment' and is imposed by a court on people that have been declared (partially) unaccountable for the crime(s) they committed as a result of psychiatric problems. These offenders receive mandatory psychiatric treatment after having served a custodial sentence. The length of a detention under a hospital order is two years and can be renewed every two years. In practice, this means that no record of an official end date could be found for these offenders which was crucial for this study. Furthermore, individuals staying in a minimum security prison were not eligible. They were in a final stage of detention phasing where they gained privileges and freedom (for example sleeping at home in the weekends, working during daytime) to an extent that we cannot speak of a closed prison setting anymore, it was as if they were already 'on the outside'.

Finally, sex offenders were also excluded, because of the characteristics of this specific group and their difference from the general prison population. Desistance processes among sex offenders are being studied by different scholars and highlight other challenges to aspects of identity (Wößner, Wienhausen-Knezevic & Gauder, 2016; Laws & Ward, 2011).

Participants

When the data collection for this study started in November 2013, only four participants of the original Prison Project sample were eligible to be approached for an interview. Since the focus of this study was on long-term prisoners, new participants were added to the sample. To select the participants, in August 2014 the Dutch Prison Service provided a list of prisoners to be released between September 2014 and October 2016, aged between 18–65, born in the Netherlands and staying in one of 28 prisons throughout the entire country of the Netherlands. The original list encompassed 363 men, but 136 men were not meeting the additional inclusion criteria and could be excluded immediately for various reasons: they were following a penitentiary programme outside prison (replacing the final phase of a prison sentence), for example in an assisted living facility, they were staying in a minimum security prison, a facility for revolving door criminals or at a psychiatric prison. Soon after I began to trace the remaining 227, I found out via prison and probation staff that another 143 men should be excluded as well because of the following reasons: they were already staying outside of prison (n=57), an additional (or remaining) sentence was added to their current sentence (n=21), they were convicted for a sex offence after all (n=20), they were transferred to a minimum security prison (n=30), they were staying in a facility for revolving door criminals (n=7), they were staying at a psychiatric prison (n=3) or they were illegal, not Dutch citizens or untraceable (n=5). Eventually, the list contained 84 eligible long-term prisoners held in 13 penitentiary institutions throughout the Netherlands. When the data collection period of this study ended in October 2015, 44 men could be approached in prison and 36 were interviewed. Eight interviews were excluded afterwards because of the following reasons: they were convicted for a sex offence (n=2), they received an additional sentence while imprisoned (n=2) which meant they would not be released any time soon and therefore had to be excluded, they were in appeal (n=3) and one prisoner was detained for a shorter time than initially intended. In the end, 28 men were included in this study in the prison interview (T1).

It should be noted that I envisaged to interview 30–35 men at the start of the study, but the administrative process limited the number of interviews I could carry out each month. However, 28 men were close to the 30 I desired to include at the start and this sample size fitted well into sample sizes in international PhD research using qualitative interviews, concluding that the most common sample sizes were between 20–30 (Mason, 2010). Also, it has been noted that the number of participants needed in a study can be reduced when the research design involves multiple in-depth interviews with the same sample, such as in the current study.

All 28 men could be located three months after release (T2) and most of them could be contacted in person, either face-to-face or via text-messaging or phone. One was still detained since the first interview; his initial release date was moved into the

future, probably due to non-motivated behaviour in prison. Three men, of whom only one was contacted 'directly', refused to participate in the post-prison interview; one of them stayed in contact via email, but after several attempts sent the message that he was fed up with the system and did not want to cooperate. The other two were contacted via their parole officer or the assisted living facility. Both let me know they were quite busy with rehabilitative endeavours and that it took up all of their time. For example, Nick's mentor notified me that the reason he did not want to participate was because of a new job and other obligations, such as adhering to the conditions of parole. He felt there was no time left in his week. In the end, 24 of the 28 participants were successfully interviewed at the follow-up.

At the final interview, approximately 12 months after release (T3), I managed to contact and convince all participants of T2, except for one. This participant had been cooperative in the previous interviews and stayed in contact with me after the interviews. Some weeks before our last interview had to take place, I lost contact with him. Eventually, I found him via a new Facebook account and it appeared he moved abroad to pursue a job offer. Unfortunately, I was unable to establish a Skype or telephone interview with him. In total, data from 75 interviews with 28 men have been collected at three different points from pre-release to post-release (see Table 2.1). From the total of 28, 23 men participated in all three interview waves.

Although a relatively small sample of Dutch male prisoners was interviewed in this study, the sample was based on a list, which contained all imprisoned men in all Dutch prisons that fitted the inclusion criteria. Every prisoner that was scheduled to be released within the timeframe of data collection could be included in the research. However, it must be noted that men serving relatively long prison spells and who show motivation and pro-social behaviour have the possibility to apply for a penitentiary programme that was introduced in the Penitentiary Principles Act 1999. This programme serves to replace the final phase of a prison sentence since it can start in the last six weeks to one year of the remaining sentence. During a penitentiary programme, prisoners can stay outside regular prison walls, e.g. in an assisted living facility or a minimum security prison and engage in activities aimed to prepare prisoners for their return to society. A substantial part of the list obtained from the Dutch Prison Service had already started their penitentiary programme and did not reside in prison anymore. In practice this means that it was likely that the remaining men that were approached from the list in prison approximately three months before their actual release date, were seen as the more 'unmotivated' ones, not following a penitentiary programme. As soon as this was known, efforts were made to approach others from the list sooner than planned to be able to speak to them before they started a penitentiary programme. However, this was not always possible because in some cases men did not fit the selection criterion of a minimum imprisonment of 2.5 years anymore.

Thus, while the current research sample consisted of men who fitted the inclusion criteria, there seemed to occur some sort of self-selection, which resulted in a sample that did not only consist of seemingly motivated prisoners, the sample also included the seemingly 'unmotivated' ones, men who could be seen as having a high risk of reoffending after release.

Table 2.1 *Participants in this study and their participation in the three interview rounds (N=28)*

Name	Age	Sentence	Offence type	T1	T2	T3
Aaron	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery	x		
Ab	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Casper	35-39	2-3 years	Kidnapping, extortion	x	x	x
Charles	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x		
Dave	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Leon	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Peter	50-54	2-3 years	Fraud	x	x	x
Richard	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	
Tom	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Tony	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Bart	30-34	4-5 years	Aggravated theft, extortion	x	x	x
Chris	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Isaac	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Jack	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Kay	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	x		
Martin	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Milo	25-29	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	x	x	x
Nathan	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Nick	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x		
Oscar	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Pascal	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Roy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Rudy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Sam	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Simon	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x
Vince	25-29	4-5 years	Burglary	x	x	x
Wessel	20-24	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	x	x	x
Xavier	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	x	x	x

2.3 FIELDWORK

Getting in: Approaching the participants

Interviewing in prison meant that many of the typical challenges of prison research had to be overcome (Liebling, 1999; Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Ferranti & Santos, 2005). In this context, I think my previous experiences with collecting data in prison helped me at not being seen as "green, uncomfortable and out of place" (Sparks, 1989, cited in Liebling, 1992, p. 103) and knowing my way around prison and prison rules. For the present study, the most important thing was getting 'social access' (Noaks & Wincup, 2004) by establishing a feeling of trust with the prisoners so they could be interviewed optimally and convinced to participate in the future post-release interviews. Specifically much attention was given to the first minutes of the contact between the interviewer and the prisoner and throughout the interview by trying to make a connection and treating them as equals, despite the unequal setting of the prison, which sometimes was very apparent given the beeper I had to wear and the positioning in the interview room (I had to sit close to the alarm button in case of an emergency). Another good tactic was to find something external which we both could relate to. For example, my notes about Leon's interview say:

> He is very suspicious at the start of the interview and replies with short answers. Then, we get to talk about a movie on Dutch-Surinamese slavery which was on TV last week. I also watched the movie and it turned out we were both a bit astounded by a particular scene in the movie. When I made a Surinamese joke about the scene, he has to laugh and the ice is broken. I'm relieved, because it took me some effort to get him to sit down and talk. (Fieldnote July 6th, 2015)

Some participants mentioned that it was a while ago that they spoke to someone 'normal'. According to Bosworth et al. (2005, p. 257) a feeling of isolation is in particular common for prisoners serving longer terms and interaction with someone from the community could help them feel "a bit more like a human being and a bit less like a prisoner" (see also Schinkel, 2014). The practical endeavours of doing fieldwork were also time-consuming, since there was a lot of travelling to the various penitentiary institutions across the country, some located more rurally. Furthermore, dealing with prison rules or communication between staff and prisoners made the moment of contact quite challenging. One of the participants (Wessel), of whom I learned in the following interviews that he always took good care of his appearance, mentioned he was not informed about my visit while I actually had informed the prison some time beforehand:

> Normally you hear if you get a visitor in the morning, but now he [prison guard] just came up to me and said I had to go to this room for visit. And I had just came from my daily run. Couldn't shower, couldn't shave, so I just grabbed a shirt out of the closet. I was pissed.

Some interviews were curtailed by prison timetables. Most prisons were not keen on allowing prisoners to skip work obligations in order to participate, although there were a few exceptions. Nevertheless, for the most part this meant interviews had to be scheduled on that part of the day where they did not have to work. In this 'free' period, prisoners were also entitled to yard shift, visiting hours, church services, library time, sports, education and recreation. Although some participants said to voluntarily give up one of the services mentioned above, for most of them, obviously, these were important and not be missed. Some prisoners wanted to cook before they were being locked up in their cells again for the evening, so at some occasions I had to reschedule and come back. Unexpected events in prison could delay procedures: participants that were sent to solitary confinement on the morning of the scheduled interview and participants who had an appointment with their lawyer at the same time of the scheduled interview. To conclude, the participants and the rules in the prisons were additional challenging factors. Doing prison research means working your way around daily timetables, compulsory programmes and unexpected events.

Interviews in prison

The interviews were conducted in a separate room where no staff members were present or could overhear to guarantee privacy. All participants were given information about the research and received an information leaflet (see Appendix I) which included the (simplified) aims of the present study and a brief description on how confidentiality would be maintained. I invested time in making clear that my research was carried out independently from the criminal justice system. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and whether or not they would agree to participate would not in any way hold consequences for their detention phasing. Also, it was stressed that their real names would never be used in publications to maintain privacy and confidentiality, and no information would go to lawyers or prison staff of any institution they were staying. Although prison staff in general was interested in the study and the results, they were very discrete and respectful and did not ask for more information about a certain participant after an interview. To minimize the chance of refusals and to emphasize the autonomy of the researcher, the prison staff was clearly requested to avoid asking the participants for participation. It was crucial that the researcher asked for participation in person. My request was carried out at almost all times, yet prison staff sometimes informed

potential participants about my visit and already mentioned it was in the context of a study being conducted. I did not get any refusals in advance, so it did not seem to impact the willingness to participate.

To minimize chances of information resulting from the interviews being biased and to have a full registration of the interview, a voice recorder was used to record all interviews if participants agreed to it , enhancing the reliability and accuracy of the data (Beyens & Tournel, 2010; Bryman, 2004). Although some previous research reported trouble getting audio equipment inside the prison to record interviews (see e.g. Healy, 2010; Bachman et al., 2016), for this data collection permission was obtained to bring in a tape recorder by each penitentiary institution separately. It was emphasized to participants that the recording was confidential and would only be heard by me and maybe other members of the research team. To prevent refusal on the recording issue, I explained to prisoners that if they would allow me to record their interview it would enable me to pay attention and focus on what they were saying instead of writing all the time (Moser & Kalton, 1971). Moreover, I explained the added value of minimizing bias or, as Liebling (1992, p. 96) said: "to accurately represent the subject's own view" when transcribing the interview. Participants seemed susceptible to these arguments reflected in nodding their heads to agree. In general, most prisoners did not seem to mind the tape recorder and even understood and said they were glad that the story was put down in their own words, especially because some mentioned that their words sometimes get 'twisted' when they talk to someone from the criminal justice system. There were only a few who refused tape recording their interview or who asked to turn off the recorder at certain moments. In that case, notes were written down extensively during, but mostly after the interview to minimize the loss of data. Two interviews were conducted in two parts. For example, in the middle of one interview, one participant had to go out to the yard for recreational hour with all the other prisoners. Afterwards, we continued the interview. Most in-prison interviews took on average 1.5 hour, with some finishing at 45 minutes, but many went towards two hours. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix I).

Maintaining contact with participants

Longitudinal research among ex-prisoners is difficult, costly and time consuming and faces many challenges when locating participants (Farrall, 2006; La Vigne, Visher & Castro, 2004). First, it is necessary to have as much information as possible on their location after release. To obtain that, at the end of the first interview in prison, all participants were asked for permission to contact them again after release. For this, names, addresses and other contact information of themselves, relatives and friends that would be helpful in tracking them down, were noted. Two

participants refused to provide contact information. However, they did agree to be interviewed again after release if I could find them, turning it more or less into a challenge, or even a bet. For example, my notes about Roy's interview say:

> He does not want to give any contact information of himself or his girlfriend or anyone else. When I ask him, if I can interview him again after release to see how he is doing, he smiles and says: if you can find me, you can interview me. Deal? (Fieldnote January 9th, 2015)

Secondly, ex-prisoners are typically hard to trace. Some change addresses, they don't stay in contact with their family, they hide, or they move to another country. To overcome these challenges, and thus to minimize attrition, I gave my business card with email and phone number in prison and tried to stay in contact with the interviewees in the period from release to the second interview by phone, email or via a text messaging service. Occasionally, birthday and Christmas cards were sent to the participants for example if the birthday was between two interview rounds. In a few cases the participants even contacted me themselves after they were released – and indicated to be open for a follow-up interview. Even Wessel, who was arrested again for a serious crime, was keen on staying in contact with me:

> When he is released, he sends me a text with his new address and phone number. And that he is doing all right. When it is time to interview him after three months, his phone number is not working and I find out that he cut his ankle bracelet and fled the facility he was staying. When I visit him in prison after his arrest, he apologizes for not staying in contact. He forgot to take his notebook, which contained my number, from the facility he ran away from. When he fled, he threw his phone in a lake, so he was not able to contact me with his new number. (Fieldnote May 19th, 2016)

Thirdly, when participants are found, the next step is to convince them to participate again. Some were quite busy men now, compared to the time in prison, because they were rebuilding their lives with jobs and courses. Or they were reconnecting with criminal life again and a nosy researcher would be the last thing they needed. To overcome this challenge, I conducted both the in-prison and the post-prison interviews myself in the hope of establishing a bond and becoming someone they already knew when being traced after release. This was a good strategy, since when contacting the participants for the second interview, none of them had difficulties remembering the researcher from the in-prison interview and all were willing to

participate again. Even when I could not directly contact the participant; for example an email from an employee at the assisted living facility where Simon was staying read the following:

> This Friday, I brought up the request you had in relation to interviewing him again. Simon only needed a minute to recall the interview. He didn't forget, that's for sure. Simon is willing to make an interview appointment again. (Email October 3rd, 2015)

Also in the case of Bart it turned out to be crucial that he already knew me from the previous interviews. At the final interview, which took place in prison again, I remembered from the previous interviews that he was not too keen on talking with social workers:

> When I arrive at the prison where Bart is staying, they let me know that he does not want to come down. First, I am somewhat surprised, because we previously had two good interviews, but when someone of the prison staff asks me if I am a parole officer, I connect the dots. I ask the prison staff if they could call again and clarify that I am Jennifer from Leiden University. Fortunately, Bart wants to come down now and he even seems quite agitated towards the prison staff that he almost missed his appointment with me, because of miscommunication. (Fieldnote October 29th, 2015)

Post-prison interviews

The post-prison interviews lasted between one and 2.5 hours and were slightly longer than the in-prison interview. Locations of both post-release interviews were by default at the participant's home or the assisted living facilities where they were staying (30%), unless they preferred to be interviewed at an alternative location which included public areas (37%) and private rooms at the probation office (13%). Some interviews were carried out in prison if they had returned (20%). It was not allowed to give any reimbursement to the prisoners at the end of the in-prison interview, but a small cash incentive (€ 10) was provided at the end of the post-release interviews. This was primarily done to show appreciation for them taking the time to meet with me, but some of the participants refused to accept the fee, explaining they "did not do it for the money". At the start of the study, I applied for my Certificate of Good Conduct which I kept with me at all times when visiting the prisons and also during fieldwork. Furthermore, confidentiality agreements were signed for the Prison Project as well as for the Dutch Probation Service.

Besides protecting the privacy of my participants, I also had to protect my own privacy, especially with the post-release interviews which mostly took place at participant's residences. The Prison Project designed a safety protocol to maximize protection in case of an incident. I adapted this protocol and adjusted it slightly to suit my research project. It entailed the following: I informed another member of the research team about my scheduled interview, location and other details. At the start of the interview, I would send a text message to this person and when the interview was finished, I would send another message. This way, someone was always aware of where I was located and I would never schedule an interview at someone's house when it did not feel 'right'. Of course, I could never eliminate all risks, but this was one way to increase safety. Since I used Facebook as one of the strategies to relocate participants, at the start of the project it happened a few times that released prisoners added me as a friend on Facebook, since they had my business card and knew my full name. I decided to be completely honest and tell them my Facebook account was private and that I was using another one for my research project. I was afraid that some would then reject to see me for another interview or just feel rejected at all by adding the (possibly) first person they knew on Facebook, but they were understanding and we connected via my other account.

2.4 INTERVIEWS

Interview schedule

Three separate interview schedules were created to guide the in-depth interviews in the multiple rounds. I did not choose the life history interview used in many other research as my interview tool, since it has been suggested that this type of interview might generate narratives where agency is the primary explanatory mechanism (Carlsson, 2016; Giordano et al., 2002). In an effort to avoid this bias, which qualitative research in general might be prone to (Bersani & Doherty, 2017), I constructed three semi-structured interview schedules which held more or less identical questions for the three interview rounds, but left enough space for the conversation to incorporate other issues.

Topics from the literature and previous research that were presumed to facilitate the process of desistance were incorporated. Moreover, an additional search for questionnaires and topic lists from other (cross-sectional and longitudinal) studies was carried out to find useful questions or topics for the present study (Visher et al., 2004; LeBel et al., 2008; Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Harding, Wyse, Dobson & Morenoff, 2011). The interview schedules went through a few rounds

of redesigning[2] and after that, a pilot was done with three participants (that were not included in the final sample) in October 2013 to 'test' the interview schedule and adjust where needed (see the following paragraph for the main deviation). The topics in the interview related to the different dimensions of desistance: primary/act desistance, secondary/identity desistance and tertiary/relational desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2016b; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). More specifically, questions concerned the meaning given to and experience of intimate relations, friends, children, parents, parole and employment (possibly sources of relational desistance), as well as questions about goals, obstacles, change, different selves (reflecting identity) and criminal activities (act-desistance). The basic idea was to capture the meaning and perception of these topics at multiple stages, in prison and after release. Each interview started with the same question: 'Describe yourself in three words' to break the ice and set the participant at ease (Rubin & Rubin, 2004), but also to examine (the change in) how they perceived themselves (see Figure 3.1 in *Chapter 3* for a visual map of the answers of the sample to this question). Also, each interview ended with the same question: 'Where do you see yourself in five years from now?'.

The interview schedule for the in-prison interview comprised three parts. The first part of the interview focused on life before the current imprisonment with regard to living situation, partner and children, and ambitions before the current imprisonment. How did they view themselves before they got imprisoned? What did they strive for? Part two included the prison experience; visits, perceptions of prison staff and interventions. Main focus were questions about changes in self-perception and identity during this imprisonment, such as 'How do you think you have changed during this imprisonment?'. Part three covered the plans after release, expectations for the (non-)criminal self, goals and perceived obstacles. Questions concerning future act-desistance and identity were for example: 'How do you see you future?' and 'How do you see your life after prison concerning criminal activity?'.

The topics and structure of the follow-up interviews were almost identical to that of the in-prison interview, although concentrating more on experiences since release and goals and plans for the future. The interview usually started discussing what it was like to have some form of freedom[3] and if changes in society impacted their lives. Then, questions revolved around the meaning given to and experiences with parole supervision and the parole officer, and relationships with parents, partner, children and friends.

2 During a fruitful visit to Queen's Belfast University in October 2013, Prof. Shadd Maruna took a closer look at one of the first versions of the interview schedule. He provided valuable comments and suggestions to improve the interview schedule.

3 Note that almost all were under parole supervision.

Also, I asked how they had experienced reactions to their release from social networks and employers and how they reflected on their time in prison. If it did not already come up, they were asked about what they were doing to get by in the past few months since release, specifically about post-prison criminal activities. Then, topics on (and changes in) motivation to quit crime, self-esteem and self-efficacy were dealt with. The ex-prisoners were also asked to reflect on their former expectations of their (non-) criminal self and factors that played a role in refraining from or continuing in crime.

The emphasis in the final interview was on reflection and the impact of changes during the first year after release. In contrast to the other two interviews, this interview set out to gather more information on their childhood and upbringing, how they entered crime and how it evolved into more serious crime, adding more story to their life which I got to know so far. Since I already had interviewed them on two occasions before, I felt this was the right moment for them to open up and also to reflect, while not being in prison anymore. Of course, in the previous interviews we already discussed (sometimes briefly, sometimes more extensively) childhood experiences or their introduction to more serious crimes, so I could already start by putting some pieces together. Conducting multiple interviews with the same person also allowed to check information on accuracy, for example childhood experiences, which added to the quality of the data.

Difficulties in the interviews

In general, the interviews went prosperous and none of them, except for two, had trouble telling 'stories' about many aspects of their life. Indeed, they were not all natural 'storytellers', but the semi-structured interview schedule stimulated a flow and guided direction. Although I tried to keep the words I used in the interview as informal as possible, there was one word in the interview schedule that caused some confusion or lack of understanding: the word 'definition'. After a couple of participants asked me for the meaning of the word, from then on I added some extra explanation to the question: "What is the definition of success to you?", such as "What does it mean to you to be successful?" or "What is success to you?".

One of the most challenging questions for participants in my opinion was the 'ice-breaker' question about describing themselves in three words. They all smiled when I asked this particular question and some scratched their head. For some participants it was difficult to reflect (on their life, choices, themselves) as well as to think ahead. There were a few men for example, who indifferently said to live day by day and not thinking of tomorrow. In such cases, I tried to get a bit more out of the answer by asking for example "If you think of you in a few years from now, what are you doing, who are you dating, how are you making money?", but I never forced it.

Furthermore, in the context of the topic of this dissertation, some participants were not too strong in reflecting on their actions or showing insight into their own choices while the interviews were aimed at this reflexivity.

Furthermore, as a result of the pilot, the question about what kind of offence they were convicted for was replaced from somewhere at the start of the interview to somewhere near the end. I felt the question was 'ruining' the flow of the conversation so I moved the topic a little bit further from the start and I started asking how long they had been doing time and how they had experienced it. Either within the scope of this topic or in answering an earlier question on how they initiated into crime and how it evolved into more serious crime, the current offence came up. This way, it felt more natural in the conversation and participants could share it whenever they were ready for it.

Analysis of interview data

All interviews were transcribed using transcription software F4 and effort was made to maintain the flavour of the speech as much as possible by including street language and words from other languages (usually with a cultural component) that were used by the participants. Also, I made extensive field notes of the process of gaining access, maintaining contact, recontacting and interviewing all participants during all interview rounds which I sorted in a table to be able to compare field notes.

The analysis started by reading the transcripts a few times to familiarize myself with the data and to gain an overview of the content. This was an organic and continuous process since it concerned three rounds of interviews from which data was being collected partly simultaneous. Using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), themes and codes could be identified according to an inductive and a deductive way. At the start of the study the focus was more deductive and theory-driven and less 'data driven' (represented in Chapters 4 and 5), and later on the focus shifted to a more inductive way of analyzing (represented in Chapters 6 and 7). I went back and forth between the data and the literature to use existent theory and theory emerging from the current analysis, in line with an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998).

All interviews were coded after transcription. This involved labelling fragments in the separate interviews with a 'code'. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 61) described this process as: "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data". First, themes and codes were derived from the research questions, the interview schedule, theoretical notions and previous research described earlier (this is called a-priori coding; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Secondly, new codes emerging from the data (first in-prison interviews) were added to the existing codes. Adding new codes to the initial list allowed to have an open mind during the coding process instead of dividing all fragments in existing codes. To increase the reliability of the

coding process, all the fragments were compared to the code they had been given to check whether the fragment 'fitted' the code. This sometimes resulted in fragments being slightly recoded. Then, all transcripts were reread to identify and link evolving codes and themes (pattern coding, Miles & Huberman, 1994) which resulted in a thematic framework which was then used to code the rest of the transcripts (see Appendix IV). Figure 2.1 visualizes the coding process. For each empirical chapter, I assessed which set of codes was relevant for the topic and these were then further analyzed across all interviews, since each interview round had more or less the same codes.

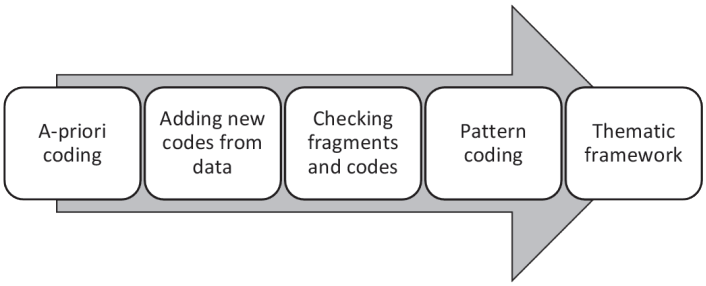

Figure 2.1 Coding process

To strengthen the reliability of the data and the coding (King & Horrocks, 2010), two additional members of the research team separately coded the data to assess the thematic analysis and coding decisions. We then compared our codes and discussed codes that did not match until we reached agreement. This was more a deductive process using descriptive codes from theory and previous research and most codes matched, although I myself coded more thorough and detailed. Then, for the more inductive analysis, I gave access to all transcribed interviews to an external researcher who was unfamiliar with my data, to assess if we would come to the same conclusions independently. We drew the same conclusions based on the data, but we were also able to refine the analysis by combining two sets of interpretations of the data.

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package (CAQDAS) Atlas.ti facilitated this process of data management and analysis and contributed to the enormous amount of data being manageable and allowing to work systematically during analysis. To identify quotes in the following chapters, all participants received a pseudonym and readers must bear in mind that the quotes used in the chapters have been translated from Dutch to English.

While the qualitative longitudinal research design has enormous strengths when examining dimensions of desistance, it also has some methodological limitations. Conducting a prospective longitudinal study bound by a time path, it was not possible to claim that I have achieved saturation with the data. While saturation is often a guiding principle in collecting qualitative data, it has also been debated (Mason, 2010). In this context, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that there is always the possibility for the 'new to emerge' from the data and that when the researcher starts analyzing, it is important to become disciplined and cut the data when necessary instead of seeking for new themes that do not necessarily add something to the overall story. For the purpose of this study, I conducted three rounds of interviews that covered a broad range of topics. To analyze the different topics for the empirical chapters, I had to decide which codes were relevant to the topic hereby already cutting down the data. To avoid missing important things relevant for the topic of the chapter, I read all the interviews for each chapter again to look for fragments that might be additionally relevant.

Reflections on the interviews

To carry out all the qualitative interviews myself meant I was my own research instrument (Liebling, 1992). I was actively engaged in building a relationship of trust, yet I contemplated about possible implications. Reliable information is important in scientific research, but getting too close to participants may decrease the reliability of the data whereas too much distance can breach trust. I kept in mind that an interview is an active process between a participant and a researcher and as a researcher in qualitative interviews, I could not be completely neutral, objective or distant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Liebling, 2001). However, it was important to have appropriate distance towards the participants to remain critical of what was being said, and to find balance between human interaction and scientific responsibility (Decorte & Zaitch, 2016). This mostly went well, but the longitudinal research design allowed me to get to know most of these men quite well and they also travelled along with me in my life. I remember one of the last interviews in which the participant got emotional because he lost someone dear to him. I, at that point, had also lost a significant other and I tried not to get emotional during the interview. Nevertheless, the participant noticed me choking up a little bit. Of course, I do not know how this might have influenced the interview. After the interview, the participant mentioned that "it was nice to see you are also just human". Finding a balance was sometimes a challenge, but I think I have managed to stay true to my role as a researcher.

It has been pointed out that repeated interviews can also have a normative impact on the side of the participant implying expectations of growth and progress (Thomson & Holland, 2003). This was likely the case for one participant (Richard) who went abroad after things did not turn out the way he wanted. My notes about efforts in locating and approaching him for the final interview say:

> He was doing really well when I spoke to him at T2. He was proud he got himself a job and had high hopes for the future. When I contact the living facility he was supposed to be staying at, I find out he lost his job, started gambling again and eventually left the country. When I contact him via Facebook for the final interview, he lets me know he went abroad for a work opportunity, but was now unemployed for three months already. He keeps postponing the day he is back in the Netherlands so I can interview him and we fail to set up a Skype meeting. I am starting to feel he is not doing that well, but he does not want to meet possibly because of some feeling of shame that he is not living up to his (and maybe mine?) expectations. (Fieldnote March 2016)

Sharpe (2017) called the way we as researchers try to trace and locate our research subjects in longitudinal research a form of 'sociological stalking'. With this in mind, I wanted to respect the lives and personal space of the participants as much as possible and while I tried to have all men participating in the follow-up interviews, I did not pursue this too vigorously. In other words, if someone directly told me to leave him alone, I would leave him alone after asking twice. For example, my notes about Nick's refusal to participate in both post-release interviews say:

> Via his mentor at the assisted living facilitate he is staying, he lets me know he does not want to participate again. Of course, I try my best to convince him with all the reasons I got, but when he explains he has too much going on right now (work, courses, parole conditions) and he needs to focus on 'keeping his head straight', I decide to let it rest and take no for an answer. I don't want my research to stand in the way of his attempts at desistance. (Fieldnote May 7th, 2016)

In this context, during a presentation at a conference a few years ago, someone asked me if I thought about whether and how my presence in their lives on several occasions might have contributed to their process of desistance. This question always stayed in the back of my head and to this date, I have no answer to it. Indeed, the questions I asked were not things they thought about on a daily basis. Some even explicitly said they had never thought about it up until now. It was not uncommon for questions in my interview schedule to evolve into deeper conversations about life,

purpose, their place in society and happiness. This connected to more existentialist thoughts on what the future holds for them, which in turn reconnected to my research topics. It is unsure if some men shared things which they otherwise would not have or, developed thoughts that would not have developed if I was not asking certain things (see also Schinkel's contemplation on this issue; Schinkel, 2014, pp. 108-109). Sometimes I also deliberated about ethics when I asked participants to look back on their time in prison while they frequently said they had closed this chapter. This became especially evident when Dave said to me in the final interview:

> Shall I tell you something weird? Since I am having these conversations with you… Last night I dreamt that I got imprisoned again. I swear! I thought, what the hell, where am I, you know? I wanted to get out and then suddenly I woke up, I realised fortunately I am in my own room.

Aside from revealing the impact of the imprisonment on him and a fear for future imprisonment, it also uncovered a possible side-effect of having repeated interviews, asking the same questions and expecting participants to reflect and look back on their time in prison while they deliberately tried to not 'go there anymore'. Occasionally, it felt like I was reminding men of their previous 'prisoner' identity while they were trying to get rid of it.

Another aspect I would like to highlight is the possible contribution of my own (Non-Western) cultural background to gaining access to participants. In this context, Sharpe (2017) noticed that some of her participants with a different cultural background might have refused to talk to her or went silent in interviews, because she belonged to a particular social group (white, middle class). In my case, I did not belong to the dominant social group she refers to, but rather I shared the minority social group with a large part of the research sample (individuals with a Non-Western migrant background). I believe this allowed for rapport and a feeling of 'familiarism' throughout the interviews, but it was also important in establishing contact in the first minutes of meeting someone. In terms of age was my own age slightly above the average age of the sample, which made it quite easy to relate. Furthermore, being a women interviewing male participants in prison (and outside) might have played an invisible, but inevitable role in the course of the interviews. Participants could have been involved in impression management (Decorte & Zaitch, 2016), but I tried to be aware of not only obtaining a one-sided image of them.

2.5 PAROLE FILES AND CRIMINAL RECORDS

In addition to carrying out multiple interviews with the participants, which allowed to gain insight in and understanding of participants' experiences, I obtained permission to analyse parole files and consult criminal records of the research sample to increase the validity of the results by including different views (Noaks & Wincup, 2004). Parole files of the men in the research sample were examined (see Chapter 7) and contained information from the Prosecutorial Office about the imposed specific conditions, such as check-ins, participation in courses and electronic monitoring, and about violation and sanctions up to a year after release. Aside from this official information, parole files also included extensive notes and reports from parole officers about their contact with the parolees: doubts with regard to a parolee's rehabilitation efforts, deliberations concerning missteps and considerations whether or not to sanction violations. These files were systematically examined by (a) collecting the release conditions for all participants; (b) searching for violations and the arguments deployed whether or not to sanction; and (c) analyzing the parole officers' notes, mostly recorded at the check-ins. Studying these notes offered insight into the practice of the parole officers and allowed to include their perspectives concerning the supervision of the parolees.

Data from the Criminal Records Office (Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice) were consulted for the purpose of triangulation of the theoretical construct of primary or act-desistance, to describe the sample's criminal history in Chapter 3 and in the life stories (see paragraph 2.6). Criminal records contained criminal history and revealed offending that was noticed by the criminal justice system within a year after release of all sample members. These official records included information about conviction, incarceration and recidivism. Consulting the criminal records was by no means an attempt to test the 'truth' of the self-reported crime by the research sample, rather using both measures of crime contributed to the triangulation of the theoretical construct of primary or act-desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) which is then viewed from multiple vantage points (Sullivan & McGloin, 2014, p. 13): from the criminal justice system's and from the participants'. In all cases when the official criminal records indicated offending behaviour (recidivism), participants also mentioned that they had been involved in criminal behaviour. In general, however, the criminal records contained less offending than reported by participants themselves in almost all cases in which individuals continued offending (Ab, Martin, Tony, Roy, Tom, Leon and Wessel). Either participants reported to be engaged in criminal activities, but this had not (yet?) been noticed by the criminal justice system, or participants mentioned to be engaged in *more* criminal activities than were registered in their record. Note that criminal records do not include arrests

by the police that were not prosecuted. Only when a filed report becomes a criminal case which is being prosecuted by the Prosecutorial Office, this case will be added to the criminal record.

2.6 LIFE STORIES

Although the experiences of all participants are integrated in the specific chapters, I also wanted to portray a few participants who are either exemplary of a certain 'type' of re-entry trajectory or somewhat of an exceptional case in this particular sample. While the primary focus in the chapters is to answer the research questions concerning dimensions of desistance, the aim of the life stories is to provide some contextual nature of these topics. This way, the reader is given more background information of different participants and the stories serve as a broad illustration of the findings in the chapters. Another important reason is a methodological one: enhancing the external validity or 'transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of qualitative data, since these life stories may serve as case-to-case transfer examples (Firestone, 1993).

Being able to conduct three interviews with most participants in this study and following them during their transition, facilitated a certain classification in each analysis stage: in prison this was based on their expectations regarding future criminal behaviour (criminal, non-criminal and ambivalent) and at the two follow-up interviews this referred to the self-reported and official offending. Combining these classifications resulted in different desistance trajectories. The last column of Table 2.2 identifies the self-reported and official desistance/persistence-trajectories from pre-release up to a year after release. The label consists of three letters (A, N, C) in various combinations. At the in-prison interview, responses to the question 'How do you see your life after prison concerning criminal activity?' were classified as criminal (C), meaning continuing crime; non-criminal (N), meaning refraining from crime; or ambivalent (A), meaning unsure about continuing or refraining from crime. For each of the follow-up interviews, behaviour was classified as criminal (C) or non-criminal (N). Behaviour that was illegal according Dutch criminal law was labelled as criminal. Technical violations of license conditions were not considered criminal offences, neither was informal employment when it did not involve any illegal activities.

Table 2.2 *Classification of participants who participated in all three waves (n=23)*

Name	Age	Sentence	Offence type	Social situation	Trajectory
Ab	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	CCC
Casper	35-39	2-3 years	Kidnapping, extortion	No partner, 2 children	ANN
Dave	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	NNN
Leon	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	CCC
Peter	50-54	2-3 years	Fraud	Partner, 1 child	NNN
Tom	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery	Partner, 2 children	NNC
Tony	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	CCC
Bart	30-34	4-5 years	Aggravated theft, extortion	No partner and children	NCC
Chris	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	ANN
Isaac	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner, 3 children	ANN
Jack	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	NNN[4]
Martin	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	ACC
Milo	25-29	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	No partner and children	CNN
Nathan	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Oscar	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Pascal	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	CNN
Roy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, 1 stepchild	CCC
Rudy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	CCN
Sam	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Simon	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	NNN
Vince	25-29	4-5 years	Burglary	No partner 1 child	ANN
Wessel	20-24	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	No partner, 2 children	CCC
Xavier	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN

Between each chapter in this dissertation is a life story of one of the sample members, six in total. The sources used to describe their stories are the interview data combined with data from parole files and criminal records. The stories will be described according to a specific format (see Appendix V) in chronological order, starting from childhood and ending a year after release, reflecting on what they had experienced in their transition from prison to society (or for some back to prison

4 Three months after release, Jack was in prison again for violating his license conditions, because he had no official registration address which was needed for the conditional release. We classified him as non-criminal (N) at all three waves, even though he was in prison at the time of the second interview.

again) and contemplating what their future would be like in five years from now. The separate life stories serve as a bridge from one chapter to the next, illustrating how the key concepts of this dissertation work in practice given the context.

Table 2.3 *Selected participants for the life stories and the number of participants in each classification.*

	T1 Expectations	T2 Behaviour	T3 Behaviour	n	Life story of
NNN	Non-criminal	Non-criminal	Non-criminal	8	Simon
NNC	Non-criminal	Non-criminal	Criminal	1	
NCC	Non-criminal	Criminal	Criminal	1	
CCC	Criminal	Criminal	Criminal	5	Wessel & Tony
CCN	Criminal	Criminal	Non-criminal	1	
CNN	Criminal	Non-criminal	Non-criminal	2	Milo
ACC	Ambivalent	Criminal	Criminal	1	Martin
ANN	Ambivalent	Non-criminal	Non-criminal	4	Casper

The six participants whose lives will be described in more detail all represent a different trajectory. Four participants (Simon, Wessel, Tony and Casper) together represent three trajectories that were most prevalent in this sample: 17 out of 23 participants could be categorized in the trajectory that Simon (n=8), Wessel and Tony (n=5) and Casper (n=4) fit into. This does not mean all 17 men in these trajectories are all the 'same' men, there were a lot of in between participants' differences, even within the same trajectory. For example, while Wessel continued serious violent crime, Tony was determined not to be involved in violent crime anymore, but instead persisted in low-risk crime. These four life stories may be illustrative for more common persistence/desistance pathways among (ex-)offenders. The life stories of two other participants (Milo and Martin) are taken into account, because they represent a less common trajectory in the current sample. Maybe their stories are somewhat more off the beaten track but also shed light on desistance as "a journey of growth which comprises a multitude of pathways, turning points, dead ends and relays" (Phillips, 2017, p. 6).

LIFE STORY 1 DESISTER 'CHANGING IDENTITY'

Who is Simon?

Simon, a 24-year old guy with non-Western ethnic roots to 4.5 years in prison for an armed robbery. He was arrested three times before the current imprisonment, mostly for drug related and violent offences. He was registered on a list of 'most notorious' young repeat offenders by the authorities. At our interview in prison, his demeanour was laidback and he described himself as being a kind and helpful person who liked sports.

Background

Simon was born in a large urban city in the Netherlands. His parents divorced when he was three years old and he stayed with his mother and little sister. Simon cherished warm feelings for his mother, being raised by her and always felt he could talk to her. In contrast to his father who didn't raise him and frequently clashed with him. Difficulties with authority and lack of focus emerged at elementary school: teasing other children, bullying, disobeying the teacher, acting tough. Simon said he had always been 'a pain in the ass' at school, but when he was a teenager he also got into trouble outside of school, returning home past his curfew (sometimes in the middle of the night) and being untraceable. He frequently got beaten up at home and grounded, but his ideas on why punishment didn't prevent him from more antisocial behaviour reflect a few important debates in criminological literature : "I think it was just in me. My mother hit me, it hurt, I knew what I've done wrong. It had a reason, the beating… But yeah, it was just in me, I guess. You cannot beat it out of your DNA. It just has to go out sometime."

At age 14, Simon was caught carrying a weapon at the local soccer club. He had no intention to use it though, he wanted to show-off. He was convicted to community service and was glad he did not have to go to prison. After getting into trouble in and outside of school, his mother reached her limit with this incident and send him to live with his father (in another large city in the Netherlands). Simon was not amused about this decision, because he had to rebuild his social network, yet he succeeded to do so. He went to school and almost finished his education, but unfortunately he could not find an internship. After the deadline passed, he had to leave school because of this and got into a string of temporary jobs, for example in the kitchen and in construction. None of these jobs resulted in a steady income and according to Simon, the combination of these events culminated to the point it really went wrong:

> People say you cannot think that way, but I think it's the truth. If I could have just finished my education, I think I, I know for sure… That I would be further in life than I am now. I went to school, I got my [high school] diploma, I behaved well. And I was never afraid of hard work, I worked for my money. […] And then no internship… Honestly, it [getting involved in crime] happened like that [snaps his fingers].
> JD: Was it a decision or did something come across your path?
> Simon: You hang around with boys who are already in crime, but I didn't do anything wrong [yet], I just rolled with them. And then eventually, when you have no internship and only temporary jobs….You roll with them more often, you go with their flow. I was easy to go in their flow… and that's how I got stuck in it.

He first got involved in petty thefts which quickly turned into dealing drugs and fraud using debit cards. Making money easily fuelled his desire for wanting more and more:

> And then you see, hey there is money and you want more, more, more. You start thinking bigger. Maybe you have 4,000 euro now, you'll spend it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Then you think to yourself, no 4,000 euro is not enough, I want 8,000 euro. You start thinking bigger and higher [amounts].

At the same time, the way he valued money changed rapidly: "there is no value in that [criminal] money, to be honest. You buy expensive clothes, but there is no feeling involved because you don't work for it, you only grab." He quickly got used to the money and reflected on his life as being good at that time. For some of his crimes he never got arrested, but some got him in prison, mostly for short sentences of a few months.

In this criminal period, Simon started dating a girl, whom he got pregnant. He looked back on this being a high point in his life that he was about to become a father. However, she had a miscarriage and that same pregnancy also became his low point. His girlfriend knew he was working the streets: "She did not approve of it, actually, but yeah, she got used to it anyway of course." They dated for four years, but the long prison term eventually made an end to it.

Current imprisonment

The pursuit for more money got Simon involved in a violent armed robbery which he was caught for. He thought he would be sentenced to 6 years in prison, but at the trial the verdict was 4.5 years. Simon was 21 when he entered prison to serve his first long-term sentence. Looking back he said it was a waste of time, yet it went

quite fast and he expected it to be a lot harsher. This expectation was rooted in his thoughts of spending a longer prison term and therefore being surrounded by 'real' criminals. Instead 'boys' his age, but serving shorter sentences, were predominantly present during his incarceration. He was also surprised by the mild conditions of confinement that characterize the Dutch penal system; for example, there were more opportunities for recreation and making phone calls than he'd expected. Furthermore, he'd always felt safe in prison and never had to look over his shoulder. According to Simon, doing time is easier when you prevent yourself from thinking of the outside world: "thinking of where you could have been and what you could have done if you weren't in prison can destroy you when that cell door closes at 5".

The first year of imprisonment was tough for him and his girlfriend. After a lot of troubles and waiting, Simon broke up with his girlfriend after a relationship which lasted four years. He was realistic and acknowledged the fact he had a long-term sentence and she had to wait a very long time if they wanted to continue the relationship: "I cannot hold you [girlfriend] by me and you want to do your own things [outside]. So just go, I made the decision myself of course. I said, I'm not in here [prison] for nothing, you know that. It's better for it to be this way." He stayed in contact with her though ever since and expressed some tiny hope that maybe in the future they could be back together. For a long time, he kept a phone illegally in his cell. It was his way to keep in touch with family in the evening behind closed doors, because the public 'phone-times' in prison were always during working hours. However, prison staff found the cell phone during a search and he had to spent a week in isolation. The first two years of his imprisonment, Simon enjoyed the visits from his ex-girlfriend, mother and friends, but after these years, he did not care for it much. He explained it's tough when his mother cries at visiting hour and at a certain point, conversations with friends about the outside world are just confrontational especially when he returns to his cell and they leave and go party outside.

Simon could get along with everyone in prison: "whether he's young, old, junkie, black, white, it doesn't matter to me. Everyone gets respect from me and if you give me respect, you get respect back from me." He described himself being someone who prefers talking in situations of conflict instead of fighting: "but if you touch me, yeah, you're going to get it." He never went looking for fights and according to him, he only got into one fight during his prison term with another prisoner who came looking for a fight with him and he could not walk away.

Simon participated in a rehabilitation programme and finished a Choose for Change and a Cognitive Skills Training as part of this programme, mostly motivated in order to be promoted to a plus-regime. He did not think they were really of value for his reintegration. However, when talking about positive effects of this imprisonment, he mentions being more mature, looking at life differently and not wanting to cause more pain to his family. In the future, he said he will think before he acts, which is the core

of Cognitive Skills Training. Simon was not granted any leaves. He found this difficult to cope with: "I have not been outside for 3.5 years. It's tough. And here [in prison] they say they help you with returning to society, but I haven't seen society yet."

Pre-release expectations

Simon said he did not want to be in prison again for a long-term sentence and did not want to cause his mother anymore pain: "I hope those two things will keep me strong and motivated." He certainly did not see a place for crime in his life anymore and was determined to find a job, be normal and find a place to live. In addition, he mentioned a desire to have children someday, be a good father and a good person. Worries were present when he thought of finding employment, because he was under the impression that employers are reluctant to hire ex-prisoners. He applied for a sheltered housing programme and was hoping they would be able to make up for the lack of aid in prison and assist him in achieving his goals. He looked forward to being free, which for him meant: "to make your own choices, when you will eat, when you will shower, when you need fresh air, when you go out, everything. In here, you are being directed."

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

After an imprisonment of 3.5 years, Simon was assigned to the sheltered housing programme he applied for. He wanted to start fresh and selected a location away from his old neighbourhood. He was excited to use his cell phone again instead of having to do this secretly as he did in prison. It took him a few weeks to adjust to life in society, but he vividly recalled the first day:

> I adjust easily. But on the first day, I was allowed to go to the supermarket with some money and buy my own stuff. I think you could tell by just watching me that I didn't have a clue what to do. So many people and then having to take your own stuff. That's kind of like… hey…shit… They also asked me, I was like sorry, I just got out, I will be okay, but I have to count till 10 now and then it will be all right. It was… quite scary actually.

Simon was very content with the aid he got from the sheltered housing programme. They asked him what he needed and first proposed to apply for social benefits, but he refused and said he wanted to work for his money. In his search of employment, they did request welfare to bridge the period without money and helped him with his papers. He actively started seeking for jobs and soon, this resulted in a job at a local fast-food chain. He enjoyed working, although he felt he was capable of more, but he recognized he had to start somewhere and it was better than doing nothing.

In contrast to the assistance he received from the sheltered housing programme, Simon experienced his parole supervision as not very helpful. Although he appreciated his parole officer, he felt he merely had to attend check-ins and was asked how he was doing. He expected more help from the probation service. Simon did not have to wear an ankle bracelet which added to the feeling of freedom he experienced since his release. He kept emphasizing that he is a normal person now, having a normal job and how crime was not a part of his life anymore. His mother was still his prime motivation. He sounded determined when he spoke of ricocheting criminal offers: "when someone would say I can make a million doing this or that, I say: you take it, I'm gonna go to [name of fast-food restaurant where he worked] and work. Let me know how it went. Simple as that. I stand by my decision and will not be distracted anymore." Simon did not feel oblivious to the fact that there will be ups and down in achieving his goals, however he felt prepared to deal with setbacks. Soon after release, Simon met a girl he had known already for quite some time and started dating her. She was living a conventional life and motivated him in his attempts to do the same, encouraging him to keep his head clear and stay focused.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

When I had to interview Simon for the third time, I found out he was forced to leave the sheltered housing facility where he was staying because of a disagreement with a staff member concerning an act of aggression. Against his wishes (and apparently also against his parole officers' wishes), he got transferred to a location in his old town: "I wanted to start over in a new town, but now I see my old friends again here and you can easily fall back into the old routine which I was afraid of. But fortunately it did not happen, but being here makes it easier of course." Simon faced some setbacks since he was transferred. He lost his former job at the fast-food chain, because he couldn't meet the travel expenses anymore after being relocated and could not find another job in the area. He was volunteering in the meantime and considering to go back to school. Furthermore, he was annoyed at being pulled over by the police at least 20 times since he moved back to his former neighbourhood. Simon claimed there was no reason to stop him for questioning and that in his perception this was the result of labelling. His expectation was that this labelling would occur in search of a job, but he was surprised to see that employers did not ask about his past. He hastened to add that it helps when you know where you can apply for a job without a certificate of conduct.

Since he had to return to his mother if he did not find a place of his own by the time he was allowed to leave the sheltered housing facility, his next goal was to get a place of his own. He said he had already been away from home for six years, so it would be weird returning there. As a result, he felt great motivation in achieving this goal, but did not know how he would get there without some help. He already

enlisted himself at a housing corporation, but waiting lists in large urban Dutch cities are long so housing prospects ("Even to start, a single room, studio, anything!") were low.

When asked who supported him the most during the past year, Simon mentioned his family and himself. He felt great support of his family who didn't judge him and still trusted him. He was thankful they did not push him away. His mother was still his number one ("My mother is my all, my wife, my friend, my father, my all") and he did not stay in touch with his father anymore. The limited role he fulfilled in Simon's life was not enough for him to feel emotionally connected to him. He planned on doing things differently when he would have children someday:

> Simon: He made me, that's all. Conceived me. I would be there for my children, [I would be] a different father.
> JD: What is a good father in your opinion?
> Simon: To be there for your child.[…] Go to school sometimes, see how they are doing in school, give them money sometimes for clothing or anything, go to soccer. You name it, if they are involved in something, you join them.

The relationship with his new girlfriend stranded when Simon got busted cheating on her. She found out when he left his phone on during a nap and she got access to it. Although he said he was the one who ruined it, he did not express any remorse: "I have to act out a little, right. [...] She has to continue her life. Yeah, it's a pity, but yeah guys…I think all guys are like this."

Since the previous interview, Simon was still refraining from crime and involved in diachronic self-control by avoiding tempting situations. Of course, time restrictions from the sheltered housing programme prevented him to go out at night, but he actively avoided situations involving alcohol:

> See, everyone drinks of course. I drink for fun. But if someone else drinks and get aggressive and you have words, that person has a weapon, you continue, you also find something and in the end you accidentally beat him to death… Yeah where are you then? You go to prison again, for what? Because you went partying. [...]
> JD: Why not walk away from a situation like that?
> Simon: Yeah, you have been drinking. You think about leaving, but in the end…. Alcohol talks. And that's the reason I don't drink at all anymore, I did not drink, I'm done with that. So now, if I ever would go out and see a conflict like that, I would retract and walk away.

Another example of him avoiding temptation was not to look at high-end clothing from expensive brands. And if he looked, it did not trigger an urge of having it right away. If he wanted it, he would "not fight of steal for it anymore, just act normal and save for it. And if I don't have it now I'll have it next month or the month after that. Louis Vuitton will never leave." These examples of diachronic self-control reveal a different way of thinking on a more latent level influencing Simon's behaviour. It resulted in him "laying low and be a normal person in society".

Looking back on the past months since he got to the new location, Simon expressed disappointment in the level of assistance he got. He thought they could help him in his endeavours finding a house, but that was not the case. When discussing the controlling function of this sheltered housing programme, I asked him if he thought he would be able to stay straight (refrain from crime) without it: "Honestly, I think so. You know why? Because I said to myself: I don't want it [crime]. From 6 AM till 9 PM I'm allowed to leave this place, I could also do the wrong things then. They cannot check up on me [...]". He continued to elaborate on what help people like him should get when they are release:

> What they should do when guys with a long-term sentence are released, they should *really* [emphasis] help them. So many things are being built, why don't they built some boxes for guys coming from prison and don't have housing. Then assign them a mentor who helps them getting a job, weekly talks. Then they [ex-prisoners] also feel: hey, I'm getting help becoming a normal person in society. Here, you are just abandoned. I think it's a shame. Especially for guys who spent more time in [prison].

Similar to other participants in the sample, Simon mentioned Germany as an example where more attention is given to future rehabilitation for prisoners, getting paid a normal wage for in-prison employment. Being released with honestly earned money maximizes prisoners' chances to make it on the outside and makes attempts at rehabilitation more fruitful.

Simon talked about being a 'normal' person multiple times. Normal for him meant being a normal person in society with a job, a house, a family and he firmly believed that as long as he desired and strived towards these goals, eventually he would achieve them. Furthermore, he expressed a generative desire to give something back to society by helping 'guys like me'.

Future

As much as he loved his mother, worst-case scenario would be if Simon was living with his mother again in five years from now and if he would return to crime. A positive painted future included having a place of his own, employment and a family. Simon could envision himself contributing to the rehabilitation of other ex-prisoners: "If 10 or 20 out of 100 criminals become normal…I 'm not saying everyone wants to be [normal], but for the ones who do, that they get the help and they can get normal.."

CHAPTER 3
THE MEN

This chapter provides an overview of some of the characteristics of the 28 interviewed men and the larger (Dutch) context surrounding them to give a more complete image of the (social) context of these men. Topics are divided into six paragraphs. The first paragraph starts with an overview of the description of participants that they provided themselves since each interview started with the same question: 'Describe yourself in three words'. Then, some demographical information of the sample is presented in the second paragraph, followed by the legal framework of the crimes the men were convicted for, such as sentence and imprisonment length, and imposed conditions tied to their conditional release. Topics concerning their time spent in prison such as courses, visits and leaves will be explored in the fourth paragraph, continuing with the men's social situation before and after imprisonment when it comes to partner, children, housing, employment and drugs. Finally, criminal history and recidivism is presented. If the topic entails information about the follow-up interviews after release, only data from the men who participated in either two or all three interviews were included

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS BY THEMSELVES

The start of the interviews was always the same, breaking the ice and setting the participant at ease. The men were asked to describe themselves (their present selves, i.e. what described them best at the time of the interview) using three words. The responses to this question for each interview round are visually displayed in a word cloud timeline (see Figure 3.1). Interestingly, the first two words to describe themselves always referred to good characteristics, such as social and helpful, whereas the third word usually seemed to reflect another side, such as 'innovative', 'selfish', 'determined', which they often framed in the context of their criminal activities. Overall, answers seem to stay more or less the same over-time: social, cheerful and calm. However, the answers to this question at the first follow-up interview three months after release seemed to contain more words reflecting the first 'messy' months after release, such as 'restless', 'tired' and 'stressed'.

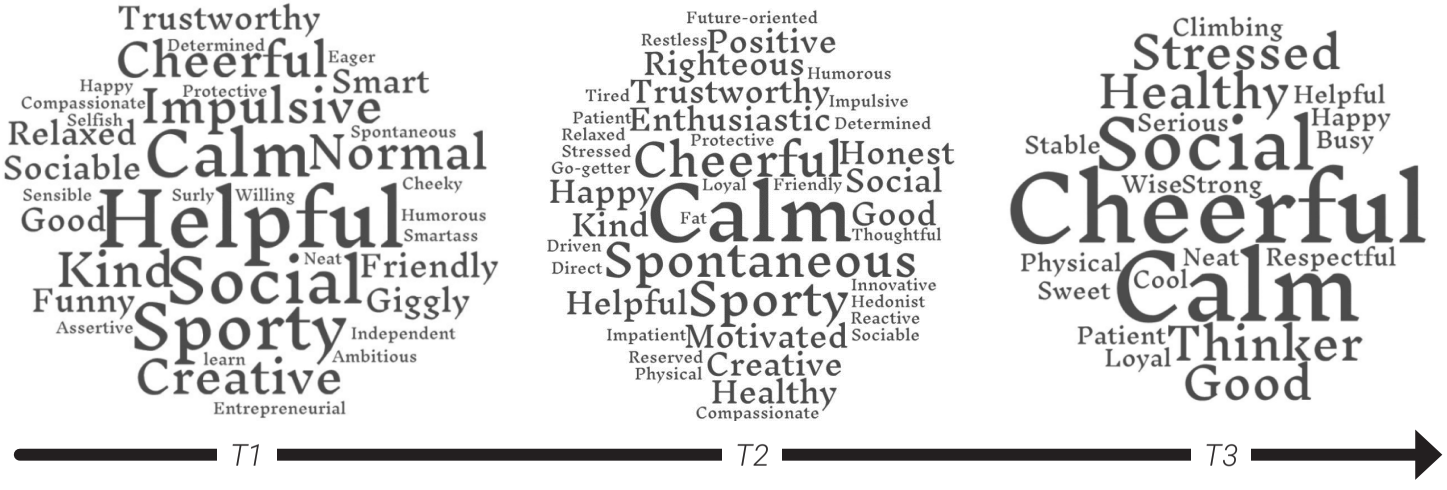

Figure 3.1 Word cloud showing responses to the question: “Describe yourself in three words” from all interview rounds (T1, T2, T3).

3.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

The mean age of the 28 men (at the time of the in-prison interview) was 27 years with a range of 21–53 years old. Three quarters of the sample (21 out of 28) was younger than 29 years at the time of the pre-release interview. The other half consisted mostly of men aged between 25 and 34 years. In 2012, 2013 and 2016, prisoners between 20 and 29 years made up the largest share of the Dutch prison population varying from 35 to almost 40 percent of the total prison population (De Looff et al., 2017, Table 3.7). The current sample has a higher percentage of men younger than 30 years, but this may reflect the length of the sentence and thus the offence they were convicted for. Offenders who are younger than 30 years are overrepresented in crimes combining property and violence, which is the case for armed robberies (Beijersbergen et al., 2018; De Looff et al., 2017).

All men were born in the Netherlands, but 19 out of 28 men (67%) were second generation immigrants, meaning that at least one of their parents was born in a foreign country. This mirrors the Dutch prison population in which ethnic minorities are overrepresented. In 2015, 62 percent of all prisoners originated from a migrant background which means that at least one of their parents was born in a foreign country (CBS Statline, 2017).

3.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The sample members were currently convicted for (multiple) mostly violent crimes such as armed robberies, attempted manslaughter and extortion, often in combination with a weapon. The men were serving sentences between two to three (n=8) or four to five years (n=20) and the average time they spend in prison before they were released was 39 months (range 30 to 50 months). On average the men had served time in three different locations during this prison sentence (including the remand centre).

All men had specific conditions tied to their release relating to different legally grounded categories:[1] check-ins, contact restrictions, location bans, residence orders, curfews, treatment orders, behavioural intervention orders and drug bans. In 2011, a national action programme (in Dutch: Programma Gewelddadige Vermogenscriminaliteit PGVC) targeting specific offenders of so-called High Impact Crimes was implemented (Ministry of Security and Justice, 2014, 2016). One of the measures included in this programme, was that soon to be released prisoners convicted for violent crimes were placed into the most intensive level of supervision

1 Kamerstukken II 2009-2010, 32 319, nr. 3.

after release, meaning weekly check-ins and house visits often together with freedom-limiting measures such as curfews and location bans which can be verified by electronic monitoring. The large majority of the current sample was indeed placed into the most intensive form of supervision with a multitude of requirements, because of a high risk assessment combined with the crime they were in for.

3.4 LIFE DURING IMPRISONMENT

Courses

The four behavioural interventions the men could participate in during their imprisonment were: Cognitive Skills Training (CoVa), Lifestyle Training for Addicted Offenders, Job Skill Training and Aggression Replacement Training (Ministry of Justice, 2005). Recently, it was revealed that only 40 percent of all prisoners who fulfil the requirements for behavioural interventions between October 2010 and March 2011 completed one of the interventions of the Prevention of Recidivism Programme (Bosma, Kunst & Nieuwbeerta, 2013). Furthermore, since the end of 2011, a Choose for Change course, based on the thought of prison as a turning point (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Nelissen & Schreurs, 2008), is offered to prisoners who want to be promoted to the plus-regime and get access to rehabilitative activities. The plus-regime is part of a system of promotion and demotion that has been introduced to the prison system in March 2014, targeting all prisoners who show pro-social behaviour and motivation to disengage from crime (*Staatscourant*, 2014). Before, specific treatment modules and phased re-entry were only available to detainees with a prison sentence of at least four months under the wings of the Prevention of Recidivism Programme (Van der Linden, 2004).

The participants of the current study all started their imprisonment before March 2014 and were almost all released after this date, so they often experienced the implementation of both policies in prison. Out of 28 men, 23 entered (and completed) one of the behavioural interventions mentioned above during imprisonment, mostly the Choose for Change course (n=14) and the Cognitive Skills Training (n=14), often combined. Furthermore, some also passed for a vocational certificate, for example with regard to painting, security or operating a fork lift. Three men did not sign up for any course, they said they did not want to and they thought it was not useful.

Table 3.1. *Descriptives of the sample during imprisonment concerning courses, leaves and visits (N=28).*

Alias	Behavioural courses					Leaves	Visits
	CST	CC	LTAO	JKT	ART		
Aaron	x					Yes	No
Ab						No	Yes
Casper		x				Yes	No
Charles		x				Yes	Yes
Dave	x					Yes	Yes
Leon		x				Yes	No
Peter						Yes	Yes
Richard						Yes	No
Tom		x				Yes	Yes
Tony	x	x				Yes	No
Bart						No	No
Chris	x		x		x	No	No
Isaac		x				No	Yes
Jack	x	x	x			No	No
Kay		x				No	Yes
Martin	x	x				No	Yes
Milo						No	No
Nathan	x					Yes	Yes
Nick			x			Yes	No
Oscar		x				No	No
Pascal	x		x			Yes	Yes
Roy	x				x	Yes	No
Rudy	x	x	x			Yes	Yes
Sam	x					No	No
Simon	x	x				No	No
Vince	x					No	Yes
Wessel		x				No	Yes
Xavier	x	x				Yes	Yes

Note: CST= Cognitive Skills Training, CC= Choose for Change, LTAO= Lifestyle Training for Addicted Offenders, JKT = Job Skill Training, ART= Aggression Replacement Training
Note: Leaves = during current imprisonment, visits = at the time of the in-prison interview

Leaves

A prison sentence must be dedicated to prepare a prisoner for re-entry to society as much as possible according to section 2 of the Dutch Penitentiary Principles Act. This can also include giving permission for rehabilitative leaves which aims to enable prisoners to *gradually* prepare for re-entry to society. To qualify for leaves and other rehabilitation opportunities, a prisoner needs to be in the plus-regime and show to be working on rehabilitation. There is a variety of reasons why leaves can be denied: when there is a flight risk, risks to use alcohol or drugs, or a recidivism

risk. Also, leaves can be denied when the address where the prisoner would spend the leaves is not deemed acceptable.[2] For example, when the person living at that address has a criminal record.

Half of the sample in the current study was given one or more leaves during the current imprisonment (15 out of 28). The other half reported that their applications for a leave were rejected, sometimes multiple times and as a result, they had not been on leave yet at the time of the in-prison interview three months before release. For example, the addresses that Wessel registered to spend his leave, could not be approved since individuals with a criminal record were living there. Except for one, all participants who were granted leave, returned from it at the designated time. One prisoner did not return from his first leave and manage to stay outside for a few weeks until he was arrested again. Note that at the follow-up interview three months after release, a few men mentioned that they had been granted one or more leaves after the initial interview held in prison approximately three months before release. However, Table 3.2 displays who were given one or more leaves from the start of their imprisonment until the time of the interview.

Visits

According to article 38 of the Dutch Penitentiary Principles Act, every prisoner has the right to receive at least one visiting hour a week. This number could be increased up to two hours a week if someone has been promoted to the plus-regime (*Staatscourant*, 2014). Each prison can decide on how to implement this right and to set house rules for visits. In practice this means that some prisons make an effort to offer visiting hours in the evenings or weekends instead of solely during working hours, making it easier for children, partner or parents to visit.

Almost all men received visits at some point during their prison spell. This often took place at the start of the imprisonment. At the time of the pre-release interview with the imminent release date, half of the sample said they were not having visitors over anymore, for a while now already (varying from the past few months to the past year). Partly because of their upcoming release date, some also contemplated about how the years passed by and they lost touch in a way. A few men still appreciated to have visitors, but most men expressed mixed emotions about visitation. On the one hand, participants said it is good to see your loved ones and to be able to stay in touch, talk about how things are going at home. On the other hand, visits can be an emotional event with crying mothers, girlfriends or children and also a confrontational event when they leave to their homes and the prisoner to his cell. Most participants agreed that doing time is more difficult when ties to the outside world remain close.

2 Article 4 'Regeling tijdelijk verlaten van de inrichting' grounded in article 26 of the Dutch Penitentiary Principles Act.

People who came to visit included parents, friends, (ex-)partners and, to a lesser degree children. Men who were still in contact with their children confessed they did not want their child(ren) to have to come to prison and be searched and see their father 'that way'. Some visits by friends seemed to be functional rather than personal because they had to bring goods to prison: clothes or contraband.

3.5 SOCIAL SITUATION

Living situation

Half of the sample came from broken families, growing up without one (mostly the father) or even both parents. Also, a few others mentioned that although their parents were still together, they were raised by their mother since their father was mostly absent for various reasons. Almost half of the sample lived with (one of) their parents before they were imprisoned for the current sentence. Eight out of 28 men had some form of independent housing such as renting a single room or an apartment before they got imprisoned; another five lived together with a partner before they got arrested for the current offence. Simon and Leon mentioned they were living with a relative before imprisonment, such as an aunt.

Table 3.3 shows the living situation at the two follow-ups after release. The most common living options immediately after release were with (one of the) parents and in sheltered living facilities, but this share decreased up to 12 months after release when more men obtained a form of independent housing. However, this also included more informal housing such as illegal subletting a room. Except for one, all men who had their own place before prison had to give it up at some point during their imprisonment. Casper was the only one who managed to secure his house by giving a legal permission for someone else to stay in his house until his release. As a result, he could return to his own house at the day of his release. Ten out of 23 men experienced at least one change in their living situation during the period from three months to one year after release: sometimes this was for the better when going from a sheltered living facility to finding independent housing, but sometimes it went downwards, at first sleeping here and there to even someone eventually becoming homeless at the time of the last follow-up interview. For Bart and Wessel, both the three months follow-up and the one year follow-up interviews took place in prison. They lived at a friend's place and in a sheltered living facility for a short while before they were rearrested for a new (serious) crime.

Partner

Half of the sample was involved in an intimate relationship (often for multiple years) before the current prison spell and mentioned their relationship to be of importance to them. Charles and Peter said to be married to their partners. However, for most (10 out of 14) the relationship stranded when they were imprisoned for the current crime.

Three men whose partners stayed with them through their prison spell and in the first months after release, saw this relationship being terminated in the months that followed. Peter said this partner did not 'fit' him anymore, he was having doubts already before prison; Roy did not want to be bound by his relationship and Tom was slowly falling back into his old criminal behaviour which was not appreciated by his partner. All three were single one year after release after being in a multiple year relationship. Ab was the only participant that was in the same relationship as he was before imprisonment and stayed with her throughout the research period. He said their bond became stronger and at the final follow-up, his girlfriend just gave birth to their first child, although he was back in prison and had to wait a few more weeks before he could hold his daughter for the first time. Three months after release, 17 out of 24 men were single and a year after release, this number was 13 out of 23.

Children

The sample consisted of 11 fathers who collectively had 18 children. Most of them reported a good relationship with their children and saw them on a weekly or even daily basis before they got imprisoned, although none of them actually lived with their child (except for Roy who lived with his girlfriend and her son who he regarded as his stepson).

Most fathers in the sample (i.e. Dave, Vince, Isaac, Casper, Jack, Tom) felt they were not able to maintain and invest in the contact with their child(ren) during imprisonment. According to them, this was related to being imprisoned again and 'screwing' up chances to remain in contact with their child(ren). For example, the mother of Vince's daughter was clear that if he would ever be arrested again, he would not be allowed to see her for a while. So Vince spend his imprisonment without seeing his daughter, while the bond before imprisonment was good and she seemed to be quite important to him. Dave and Isaac had also decided they did not want their child to come to prison and see them 'that way'. Whatever the reasons might be, at the end of the prison spells, some fathers (i.e. Wessel, Tony, Jack, Vince, Dave, Tom) had not seen their child(ren) for a few years, yet they mentioned to have a good relationship with them and expected to continue this bond after release. Nevertheless, only a few participants (Isaac, Dave, Vince) were actually able to create a strong bond with their children a year after release. The rest found themselves fighting custody battles, negotiating visitation rights or simply retracting from their child's life to be able to progress in their own. One year after release, Milo was about

to be a father and Ab just became one and for both, this seemed to be a significant moment contributing to feelings of maturity and responsibility (although one was refraining from and the other one continuing crime).

Table 3.2. *Descriptive characteristics of the sample before imprisonment (N=28)*

	Age	Background	Living situation	Partner	Children	Employment	First time imprisonment
Aaron	30-34	Western	Independent	Yes	0	Formal	No
Ab	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	Yes	0	No	No
Casper	35-39	Western	Independent	No	3	Informal	Yes
Charles	20-24	Non-Western	Independent	Yes	0	No	No
Dave	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	No	1	Education	Yes
Leon	20-24	Non-Western	Relative	Yes	1	No	No
Peter	50-54	Western	Independent	Yes	1	Formal	Yes
Richard	20-24	Non-Western	Independent	No	0	No	No
Tom	30-34	Non-Western	Independent	Yes	2	No	No
Tony	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	No	1	No	No
Bart	30-34	Western	Parent(s)	No	0	No	No
Chris	25-29	Western	Independent	No	0	Informal	No
Isaac	30-34	Non-Western	Independent	No	4	No	No
Jack	25-29	Non-Western	Independent	No	1	No	No
Kay	25-29	Non-Western	Independent	No	0	No	No
Martin	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	No	0	No	No
Milo	25-29	Non-Western	Independent	Yes	0	No	No
Nathan	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	No	0	Education	No
Nick	20-24	Western	Parent(s)	Yes	0	No	Yes
Oscar	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	Yes	0	No	Yes
Pascal	30-34	Western	Independent	Yes	0	Formal	No
Roy	25-29	Non-Western	Independent	Yes	1	No	No
Rudy	25-29	Non-Western	Parent(s)	No	0	No	No
Sam	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	Yes	0	No	No
Simon	20-24	Non-Western	Relative	Yes	0	No	No
Vince	25-29	Western	Parent(s)	No	1	No	No
Wessel	20-24	Western	Parent(s)	No	2	No	No
Xavier	20-24	Non-Western	Parent(s)	Yes	0	Formal	No

Employment & education

All men completed elementary school with just a few finishing high school. Many eventually got suspended from school and they themselves mentioned they were not good learners or they were just not interested in school. This feeling could exacerbate when someone from the neighbourhood told them how to make fast money when resources at home were scarce. A few men stated they were convinced they had the brains to finish an education and also made attempts towards starting one. For example, Richard had successfully entered a 21+ test in the past, which someone can take to 'prove' they are qualified for higher education when lacking an official degree.

Three months after release, nine out of 24 men found some form of formal employment or started an education. In addition, Jack and Vince were involved in informal work, yet not illegal by criminal law. Almost all of them managed to stay employed or in school in the months following up to 12 months after release. Formal work areas included industrial jobs such as construction work or in a butchery, but also more service oriented job such as working as a cook, in a call centre or visiting consumers for their cable TV connections. Most men who found a legit job (Dave, Milo, Nathan, Richard), felt they had much more to offer and that the job did not make use of all their capacities. However, they were pleased to be working, having something to do, earning money and realised it was a good opportunity for people with a criminal record, but without a diploma. Getting up early to go to work and working for a boss were not experienced as difficulties. Also, there was a sense of pride in finding a job shortly after release as this was sometimes mentioned to be a high point in the past few months after release.

Some men who were unemployed at the three months follow-up reported difficulties in finding a job related to their criminal record, lack of diplomas and/or meeting the supervision requirements, but in general, almost half of the sample admitted during the interview that they were not keen on working immediately after release and needed some time to adjust. As a result, they did not put too much effort in writing letters for jobs and seeking work opportunities.

Drugs alcohol

Half of the sample used cannabis and almost all of these users were daily users in their lives before the current imprisonment. Aside from cannabis, five out of 28 men mentioned to be regular users of hard drugs such as XTC, cocaine and/or speed at parties and get-togethers. No one said to be a heavy drinker, but almost all men occasionally consumed alcohol on parties.

Table 3.3. *Descriptive characteristics of the sample after imprisonment (N=24).*

	Living situation		Partner		Children		Employment	
	T2	T3	T2	T3	T2	T3	T2	T3
Ab	Parent(s)	Prison	Yes	Yes	0	1	No	No
Casper	Independent	Independent	No	No	3	3	No	No
Dave	Parent(s)	Parent(s)	No	No	1	1	Formal	Formal
Leon	Living facility	Informal housing	No	Yes	1	1	No	No
Peter	Independent	Independent	Yes	No	1	1	Formal	Formal
Richard	Living facility	Abroad	Yes	NA	0	NA	Formal	NA
Tom	Relative	Homeless	Yes	No	2	2	Formal	No
Tony	Parent(s)	Informal housing	No	No	1	1	No	No
Bart	Other	Prison	No	No	0	0	No	No
Chris	Living facility	Living facility	No	Yes	0	0	No	Formal
Isaac	Living facility	Relative	No	No	4	4	No	No
Jack	Living facility	Relative	No	No	1	1	Informal	Informal
Martin	Parent(s)	Prison	No	No	0	0	No	No
Milo	Partner	Independent	Yes	Yes	0	0	Formal	Formal
Nathan	Parent(s)	Parent(s)	No	No	1	1	Formal	Formal
Oscar	Living facility	Independent	Yes	Yes	0	0	No	No
Pascal	Independent	Independent	No	Yes	0	0	No	Formal
Roy	Partner	Informal housing	Yes	No	1[3]	0	No	No
Rudy	Living facility	Parent(s)	No	No	0	0	No	No
Sam	Parent(s)	Parent(s)	Yes	Yes	0	0	Education	Formal
Simon	Living facility	Living facility	Yes	No	0	0	Formal	No
Vince	Parent(s)	Parent(s)	No	Yes	1	1	Informal	Informal
Wessel	Living facility	Prison	No	No	2	2	No	No
Xavier	Living facility	Living facility	No	No	0	0	Education	Education

At the post-release interview three months after release, 12 out of 24 men were (still) using marijuana and all of these men were using on a daily basis. A year after release, 13 out of 23 men were smoking marijuana on a daily basis and both Pascal and Vince had experienced a relapse in the past months concerning cocaine and XTC, but quit again at the time of the final interview. The majority of the men who were smoking on a daily basis also assessed their use as very high, but only Tom

3 Roy's girlfriend had a son of who he said to see him as his stepson. At the final interview, Roy and his girlfriend broke up and he was not in contact with her son anymore.

claimed he was addicted to it and that he needed help. Furthermore, most men claimed to be recreational drinkers with the exception of Xavier, Pascal and Tom who experienced problems with alcohol in the past.

3.6 CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

The large majority of the sample (20 out of 28) reported to have grown up in quite criminal surroundings, embedded in life on the streets and acting out or showing deviant behaviour starting in puberty, getting into (group) violence, stealing and dealing. Some of them already contacted the criminal justice system when they were minors, but for most, they were convicted for the first time when they were adults. Xavier, Nathan, Sam, Leon, Martin and Richard entered prison for their current sentence before the age of 20. For Dave, Peter, Casper, Oscar and Nick, it was their first prison spell. The rest had spent multiple times in (a foreign) prison and/or in juvenile correctional facilities. A few men had already experienced a relatively longer term imprisonment, however, for most men this was the first time they were locked up for a *long* periods of time. The offences they were convicted for in the past varied from simple thefts, drug dealing and violent fights to more serious crime such as armed robberies and attempted manslaughter.

Criminal behaviour after release (n=9)

The nature of the crimes the men were involved in after release (n=9) varied from dealing drugs to more serious crimes such as forgery, robberies, rip deals, extortion and attempted manslaughter. Possibly due to supervision, crime in the first few months after release mostly comprised dealing drugs and evolved to more serious violent crime a year after release. One participant became a suspect in a rape-case at the final interview and another one confessed his contribution to a kidnap. At the post-release interview shortly after release (T2), Jack, Bart, Wessel, Rudy and Leon were back in prison. At the final interview (T3), Bart, Wessel, Martin and Ab were awaiting their trial with regard to a new serious crime and some anticipated a long-term sentence again.

WHO IS WESSEL?

At our first encounter, Wessel was 26 years, had Dutch ethnic roots, and had been sentenced to four years in prison for a serious violent crime. He was convicted six times for mostly violent crimes such as assault, aggravated theft, attempted manslaughter. He sighed when I asked him how many years of his life he had already done time as his answer was eight or nine years 'clean'. He described himself as being humorous and someone who does not take life too seriously. He likes to work out at the gym and said he is a very 'tidy' person, washing his hands all day long and keeping his cell clean.

Background

Wessel's childhood featured a lot of violence, drugs and neglect. He grew up with a father who was a big shot criminal, actively involved in trafficking drugs and weapons and "everyone knew who he was". Although his father was always in and out of prison, Wessel does recall him attending his Holy Communion under the supervision of two policemen carrying guns: "I grew up with the idea that the police is the enemy, because it was always associated with arresting my dad". He was raised by his mother, who was never criminally active, yet she had her own share of problems with alcohol and drugs. Wessel said his parents had an intense love-hate relationship infused with a lot of violence. On several occasions, Wessel witnessed his father abusing his mother and at the age of 6, his father was convicted for a serious violent crime against his mother. His older brother was unmanageable and soon was placed into care. After his father decided to be with another woman, his jealousy driven mother jumped of the balcony and was seriously injured. She had to be hospitalized for months. Twelve year old Wessel then lived with his father and stepmother. Looking back, he felt that this was the point where it all went wrong. He had easy access to drugs (because drugs were always lying around at home for his father's business) so he began stealing from his father and dealing at school. He got noticed by a violent group of older boys who were already involved in criminal activity and Wessel, provided them with drugs and mooched around them on a regular basis. He started to neglect school, doing drugs himself and got into a string of fights and thefts using weapons from the group supply. Informal social control was absent as his father was abroad for transporting drugs and was rarely at home.

When his father got imprisoned after being arrested for a large drug transport, Wessel was placed into custody of the court. He ended up in several assisted living facilities where he continued dealing drugs and became a heavy drinker. After his father's release, he went to live with him and his drug use became heavier, including cocaine and XTC. His father didn't know how to set an example and they did not have a normal father-son relationship: "sometimes I went downstairs, there were drugs on the table, there was a party. And my dad was very open, invited me to join. We did drugs together and we did crime together. Then the boundaries just fade away." When he was 16 and in his words "out of control", a fight with his father about past wrongdoings to his mother escalated and he assaulted him badly using a dangerous weapon. Wessel considered this an absolute low point is his life and still wonders how it got so out of hand. His heavy drinking, drug use and anger about the past culminated into this strong act of violence with Wessel trying to kill his father:

> I got so emotional from using drugs. And then my dad used to say things like: 'what are you crying about, your mother is a whore, she shouldn't have worked in that club when I was in prison and this and that.' And that night [of the crime] I exploded. Even the police said: 'we have never visited a crime scene like this'. The blood was everywhere. But my dad, all covered up in bandages, actually defended me in court saying he provoked me. To me he said I was a man, he respected me for defending my mother.

Wessel was convicted for attempted murder and sent to juvenile detention for a long time. He felt it was the right thing at that time, otherwise he thought he might have killed someone. During an unsupervised leave, Wessel met a girl and got her pregnant. She denied it was his son and it was only after four years he discovered it was his after a DNA test. Wessel was released from juvenile detention combined with treatment at the age of 20. He had several jobs in a bakery and as a road worker and managed to stay out of prison for almost a year. During this time he met his ex-girlfriend in a local disco and soon after that, she got pregnant. He actually did not want to have kids, because of the life he was living: "It was not healthy for a child" and that is why he believed she tricked him by saying she was on birth control.

Current imprisonment

The crime Wessel was currently in for was attempted manslaughter. According to him, things got out of hand when he was hired to beat someone up to retrieve money, but when he arrived at the location he saw there were little children present. Wessel firmly stated he would never do anything violent with children around, recognizing they could get traumatized. When he was instructed to "put the children in the shower", he exploded and got into a fight using a chair and a gun. Wessel admitted

he was drunk at the time this happened and that when he drinks, he should not be provoked. Wessel fled the crime scene and was on a run a few weeks when he realised he could not live that way. He returned to his mother with a bottle of rum and sat on the couch until 15 minutes later the police stormed in. Wessel was convicted to four years in prison.

In Wessel's view, the criminal world exists parallel to the 'normal' world and therefore, he did not declare anything at trial: "I know my side of the story, that is enough. Criminal activities… you have to keep it between the criminals involved. Don't rat out at the police station. I can't look myself in the eye if I would do that". Soon after the conviction, his father died but Wessel was not allowed to go to his funeral and he recalled how difficult it was for him to cope with the situation while being imprisoned. He suffered from panic attacks, anxiety, screamed in the middle of the night and was transferred to a special care unit.

About imprisonment, Wessel says: "I can do time easily. When I'm inside, I'm inside. I don't call a lot, I don't need visitors." He reported to have a good relationship with other inmates and with prison staff and took pride in the special job he had on the floor. A few years after his father died, his mother committed suicide. This was also a very difficult time for Wessel. He was allowed an unsupervised leave to go to her funeral, but then relapsed with alcohol and drugs. It all went so fast, and he tries not to think about it, but: "I think when I'm out and I won't see my father and mother…. I think I will struggle.."

Being part of the rehabilitation programme he participated in, he finished a Choose for Change course, which he didn't perceive as valuable. He explained his point of view by questioning what they were really going to do for him when he got out. Knowing what to do and what not to do is easy on paper, but in practice it isn't all that easy, although he felt that is how they presented it in the course.

Towards the end of his imprisonment, Wessel was allowed to go on leave yet all 10 addresses he selected were declined. Apparently, the people living at these addresses were involved in criminal activity or had been in the past and therefore, unsuitable to serve as a valid address. As a result, Wessel has not seen the outside world since the start of his incarceration (except for a few days to attend his mother's funeral). He did not share the opinion of the system that there were risks involved when he would contact his old criminal network again:

> The last address I reported was my nephew's. The last criminal thing he did was in 2013! And that was about growing marijuana, I don't even think that is a bad crime. You see, the coffee shops can sell, but we are not allowed to grow…. That doesn't make sense!

Pre-release expectations

Not being granted any leaves, Wessel foresaw the impact it would have on him upon release. He mentioned fear that it would all be too much, entering society after all these years without any money, no father, no mother, no brother (who was imprisoned abroad), working all of a sudden. Wessel expressed a desire to try and do it the normal way in the context of his conditional release and he wanted to quit violent crime, because: "you don't gain anything. Being inside is just being inside. The world outside continues and you won't see your children grow older. I also want to have my life outside now, I've had my share of trouble." However, he did not envision a life without any crime. In this context, he revealed he was never arrested for drug related crimes (which underscores the importance of adding data from narratives to official crime records to understand the process of desistance), so he saw his future continue in that direction. But he was well aware of his weaknesses: being drawn to the seduction of crime and not being able to say 'no', being unstable and unpredictable, having a preference for expensive clothes and willingly searching for risky situations involving alcohol and drugs. As part of his conditional release and in an attempt to part from the violent criminal world, he made a decision to leave his old town and applied for an intensive rehabilitation programme on a farm. As we shall see, this optimism turned into fatalism quickly after release, resulting in Wessel's self-sabotage and reoffending.

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

After 35 months of imprisonment (and without any previous leaves), Wessel was conditionally released and placed at the farm. He tried to get used to the electronic ankle bracelet and to function in a law abiding context which demanded conformity, but it was not long before he lapsed into his old behaviour:

> He [the farmer] thought working is the solution for everything. But I was inside for so many years and outside I don't work, so this was hard on me. My hands ached, everywhere. [...] It was difficult for me, I didn't feel happy there, I was sitting at their dinner table… I lost my father, my mother … I didn't want to be there, you know. [...] There was no connection at all [with the farmer] and he admitted he set the bar very high. We were supposed to have a talk….. because yeah, I overslept you know... I went out drinking too much, found a nearby dealer.

Wessel confessed he purposely used drugs in order to get away from the farm and to be admitted into a clinic. However, because he refused to go to a clinic earlier during his prison spell, he first had to go back to prison to be examined. Panicked by the news of having to return to prison, he cut off his electronic monitoring device

and fled. He immediately entered the criminal life again of producing and dealing drugs and being involved in violent rip deals. He also started dating a girl whom he had known a long time. Three months after release, he was arrested for another serious violent crime in her home. He expected to be sentenced to 12 years in prison: "Anything less would be positive". About re-entering prison, he revealed: "it might sound strange, but a feeling of calmness came over me when I walked in".

Wessel had seen one of his children when he was out, but had already lost contact now he was in prison again explaining the mother of the kids (who had problems of her own) would never pick up the phone when he called. He said to keep trying, but that he had not seen his other son for such a long time, he realised the value of the bond with his children was decreasing, having less impact:

> You see, everyone keeps saying: 'think about your kids'. But if you don't have a bond with them you really have to see him to realise the value. A picture will not help. You have to hold your child. I do not have a connection with him, I know that. Sometimes I feel guilty, but yeah, than I think it's easy to say: do it for your kids, when you don't feel connected to them.

Thinking about the future, Wessel is quite pessimistic and mentioned that he had shut it out a bit in order to be able to get through. He wanted to make the best of it, but the only option in which he could see himself parting from crime if when his girlfriend would wait for him, although this seemed to be more a form of wishful thinking.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

At the time of the third interview, Wessel was still incarcerated facing another long-term sentence. When the prison staff instructed him to go to the private room where I was waiting for him, he thought his lawyer was present. But when they mentioned the university, he knew it was me. He apologized for not being showered and explained he just came from a training session in the gym. He was currently reading the book *Papillon*, about a prisoner wrongly accused and sentenced to life.

A few months before this interview, Wessel was subjected to psychiatric and psychological tests and the report read he was a psychopath needing excitement and seeking for thrills. When asked if he recognized himself in these words, he replied:

> There is some truth in that, but yeah, I have to in that [criminal] world, that is how it goes. But outside, I would never ever do that [assault] to a 'normal' person [...] but yeah, in that criminal world, yeah, I do that. Maybe by losing my father and mother and everything I grew up in, maybe it is a part of my character now. It has done something to me.

When reflecting on how this crime could happen so soon after he was released from prison, he linked this to his state of mind at that time, which in his view originated from the difficulties at the farm which was not what he expected. It also still bothered him that he was not granted any leaves for it impeded opportunities to get used to society. According to him, to ventilate all this suppressed anger and frustration he fell back into his old script using drugs again. He knew he was not doing well and things exploded when he heard he had to go back to prison.

Being 'in' for a while now, prison is familiar ground to him. He got into a prison he already spent time in before, so he knew the guards and other prison staff which he seems to prefer over life outside prison walls: "Out there you are on the run and you are not in touch with your children, with no one, it's a hard life outside. In here I have my people, I know everyone and it's sociable. I know what it's like to do time, I don't have any problems with it. [...] It's been like this all my life." He was clean for some time now.

He broke up with his girlfriend after a few visits from her side, but he immediately added that although he had known her his whole life, they only started dating two or three weeks before he was arrested: "It was not that serious, no deep love or anything and I don't miss her". He also completely lost contact with his children, stating that the minute he is in prison, he shuts off all connections to life outside the walls.

Wessel felt he was reaching out for help to cope with all the things from his past. He knew about himself that when he was not feeling well, he turned to drugs. Inside it is easy for him to refrain from using drugs, but outside it is a different story. However, he had the feeling he did not get the aid he wanted and that they abandoned him: "I really want to get help, to process all of this [past]. But nothing has been done. They don't see me. The psychiatrist also didn't listen to me when I said I needed help." He felt that if got help to deal with his current problems, he was able to influence negative future events. In the tests, they also established his low IQ and the lack of specific skills, so Wessel knew he needed to work on this.

Future

Envisioning the future is difficult for him, since he will be in prison for quite some time for this new crime. He expresses no regrets about the decisions he made though when he summarizes: "when the lights go out, no one knows who you are". He also admits (and hereby agreeing with the psychological diagnosis) that his need for excitement and adrenaline fuels his deviant behaviour and gets him into trouble. Worst-case scenario would be if he turns into a junkie, being homeless or in a shelter. This is quite a realistic image, so he was taking steps to be clean. Despite past traumatic

experiences, continuous criminal behaviour across different stages in his life and a new long-term imprisonment, Wessel felt content. When asked to describe himself in three words at our last encounter, he claimed to be happy, peaceful and healthy:

> Yeah… I'm happy. This is my life. I'm actually pretty satisfied with how things are going, I don't have much to complain. It's fine like this." For the future, he expressed the desire to have a house of his own, a nice girl and being able to take care of himself.

Future plans included building some boxes to grow cannabis, because this was something his family had always been involved in and he saw no harm in supplying coffee shops. He explicitly mentioned he did not want to quit crime and he could not imagine quitting. When I asked him if he had any boundaries, he sighed and said:

> I have very few boundaries. If someone would call me to shoot someone for 50K [thousand] ... I would do it. Not that I'm planning to do it [laughs ashamed]! But when I look ahead and you ask me if I have boundaries and when I think about that, I think I have very few. [...] I would never shoot someone innocent, but someone in this [criminal] world. It's part of it. And I would never do it when there is a kid around.

CHAPTER 4
TO DESIST OR NOT TO DESIST?▪

A qualitative study of a sample of Dutch prisoners and their pre-release expectations for future criminal behaviour

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a sample of 28 male long-term prisoners in the Netherlands who were about to return to society. The aims of the study are to examine their future expectations regarding criminal behaviour and to explore how social (e.g. employment, family support) and individual factors (e.g. agency) are associated with these expectations. Since such expectations may affect their actual (criminal) behaviour after release, it seems important to gain more insight into pre-release expectations and factors that might play a role. Pre-release semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and these interviews included questions about future expectations, social ties and sense of agency. Prisoners expecting to quit criminal activities had both close social ties to society and scored high on individual factors. Prisoners who did not expect to disengage from crime had weak social ties (or no social ties at all) and a weak sense of agency or self-confidence.

Keywords: long-term prisoners, future expectations, social ties, agency.

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Monday 1PM. In a separate room in prison where no staff members were present or could overhear us, I patiently wait for Ab (24 years). He is a long-term prisoner and spend the past 2.5 years in four different prison locations for an armed robbery. In a few days he will be released. Ab is a cheerful guy who immediately starts talking about his life and experiences in prison. He tells me about the gun that was found in his locker at school when he was only 15 years old. About the drugs he started dealing and the money he has made. He tells about his brother who was shot in that same drugs scene and passed away. But he also tells me about his principles and values, the rule that he'd rather not use violence. That he wants children and longs to marry his girlfriend who stood by his side all these years. When I ask him how he envisions his life after release, he goes quiet for a second. Then he says: "this is the only thing I am good at. I wouldn't know what else to do". When I ask him where he sees himself in five years from now, he frowns even more profound. I make a joke that I am making him think hard on this Monday afternoon, to which he replies: "More [thinking] than I've done in all these years here [in prison]."

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, a relatively small group of offenders is serving longer terms in prison. In fact, only 7 percent of all Dutch prisoners are sentenced to more than a year in prison (Kalidien, 2017); only 2 percent is released after an imprisonment of two to four years; and 1 percent after serving four years or more (De Looff, Van de Haar, Van Gemmert & Bruggeman, 2018). Since the average time of being imprisoned in the Netherlands is 105 days, for Dutch standards, being released after spending two to four years in prison is considered an extensive period of time. Although prisoners serving more long-term spells are convicted for serious and violent crimes such as armed robberies, violent burglaries and attempted manslaughter, knowledge about this group remains scarce. Given they are responsible for serious crimes known to have major impact on the victims, on society at large and on feelings of safety (violent crimes are classified as High Impact Crimes (HIC) by the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, 2014, 2016), gaining more knowledge about this type of offenders seems of great interest. In addition, re-incarceration rates within two years after release are similarly high for long-term prisoners and short-term prisoners. For example, 25 percent of all offenders released in 2015 after serving two to three years in prison, was in prison again for a new crime which is almost the same number (27%) for short-term prisoners serving less than two months (De Looff et al., 2018).

Sending an individual to prison serves various goals: such as reducing recidivism, incapacitation, deterrence, retribution and rehabilitation (Von Hirsch, Ashworth & Roberts, 2009). While a longer stay in prison results in an immediate removal of this

individual from society for a longer period of time (incapacitation), some research illustrates that imprisonment length or sentence length does not have a clear effect on reducing future crime (deterrence) (Loughran et al., 2009; Snodgrass, Blokland, Haviland, Nieuwbeerta & Nagin, 2011; Wermink, Nieuwbeerta, Ramakers, De Keijser & Dirkzwager, 2018). This implies that solely sending individuals to prison to serve longer terms does not seem to contribute to reducing recidivism.

Serving the goal of rehabilitation, the focus shifts to what happens during imprisonment when working towards release. Rehabilitative activities involve both the individual himself and the external, social context. Before 2014, only prisoners serving longer prison spells (more than four months) could be involved in rehabilitative activities (in contrast to short-term prisoners who participated in the regular daily programme and were bound to 'just' do their time). This has changed from March 2014, when a system of promotion and demotion was implemented in Dutch prisons. [1] In theory this means that all prisoners (so not only long-term prisoners) who behave in a pro-social manner and show motivation to change their ways can be upgraded from the regular, sober regime they start in when they enter prison, to a so-called plus-regime. The plus-regime allows prisoners to participate in courses and activities aimed to change their behaviour or thinking, apply for leave and receive assistance with arranging aftercare. Aftercare in prison focuses on social factors by working on problems in the area of employment, housing and care. Long-term prisoners have more chances and time to be engaged in prison-based rehabilitative activities. This suggests that on the one hand a longer prison spell could induce behavioural change that reduces the likelihood of recidivism. On the other hand, longer terms in prison also mean a longer period away from society, which could result in a failed connection to the labour market and weakening of pro-social bonds (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Thus, re-entry challenges can be more challenging for prisoners serving longer terms and this could increase recidivism.

When approaching the end of imprisonment and the imminent release date, inmates have to think about their life after prison, contemplate about continuing or disengaging from a criminal lifestyle and how to deal with re-entry challenges such as difficulties in finding employment and reconnecting to family and friends (Irwin, 1970; Petersilia, 2003). The current study explores future expectations of long-term prisoners in the Netherlands approaching release and focuses on future criminal activities. It is important to gain more insight in prisoners' *own* future expectations of criminal behaviour, since psychological literature illustrated that expectations can direct (future) behaviour (Atkinson, 1964; Rotter, 1966), and therefore, possibly future criminal behaviour as well. Two theoretical streams served as a framework to

1 *Staatscourant*, 20 February 2014.

examine prisoners' future expectations and factors that might play a role in shaping these expectations. The present study examines the idea that social factors, such as employment, housing and social support (Sampson & Laub, 1993), and individual factors, such as agency (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001) that explain how and why people quit crime, can also play a role in the future *expectation* to quit crime. The main research questions addressed here are: (1) What are the pre-release expectations of prisoners regarding future criminal behaviour? And (2) how do social and individual factors relate to prisoners' expectations regarding criminal behaviour? Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 prisoners who were imprisoned for a minimum of 2.5 years at the moment of release. The interviews included questions about future expectations regarding criminal behaviour and factors that may be related to these expectations, such as social ties and a sense of agency.

Prisoners' expectations of future criminal behaviour

The present study explores the future perspective of long-term prisoners in the Netherlands regarding criminal activities. Since future behaviour can be influenced greatly by the expectations people have about the consequences of their actions (Atkinson, 1964; Rotter, 1966), it seems relevant to discuss what is known from literature on how realistic these expectations are when it concerns their own future. In general, people are biased towards the positive and therefore tend to have a positive future prospect (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Weinstein 1980). People tend to believe that they will do better than someone else or that chances are low(er) that something could happen to them instead of someone else: "it won't happen to me" (McKenna, 1993, p. 39). This is called 'unrealistic optimism'. On the one hand this can contribute to less motivation to protect oneself, by engaging in activities that minimize the chance for negative events to happen (Oettingen, 1996; Weinstein, 1980). Also, it can stand in the way of making plans in achieving goals, because of the thought that it will be okay anyway. On the other hand, unrealistic optimism could increase motivation and perseverance in high risk situations where chances of success are uncertain (Taylor & Brown, 1988). When this topic is examined in the population of prisoners, it could be argued that 'unrealistic optimism' may be beneficial for the process of re-entering society after a prison sentence (high risk situation). Yet, being overly optimistic could also obstruct actively taking concrete steps to disengage from crime and deal with well-known re-entry challenges such as finding a job and housing (Petersilia, 2003), because people might think they will be fine anyway. In this context, expectations play an important role: to perceive a desired outcome as attainable will motivate behaviour to achieve this outcome and contribute to perseverance when being faced with adversity (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Research findings demonstrate that prisoners are quite positive about their future when thinking of life after prison. For example, US and UK prisoners seem to give a lower estimation of recidivism compared to official statistics on recidivism for ex-prisoners (Burnett, 1992; Dhami, Mandel, Loewenstein & Ayton, 2006; Visher, La Vigne & Castro, 2004). Maruna's influential study (2001), examining differences in the narratives of individuals who had disengaged from offending and others who continued crime, illustrated that the stories of desisting offenders were characterized by an optimistic future outlook. However, this link could only be established in retrospect, which means it remained unclear if the desisting individuals were already optimistic at the time of release, or that, knowing they had successfully abandoned crime, a positive mindset was present at the time of the (post-release) interview. In addition to these research findings, Schinkel (2014) interviewed 12 long-term prisoners (sentenced to four years or more) and nine parolees, and suggested that disengaging from crime did not necessarily seem to 'need' an optimistic outlook; also a rather uncertain future perspective could be linked to moving away from a criminal life. She explained this by arguing that (optimistic) thinking could be strengthened when successes on the outside occur, such as finding housing or obtaining employment.

Theoretical framework

To examine the factors associated with future expectations regarding criminal behaviour, the present study draws on two prominent theoretical streams: (1) social control theories (Hirschi, 1969; Laub & Sampson, 2003) and (2) identity theories (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). These two theoretical streams differ in which factors are thought to be more important in disengaging from crime – respectively social factors and individual factors – and together they provide a possible explanation for when and why people desist. The current study presumes that factors from these theories might also play a role in the *expectation* to stop, or desist from, crime.

Control theory (Hirschi, 1969) postulates that an individual's proclivity to deviate is universal and the question should therefore be why some people indeed conform to society. The core thought is that people form ties to conventional society, such as employment, housing and the relationship with children and a partner. Sampson & Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control (1993) added that informal bonds can develop and become stronger gradually, also depending on age. For example, ties to parents will have more impact on children, while for adults, ties to employment, partner and children will become increasingly important as they grow older. These 'stakes at conformity' can be at risk when someone engages in criminal activities, which then motivates to refrain from criminal behaviour (Hirschi, 1969). Stronger ties could constrain the inclination towards criminal behaviour, which

highlights the quality of bonds instead of the mere presence. In sum, social control theory is based on the idea that individuals are motivated by external, social forces that direct their (criminal) behaviour.

In past decades, the field of criminology has increasingly been expanded by paying attention to more internal, subjective and complex processes that seem to play a role in the process of disengaging from offending (Bandura, 1989; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). The basic assumption here is that people are active in shaping their own world and cognitive shifts precede actual changing behaviour (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). Identity theories posit that change has to come from within the 'self' before that individual will take steps towards a life without crime. The explanatory mechanism here is the concept of identity change: moving from the old, criminal identity to a pro-social one that does not involve criminal behaviour. A cognitive shift takes place when a person starts to envision a future conventional non-offending self which can replace their current offending self.

Bandura (1989) criticised approaches in which the human being was viewed as a passive actor, as in control theories. He proposed an *agentic view* in which individuals are perceived to be actively shaping their lives into the desired direction. Although increasing attention is being paid to the concept of agency within the field of desistance (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Vaughan, 2007), there is no agreement on the definition of this concept (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008). Despite the lack of a clear definition, agency seems to encompass a few aspects: being goal oriented, the ability to influence and adjust your choices and believing in the desired outcome of your actions (Bandura, 2006; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The last aspect refers to self-efficacy, a sub mechanism of agency (Bandura, 1989): believing that goals can be achieved, to concur obstacles and being confident in one's own abilities. Or, as Maruna (2001, p. 147) concluded in a group of ex-offenders that successfully moved away from criminal life, that: "they had a plan and were optimistic that they could make it work." Burnett and Maruna (2004) described agency as the motivation to strive towards a goal and the ability and capacity to reach this goal, or "the will and the ways".

Previous research

Previous studies have provided evidence for the importance of social factors when re-entering society after prison, such as the role of employment, family and partners (Ramakers, Nieuwbeerta, Van Wilsem, Dirkzwager & Reef, 2014; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). Family and partner can be a valuable source of emotional and financial support, but also to provide housing and a feeling of stability. Other studies have shown that for example, receiving visits in prison from significant others reduces the chance at recidivism after release (Cochran, 2014; Duwe & Clark, 2013).

A few studies have zoomed in on prisoner's own pre-release expectations by examining which social or individual factors (excluding pre-prison factors) seem to be related to these expectations (Crank, 2016; Dhami et al., 2006; Van Ginneken, 2015; Visher & O'Connell, 2012). Dhami and colleagues (2006) showed that, from a range of factors, the perceived return to family/friends upon release was a significant predictor of lower forecasts of recidivism among a sample of UK and US offenders approaching release. They illustrated that social bonds can be a source of social support dependent on the perceived strength and quality of the bond. Similarly, Visher & O'Connell (2012) demonstrated that being a father, being married, experiencing family support and higher levels of self-esteem were related to optimistic pre-release expectations among a sample of US prisoners. From a more qualitative perspective, Van Ginneken (2015) interviewed 30 offenders approaching release and observed that offenders with a positive outlook on the future in general were characterized by having goal-oriented thoughts, concrete plans to achieve certain life goals and were motivated to do so. Lloyd & Serin (2012) showed in a sample of 142 minimum-security prisoners that a positive expectancy for desistance was related to a strong belief in the ability to desist (agency), and suggested that optimism, realistic or not, could be necessary to maintain strength and confidence in one's own abilities.

In sum, both social and individual factors are proposed by theory to play an important role in processes of behavioural change, such as desisting from crime. Some previous research suggests these factors can also relate to future expectations for life after prison. The current study examines how social and individual factors, which are associated with desistance, relate to future expectations regarding criminal behaviour in a sample of Dutch long-term prisoners.

Dual contribution social and individual factors

Combining social and individual factors, persons can be divided into four categories (see Table 4.1). Prisoners with a high score on both factors (multiple and/or strong social bonds and a strong sense of agency) will be, based on theory and previous research, more likely to have expectations to disengage from crime in the near future. Conversely, prisoners with low scores on both factors (few and/or weak social bonds and a low sense of agency) will not or less expect to refrain from crime. The future expectations of prisoners with both high and low scores will vary on a continuum between refraining and continuing crime.

Table 4.1. *Typology of social and individual factors and hypotheses*

Type	Social factors	Individual factors	Expected direction prisoners' forecasts
I	+	+	Non-criminal
II	-	-	Criminal
III	+	-	Between non-criminal and criminal
IV	-	+	Between non-criminal and criminal

Note: a plus sign means a high score, a minus sign means a low score.

4.2. METHODS

Procedure and participants

The current study is a sub study of the Prison Project, a longitudinal research on effects of imprisonment among Dutch male detainees aged 18–65 years (Dirkzwager et al., 2018). Our target sample met the same basic criteria as the Prison Project participants, but additionally focused on prisoners who (a) had been imprisoned 2.5 to four years at the moment of release, (b) were convicted for a crime that is not in appeal, (c) were not in an ISD or TBS programme or a minimum security prison, and (d) were not convicted for a sex offence. Since only four participants of the original Prison Project sample met the extra criteria, an additional data collection was initiated based on a new list provided by the Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) that consisted of prisoners in 28 prisons across the country, meeting the inclusion criteria and to be released between September 2014 and October 2016. Since the aim of the research was to explore future expectations, it was important to interview the prisoners before release. The list contained 84 long-term prisoners who met the criteria.[2] This small number reflects the criminal justice system in the Netherlands, where longer term prison sentences

2 The original list encompassed 363 men, but 136 men were unfortunately not meeting the additional inclusion criteria and could be excluded immediately for various reasons: they were following a penitentiary programme (replacing the final phase of a prison sentence) outside prison, for example in an assisted living facility, they were staying in a minimum security prison, a facility for revolving door criminals or at a psychiatric prison. Soon after beginning to trace the remaining 227, another 143 men could be excluded in addition because of the following: they were already staying outside of prison (n=57), an additional (or remaining) sentence was added to their current sentence (n=21), they were convicted for a sex offence after all (n=20), they were transferred to a minimum security prison (n=30), they were staying in a facility for revolving door criminals (n=7), they were staying in a psychiatric prison (n=3) or they were illegal, not a Dutch citizen or untraceable (n=5).

are rare – by international standards. By the end of the data collection period, 44 men in prison were approached and 36 were interviewed.[3] Eight interviews were excluded afterwards because of various reasons.[4]

When approaching the prisoners, an explanation was given about the study and it was pointed out that participation was voluntary. Furthermore, they were informed that this study was conducted independently of the Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice and that information was not shared with other inmates, nor with prison staff or the Probation Services. Interviews were all done by the same interviewer and took place in a private room. They lasted one to two hours and with permission of the participants, 26 out of 28 interviews were tape recorded. Notes were taken during the interviews with the two participants that refused audio recording and written down immediately after the interview.

The average age of the participants was 27 years (range 21 - 53 years). Table 4.2 presents some information about the sample. The majority is convicted for violent crimes (such as armed robbery). All the participants were given a pseudonym.

3 Participants refusing to participate or did not show up (n=4), participants that could not be reached when visiting the prison (n=4), for example because they were placed in solitary confinement or due to administrative problems.

4 For two participants we uncovered that they were convicted for a sex offence after all, two participants received another sentence while imprisoned, which meant they would not be released any time soon and therefore had to be excluded. One prisoner was detained for a shorter time than we initially thought and three prisoners appeared to be in appeal.

Table 4.2. *Descriptives of the participants*

Name	Age	Sentence	Offence type
Aaron	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery
Ab	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Casper	35-39	2-3 years	Kidnapping, extortion
Charles	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Dave	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Leon	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Peter	50-54	2-3 years	Fraud
Richard	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Tom	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery
Tony	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery
Bart	30-34	4-5 years	Aggravated theft, extortion
Chris	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery
Isaac	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery
Jack	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery
Kay	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery
Martin	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Milo	25-29	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter
Nathan	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Nick	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Oscar	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Pascal	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery
Roy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery
Rudy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery
Sam	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Simon	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery
Vince	25-29	4-5 years	Burglary
Wessel	20-24	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter
Xavier	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery

Interviews and analysis

Data was collected using an interview protocol comprising questions about social and individual factors known from theory and previous research to be related to desistance and the expectations regarding desistance. Prisoners were asked about their expectations for future criminal behaviour and how they envision their life after release. Social factors were reflected in questions about living and working conditions and relationships with parents, partner, children, criminal and non-criminal friends. Moreover, questions about future goals and feelings of being in control of your own life and the choices you make were added to dissolve the concept of agency.

The interviews provided rich data comprising a wide array of topics. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and first read multiple times. To organize the data it was then coded with Atlas.ti. A list of pre-set codes were initially formed based on the interview protocol and conceptual framework, this is called a-priori coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then new emerging codes were added to the existing codes during the coding process. To minimize subjectivity in the interpretation of the results, coding of the interviews and categorizing the participants into the typology (as mentioned above) was done by two researchers independently.[5] If a person had two or more (strong) bonds such as housing situation after release and relationships with children and parents, the participant was given a high score on social factors. Likewise, a high score on the individual factors meant that a high sense of agency was found in the narrative. This included to what extent a person felt he is in control of his life, takes responsibility for his own actions and whether he is goal-oriented. In the next section, the typology will be discussed and quotes will be given to illustrate the high and low scores.

4.3 RESULTS

Future expectations regarding criminal behaviour

The future expectations of the interviewed prisoners could be divided into participants who expected to quit crime after release (non-criminal future expectation, n=11), participants who were certain that they would continue offending (criminal expectation, n=10) and participants who did not have clear expectations about their offending behaviour (ambivalent expectation, n=7). Dave's future outlook illustrates the non-criminal expectations:

> I am not going to do that stuff anymore when I'm out, I've thrown away too many years already.

Ten out of 28 prisoners expected to continue crime after their release, although most of them thought they would engage in less serious crime in comparison to what they have been convicted for (for example, dealing drugs instead of robbing a jewellery store). Seven prisoners expressed more uncertainty when they talked

5 The categorization of the sample in four profiles done by the two researchers separately corresponded highly with each other. In three cases there was a difference in interpretation, but after an extensive screening of the material, consensus was reached.

about future criminal behaviour. They doubted whether or not they would refrain from crime. Some said they wished to quit, but at the same time were not sure whether this will happen, as Vince described:

> The chance that I will be back in prison? (Sigh)…. I can't say. Let's say 50/50, I also had some bad habits you know, I gambled, used drugs and partied a lot.

Social and individual factors and future expectations

To examine how social and individual factors relate to future expectations the participants were categorized in four different types. Table 4.3 shows the results of these categories combined with the future expectations of the participants.

Table 4.3. *Typology of social and individual factors combined with future expectations.*

Type	Social factors	Individual factors	n=	Future expectation
I	+	+	5	Non criminal (4) Ambivalent (1)
II	-	-	12	Non criminal (2) Criminal (9) Ambivalent (1)
III	+	-	5	Non criminal (1) Ambivalent (4)
IV	-	+	6	Non criminal (4) Criminal (1) Ambivalent (1)

Note: a plus sign means a high score, a minus means a low score.

Type I: high social factors, high individual factors (n=5)

Participants in this group had multiple strong social ties such as a place to live, a job, partner, children and/or a good relationship with parents. They felt supported by people from their social network and those people also visited them during their imprisonment. The possibility to return home after release also demonstrated the experienced support of their parents. Four out of five participants had one or more children who they felt closely related to. They saw their child(ren) during the visits in prison or when they were on leave and expressed how much they missed them. In addition, they talked about being a role model and about what it meant to be a good father.

A high score on individual factors was illustrated by the need to take charge and be in control of one's own life. Participants realised that old 'friends' and life on the streets had not been very good to them, but they acknowledged the choices they made and took responsibility for them:

> Now through prison, this has made me think of what I've achieved in my life so far: nothing! And I was always fooling around, chilling on the streets, never finished my education and changed schools every time. And finally I was in school, doing something that was really useful, and see what happens: I blew it. At a certain moment I thought: this has to change. (Dave)

All participants in this group expressed a feeling of control over their future and achieving their goals. Moreover, this seemed to give them a feeling of optimism in dealing with the future. Their interviews indicated that they were confident in their own capabilities and seemed to actively distance themselves from the criminal lifestyle.

Type I prisoners almost all expected to refrain from criminal activity. The support from social ties (e.g. housing after release and meaningful relationships with partner or children) seemed to play an important role in these positive future expectations. The next fragment illustrated the importance of the strength of social bonds. This prisoner had girlfriends in the past, yet he did not stop committing crimes until now:

> Tom: Because she entered my life she helped me, she pulled me away from there [criminal life]. And I felt the progress, because when I started dating her, I stopped doing a lot of bad things. And then I noticed, there was no stress, I was relaxed and I enjoyed every day! So I thought, let me take this other path. Because I never gave it a chance. And now I know it will all be all right when I leave prison.
> JD: How do you know this for sure?
> Tom: Just because, I know who has my back and who is with me. And I know what I want. The criminal life is something I already know, but I don't know what it's like to work and have no stress and no problems. I've always taken path A, now it time to try path B.

Participants in the type I group tended to realise how much they sacrificed living a criminal life and seemed motivated to actively avoid situations where they might be tempted to be criminally active. They displayed having faith in their own capabilities to achieve desired goals and explicitly explained how they planned to deal with challenges and temptation:

> Certain things will not be on my 'to do' list anymore. You have to be careful otherwise you'll be in the danger zone in no time. I don't want to go there, it's slippery. Money talks. Sometimes it is also wise to decide to not be involved in something. That is also a decision. (Peter)

Type II: low social factors, low individual factors (n=12)

Participants in this category had no, few or weak social ties. They did not get visitors (anymore) in prison. These men grew up in criminal surroundings where stealing and violence were quite normal. A life without crime seemed hard to imagine:

> I don't mind having a criminal record, I know people see me as a criminal. To be labelled as a criminal does not matter to me. I've been involved in crime all my life and I do not plan to do it differently. (Rudy)

Two out of 12 participants had a romantic partner. According to them, these partners did not agree with their criminal lifestyle, but they continued the relationship (for now). Four participants had (step)children, but it did not appear as if they were involved in meaningful relationships with them. They were barely involved in raising them and one child lived abroad, so opportunities for contact were already restricted. Furthermore, the network of most of these participants was predominantly criminal or at least high-risk.

Prisoners in this group seemed to blame their behaviour on external causes instead of taking responsibility for their own choices. One participant appeared to have little control over his own actions when he said he was not purposely engaged in crime, but that sometimes "things happen and he cannot walk away." The rest of this group justified their criminal involvement, because they had no diplomas or they could not find employment. They explained that they were trying to make it, "just as anyone else in this world." However, not being able to deal successfully with certain obstacles seemed to contribute to pessimistic feelings to be able to succeed in conventional society. Nonetheless, they were quite confident of the success of their criminal activities. Interviews indicated they were very goal oriented regarding crime, but they expressed a lack of confidence about their abilities to 'make it' in conventional society:

> Quitting? To be honest... if I don't make a little extra money on the side, someone like me trying to make it to according the book… We can never do that. I don't have any papers, but I am creative. I know how to solve things and make money. (Tony)

Nine out of 12 type II prisoners envisioned a future where crime is still present. In their perception, their past or surroundings have driven them to crime and they admitted to find it difficult to actively turn this in a different direction. The lack of pro-social ties (partner, children and parents) did not appear to enhance this process. In addition, the criminal network seemed to have a negative contribution to the future expectations since they expressed the wish to return to these networks. However,

there were two participants in the type II group that clearly envisioned a non-criminal future, yet they seemed to have no clear or more detailed idea on how to fulfil this positive forecast.

Type III: high social factors, low individual factors (n=5)

In this group the prisoners had multiple social ties (housing, children, non-criminal friends, no one had a partner). Despite their criminal past, the social network seemed strong. They mentioned they would be welcomed back home after release by their parents, with whom they maintained a good relationship. Two out of five expected that their previous employer would hire them again. Vince expressed he desired to be a good father for his daughter and he had some non-criminal friends whom he highly appreciated.

> Those are my real friends from way before I became criminally active. When I chose the criminal life, they just stayed normal. They will also be there when I get out. They always ask me what I am doing with my life, but yeah... I usually take the easy way out. (Vince)

Participants in this group had overall low scores on the individual factors. They did not have clear goals – which could be related to their age since most of them were under 30 years old – and were ambivalent about feeling in control of their life. Furthermore, a belief in being able to avoid crime appeared low:

> I don't want to come back here anymore. But what I can say: for this crime I will not be convicted anymore, but you never know what might happen… (Xavier)

One participant appeared to be goal oriented in his criminal actions. Similar to type II participants, he expressed faith in his ability to successfully achieve criminal goals, but did not have the same faith in the outcome of actions in the conventional world.

Almost all type III participants had an ambivalent image of future criminal activities. According to them, not knowing what the future might bring affected their future perspectives. They felt as if they did not have the opportunity to influence choices and therefore felt ambivalent in dealing with obstacles.

Type IV: low social factors, high individual factors (n=6)

Participants in this group had no, few or weak social ties. No one was involved in an intimate relationship and they tried to distance themselves from criminal friends who were present in their surroundings. One prisoner had children, but feelings of shame were dominant in his interview when talking about being absent in their

childhood. Type IV participants mentioned a connection to their parents, but from their interviews it appeared that they did not see them often, that they were already very old or involved in crime themselves.

A high score on individual factors in this group was illustrated by a strong desire to live a 'normal' life. The element of taking charge of your life could clearly be found in the narratives of these men. They seemed determined to guide their life in a chosen direction:

> Isaac: I am a mechanic; I can paint, so I hope I can get some work. I am going to that facility [assisted living facility where he applied for], nothing can keep me from that road, I want to go there.
> JD: What is most important for you to quit crime?
> Isaac: I don't want to be lived by these people. I want to be able to take my own decisions, good decisions.

The six participants of this type were all experienced in the criminal world and the majority showed a new insight and realization that the life they had been living did not fulfil their wishes. Questions about fate and making your own choices provided answers revealing what the criminal world represented in their perception as well as their awareness to take responsibility.

> Richard: When you are from the street, you are not cool. There are risks in criminal life and those risks influence your perseverance. If you die is totally up to you. You decide how you run your business. The choice is always yours, you can distance yourself, also on the streets, you can say: no, this is not for me.
> JD: To what extent do you think life just happens or can you influence your own destiny?
> Richard: Your destiny is the situation where you find yourself in and then you have to try to exert as much control as you can given the circumstances. You can be active or passive in this process, but you should never expect that everything is laid out for you. Picasso was a great painter, but his son was a loser, because success is not determined by the situation at birth, but by the influence you have on the situation or circumstances. So yes, you should always use the power you have to control a situation. Combined with some optimism I think.

The future expectations of type IV participants were mainly non-criminal. A desire to follow another path in life seemed to contribute to this forecast. Even given their lack of strong social bonds they seemed eager to strive towards this non-criminal path (and to be able to build non-criminal social bonds). Sam explained:

> If someone would contact me, to do something… I would just leave it. Go my own way. Maybe it is easy to say now that I'm still in prison, but… I don't think like that anymore. You get older, I want to have children. So now I really want to work and find a house for my own. (Sam)

While the lack of social ties could be a trigger to strive towards a non-criminal future on the one hand, the same lack of social ties also seemed to play a role in ambivalent and criminal future expectations, even if participants had high scores on individual factors. Milo mentioned he did not want to live this way anymore, but he admitted to pick up right where he left things before he got imprisoned :

> No, I'm not pleased at all. Of course it is nice to be able to rely on something, but this is not living. At least, it is not the right way of living. But I have to do something: I can wait two months for a paycheque or social welfare, or I can go to school, but still, I will need money. (Milo)

4.4 DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to explore the future expectations regarding criminal behaviour of soon to be released prisoners and to examine how social factors – such as employment, housing and social support of partner – and individual factors – such as feelings of control and a belief in one's own capabilities – relate to these future expectations. Knowledge of expectations regarding future criminal activities is important, because they can influence actual (criminal) behaviour (Atkinson, 1964; Rotter, 1966).

The interviewed prisoners expressed non-criminal, criminal or ambivalent expectations. Based on theory and previous research that emphasizes social and individual factors (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993), the participants were divided into four different types based on high or low scores on these factors. A high score on social factors displayed multiple strong social bonds, for example because they were sure they could obtain employment after release or they felt supported by family. A high score on individual factors meant experiencing feelings of control over the future and displaying a belief in their own ability to quit crime and achieve desired goals. It was examined how social

and individual factors that play a role in the process of desistance contributed to future expectations of prisoners regarding desistance. Having a place to stay after release or having a job, support of parents, partner and/or children combined with a belief in one's capacities and feelings of control turned out to be associated with expectations to refrain from criminal activity. Perceived support from social ties, such meaningful relationships, appeared to contribute greatly to these positive future expectations, but these prisoners also had concrete plans to work towards goals. Vice versa, having weak (pro-)social ties (or no social ties at all) and a weak sense of agency was linked to criminal expectations. However, ties to the criminal network were strong and they displayed a high sense of agency concerning criminal activity, which seemed to contribute to their criminal expectations. Prisoners who showed average faith in their own abilities, but had support from strong social ties expressed a more ambivalent expectation regarding future criminal behaviour. The idea of uncertainties about the future and the feeling that they therefore did not have enough control to influence the direction of life, seemed to contribute more to their ambivalent expectations than the support of their strong social ties.

In sum, the results showed that soon to be released long-term prisoners who thought they were capable and confident enough to take charge of their life, had a more positive outlook regarding refraining from future criminal behaviour. Social bonds did not seem to contribute to more confidence, but the prisoners in the current sample with weak or no social ties still mentioned non-criminal expectations if they had a high sense of agency. These findings provide support for the ideas of Giordano and colleagues (2002) and Maruna (2001) who contended that these internal, subjective factors play a more prominent role in the process of actual desistance than social, external bonds. Striving towards a non-criminal future seemed even more important in the absence or weakness of social ties. Those who scored high on individual factors predominantly expressed non-criminal future expectations, but having a high score on just social factors did not necessarily link to imagining a future without crime. From previous research it is known that family and partners are an important source of (perceived) support and stability in the process of rehabilitation (Dhami et al., 2006; Naser & La Vigne, 2006), and the results from the current study point out that these factors were indeed reflected in a non-criminal expectation of prisoners who experienced support from these ties, but a lack of social bonds did not necessarily link to a pessimistic outlook regarding criminal behaviour. However, theory and research also draws attention to the perceived strength and quality of bonds(Dhami et al., 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1993). A possible explanation for differences in future expectations could be that the perceived strength of social bonds of the prisoners with ambivalent expectations

was lower than that of prisoners with non-criminal expectations. Future research could dive deeper into the perceived quality of social bonds in relation to pre-release future expectations.

The current research has several limitations. First, a relatively small – and possibly selective – sample of male prisoners has been interviewed. Nonetheless, all penitentiary institutions across the Netherlands were included and prisoners were selected based on a national list of all prisoners who fitted the inclusion criteria. Second, the current study focused on prisoners who served longer prison terms in the Netherlands. Future research focusing on prisoners serving similar prison terms in other countries is needed to see to what extent the findings of the current research also apply in a different context. Despite the limitations mentioned above, the current research provides new knowledge on prisoners and their future expectations. This is of importance, because if expectations influence behaviour (and therefore recidivism), it is possible to intervene in early stages in the process of rehabilitation. The current study shows that the combination of social bonds and individual factors (such as feeling in control of your own choices and life) are important for expecting to disengage from crime in the future. Individual factors however also contribute to non-criminal expectations when not combined with social factors. The criminal justice system in the Netherlands already focuses on several social areas, such as housing, employment and maintaining relationships, and prisoners can apply for behavioural interventions to enhance cognitive skills (Van Gent, 2013). Since 2003, the 'Enhanced Thinking Skills' course from the UK (Clarke, 2000) was introduced to the Dutch prison system as the Cognitive Skills Training (in Dutch: COVA) and in 2007 it was fully accredited by the Dutch Correctional Services Accreditation Panel for Behavioural Interventions. Aside from impulse control and problem solving skills, COVA also focuses on taking responsibility and feelings of control and perspective taking (Henskens, 2016). An evaluation of the effectiveness of this course indicated a 'marginal to small' effect for perspective taking and no effect with regard to taking responsibility/ feeling of control (Buysse & Loef, 2012), which creates potential for improvement. Also, the Choose for Change course incorporates notions from cognitive transformation (identity, purpose in life), self-efficacy and (perceived) social support (Nelissen & Schreurs, 2008). The aim of the course is to stimulate prisoners to think about their life after prison and if they want to change their path. However, this course is mandatory if a prisoner wants to be promoted to the plus-regime, which can be problematic because prisoners might engage in the course for the sole benefit of enjoying more privileges.

Research findings imply that it is also valuable to expand this focus on cognitive skills by paying more attention to individual factors, such as working on self-esteem and gaining confidence so prisoners increase feelings of agency. The large majority of detainees in the Netherlands (70%) for example, showed a low score on self-

esteem in a study examining interventions in prison (Fischer, Captein & Zwirs, 2012). It might be fruitful to explore how the existing behavioural interventions offered in Dutch prisons can be supplemented with more confidence-related activities or interventions. Enhancing feelings of agency might for example also benefit from 'doing well' or experiencing success in performance tasks (Caspi, 1993, Maruna, 2001). However, with the introduction of the basic prison regime, which has become the regular regime for most prisoners in the last decades (Boone, 2007), opportunities for extracurricular activities that might develop or boost self-esteem, are sparse. Discovering avenues to offer activities that are experienced to be meaningful and rewarding by prisoners themselves, such as music, art, or education, (song)writing (see e.g. Cox & Gelsthorpe 2012; Digard & Liebling, 2012; McNeill, 2018), might be a rewarding exercise. If prisoners' feelings of agency could be enhanced, maybe they feel more confident to pursue personal goals and dreams upon release and be better equipped to face and deal with challenges in the process of re-entering society.

LIFE STORY 3 DESISTER 'LACK OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT'

WHO IS CASPER?

Casper was a 35-year old man (Dutch ethnic background) who served a three year sentence for a violent robbery when interviewed in prison. Although participating in some community services when he was younger, he had been criminally active for a few years, but this was his first imprisonment. He described himself as laidback, helpful and quiet. Casper had three kids, but was no longer together with his girlfriend.

Background

Casper was the youngest in a family of six, but largely grew up without family. When he is seven years old, Child Protection Services placed him in custody of the court because they deemed his home environment not safe enough. This was the start of a long period of foster care and boarding schools. He said he never felt home in all those years anywhere and had to take care of himself all on his own. His turbulent youth also included switching schools frequently, but he managed to complete elementary school. From the age of 12, Casper got involved in a series of shoplifting and fights, finding expression for the anger that accumulated during the years: "In that time someone just had to look at me and I would punch him in the face." He got involved with the police, got arrested and had to do a few community sentences. When he was 18 he realised he could not just punch someone in the face over nothing and "turned himself around." He obtained a job as a cab driver, met his ex-girlfriend and became a father. It was only a few years later when he got involved in criminal activities, mostly transporting and dealing drugs and car parts. He was 25-years old when someone who he had to take from A to B in the middle of the drive mentioned there was also 'something else' in the truck as well. Casper remembered that an instant feeling of stress came over him worrying that the police might stop him. After that time, he decided not to do this type of rides anymore, but the money convinced him and when he needed financial aid to support his children, he got in the game again. He continued to do this for a few years and never got caught. On a Tuesday morning at 6 AM, the police arrested him at home for the current offence. Casper was in total shock and said he did not see this coming, believing someone turned him in. His lawyer said he did not need to worry as he would walk out of the courtroom a free man. However, he got sentenced to three years in prison.

Current imprisonment

Talking about his imprisonment, he mentioned a good prison climate in the various prisons he stayed in and the period in prison was relaxed, with no fuss, no fights, no nothing. He said to himself that he needed to accept his sentence otherwise he would just end up in solitary confinement. The hardest thing for him to deal with was the psychological impact of prison: "you get ripped out of society all of a sudden". The positive thing about prison was that he learned to stand up for himself during his imprisonment, otherwise he would be overruled all the time. But he also emphasized he had managed to stay true to himself.

Casper completed a Choose for Change course, but considered it to be "dumb and simple". He had an opportunity to get involved in a VCA certificate, yet he had not been to school for over 20 years now and thought it would not be something he could catch up. He was not involved in other courses and made no further attempts to educate himself during imprisonment.

Some friends visited Casper in prison at the beginning, but he never asked for his kids to come, thinking it would be too hard that he had to return to his cell when they went home. He cut all ties with his family so they never came to visit and Casper was clear he never wanted to be in touch with them again. Casper smoked marijuana on a daily basis because it made him at ease and helped to keep him from getting angry and confrontational. He had been on leave for seven times which he experienced to be awkward at first. He recalled having to choose if he wanted to go with Christmas or on New Year's Eve for his first leave. This was, in Casper's words, a "no brainer" since New Year's Eve would be disastrous given all the temptation outside.

Casper compared the process of release preparations in prison to a game of table tennis, 'ping-ponging' to yet another person who claimed they could help you. It drove him crazy and at a certain point, he firmly asked for a single person who would guide him instead of 10 different ones. Casper thought he was ill-prepared for release, because he was going back to nothing. He wanted to have financial aid concerning his debts and would have liked to already have applied for social benefits, which was only possible after release.

Pre-release expectations

Casper was rather ambivalent about the future. Ideally, he would like to do it the right, the legal way, but he also wanted to meet the demands of three kids 'growing up fast'. In this context, he believed it was possible that at some point he would favour the illegal way: "you never know what the future brings, if something good passes along, I will not say no". He was convinced that money served as the only trigger for him to engage in crime, but he doubted if crime and happiness could go hand in hand. Casper's priority was to create the option for his children to study if they wanted to and that money should not be an obstacle. He also worried about financial issues

concerning his own future: he had a lot of debts and in the past few years he had left all the letters from the credit agencies requesting him to pay, unopened. He would start with paying off his debts after release. The future perspective of being broke after release made Casper start saving up some money in prison by requesting more work shifts, working both mornings and afternoons. He did not need to worry about accommodation, because he managed to hold on to the house he lived in before prison, so it reassured him that he could return after release.

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

Casper did not tell anyone he was being released. He took a train to his hometown and went straight to his house to get the key. In his own neighbourhood, things had hardly changed but a bit further down the road he mentioned there were new buildings, a hotel, a movie theatre. The first weeks out, he got into a string of parties with strangers, drinking and waking up on the couch not remembering how he got home, similar to what Liem (2016) described in her work with lifers being released and playing 'catch up'. Soon, he felt there was no value in it for him, he did not feel happy because of it and he was not in a good place having mood swings every day. The dominant feeling of these first months was a fear of being lost, isolated and overwhelmed. It was all too much. He sought retreat from daily social life, spend a lot of time in his house afraid of temptation outside and of making missteps. His supervision was at the highest level, although it was not electronically monitored, and he was very aware of the constant surveillance.

He had to wait some weeks before he received his social benefits, but he profited from the money he saved up in prison. He was keen on getting to work or doing something to fill the days and to get his mind in the right direction:

> So I can get my thoughts to change, it is just that I have to find the real me and give everything a place in my head. I used to be very willing and accommodating, helpful to others, not picking any fights. But now, I don't feel like it and I want people to leave me alone, otherwise I can get angry.

Soon after release, he also wanted to visit his kids, but this turned out to be somewhat of a deception:

> I rang the doorbell, door opens. Two eyes look at me. I say, 'yes I'm here and I'm looking for your mother, is she at home?' 'Yes she is.' 'Well then can you call her for me?' 'Mom, some guy is at the door for you!

His kids did not recognize him at first, which he talked about with some indifference ("I thought it was kind of funny") and he also retracted slowly from their lives in these first months after release, also because their mother seemed not too keen on him actively participating. Casper cut the ties with all of the people in his former network and because he was not working or otherwise daily engaged, opportunities for social contact were sparse. He was still using marijuana on a daily basis, but cut down on his alcohol use. Being intensively supervised also meant a high frequency of contact with his parole officer. She was really on top of things, a bit too much for his liking, yet he appreciated her efforts in assisting him with rehabilitation efforts and trying to surmount his obstacles.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

After the initial months after release, which he described as a 'drama', Casper kept struggling to find his place, being low in energy and not motivated to do anything. He stopped taking care of himself and his house and saw no purpose in life. His parole officer was alarmed and arranged a few meetings with a psychologist and psychiatrist, but Casper did not experience these meeting as helpful and concluded he had to do it on his own. When his parole officer arranged an intake for employment possibilities and called credit bureaus with regard to his debts, he gradually started to see a brighter side to being out of prison. The financial help with his debts took a leap and eventually, Casper could start in a thrift shop five days a week. It was not a paid job, but he could 'work' here in order to receive his social welfare while at the same time it kept him busy and he could get used to working life. He hoped that getting some work experience would help him find an actual paid job. In the meantime, Casper expressed a lot of positive feelings with regard to his activities and colleagues in the thrift shop and also important, it provided structure to his days and weeks.

Looking back a year after release, he was very content with the process of reintegration after release and gave a lot of credits to his parole officer. He also said, he would not change anything looking back on the process. He was lucky to have such a committed parole officer, but could imagine that it might be different for others depending on who guided you through conditional release. Unfortunately, he experienced a change of parole officer, which he not really fancied. The previous one had gone the extra mile for him and he felt the current one did not do much more than monitor him.

He was still using marijuana daily, because it gave him peace and space to adjust to life outside. His use of alcohol was recreational now and he said to make sure he was never back in that place right after release when he sometimes did not even know where he was when he woke up. People were still sometimes staring at him

at the supermarket, but he tried to ignore them. Sometimes he could not hold back and said out loud: "Yes, it's me!". He lost contact with his kids, but felt it was for the best at this time while he was putting his life together. His life was still quite isolated with minimal social contacts, but there was a routine going to the thrift shop and his debts were being paid off. Furthermore, he was actively looking for a paid job and thought his chances were good now he was spending time at the thrift shop. If it was necessary, someone from the shop could vouch for him.

He said prison changed him in the sense that it made him harder, he would not help people anymore as quickly as he used to with the chance of being used or screwed over. His definition of success was just accepting things how they are and trying to live life as it is, although he strongly felt crime was a choice. He had firmly refused offers that came his way and let everyone know they did not have to approach him anymore:

> You can take the good road or the bad one. It is easier to take the bad one, but then you are at risk. But it's still a choice.

Future

Casper expressed a desire to reconnect with his children in the future, but was pessimistic if this would actually happen. The mother of his kids was not particularly keen on him being back in their lives. Furthermore, he did not want to look ahead too much and continued to say that he lived day by day and had no idea what the future might bring. If Casper envisioned his future in five years from now, he hoped his family would leave him alone and would not be seeking contact. This was a closed chapter in his life. Furthermore, he hoped not to be in prison again but he could not say with certainty that this would not happen. Envisioning a positive future for himself was difficult, because he felt he was never allowed to think of a positive future and make plans from a very young age. He concluded to say that he was afraid of wanting things of which he was unsure he was able to achieve it. Casper did not dare to dream.

CHAPTER 5

EARLY ATTEMPTS AT DESISTANCE FROM CRIME▪

Prisoners' pre-release expectations and their post-release criminal behaviour

ABSTRACT

Recent attention has been paid to the role of a positive outlook in early stages of the desistance process. The aim of this article is to examine prisoners' own expectations regarding future offending before they are released and why these expectations come true or not after their release from prison. Longitudinal data were used from in-depth interviews with 24 prisoners who were interviewed at the end of their sentence and three months after release about their future outlook on criminal activities, social capital and agency factors and current criminal activities. Findings suggest a strong connection between criminal and non-criminal expectations and post-release criminal behaviour.

Keywords: early desistance, prisoners, re-entry.

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Whether or not people recidivate after being incarcerated is often explained by theories from sociology and economy. Re-entering society involves many socio-economic challenges for prisoners, which include meeting basic needs for shelter and food and building social capital such as reconnecting with family and friends (Petersilia, 2003; Visher & Travis, 2003; Harding, Wyse, Dobson & Morenoff, 2014). Terms of incarceration influence conventional bonds such as work, housing and the quality of social relationships (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993) but confinement possibly also means time for correctional rehabilitation. From an economical deterrence perspective, spending a period in prison can reduce the likelihood of future involvement in crime, because of the costs that are associated with serving time (Nagin, Cullen & Jonson, 2009).

However, the literature also offers psychological explanations for whether or not prisoners recidivate and more recently, attention has been given to first steps in the desistance process and the role of cognitive shifts. Shapland and Bottoms (2011) suggested that in early stages of desistance an initial wish to change precedes the beginning of thinking differently about oneself. To refrain from criminal behaviour requires a change in how a person sees himself. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) add that also the perception of a *feared* and *desired self* in the future contributes to an initial motivation for change.

Prisoners' *own* expectations of the future reoffending self are an important but rarely investigated topic within the context of resettlement and desistance. Gaining insight into these future expectations and how they interact with early attempts at desistance can enhance the transition from prison to society and long-term desistance (see Apel, 2013; King, 2013; Souza, Lösel, Markson & Lanskey, 2013). The aim of this article is to examine the expectations of prisoners before they are released addressing the following research questions: 1) To what extent do prisoners' pre-release expectations regarding future criminal behaviour compare to their criminal behaviour after release? And 2) what reasons do ex-prisoners give for these expectations to come true or not?

Theoretical framework: Expectations, optimism and desistance

A central issue in psychological theories on motivated action is that behaviour is greatly influenced by the expectations people have about the consequences of their actions (Atkinson, 1964; Bandura, 1977; Rotter, 1966). To perceive a desired outcome as attainable will motivate behaviour to achieve this outcome and contribute to perseverance when being faced with adversity (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988). However, if the desired outcome is seen as unachievable, people may be less motivated in making an effort towards these goals and eventually give

up. Positive expectations and individual goals can be represented in the concept of *possible selves*, where the visualization of a non-desired self in combination with an expected self, strengthens motivational action and well-being (Markus & Nurius, 1986; King, 2001). Behaviour then, can be motivated by a state of cognitive dissonance which occurs when a person has two conflicting perceptions of the self and will try to reduce this inconsistency (Festinger, 1962). In addition, a social environment that satisfies needs for autonomy and competence also facilitates motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although people in general are biased towards the positive and therefore tend to have a positive future prospect (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Weinstein 1980), optimism that is unrealistic can stand in the way of making plans in achieving goals (Oettingen, 1996). Realistic optimism includes being aware of challenges that will need to be overcome and still trying to make the most of life instead of mere daydreaming without relevant reality checks (Schneider, 2001). Likewise, research on the topic of resilience emphasizes the importance of facing reality and successfully dealing with the negative consequences of adversity (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004; Rutter, 2012).

The idea that optimistic expectations and perceptions of the self are important for future behaviour is also prominent in criminological literature (Apel, 2013; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002;. Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). In the Identity Theory of Desistance (ITD; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), a form of cognitive dissonance seems to take place when the concept of a possible self from psychological research is being supplemented with a *feared self*, which reflects the future if a person would continue crime. Motivation to move away from crime is triggered by the deterrent perception of the feared self combined with a desire for the positive possible self. Visualizing a positive possible self also enhances feelings of agency (being in control over one's future) which is important to motivate behaviour towards this future perspective, including shifting away from crime (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008; Maruna, 2001). Offenders who successfully moved out of crime believed that their actions were the result of their own effort and positive mindset, where the offenders that continued crime tended to blame their situation and failure to external events (Maruna, 2001). Instead of being actors in control (desisters), the persisters saw themselves as being controlled by the outside world.

Another factor that might be associated with whether or not inmates' expectations are being met can be found in Sampson and Laub's (1993) age-graded informal social control theory. According to this theory, attachment to informal social bonds such as family or employment increases social capital, which in turn can lead to desistance. For example, strong interpersonal relationships can serve as a protective bond in trying to abstain from crime, adding perseverance in meeting non-criminal expectations.

Previous research

Some research on the link between offender's future expectations and their post-prison behaviour has been done. A review of the literature shows that the number of studies is small and that the results differ.

Several of these studies have a *cross-sectional* design. Maruna's research (2001) contributed a great deal to the topic of desistance when he found a positive relation between optimistic thinking about life after release and actual desistance in the life stories of former prisoners. Where active offenders had little vision of future prospects, desisting offenders "were optimistic that they could make it work" (Maruna, 2001, p. 147), although this link could only be established in retrospect. Schinkel (2014) shed new light on this issue. She interviewed 12 long-term prisoners (sentenced 4 years or more) and nine different long-term prisoners on license and in comparing the stories of these groups, illustrated that the vision of the future can be uncertain at times and will get stronger when successes in relation to goals on the outside are achieved. Recently, Nugent & Schinkel (2016) introduced the term 'relational desistance' to describe the importance of recognition by others for successful changes because how we act also depends on how others see us. Optimism strengthens the process of desistance and successful attempts at desistance in turn strengthen optimistic views of transformation. Research done amongst probationers supports the idea of belief in one self and agency being low at first and getting stronger when successes on the outside increase (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008). Although cross-sectional research provides valuable knowledge about the scope and nature of future expectations, it does not explore the relationship with future behaviour.

Few studies have used a *longitudinal* approach to link expectations to behaviour. To the best of our knowledge, we found five, prospective, longitudinal studies where prisoners were asked (amongst other things) about their future expectations regarding criminal behaviour and were retraced for a follow-up (Burnett, 1992, 2004; Howerton, Burnett, Byng & Campbell, 2009; LeBel et al., 2008; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne & Travis, 2004; Souza et al., 2013). The follow-up period ranged from three months to ten years, but there were a few common general findings across the studies.

On one hand, participants from these five studies who were more optimistic about their future, seemed to be more successful in dealing with reentry challenges and creating a social context which reduced the chance of criminal opportunities. Inmates in the research of Souza et al. (2013) who were more positive reported fewer problems with staying out of crime six months after release and vice versa. In this context, it appears as if individuals with an optimistic outlook are more actively engaged in shaping their life and therefore acting with higher levels of agency. For example, in a qualitative study on short term 'revolving door prisoners' (Howerton et al., 2009), participants who were optimistic about their chance in society to be crime-free,

appeared to be more successful in their endeavours to find a job, which they felt was necessary to be able to refrain from crime. Participants who were pessimistic and continued crime and drugs spoke as if they had little control of their future but they did claim that in order for them to desist from crime, changes would only occur if they "were ready to make a change" (Howerton et al., p. 453). Shapland and Bottoms (2011) found that participants who made a decision to desist were more often actively seeking support from pro-social bonds such as partners and parents.

On the other hand, while the majority of the samples across all five studies reported to have a positive pre-release future expectation (desire to quit crime or made a decision to desist), most of the sample members were re-arrested, reconvicted or re-imprisoned again at the follow-up. For example, Shapland and Bottoms (2011) followed a group of 113 young adult male prisoners (age 19-22) and at the time of the first interview 56 percent said they decided to quit crime in the near future and another 37 percent wanted to quit but did not know if they were able to. Nonetheless, after three years, 90 of the 113 young men (79.6%) were reconvicted.

Thus, prisoners tend to be optimistic about their future criminal behaviour, but not all prisoners with a positive expectation desist. In fact, a large number of these 'positive thinkers' will recidivate but for the ones that manage to stay crime free their positive outlook seemed to contribute to their success in dealing with re-entry issues. Achieving success in relation to one's personal goals and getting recognition from others are found to be important in gaining more confidence, keeping optimistic and staying away from crime.

Based on literature and previous research it is expected that prisoners with an intention to refrain from criminal behaviour will either be engaged in goal oriented behaviour and therefore be more likely to stay crime-free shortly after release. Or, if prisoners are not aware of awaiting difficulties, they will be more likely to reoffend. Furthermore, it is expected that prisoners with ambivalent perceptions of their future criminal behaviour are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour when success after release is low. Prisoners who expect to continue crime will be less likely to take responsibility for the outcome of their actions and more likely to reoffend.

This study

The current study contributes to existing knowledge about c*ognitive* processes when transitioning from prison to society by combining a qualitative and longitudinal approach. We zoom in at the first challenging and unstable months after release which seem crucial in the re-entry process and early stages of desistance. How do future expectations start to shape behaviour (or the absence of criminal behaviour in this case) and how do prisoners perceive this process of change? We examine

this in a sample of prisoners in the Netherlands. Knowledge of how expectations of prisoners interact with future criminal behaviour is highly relevant in understanding early attempts at desistance and contributes to improving reintegration.

5.2 THE DUTCH CONTEXT

Every year, approximately 40,000 inmates are released from imprisonment in the Netherlands (Linckens & De Looff, 2015). Almost 95 percent of the prisoners are released within a year; only 2 percent spend between two to four years in prison. Similar to recidivism rates for short-term prisoners, the recidivism rates in the Netherlands for these long-term prisoners are approximately 50 percent (WODC, 2015).[1] In the Netherlands, individuals sentenced to prison for two years or more are conditionally released after having served two thirds of their imposed sentence. After release, they are still under probation supervision until the actual end of their sentence. During parole they can be subjected to certain conditions, such as wearing an ankle bracelet for monitoring purposes and drugs tests or obligatory courses. A prisoner who breaches these conditions can be sent back to prison.

5.3 DESIGN

Participants

This study was a sub-study of the Prison Project (Dirkzwager et al., 2016). This project examined prisoners who were: men, born in the Netherlands, age 18-65 and were held in pre-trial detention in the Netherlands. The current study used the same inclusion criteria but also restricted itself to prisoners who (a) had been detained between 2 and 4 years, (b) were convicted for a serious Criminal Offence by a final decision and the conviction was not in appeal, (c) were not treated under hospital order (in Dutch: TBS) or in a programme for revolving door prisoners (in Dutch: ISD) or in a minimum security prison, and (d) were not convicted for a sex offence. Only four participants of the original Prison Project sample were eligible for the current study, so we had to add new participants.

To select the participants, the Dutch Prison Service in August 2014 provided a list of prisoners in all 28 prisons throughout the entire country of the Netherlands, meeting the inclusion criteria and to be released between September 2014 and October 2015. By far the majority of the convicted individuals were still in appeal, the list contained

1 Only the group that was in prison for four years or more showed lower recidivism rates (33.6%; WODC Recidivemonitor, 2015). Via https://wodc-repris.nl/Repris.html.

only 84 eligible long-term prisoners held in 13 penitentiary institutions throughout the Netherlands.[2] This small number also mirrors the criminal justice system in the Netherlands, where longer term prison sentences are – by international standard – very rare. When the data collection period of this study ended in October 2015, 44 men could be approached in prison and 36 were interviewed.[3] Eight interviews were excluded because of various reasons[4]

Table 5.1. *Descriptive statistics of Pre-release Prisoners (N= 24)*

	Mean/%
Age at entry (range 20-53 years)	27
Type of offence	
Violence (robbery, assault, kidnapping, homicide)	92%
Other (burglary, fraud)	8%
Prior convictions	100%
Prior detention spells	83%
Length of imprisonment in months (range 30- 50)	38
Length of sentence in months (range 30-66)	48
Partner at pre-release interview	17%
Partner at post-release interview	29%
Children	46%

2 The original list encompassed 363 men, but 279 men could already be excluded, for various reasons: they were already staying outside of prison, for example in a sheltered housing concept, or in a minimum security prison, they were revolving door criminals, they were convicted for a sex offence or they were staying at a psychiatric prison.

3 Participants refusing to participate or did not show up (n=4), participants that could not be reached when visiting the prison (n=4), for example because they were placed in solitary confinement or due to administrative problems.

4 For two participants we uncovered that they were convicted for a sex offence after all, two participants received another sentence while imprisoned, which meant they would not be released any time soon and therefore had to be excluded. One prisoner was detained for a shorter time than we initially thought and three prisoners appeared to be in appeal.

Descriptive characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 5.1. The men were on average 27 years of age at the in-prison interview and spend between 30 and 50 months in detention. Four participants had a partner during the in-prison interview and maintained this relationship the months following release and another three were involved in a new romantic relationship after release. Almost half of the sample were fathers (with in total 15 children and one stepchild). Although all men had been previously convicted and most of the sample previously imprisoned, five men were serving their first prison sentence. Except for one participant, all of them were still under probation supervision when interviewed after release.

Procedure

When the prisoners were approached by the interviewer, an explanation was given about the study and it was pointed out that participation was voluntary. It was emphasized that the research was independent of the Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice or the Dutch Prison Service, and that the information was not shared with inmates, prison staff or other criminal justice officials. Participants therefore were interviewed in a private room. The entire in-prison interviews took on average 1.5 hour and the interviews were all done by the first author of this paper.

At the end of the first interview in prison, participants were asked if the researcher could interview them again after release. To facilitate this, they were asked to give addresses and/or phone numbers of relatives, friends and themselves where we could reach them. To minimize attrition, the interviewer provided participants in prison a contact card containing email and phone number and tried to stay in contact with the interviewees after release by phone, email or via text messaging service. All 28 ex-prisoners could be located via the given contact information or via their parole officer. One was still detained since the first interview and three refused to participate in the post-prison interview when being contacted. In the end, 24 of the 28 participants were successfully interviewed at the follow-up, held approximately three months after their release.

The post-prison interviews lasted on average one and a half hours. Most of the interviews were conducted in interviewees residences, some in a public location, others at the probation office, and a few in prison (when they were back in prison for another offense). At the end of the interview, participants who were not in prison were offered a € 10 compensation for their time and effort , although some declined this fee.

Interviews

The design of both the in-prison and post-prison interview was semi-structured. During the in-prison interview – to be able to address the main research question on the relationship between expectations and life after prison -, future expectations of

the prisoners were measured by asking them how they would see their life after prison and specifically concerning criminal activity: 'Do you think you will engage in criminal activity in the future?' And – if applicable: 'Why (not)?'. In addition information was gathered on social capital topics such as housing and social support and agency topics such as feelings of control, self-efficacy and taking responsibility for the direction of events.

The post-prison interview, held three months after release, included in addition questions about their experiences since release, current criminal activities, and on whether or not their motivation to quit crime had changed. The ex-prisoners were also asked to reflect on their former expectations of their future criminal behaviour and factors that played a role in the process of refraining from criminal activity (e.g. social capital and agency related factors).

This study throws light on the prisoners' view of his future in the final stage of his sentence. To our knowledge only two prior studies on this topic have used a similar longitudinal and qualitative approach (Howerton et al., 2009; Souza et al., 2013). So, the results of this study will make a significant contribution to criminology and especially to an understanding of the first steps on the road to desistance of ex-prisoners in the Netherlands.

Analyses

Most in-prison interviews (22 out of 24) and post-release interviews (18 out of 24) were audio-recorded with permission. During the interviews with the participants that did not permit audio-recording, notes were taken and written up immediately after the interview to minimize the loss of data. All the interviews were transcribed.

Using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), themes and codes can be identified from an inductive and a deductive perspective. The focus here was more deductive and theory driven and less 'data driven'. This paper therefore does not provide a thick description of all the data, but zooms in on specific aspects of the data and offers a detailed analysis of these aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes and codes were derived from the research questions, the interview protocol, theoretical concepts and previous research as described earlier. During the analysis, we also identified codes that emerged from the data. In the first phase the transcripts were read a few times and we could already identify some topics related to the aim of this study, i.e. expectations, criminal activities and motivation. The next step was to construct a thematic framework based on a list of initial codes to organize the participants views, experiences and motivations for (non) criminal behaviour. Then, this thematic framework was used to code data, applying the labels to fragments of data. Atlas.ti facilitated this process of data management and analysis.

5.4 RESULTS

This study focuses on the extent to which long-term prisoners' pre-release expectations regarding future criminal behaviour match their criminal behaviour after release and on the reasons the ex-prisoners themselves give for whether these expectations were fulfilled or not.

From the interviews, 19 of the 24 prisoners had clear expectations of their future criminal or non-criminal behaviour. After release, 15 of the 19 men (79%) lived up to their own expectations. As Figure 5.1 shows, nine out of 11 men who expected not be criminally active post prison, said they had been refraining from crime in the three months after release. Similarly, six out of eight men who had a criminal expectation when interviewed in prison, were indeed engaged in crime after release.

Not everyone's post-release behaviour was in line with their pre-release expectations. Two men who expected to refrain from crime after prison, were in fact imprisoned again three months post release so they failed to live up to their own expectations. Also, two other men expected to be criminally active but it turned out that they did not commit crimes.

In addition, some men did not have clear expectations when interviewed in prison. Four of them did not commit crime(s) after release and one of them did. Below we discuss each these groups in more depth – and also examine what explanations they themselves mentioned for (not) living up to their own expectations.

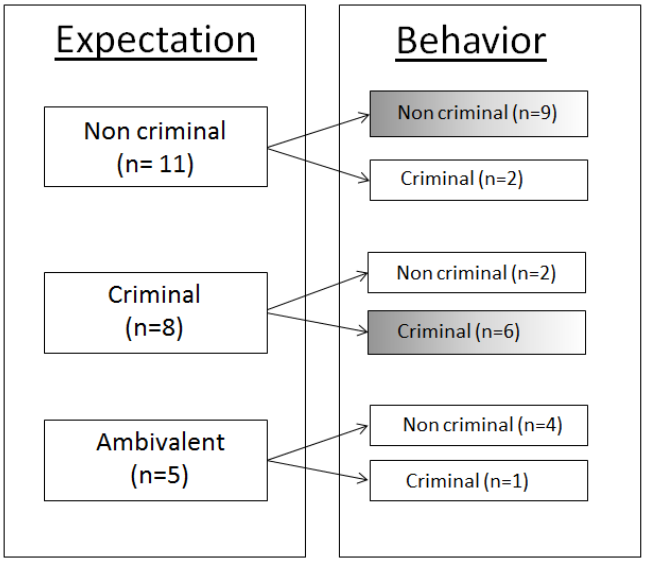

Figure 5.1. Pre-release Future Expectations and Post release Actual Behaviour of Long-term Prisoners

Results in line with expectations

Most of the men that predicted non-criminal or criminal behaviour after release lived up to their expectations (15 of the 19). On the one hand, almost all men who expected to refrain from crime, mentioned they were indeed not involved in crime in the three months after release. For example Dave expressed his feelings and plans about his future during the in-prison interview:

> Dave: I was thinking, what the hell have I achieved in my life?! Nothing! And what did I always do? Just fooling around so yes, I do want to have a diploma, I was thinking of ICT or in retail. I want to have something to bring me forward despite my criminal record.
> JD: And crime?
> Dave: No, no, no! I'm, thinking that this has to change, because I have a little one now. And that's the reason that I want to change. I'm working and have all the things sorted out, I can earn my own money. Then you don't need to deal drugs or anything.

After release, he was refraining from criminal activity in line with his plans.

> JD: How about your former criminal activities?
> Dave: No! That is not on my mind at all. For my daughter I have to get my life together. And I don't want to look over my shoulder all my life, I want to grow. I got a job and I'm set to get my driver's license and start with a new study. I really think I can make it, I just have to focus and earn money to be able to afford tuition.

Similarly, Richard (after 2-3 years in prison and embedded in a criminal environment) recognized the downside of the criminal life and said he wanted to stop:

> I'm done with it, because I see now…. This money is evil. And of course, you can make a lot of money, but the criminal life also has restrictions and conditions and I want to live free, without these conditions. So I'm done… now it's time, I'm changing I guess. And I'm trying to see the positive in me, I've always been an optimist. Now I just have to be a confident optimist.

Three months after release, he worked and was satisfied with making his own money in a legal way: "I got a job, a good job! I started sending out many resumes and I got invited. There was an assessment and I passed. And I really like it, I don't ever want to be involved in crime anymore."

On the other hand, almost all men who had a criminal expectation when interviewed in prison, were indeed engaged in crime three months post-release from prison. Tony is a clear example of this pattern. When asked about his expectations before release he mentioned:

> Quitting? To be honest... if I don't make a little extra money on the side, someone like me trying to make it by the book… We can never do that. I don't have any papers, but I am creative. I know how to solve things and make money.

At the follow-up interview, he disclosed that he lived up to his own expectations. In the three month period after release he started to sell drugs: "I'm driving across the country with some kilos of marijuana, but it's more on the down low."

Similarly, Ab is another man who expected to recidivate and who did just that. Ab expressed in prison right before his release that he was doubtful about serious crimes in the future, but expected he still would be involved in less serious crimes:

> There are good things and bad things about criminal life, but right now it is my life. And to be honest, it's the only thing I am capable of doing, I've never done anything else. I can see myself doing something legit, but I will keep selling drugs on the side. But not those serious things anymore.

After release, Ab's activities were in line with his expectations: "Just a bit of dealing and selling. There is a difference between dealing drugs and robbing a store though. I'm done with those big things, I'm taking it easy now."

Ambivalent expectations and their outcome

Five participants forecasted a rather ambivalent future at the time of the first interview. After release, one of them was engaged in criminal activity. For example, Casper said in prison he wanted to do it the right way, but also said he would not pass on an opportunity that might arise in the future:

> JD: How do you see your life after release?
> Casper: Just to be legit, do it the normal way. But with three children and a lot of debts…..things might happen. You never know how the future goes, if a nice opportunity comes by, I will not say no, but does that money really make me happy? I don't know, I don't think so. Time went quite fast in prison, but that doesn't mean I want to go back there…….no not really.

After release, he was not engaged in any criminal behaviour even though some opportunities crossed his path: "No, for now I'm not doing anything. And maybe I will never do something again! And of course I've already had some offers, but I just say no….not now."

One participant, Martin, was quite aware of the disadvantaged position he was in and expressed uncertainties about future offending:

> I believe that if you really have the feeling that you're done with it, you are done. Then you start seeing the benefits of quitting crime and you will be blind to the benefits of continuing. I have to lay low for the time being when I'm on license, but I worry if I will be able to uphold this non-criminal behaviour. I have never worked a day in my life. And with criminal friends around, I have to resist temptation.

During the post prison interview, he told us he fulfilled all the conditions of his parole, but also opened up about the criminal activities he was engaged in since release: "mostly stuff that will not be reported to the police, such as ripping other dealers. They won't go to the police to say that their drugs have been stolen."

Behaviour not matching expectations

Although most of the pre-release expectations corresponded with the post-release behaviour, there were a few exceptions. First, two men expected to refrain from crime after prison, but did not live up to their own expectations and were criminally active in the three months post-release. Bart painted a rather carefree and non-criminal future during the in-prison interview. He said:

> We shall see what will happen, just work and earn money. I don't do crazy things without a reason, but I don't want to come back here anymore. I want to go out and work hard, as I've always done.

At the follow-up, Bart was back in prison. He showed no regret when talking about the new crime he got arrested for: "That money rightly belongs to me, it was my father's. So I took control and handled it harshly, otherwise I wouldn't get it back."

Similarly, Jack was fired from the supported living facility (because he did not obey by the rules) and had no official address afterwards. This was seen as breaching his parole conditions and at the same time he became a suspect in a new case. He was sent back to prison. He himself did not think he had done anything wrong. He was working and was not involved in any criminal activities according to him, so in his opinion he did not fail to meet his positive pre-release expectations.

On the other hand, two other men expected to be criminally active but they did not commit any crimes after release. For example, Pascal was quite sure about his criminal future when interviewed in prison:

> I'm just going to continue my life as it was, I have taken a path in my life and I don't see it change with my family and all… and I don't know any other kind of life and frankly, I also don't want another life.

However, when he was asked about his involvement in any criminal activities at the follow-up interview, he answered: "No, not at all, I don't want that life anymore. I want to try to build something of my life, I don't want to hurt people anymore."

Explanatory mechanisms behind outcomes

The detailed qualitative interviews with the men provided unique information on their own vision on why this was the case, as well as on general underlying patterns. From the data several reasons showed up.

Identity

The concepts of the future possible self in combination with the feared self can be found in both pre- and post-release interviews with participants with non-criminal expectations who also refrained from crime after release. They envisioned themselves being a good father (Dave) or being a sports instructor for children at risk (Nathan and Xavier) and combined this with notions of a feared self to motivate themselves to desist from crime. As Tom explained:

> I have always taken path A and I was always on the run, it was stressful and there was a lot of misery. I lost my best friend and ended up in a psychiatric institution. I'm sick of it! Now I'll try path B. And it promises better things. Path B gives me the opportunity to work and get married with my girlfriend.

The two men who predicted to recidivate but did not three months after release, also mentioned a positive possible self and a fear about their future self if they were to continue engaging in criminal activities. However, these possible selves were only mentioned in the post release interview and were not present in their pre-release narrative. Pascal admitted in prison he could not see his life changing from criminal to non-criminal but now says he wants to try and make something of his life. He wants to become educated (possible self) and does not want to hurt people anymore (feared self).

In contrast, participants with ambivalent and criminal expectations did not seem to have a clear image of a future possible or feared self. In fact, the men with criminal expectations can hardly imagine a positive non-criminal self given the re-entry challenges that await them and admit they think they are better off continuing the criminal life. For example, both Ab and Tony said that they do not think they are capable of surviving in the 'normal' world without engaging in crime.

Agency

Second, the theme of agency – low or high feelings of being in control and making your own choices – occurred multiple times across *all* interviews. Participants who expected to refrain from crime and were indeed not engaged in criminal activity after release, took action immediately after release to maximize the chances of finding a job, for example sending out countless resumes or taking a low skilled job to earn money for their driving license.

The difference in agency between the early desisters, the ambivalent group and the ones that continued crime was whether or not they ascribed (the success of) their actions to themselves or to others. Those who expected to desist and did, saw the actions being a result of internal (themselves) rather than external (other) causes. For example, Richard was highly motivated to stay crime-free and experienced feelings of responsibility and getting more out of life. He showed insight in the influence of his own attitude and belief in his post-release success:

> I am not twofaced anymore with different intentions. I am not a criminal anymore. And it gives so much space to be who you are. I don't ever want to be dependent anymore, I don't ever want to do anything with crime, it just doesn't fit in my world. I'm on a mission now: I want to be independent. All those prisoners complaining about authority in prison: if you don't want people telling you what to do, then you have to start making other choices. That way, you can be independent.

The positive cycle of success on the outside strengthening feelings of agency was also visible in the narrative of Pascal. As mentioned earlier, he expected to be involved in criminal activity but he arranged a place to live for himself and at the follow-up interview he was positive and expressed feelings of joy being able to take care of himself and taking responsibility for his own future.

On the other hand, those who expected to recidivate and who did, said their behaviour was largely due to other circumstances and for example put little effort in finding a job at first. According to them, they were entitled to some time to readjust from imprisonment. Their narratives revealed they were embedded in a criminal environment and they also believed that some external events early on brought them

to a criminal lifestyle. They were still engaged in crime, not necessarily because they wanted to but because they felt they had no other option or because they thought it was all they were capable of. These feelings could be enhanced by difficulties in search of a job. Tony said he was really serious about finding employment but became well aware of the disadvantaged position he found himself in when he got frustrated being confronted with the offender label. For example, he explained his recidivism:

> I really want to work, not in a store or something, but somewhere outside and active, even collecting garbage! I applied for that job, but they asked for a certificate of good conduct [disclosure of criminal records].. So then there you go, that's not going to work. What do they think: I'm going to murder someone while I'm collecting garbage?! I don't understand. But I don't need them. If they don't want me, then it's a pity for them. But still… I do have to live during the week…

Two men who expected to refrain from crime minimized their involvement in actions that got them in prison again. Jack blamed it on the housing facility where he stayed but where he was kicked out of for breaking the rules. Bart justified his behaviour by saying that if the victim had just listened, he would have not been involved in a serious crime again. He felt he was treated unjustly by the assaulted person and this was his response. He showed little insight into his own behaviour and according to him, his positive future expectation regarding criminal behaviour is still a realistic one as long as: "no one messes with him."

Social capital

Third, data indicated that social capital – including support from family and partner- was relevant if they wanted to refrain from future crimes. Dave, who desisted from crime as he predicted in prison, pointed out the relationship with his family facilitated his attempts to refrain from crime:

> I first had to wait three months before I got my social welfare benefits. Fortunately, I could lend some money from my dad, but if that is not an option….. then you have to wait a really long time and it is almost like you are being pushed towards crime. I am lucky to stay at my parents' house now, which gives me the chance to rebuild my life. Pay my debts, find a job, be stable. I was a bit nervous when I applied for the job, but I got a call the same week and they didn't ask anything about my past! I had to do a test to convince someone and I passed. So I am working there fulltime now.

Furthermore, his daughter kept him on the right path and he felt he had a new purpose in life. Moreover, finding well paid employment enabled him to set new goals, gain confidence and keep his behaviour in line with his purpose. Milo as well as Pascal knew they were going to be in a post-release situation where the chances of success were low and they both predicted to continue crime. After release, their gains in social capital factors seemed to initiate motivation and persistence in refraining from crime, enabling them to move slowly towards a possible non-criminal self they started to envisage. Milo predicted he would return to crime, but upon release he felt support from his girlfriend and family to go straight which according to him: "helped him to go to work and behave well." People around him took notice of his effort to refrain from crime and expressed their appreciation, which in turn strengthened him in his attempts to stay crime-free.

Weak social support from relatives, partner or children and an unstable housing situation did seem to play a role in underestimating chances to be back in crime for participants with optimistic pre-release expectations who found themselves imprisoned again shortly after release.

Supervision

Fourth, the role of supervision was mentioned as a reason for abiding by the rules. In Casper's case, being monitored closely and the risk to lose his house in case of a misstep were reasons for him to refrain from criminal activity:

> I already did my time, but now I am being monitored. So they only need one fingerprint or one DNA trace and they will find me! So I can choose to do it, take a high risk to get caught and lose everything like my house or I just don't do anything for a while.

Pascal felt the burden of the ankle bracelet and the obligatory alcohol and drug test in his life. He remembered that at New Year's eve, he was not allowed to drink a glass of champagne and he could not be out on the street in the evening. So instead of being frustrated at midnight and maybe doing 'stupid things', he went to bed at 8'o clock in the evening. He realised the drug and alcohol tests kept him sober and gave room for clear thinking. At the follow-up, he said he was proud of himself and did not want that criminal life anymore. The social burden of the ankle bracelet was mentioned several times by multiple participants (across all types of expectations). For the ambivalent group, the strict supervision rules did seem to inhibit the tendency towards crime, but it is worth mentioning that when the social network is weak and new opportunities for social interactions are scarce, the ankle bracelet can impede the chance of new encounters.

5.5 DISCUSSION

This article contributes to the relatively under-researched topic of the role of future expectations in criminal behaviour and factors that play a role in the transition to society and early attempts at desistance. We focused on a group of prisoners who was responsible for serious (violent) crimes and who was serving an average sentence length of four years. The aim of this article was to examine the expectations of prisoners regarding their future criminal behaviour before they are released, whether or not these expectations came true after their release from prison and understand why they did or did not meet these expectations. Based on recent literature, we expected that prisoners with non-criminal future expectations would engage in goal oriented behaviour towards this expectation and therefore be more likely to refrain from criminal activity after release. Prisoners being ambivalent about their future regarding criminal behaviour, were expected to be more likely to engage in criminal activity when success after release is low.

From the pre-release interviews, three groups of prisoners emerged: prisoners with a non-criminal future expectation, those with a criminal future expectation and those with a more ambivalent future expectation. Main results suggest a strong match between the non-criminal and criminal expectations and post-release criminal behaviour. For these two types of expectations, almost all men in our sample seemed to be fairly accurate about the post-release outcomes. There were however a few exceptions with some men that recidivated while not predicted and some men that refrained from crime although they expected they would still be engaged in criminal activity. Furthermore, almost all the men with ambivalent forecasts refrained from criminal activity at the follow-up interview. Four underlying mechanisms were identified from the reasons given by the men to explain the results: possible selves, agency, social capital and supervision.

First, according to IDT (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), the findings suggest that visualizing a positive possible self and a feared self indeed contributed to motivation to refrain from crime and striving towards the goals mentioned before release. Even for the unexpected early desisters, notions of possible selves together with social capital success encouraged desistance. No clear notions of possible selves were found in the ambivalent narratives so they were abstaining from crime for different reasons.

Second, feelings of control and ascribing behaviour to self-motivation and perseverance were identified in the data which is in line with previous work emphasizing the importance of agency (King, 2013; Maruna, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 2003). The men that were abstaining for crime said that their success on the outside was a product of their own effort and the ones that continued crime said their engagement in criminal activities was due to external events. In line with

previous research (Healy, 2010), attempts to refrain from crime were challenged if the conventional life provided a lower sense of self-esteem than the criminal life. It is possible that the men who continued crime felt as if they were 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna, 2001), having few chances on the outside and felt like they were being pushed to crime. Once released, they experienced the 'pain of goal failure' (Schinkel, 2014; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), which seem to prove them right about their feelings of being doomed. Their pre-release criminal forecasts were just plain realistic according to them, especially because any effort to start a conventional lifestyle (as a part of their conditional release) failed and proved them right. They were not successful in displaying resilience in the face of re-entry challenges (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004; Rutter, 2012).

Third, social capital, which links to informal social control theory (Sampson & Laub, 1993), seemed to facilitate moving away from crime. Early desisters were actively seeking social support (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011) and pro-social bonds with partners and family and this facilitated 'relational desistance'(Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) in several ways. Material support, such as helping out with debts and offering a place to stay, and also the appreciation shown by loved ones when going straight contributed to motivation to keep striving and overcoming obstacles.

A fourth mechanism was the role of supervision which supports the notion of formal social control (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Being supervised appears to constrain the tendency towards crime,[5] but also led to the 'pain of isolation' (Schinkel, 2014; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Prisoners with ambivalent future expectations but refraining from crime after release, illustrated the pain of isolation: they were low on social capital and lived quite isolated to avoid temptation, thinking they would not be able to resist.

Being supervised by the Probation Services with curfews and drug bans meant that the chance to be sent back to prison to finish the rest of their sentence was high. This could also be the reason that the participants who had criminal expectations and were indeed engaging in criminal activity, were involved in *less* serious crimes in order to stay under the radar. This way, they could 'combine' their supervised conditional release with dealing drugs and still be able to take care of themselves.
Our findings are partially in line with what we expected based on recent literature. Prisoners with a non-criminal forecast were indeed successfully engaged in striving towards a life without crime, and other goals (Scheier & Carver, 1992). The criminal expectations also corresponded to the post-release behaviour. The ambivalent however, were for the most part not engaged in criminal activity at the follow-up three months after release, which is not what we expected, especially since they

5 Positive results when being supervised could also be related to what has been known as the ´Hawthorne effect´ (Ruch & Zimbardo, 1971).

were low on social capital. The absence of meaningful social bonds is a result also found across other studies (e.g. Schinkel, 2014) and can be quite problematic in the process of rehabilitation. Researchers argue that desistance is a product of individual factors and social capital relations (Maruna, 2001; King, 2013; Laub & Sampson, 2003) and that desistance blooms when the change in behaviour of the person is recognized and appreciated by others (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Since these prisoners with ambivalent expectations did not have strong social support, their efforts in changing their behaviour were hardly noticed by anyone, maybe only by their parole officer. For this group, it will be crucial to achieve small successes but also to be 'rewarded' for it in order to achieve 'relational desistance' (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), which is not something they can achieve by themselves.

While this study has major strengths, it also has some limitations. We interviewed a relatively small sample of male prisoners in the Netherlands based on a list which contained all the imprisoned men that fitted the criteria. Every prisoner that was scheduled to be released could be included in the research. Our study is explorative in nature and we do not attempt to generalize findings from this sample to a whole population but aim to contribute insight into the transition from prison to society and early attempts at desistance. Since the imprisonment length of the sample of prisoners used in this study is quite similar to the average imprisonment length in other countries such as the US (see Kuhn, 1996), the results of our study might be relevant to prisoners elsewhere. Future research on prisoners with similar sentences (and not life sentences) in other countries is needed to see if the results from this study also apply to other settings. Second, since the data collected was all based on self-report, one may argue that participants underreported less desirable behaviours or that prisoners with positive forecasts were giving more socially desirable answers and maybe felt the need to paint a brighter picture at the follow-up interview to keep up appearances. Nevertheless, how the men presented themselves provides useful insight even if the ones who said to be confident about their future felt the need to construct an imaginary reality if they were indeed reoffending after release. Third, this study has focused on the early stage of the desistance process by using a qualitative longitudinal design which included the period before release and the first three months after. The short follow-up period limits the findings to very early attempts at desistance. Longitudinal research with a longer follow-up is recommended to see how these processes of change evolve and the mechanisms that play a role when participants spend more time in the community. However, the presented accounts of these prisoners offered valuable insights into the transition from prison to society and those first challenging months after release where one's mindset may shape behaviour. Furthermore, findings suggested that ambivalent future expectations that do not evolve into criminal behaviour can be initially constrained by the conditional

release and a fear of going back instead of strong agentic factors. Recent research (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008) also illustrated that agency can be weak at first and increase when a person takes some successful steps on the road to desistance. This could well be the case for the men with ambivalent expectations. More research on this topic and a longer follow-up is needed to clarify how this interaction works.

This paper has presented the first findings of a qualitative longitudinal study of returning prisoners and early desistance. Since expectations influence behaviour, knowledge on this topic for prisoners can contribute to improving processes of re-entry. Future research should focus on results from a longer follow-up to see how pre-release expectations develop into behaviour and how these expectations interact with the road to desistance.

WHO IS TONY?

At the in-prison interview, Tony was 23 years old and was currently convicted to three years in prison for armed robbery. He spent a half year in a juvenile correctional facility at the age of 14 and served a 1.5 year term in a foreign prison when he was 17. These were the crimes he got convicted for, but Tony was continuously involved in (mostly drug-related) crime and other informal work, such as repairing cars, motors and scooters. He was proud of his creativity to solve any technical problem with a vehicle. He described himself as cheerful and a nice guy. Tony had one son aged four, but he got imprisoned after he was born and had barely seen him during the past years.

Background

Tony's parents moved to the Netherlands before Tony and his two sisters were born. He grew up with a mentally ill older sister who needed a lot of his parents' attention at home, so Tony was drawn towards life on the streets early on: "My mom's attention for me was minimal. I didn't mind, because I understood that my sister needed help harder than me and she needed all the help she could get." He spend a lot of his time outside and started doing 'dumb shit' such as molesting things and stealing parts of bicycles to make a new one. Anything to chase the boredom of which he suffered away. Things at home changed for the worse when his grandma died. His mother sank into a depression and his father started drinking heavily. Tony remembered vividly how his father used to beat him and his mother frequently when he was intoxicated. He had gotten into a lot of fights with his father trying to defend his mother. At one point, his parents filed for divorce and after that, things went better. Although his father continued drinking, gambling and also spend time in prison, Tony experienced him to be more relaxed, he moved to another city and Tony visited him every now and then.

Tony completed elementary school, but was absent a lot during the consecutive years at high school. The topics in school did not interest him and he had difficulty reading the material so he was putting less effort in school. It became a negative cycle and he became a 'weak student', but he admits: "it was of course my own fault." As a result, he was not allowed to pass to the next grade and he quit school. He began smoking marijuana at age 12 and met people in the streets who showed him ways to make money, which downgraded his interest in school to zero. Tony never got allowance at home and his parents were uneducated and often unemployed, so

there was not a lot of money to buy things. Tony was pleased he could come home with 'two loafs of bread' and buy things to eat for himself with the money he made on the streets. He remembered an incident when he was 13 years old and was asked to steal some expensive car rims. Because he was young, the older guys could get away with paying him half of what he should have been paid according to street value: "but I didn't mind. I could buy new Nikes. And you are making a progress, you can buy something you like, that helped and motivated me. And then you start moving over to that side more and more." Tony learned the street value of things quickly. Soon, he was not someone you could fool around with, he gained respect by naming his price for things and made serious money.

His first conviction was at the age of 14 for a few car thefts and he was sentenced to six months in a juvenile correctional facility, which he referred to as a camp, but then strictly for boys. He looked back on this time with positive feelings, seeing familiar faces from elementary school and being quite fun. Yet, he realised he did not want to be back in prison again after this sentence and he attempted to do it 'right' after his release by taking up a distribution route for a local paper. When he found out he had to pay a share of his income to taxes, he quit and it went from bad to worse when Tony got involved in violent and drug-related crime. The first time he accompanied someone whose core business was ripping consumers who reacted to ads to buy stuff. These were rather violent encounters, but Tony said: "if the first time goes well, then the second time is easier. After a while you don't think of the consequences anymore." Tony summarized his childhood by saying: "I grew up with stealing and violence, it was kind of normal."

When he was 17 years old, he got arrested abroad for dealing drugs and possession of a firearm, he had to serve 16 months in a foreign prison before returning to the Netherlands. At this time, his father reached out for him asking how he was doing and Tony noticed how he had changed: he had started to take care of himself, moved to a better place and was more spiritual. Moreover, he stressed to Tony if there was anything that he could do for him, he should not hesitate to ask him. Also in this period he met his ex-girlfriend and got her pregnant. At the age of 19, Tony became a father. He continued to earn his money informally by repairing cars and motors and delivering mostly anything he got an order for: car parts, TV's, marijuana. His dream was to open up his own car repair shop, said he could fix anything. But he also continued violent crimes together with criminal peers. It got out of hand at one of these robberies when someone unintentionally got shot. Tony and an accomplice were arrested after showing their images on TV and Tony was sentenced to three years in prison. After Tony's arrest, Child Protection Services placed his younger sister under custody of the court, because the authorities considered it to be a inappropriate environment for her.

Current imprisonment

The 'bright' side of prison for Tony was that it taught him how to be independent, do your own cooking, cleaning your cell and acquire people skills. Furthermore: "it's just prison. The door closes and it opens." Tony took the opportunity in prison to obtain his diploma for welding/soldering and he completed a court imposed Cognitive Skills Training and a Choose for Change course. The latter was necessary to move to the 'green' area in the traffic light system, which allowed for more privileges. However, Tony smoked marijuana throughout his entire prison spell, so in practice, he always resided in the 'red' area, spending more time in his cell. According to him, he blew up his chances to participate in phased detention, because of an incident with a knife. Prison staff then searched his cell and found weapons and other contraband. He knew he was taking risks by keeping all these things in his cell, but as Tony explained it: "If someone hits me, I am not going to sit quietly and take the beating. You know, prison is like a village: when I get beat on one side, the other side has already been spiced up with ketchup and mayonnaise."

At the start of his imprisonment, Tony wrote some letters home. Some friends visit him in prison until he gets transferred to a prison further away from his hometown. The most part of his prison spell he does not receive any visitors, by choice he said: "Friends come over with stories about parties and girls… that's nice and all, but I'm stuck here". Tony was granted one leave of 60 hours. He went to the park with his ex-girlfriend and his son and he saw some of his family, who said they were not surprised he was in prison: "Like father, like son".

When asked how he had changed, Tony answered that he tries to think about his actions before executing them. A fellow inmate explained to him that he had to stop conflicting bodily harm to victims. Tony was a 'stabber' but he now realised that if this went wrong, he could be behind bars for a long time. Tony showed some insight into his own behaviour by admitting he made a lot of mistakes because of his inability to stop when it comes to serious plans of hurting people.

Pre-release expectations

Tony could go live with his mother or father after release, but he decided to go to his father's. Although he and his father were hardly considered best friends, Tony did not want to put his mother up with more trouble coming from his lifestyle. He realised it had not been easy for her dealing with a son like him. On the long run, Tony expressed desires for house, bells and bliss: "It doesn't matter where I live, as long as I am with someone who makes me happy". He continued to say that he would consider quitting criminal life if he was able to build a family, but then again, he had no problem with criminal life. He wanted to pursue his dream of opening a garage, but admitted he would still be involved with less serious crime to earn money, because he was convinced he could not make it without that extra money

on the side. So his plan was to search legit employment and continue his criminal business of 'small things' on the side. His biggest concern for the future was that he would get shot sometime, but he stressed that he was not afraid to die.

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

Leaving prison with two garbage bags containing his belongings, Tony used public transportation to get from prison to his father. He remembered feeling people were staring at him. Being out was good, but there was also instant pressure of earning money, getting insurance and paying off his debts. Two weeks after release he became a suspect of a robbery for which he was arrested together with a friend. After 2 days, they were released when the police saw camera footage and concluded they were not the perpetrators. At this incident, Tony found out he was under supervision by the Dutch Probation Service. He was astonished, since he was already out for two weeks and had not heard anything from the probation service, although it was imposed by court. From that moment, he had to attend regular check-ins at the probation office. He disliked the check-ins, being monitored and doing as he was told, but he did express appreciation for the human element of parole: his parole officer. According to Tony, she was laidback and honest about what she could accomplish for him (entering courses) and what not (getting him a job).

Tony's efforts to find a legitimate job were unsuccessful, he wanted to work with his hands and applied to collect garbage, but they asked for his certificate of conduct (in Dutch: VOG). He was disappointed and expressed a lack of understanding why someone would need a certificate to collect garbage. This first rejection contributed to a downward spiral of negativity and diminishing feelings of hope. Because the Employee Insurance Agency (in Dutch: UWV)[6] mediated, there was no lack of job interviews, yet his criminal record could also be seen by potential employers who asked him question about his past. Tony made some efforts to go on multiple job interviews (bought bus tickets to get there and calling credit to be able to call), but it did not result in him getting hired.

Tony did apply for social benefits but his application was incomplete so he did not receive any money. In the meantime, Tony was driving around the country to deliver packages of marijuana. He knew there was a risk of getting caught, but it did not bother him too much as he knew the sentence would be short if he did get caught and the benefits were important to him in this time of not having anything. He could fill his days with the profit he made, but he could not save up and buy a house or rent a warehouse for opening his garage. He needed his money to be legit. So he also kept searching for jobs in the area he wanted to work, but did not explore other

6 The UWV is an autonomous administrative authority commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) to help clients find employment.

options that might lead to paid employment. He experienced little to no help from the probation service and expected more help from them to find meaningful ways to spend his days.

Tony was still living with his father three months after release, he said it was OK, because they did not interfere too much with each other's lives. His father agreed for him to live there as long as the house stayed clean and there was no police at the door. Tony had not yet seen his son in the first three months after release. He sent some of his illegally earned money to his ex-girlfriend, but she had problems with the origin of the money. For Tony, he felt it was all he could do in an attempt to take care of his son a little bit, albeit with criminal money. Concerning former 'friends', Tony was quite surprised by the reaction of some of his accomplices who received a shorter sentence and were already out: "I betrayed no one and took all the blame and now some of them won't even look at me". Tony found out they sold all the stuff they obtained from former crimes and never gave him a dime. He felt this to be crucial in this post-release period in which he needed it the most. He also referred to this observation when thinking about how he had changed. Tony said he would still never betray anyone, but looking back, he doubted if he would invest the same in so-called 'friends'. Tony had one friend who he felt had supported him most in these past few months. This friend had also been in prison, but obtained a steady job and was building up a crime-free life. Tony admired him and it gave Tony a glimpse of how things could be. This friend stimulated Tony to go find what he wanted, which was achieving 'house, bells and bliss', that was his definition of being happy. The first step was to earn money for his garage. Tony's life now was not what he had imagined it to be. It was quite boring and he was looking for purpose: "I really have to find something now, before I do crazy stuff". A positive change in him was that he felt he could handle his aggression better, he now tried to postpone the moment he gets seriously violent without walking away from the situation.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

In contrast to the two previous interviews, were Tony was quite relaxed, the final interview 12 months after release showed me a very different Tony. One who was frustrated that he had not made any progress and one who was rather fatalistic. He was still unemployed a year after release. He had been to 15 garages and was rejected everywhere. Tony said there were a few times he had gotten a call in which they said they found out about his imprisonment and asked for the reason of the offence. He chose not to tell what he really was in prison for (armed robbery), but made up a story about how a fight after a night clubbing got out of hand. He thought that was a better story to gain credibility, but it did not help. He felt he was being judged on information on 'pieces of paper' instead getting to know him and

comment on his working skills. In addition, he experienced the way he spoke and the words he used did not work in his advantage and he felt this all to be insurmountable obstacles. In his view, the probation service could have played a mediating role.

Looking back, he felt he was not well-prepared in prison for his release. According to him, no one advised him about the upfront work that he could have done in prison and that all prisoners, whether red, orange or green should be prepared for release. In particular for long-term prisoners: "25 years in prison, of course you lose a lot, but don't forget about what you also lose if you spend five years or even three years".

Tony was inclined to place the blame for him being unsuccessful on external factors and he felt his own efforts were not enough to achieve his desired goals. He felt out of control of his own faith: "They say there are plenty of chances, but it's all fake. They send you from here to there. And when you go, it does not pay off. Of course, here are a few who manage, who succeed, but unfortunately I am not one of those." For Tony, it all fitted into a downward spiral in which one bad experience led to another and felt as if he were indeed 'doomed to deviance'. Tony expressed a desire to change his life, but he let it up to other people giving him a chance if he succeeded in this.

He had to pay off his debts and his medical insurance, but had no legal income. He was still involved in drug-related crime delivering marijuana, mostly to students, but no violent crime anymore.

Living at his father's place did not go by without a hassle. Tony said his father did not understand the conditional release requirements and was very unsupportive of Tony having to meet his parole officer every week. But Tony realised he had to do it and he wanted to behave well, because there was no way he was going back to prison to finish the rest of his sentence. A few weeks after our last interview, Tony left his father place and rented a room in a house of a friend for 250 euro a month. He was happy he could afford it and be independent:

> You get older, you want your own things, stand on your own two legs and be on your own. My dad offered me his money or stuff for the house, but I said: dad, I don't want your stuff, I really appreciate it, I am grateful for it, but first let me do it myself, and if I really drop that low, I will ask for it. But until my legs can hold me, I just keep walking.

Tony had not seen his son yet since his release, they moved abroad so they Skyped every now and then. He was still in disarray with his son's mother. She made clear to him she needed someone stable in her life and not someone who could suddenly disappear for a few years. She was convinced Tony did not set a good example to her son and was afraid her son would act the same way when he grew up. Tony agreed with her on all those things, but also defended the right to see his child. Tony

said that kids were still his motivation to try and find a job and a normal house, so he has something to offer to future kids. But he also admitted that if he did not manage to succeed in the 'normal' way, he would not hesitate to get all the things he desired via the back door. Because he wanted to give his children things he had never had when he was young. Of course, he preferred the legal way, because there was a chance that he could 'disappear' in the criminal life, referring to prison, having to hide, or being killed.

When asked who supported him the most in the past few months, he laughed and answered: 'my shadow'. Tony was quite pessimistic and lost hope: "I am outside now for a while, but I don't see any progress. Everything I've done, what they tell me to, where they send me to. I go to all these places, I am as civilized as can be. I try. But what keeps on motivating you when you only get bad news?"

Future

In five years from now, Tony knew for sure he would have achieved some form of 'house, bells and bliss'. Tony did not see himself getting involved with serious violent crime again, because: "I know what the consequences are when you are older and spending time in prison. I am not building up and I consider that to be a problem, I want to build up things." His dream was still to open a garage where people could come for reparations of their car and he knew the steps to get there: find a way to earn some money legally so he could go to the bank with his business plan for a small loan. The problem was not getting hired for any legal job and all the money he earned now was illegal. Therefore, he thought he would always be making money illegally on the side, but he hoped to find a legit job. When he envisioned a negative future, this would be growing marijuana on a foreign property. If this future perspective would become reality, it meant that he did not succeed the 'normal' way. He knew that it would be so much faster to get where he wanted through the criminal way, yet it was not completely what he wanted.

CHAPTER 6
HOUSE, BELLS AND BLISS?▪

A longitudinal analysis of conventional aspirations and the process of desistance

ABSTRACT

Various studies have pointed to identity change and cognitive transformation as important predictors of desistance. Yet, even persistent offenders have conventional aspirations, which include a job, a house and a family. This paper examines the development of conventional aspirations of 23 Dutch (ex-)prisoners using qualitative longitudinal data. Findings show no association between conventional aspirations and desistance as both desisters and persisters expressed conventional goals ('house, bells and bliss'). A lack of substance and detailed scripts to flesh out the essence of the desired conventional roles meant it could be difficult to turn vague ideals into concrete action pathways. Finally, conventional aspirations and criminal lifestyles were not mutually exclusive; some of the persistent offenders used criminal pathways to fulfil conventional roles.

Keywords: desistance, imprisonment, identity, agency, re-entry

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Various theories of desistance hold that moving away from crime is triggered (or at least accompanied) by changes in identity to a pro-social and conventional self (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Attempts to fulfil a conventional life are thought to involve changes in routines and social network, and a greater stake in conformity, which have been offered as explanations of why individuals stop or reduce their offending (Farrall, 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Nevertheless, persistent offenders also hold conventional aspirations, identities and values similar to those of desisting offenders (Liem & Richardson, 2014; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). This article examines in detail the nature and development of such conventional aspirations and how these aspirations relate to self-reported criminal behaviour in a sample of Dutch men who made the transition from prison into society. We show that it is necessary to dive below the surface of 'catch-phrase' conventional aspirations to understand how they are related to desistance and persistence.

Aspirations can be understood as a future-oriented dimension of a person's identity. The meaning given to different aspects of the self (the current and future self), or self-identity, is fluid, and can be reconstructed through both social interactions (Becker, 1964; Felson, 1985) and various roles a person (aspires to) fulfil(s) in society (e.g. parent, employee or partner). The dissonance arising from conflicting perceptions of the (future) self motivates human action, which allows individuals to shape their lives into a certain direction (Festinger, 1962). In other words, people tend to behave in a way that is consistent with how they view themselves and if the perceptions of their present and future (desired) identity are inconsistent, they act to reduce the inconsistency. The notion of a cognitive script or 'role rule prescriptions' can be useful for understanding and explaining behaviour (Abelson, 1976; Harré & Secord, 1972). For example, in order to make a valid claim on a conventional identity such as a parent, an individual must have access to a script that comprises behavioural routines on how the global role of a parent must be 'performed' in situations and interactions with others. From the above, we may deduct that changes in (offending) behaviour could result from changes in a person's aspirations, and more generally, their identity.

Identity and desistance

Desistance appears to be a complex process of moving away from offending, which is not only related to criminal behaviour, but also to social, situational and existential factors, including a person's identity (Maruna, 2001; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Identity theories of desistance centre around the idea that long-term desistance requires a 'fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self' (Maruna,

2001, p. 17). Giordano et al. (2002) argued that an openness to change necessarily precedes desistance, but that identity transformation is further realised through exposure to 'hooks for change' (p. 1000), such as family, employment, prison and treatment, which creates the opportunity to fashion a *replacement self*. Thus, according to this theory, identity change occurs as a result of changes in social bonds and conventional roles. In contrast, in the Identity Theory of Desistance (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) the direction is reversed: identity change precedes socio-structural changes. According to this theory, moving to a positive *possible self* (i.e. a conventional, non-offending identity) is motivated by the deterrent image of a *feared self* (i.e. the envisaged future if a person would persist offending), which leads to a rejection of a criminal lifestyle early on in the desistance process. The dual contribution of these positive and negative future self-images initiates the desistance process and increases the likelihood that people will encounter and grab onto hooks for change.

The aspect of a 'conventional' or 'pro-social' self is key in these theories. Maruna (2001) concluded that individuals in the process of desisting from crime had been adopting more conventional identities, such as a family man or a good parent, than the active offenders. Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1001) even noted that a conventional identity would be 'fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation'. A person's identity may be comprised of how one currently views oneself ('actual self'), as well as one's 'ought self', which represents a person's sense of duty and one's 'ideal self', including hopes for the future (Higgins, 1987). By fulfilling conventional roles, desisting offenders may be bringing their actual selves more in line with images of their ought and ideal self.

Various studies have confirmed the role of identity in the desistance process and showed that offenders who successfully desisted experienced a shift towards a conventional identity (e.g. F.-Dufour & Brassard, 2014; Harris, 2011; Schinkel, 2015). However, others have offered evidence that it is possible to disengage from offending without the internalisation of a non-offender identity (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), and that persisters may continue offending despite a positive, pro-social identity and conformist values (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011; Liem & Richardson, 2014). A few longitudinal studies have found empirical support for the idea that a pro-social identity reduces the likelihood of future offending (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008; Na et al., 2015; Rocque et al., 2016; Bachman et al., 2016; Bottoms & Shapland, 2011; Walters, 2018).What distinguishes successful desisters from persisters may be related to confidence in their ability to go straight and commitment to desistance, or a sense of agency (Burnett, 2013; Liem & Richardson, 2014; *cf.* Farrall, 2002).

It is particularly difficult to empirically capture the broad construct of 'identity' (Abdelal et al., 2006). Qualitative studies tend to approach identity inductively (what emerges from participants' narratives) and holistically in relation to how participants

see themselves, including goals, values, self-worth and roles. Quantitative studies deductively operationalise identity and tend to focus on one element, such as a sense of self-worth (Na et al., 2015) or the extent to which participants see themselves as pro-social (Bachman et al., 2016).

Continued offending despite conformist and pro-social values may be partly explained by socio-structural barriers to conventional goods and roles. Strain theory already recognised that a (perceived) lack of legal pathways to achieve goals may lead to different strategies, including downscaling goals, finding illegal ways to achieve the same goals, or retracting from society, dismissing both goals and means (Merton, 1938). Indeed, many offenders face difficulties in finding meaningful, stable employment and housing after release (Petersilia, 2003; Visher & Travis, 2003; Harding, Wyse, Dobson & Morenoff, 2014). Yet, social support and structural opportunities, including employment, are needed to sustain lifestyle changes (F.-Dufour & Brassard, 2014; Farrall, 2002; Harris, 2011; Bachman et al., 2016). Thus, attempts to fulfil conventional roles and construct a pro-social identity may wither if they cannot be sustained by legal opportunities to ensure a level of financial security and reinforced by a supportive social network (Soyer, 2014; Schinkel, 2015). While rehabilitation programmes in prison may alter future criminal behaviour by enhancing offenders' skills needed to achieve pro-social life goals, imprisonment often uproots people's lives even further and many ex-prisoners face the added burden of a multitude of conditions tied to their release. The combination of 'desperate circumstances' and a succession of seemingly insurmountable obstacles may easily turn optimism into fatalism, which can result in self-sabotage and reoffending (Halsey, Armstrong & Wright, 2016).

In sum, structural factors, release preparations and re-entry challenges may impact efforts towards realising a conventional identity, so it is important to contextualise the aspirations offenders have. Furthermore, the nature of what is considered 'conventional' is value-laden and variable. For example, while the American dream entails self-made success in terms of employment, possessions and status, the – perhaps more modest – 'English dream' appears to comprise 'a not-too-onerous but safe job as an employee of a stable company, enough money, some consumer luxuries, a steady girl-friend and (possibly) kids' (Bottoms et al., 2004, p. 384). Even within one cultural context, there are multiple acceptable modes of conformity in terms of lifestyles, although 'conventional' is usually understood to mean law-abiding.

The relative importance and causal order of subjective versus social structural factors remains a topic of debate in desistance research (LeBel et al., 2008). In this paper, we deliberately focus on one side of the debate, namely the subjective side, and zoom in on the notion of conventional aspirations as part of a person's identity and how this relates to 'act desistance' (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), or

criminal behaviour. This study provides an in-depth perspective on the nature and content of conventional aspirations and how they develop over time, and to what extent they relate to conventional and criminal behaviour. In particular, it unpacks the notion of conventionality and distinguishes between goals and pathways. By doing so, we build on various earlier studies (e.g. Burnett, 1992; Farrall, 2002) and go beyond individuals' expectations about their desistance, to highlight a different aspect of 'subjective factors' and 'identity'; this may ultimately contribute to a better comprehension of causal processes of desistance.

The Dutch penal landscape

The Netherlands provides an interesting context for the study of desistance following a prison sentence. The country is known for its liberal penal climate, which is reflected in a (currently) low imprisonment rate (51 per 100,000 inhabitants),[1] mild conditions of confinement and relatively short sentence length. Only 7 percent of all Dutch prisoners are sentenced to more than a year in prison (Kalidien, 2017) which is low compared with 68 percent in the UK (Allen & Watson, 2017) and 97 percent in the US (Ann Carson & Anderson, 2016). Although the Netherlands are currently experiencing declines in recidivism rates, still a third of all released prisoners in 2014 were involved in a new criminal case within two years (De Looff, Van de Haar, Van Gemmert & Valstar, 2017).[2]

Dutch prisons have implemented a system in which phased re-entry and rehabilitation programmes are only available for offenders who show motivation to live a conventional, crime-free life. Access to rehabilitation programmes, extra visiting hours and education is granted when a prisoner shows pro-social behaviour and prison staff are expected to foster prisoners' motivation by helping them formulate short-term and long-term goals (Van Gent, 2013). Within this responsibilisation paradigm, conventional goals are considered an important indicator of motivation to change, so it is of great significance to understand to what extent they can, in fact, facilitate change.

1 *Council of Europe annual penal statistics. SPACE I – Prison populations* (2018) – based on statistics from the year 2016.

2 In 2002, this number was 55 percent.

6.2 METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

This qualitative longitudinal project is a sub-study of the Prison Project (Dirkzwager et al., 2018), which examines prisoners who were: men, born in the Netherlands and aged 18-65. The current qualitative sub-study uses the same inclusion criteria, but also restricts itself to prisoners who were (a) imprisoned between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release, (b) convicted for a criminal offence and not in appeal, (c) not treated under hospital order (in Dutch: TBS) or in a programme for revolving door prisoners (in Dutch: ISD) or in a minimum security prison, and (d) not convicted for a sex offence.[3] To be able to examine changes in identity, specifically the development of aspirations, a longitudinal approach was utilised in which participants were interviewed on three separate occasions up to a year after release.

The Dutch Prison Service provided a list containing all soon to be released prisoners meeting the inclusion criteria.[4] From the 84 men on this list, 44 were approached in prison by the first author and 36 agreed to be interviewed. After ensuring confidentiality they were individually interviewed in a private room; these semi-structured interviews lasted on average 1.5 hours, covering a broad range of topics on imprisonment, re-entry challenges, social network, motivation, agency and criminal behaviour.[5] However, eight interviews had to be excluded due to various reasons (e.g. the participant had received additional sentences or was appealing the case). Out of 28 men from the original sample interviewed in prison, 24 participants were located and re-interviewed approximately three months after release and 23 men a year after release. The post-prison interviews were conducted at participants' residences, in public locations, at the probation office, or in prison. Participants who were not in prison were given a small cash incentive (€10) as token of appreciation for their time and effort. All the interviews were done by the first author. In sum, for this article, we analysed 69 interviews of 23 men collected during three interview waves starting November 2013 until January 2017.

Descriptive characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 6.1. The men were on average 27 years of age at the in-prison interview. They had on average spent 38 months in prison (min. 30 months, max. 50 months) at the time of release and were convicted for mostly violent offences such as armed robberies and

3 Sex offenders were excluded because they are known to experience substantially different challenges in the desistance process, see for example Laws and Ward (2011).

4 In the Prison Project, almost all participants had a short prison term so only four participants interviewed in the period November 2013 – August 2014 were part of the original Prison Project and extra participants were recruited.

5 The first author can be contacted for more information about the interview schedules.

attempted manslaughter. Five men were re-incarcerated at the time of the second interview, three men at the time of the third interview. Nine men (including the men who were incarcerated) self-reported criminal activity at the time of the second and/or third interview, seven of these nine men reported that they were criminally active at both the second *and* the third interview. Participants were all given a pseudonym and these are used to identify quotes in the findings section.

The last column of Table 6.1 identifies the self-reported desistance/persistence-trajectories from pre-release up to a year after release. The label consists of three letters (A, N, C) in various combinations. At the in-prison interview, responses to the question 'How do you see your life after prison concerning criminal activity?' were classified as criminal (C), meaning continuing crime; non-criminal (N), meaning refraining from crime; or ambivalent (A), meaning unsure about continuing or refraining from crime. For each of the follow-up interviews, self-reported behaviour was classified as criminal (C) or non-criminal (N). Behaviour that was illegal according Dutch criminal law was labelled as criminal. Technical violations of license conditions were not considered criminal offences, neither was informal employment when it did not involve any illegal activities.

Although we acknowledge that the process of desistance can be characterised as 'a journey of growth which comprises a multitude of pathways, turning points, dead ends and relays' (Phillips, 2017, p. 6), for the purpose of simplicity we decided to classify participants as 'desisters' (*n*=14) when they reported no involvement in crime at the two post-release interviews (combinations NNN, ANN and CNN) and as 'persisters' (*n*=9) when they reported involvement in crime in at least one of the two follow-up interviews (combinations NCC, CCC, ACC, NNC and CCN).

Analysis

For this study, we were especially interested in participants' goals, aspirations and roles, as well as their expectations in relation to crime. We therefore focussed our current analysis on questions such as 'What do you want to achieve in life?' and 'Where do you see yourself in five years from now?' These were asked at each of the three interview waves and formed a gateway to conversations about *working* and *desired selves* (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Questions on social ties and roles, such as fatherhood or contact with former friends, allowed us to gain insight into possible new roles and intentional self-change (Kiecolt, 1994). Questions concerning goal-oriented behaviour, feelings of being in control and perceptions of being able to refuse or avoid criminal offers captured the notion of agency.

The longitudinal data were analysed using a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Layder, 1998). Codes and descriptive themes initially were identified from theoretical concepts and the interview protocol (such as 'goals'), combined with codes that were more

'data-driven' (such as 'growing/dealing drugs'). Each interview wave had the same codes. For each code concerning the topic of this paper, we made a table containing the labelled fragments of all three waves, sorted by participant. This way, we could start analysing the change in the different narratives across different waves. For the next step, we used an inductive perspective to unravel three main themes: 1) conventional aspirations; 2) lack of conventional 'script' and 3) criminal pathway to fulfil conventional role (see Figure 6.1). We went back and forth between our data and the literature to use existent theory and theory emerging from our analysis, in line with an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998). Atlas.ti facilitated the process of data management and analysis.

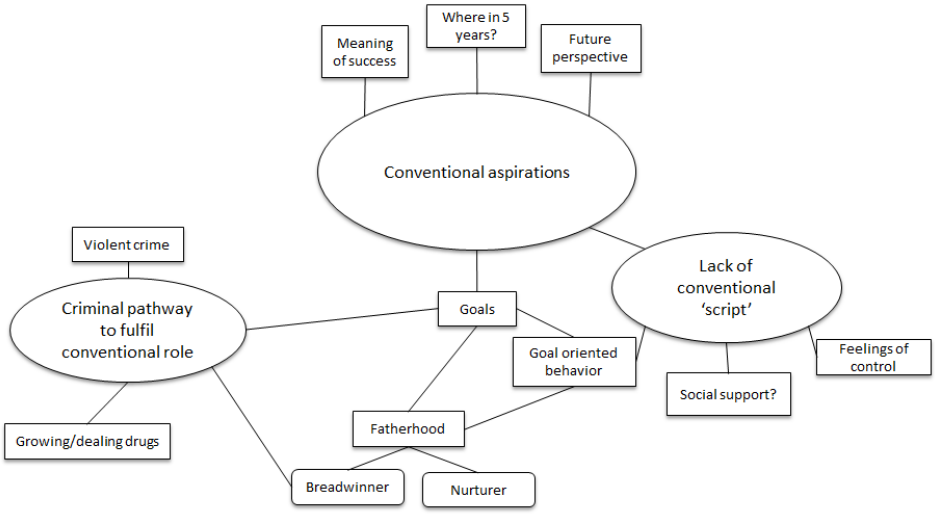

Figure 6.1. Thematic map, showing three main themes which were identified from analysing all three interview waves

Table 6.1. *Descriptives of Prisoners (n= 23)*

Name	Age	Sentence	Offence type	Social situation	Trajectory
Ab	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	CCC
Casper	35-39	2-3 years	Kidnapping, extortion	No partner, 2 children	ANN
Dave	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	NNN
Leon	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	CCC
Peter	50-54	2-3 years	Fraud	Partner, 1 child	NNN
Tom	30-34	2-3 years	Robbery	Partner, 2 children	NNC
Tony	20-24	2-3 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	CCC
Bart	30-34	4-5 years	Aggravated theft, extortion	No partner and children	NCC
Chris	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	ANN
Isaac	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner, 3 children	ANN
Jack	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner, 1 child	NNN[6]
Martin	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	ACC
Milo	25-29	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	No partner and children	CNN
Nathan	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Oscar	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Pascal	30-34	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	CNN
Roy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, 1 stepchild	CCC
Rudy	25-29	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	CCN
Sam	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN
Simon	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	Partner, no children	NNN
Vince	25-29	4-5 years	Burglary	No partner 1 child	ANN
Wessel	20-24	4-5 years	Attempted manslaughter	No partner, 2 children	CCC
Xavier	20-24	4-5 years	Robbery	No partner and children	NNN

6 Three months after release, Jack was in prison again for violating his license conditions, because he had no official registration address which was needed for the conditional release. We classified him as non-criminal (N) at all three waves, even though he was in prison at the time of the second interview.

6.3 FINDINGS

The desire to achieve a 'normal life' was a recurrent theme in most of the interviews, with the exception of two men (one desister, one persister), who said they had no goals for the future and preferred to live day-by-day instead. All other desisters and persisters had conventional aspirations, such as having a partner, a house and children. Below, we explore the content and development of these conventional aspirations in greater detail, and highlight two dimensions related to the attainment of these goals: i.e. the lack of conventional scripts and possible criminal pathways to fulfil conventional aspirations.

'House, bells, and bliss'

Conventional aspirations were often expressed through the Dutch catch-phrase 'huisje, boompje, beestje', which we have translated as 'house, bells, and bliss' (lit: house, tree, pet). This generally entailed having a home, a family, and enough money to support the family.

For many men, pre-release expectations of the future, in response to the question where they saw themselves in five years and what they wanted to achieve, were vague or even unrealistic. For example, during the in-prison interview five men envisioned themselves 'getting rich', others dreamed of living abroad. They did not specify what they would be doing all day and did not have a plan for how to realise these goals.

After release, however, goals became more specific, realistic and modest, especially for the men who desisted from crime. Dreams of 'house, bells, and bliss' were supplemented with concrete goals, such as getting one's driver's license, paying off debts, and finding a new job. Experiencing success in the process of reintegration seemed to contribute to the clarification of goals. Milo (CNN), who had never in his life earned money legally, dreamed of owning a resort abroad and being a millionaire when interviewed in prison, but after release he found a low-skilled job and started dating a girl he stayed together with throughout the research period. A year after release, Milo was about to be a father and had managed to get a permanent position, which enabled him to buy a house.

> JD: What are your goals for the future?
> Milo (T3): A job! A new job. That's the next thing I am going to handle. The house is ready, children, wife... Now a job. […]
> JD: What is a good job for you? Because your current job is already good?
> Milo: Yeah, the salary is okay. But it's dirty work. And I don't think I can move up in this line of work anymore than I've already done. I would like to start my own shop, but I don't know yet.

Milo's aspirations turned conventional once he found himself embedded in conventional institutions, including legitimate employment, house ownership, and a stable family. Besides being able to meet financial needs, Milo's job and employment aspirations served as an 'avenue' to construct a pro-social replacement self (Opsal, 2012).
A change in aspirations, including what are considered acceptable pathways to realise aspirations, was characteristic for desisters. Vince (ANN), who was criminally active from a young age, already expressed values such as being happy and proud of himself in prison, but at the final interview he explicitly rejected crime as a means to achieve his aspirations when asked about his views on personal success:

> JD: What is your definition of personal success?
> Vince (T3): I think, when you're content with the things you have in life. If you can just accept that some things aren't meant to be for you. Then you can achieve success.
> JD: Not meant to be? In what way?
> Vince: For example, like, that criminal activities can get you things that you can't achieve with a normal job. If you just appreciate the small things in life, and just accept them the way they are. That is success, I think, because it will never give you stress. Sometimes I go into town and I just buy shoes. Before, I bought an entire outfit, so to speak. Yeah, success in life, just being happy, making people happy.

Persisters still expressed vague or unrealistic aspirations at the post-release interviews. They had particularly high material aspirations, although failure to achieve those would sometimes turn their outlook on the future into fatalism, in the absence of (conventional or criminal) successes after release (see also Halsey et al., 2016).

> JD: So if you never find a job in which you make a lot of money, you'll always do things on the side?
> Wessel (CCC, T1): I'll always do things on the side.
> JD: But not violent things?
> Wessel: No. But that's what I said, right, I'm someone who needs some… I know that if I get a job, I may earn 12-1300, maximum, with my history. My girlfriend, if I get one, add another 1600… Then I need-, minimum per month, I want at least 6-7,000 extra.
> JD: Otherwise?
> Wessel: I know what I'm like. If I go into town, on the out… I already spend a lot of money on clothes. If I go out in the evening I spend a lot of money too, at least 6-700 euro, just on drinking and using [drugs] that night.

JD: How do you see the future now?
Wessel (T2, in prison): I don't see it very positively, but yeah... you know. Yeah really, it really bothers me sometimes. I've shut it out a bit, to be honest.

The notion of 'house, bells, and bliss' was commonplace, but turned out to be somewhat of an empty shell, a cliché without real meaning, which was just as easily linked to mansion-sized houses as more modest homes. The idea itself, then, was not necessarily realistic, nor concrete; which was especially true in prison and among persisters. It offered little direction for the future or for behaviour more generally.

'I know life on the streets, but I don't know what the other life is like'

On a superficial level, most participants could identify with the catch-phrase aspiration of 'house, bells, and bliss'. When prompted further, however, most men (both persisters and desisters) did not have a clear picture of what this 'normal' life would entail. Put differently, they lacked a clear and specific conventional script for how to 'perform' a role in this desired normal life. Tom (NNC), as most other persisters in the sample, had an extensive criminal record and had therefore always been surrounded by crime. Also, he did not grow up in a traditional, non-criminal family, so he had no experience with house, bells and bliss. Yet, in his pre-release interview, he expressed high hopes for a picture-perfect life. In the first few months after release, Tom attempted to live according to his image of a conventional life, yet old substance abuse habits and spending time with criminal friends gave rise to marital problems. At the time of the last post-release interview, Tom was homeless and committing crime again. He said he wanted to change, but was not sure if he was able to kick his bad habits.

Tom (T1): But I don't know it yet; *and* work, *and* no stress, *and* no problems… Yeah, I don't know, that's it for me. Just that. I have always taken path A, now I'll try path B. And it promises better things.

Tom (T3): I know life on the streets, but I don't know what the other life is like, with so many setbacks, and what happens then. How to behave. I still really want to change my life.
JD: Yeah, why?
Tom: Because I know the criminal life… This time too, it's so easy, you pick it up again so easily. But it's worth nothing, absolutely nothing. What do you achieve with it? I still want to experience the other side. When I worked briefly

> as a cook, I liked it so much… all the things I needed to remember and the certificate I had achieved too, of course. I really wanted to get my diploma. I don't know why I ruin it the way I do.

Tom talked about 'path B', 'the other side' and 'a normal life' to refer to a conventional life; a life he desired, but found difficult to realise, especially because he had no scripts for dealing with setbacks. His script for setbacks was avoidance, substance abuse, and crime. When the going got tough, Tom's default option – the most easily available identity script – was criminal rather than conventional.

This struggle to fulfil conventional aspirations – due to a lack of a detailed conventional script – was also apparent in relation to fatherhood. Considering all three interview waves, we observed a deterioration in the reported quality of the majority of the relationships between fathers and their children. At the time of the in-prison interview, 11 out of 23 participants had (step-)children and 7 reported they had a good relationship with them. Most of them expected to maintain the reported good relationship after leaving prison. However, a year after release, only 3 out of 11 participants that had children (all desisting from crime) reported a good relationship with their child(ren); although the family situation was often not conventional in the traditional sense of the mother and father living together with their children (see also Jardine, 2017). For information on how to be a good father, then, the men could not rely on any traditional identity scripts. Not only because this did not apply to their situation but also because they had been in care or their own fathers had been in prison, resulting in no 'good fathers' as role models in their lives (Purvis, 2013). It appeared that these men (who were desisting from crime) adjusted the superficial identity scripts of 'being a father' to their situation and wrote their own, new scripts as they went along.

> JD: What is a good father to you?
> Milo (CNN, T3): Being consistent. Being there for him. Giving him a base. And then do the things well that didn't go well for me. You try to, at least. We grew up in different circumstances. My father didn't speak Dutch, we were beaten. These days you can't beat your child anymore.
> JD: You will have a new role as a father. What impact does this have on you?
> Milo: I'm starting to feel more responsible. I have to watch what we spend now.

For some men, desistance appeared to facilitate better relationships with their children, and their children were also a source of motivation to live a crime-free life. The three men (all desisters) who reported a good relationship with their children a year after release, identified themselves with the nurturing role of being a father (Forste et al., 2009) and for them, being a good father included giving up crime. Nevertheless,

they also had to cope with strains of non-traditional family life (e.g. custody battles) and fragile selves in relation to their role as father. Similar to motherhood, then, fatherhood could serve as a transformational identity script (Rumgay, 2004), or a positive possible self (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). However, these scripts often lacked a detailed notion of what fatherhood is really like and action scripts for dealing with setbacks that could help cushion attacks on their fatherhood identity. This is particularly problematic considering the marginal circumstances and lack of social capital of many (desisting) offenders.

The problems with the role of being a father were most evident among men who persisted with crime: five persisters were not allowed to see their children anymore and some said this might be for the best, given the instability of their situation.

> Roy (CCC, T3): It may be better for the boy, actually. I tried to do my best for him, but I don't know if I'm a good role model. But at least he's had some sort of father.

The lack of conventional scripts was also reflected in perceptions concerning employment, especially among persisters. Tony (CCC), who had been criminally active since he was a teenager and had almost no experience with conventional employment, described his struggles to find a job going from one interview to the next and never receiving a call back. A year after release, he still had not worked (but was engaged in criminal activity to attain certain goods):

> Tony (CCC, T3): I have nothing.
> JD: And you are under supervision so you thought you would have a chance to put work on your resume?
> Tony: That's what I told them [the parole officer], but they keep saying: we try and do our best, but you also have to look for yourself. I tell them, 'of course I am looking, but the words I use [when applying for a job] don't work. With those words you [parole officers] use it goes faster, you know.' (…) They talk in a 'white people' way, it sounds more appealing. When I speak, I don't know, I am too rude, I am too straight. I just tell them [employers] 'I have done this and this, I am interested in what you do and I want to learn, are you interested in me?' If not, then have nice day. I don't need to hear your reasons, just answer me yes or no.

Most persisters had few or no past experiences with conventional employment (unlike most desisters) and had been acquiring skills in criminal life in the meantime, drifting them even further away from conventional scripts concerning employment. Moreover, frequent disappointments in the job search can contribute to the internalisation of a person's social identity of 'deviant other', as illustrated by Tony's quote above (see also

Harding, 2003). Work experience before imprisonment and connections to employers are not only a valuable asset in terms of capital, but also in terms of scripts for how to talk and dress to increase the chance of finding legitimate employment. Tony's quote further suggests that there might be a cultural component to conventional scripts, which we return to in the discussion section.

'I'm just happy when my harvest is ready'

While most men held conventional aspirations, the pathways to achieve these goals and fulfil these roles were not always conventional. Six men viewed crime as the best way to achieve an income to support a family. Out of nine men who had committed crime at some point after release, six had committed further violent crimes.

> Roy (CCC, T1): You have to be able to live up to your task of being a man. That's what's important to me, that is what it's all about. To be able to take care of your wife and family. What kind of man are you when you need to live off the money of your wife? No, that's not an option.

Most persisters made a distinction between violent crime and growing and dealing cannabis: while the former was regarded as wrong and high-risk, the latter was seen as harmless, lucrative and relatively risk-free. A few were indeed involved in growing and dealing drugs and almost all of them strived towards using less violence and professionalizing the cultivation of cannabis. Ab (CCC), who was re-incarcerated at the time of the third interview and had not seen his daughter yet since she was born, would rather move to another city to continue his drug dealing than quit this line of work for his daughter.

> Ab (T3): I think that I, because I have a daughter, started to see it differently. If people would continue to see me like that [as someone who grows and deals cannabis], it doesn't bother me now, when she's still little, but I don't know how that's going to change when she's older. Maybe people will say bad things to her, or something. Then I'd move to a different city, just keep my head down. Stay undercover.

Ab and Roy saw no paradox in continuing lower risk criminal activity and being a good father (although Ab did plan to stop smoking cannabis after release because in his perception this did not suit his role as a father).In fact, for most persisters crime seemed to be a way of doing masculinity (Carlsson, 2013), by being able to take care of their family and fulfilling their 'task of being a man'. In this context, the meaning of fatherhood for men who continued crime was more representative of a breadwinner role (as opposed to the nurturing role of the desisters; Forste et al., 2009).

The men's moral views did not always correspond with the law, but this did not necessarily affect their identity; conventional aspirations and criminal engagement were not mutually exclusive. Generally, the participants did not see themselves as criminal, even if they technically were (in line with Liem & Richardson, 2014). In fact, some men even derived a substantial amount of self-worth and pride from their criminal activities.

> Ab (CCC, T3): It definitely gives me satisfaction. I'm just happy when my harvest is ready. (…) Because I'm proud that I've achieved that then, that I did that on my own. And people work for it too, because of me other people earn money as well. So I'm quite proud of that.

For Ab, experiencing success in his criminal endeavours was a source of pride, reflecting the fulfilment of an intrinsic value aside from the instrumental value of financial security. Even though the persisters mostly did not approve of violence and expressed a commitment to de-escalation (from violent crime to drug-related crime), most had not yet been able to achieve this in the study period.

6.4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Given the recurring theme in criminological literature of a desire to live a conventional or normal life, even among persistent offenders, this article set out to critically examine the conventional nature of goals and aspirations of offenders and how these change over time. The following key findings emerged after our analysis of the longitudinal interview data. First, consistent with some important desistance research (Burnett, 1992; Farrall, 2002; Bottoms & Shapland, 2011), there was no association between conventional aspirations and desisting behaviour, as both desisters and persisters expressed conventional goals in prison and after release. Second, conventional aspirations expressed by prisoners were often superficial and usually only became more detailed and realistic after release when they were bolstered by conventional successes (in line with Farrall, 2002). Third, many participants (both desisters and persisters) lacked detailed identity scripts that could help them carve out pathways to fulfil their conventional aspirations and roles; this seemed to be related to their lack of conventional role models and social capital. Fourth, conventional aspirations and a criminal lifestyle were not mutually exclusive. Persisting offenders were often committed to using criminal pathways to achieve conventional aspirations and fulfil conventional roles.

Extending theories that suggest a role for identity and cognitive transformations in the process of desistance, we argue that conventional aspirations alone are not enough to capture identity change and cognitive transformations. Our findings suggest that concrete pathways and scripts to realise conventional aspirations and possible selves are more important in explaining desistance. We observed that offenders did not necessarily experience dissonance between conventional social values and aspirations, and criminal behaviour. However, we do agree with Bottoms and Shapland (2011) that there appears to be a moral ranking of different types of crimes, in the sense that offenders regarded drug crimes as less morally objectionable and harmful. The results are also partly in line with research done by Liem and Richardson (2014), who found that re-incarcerated lifers, similar to successfully desisting lifers, had a good and pro-social self-image. In fact, some persisters in our study pointed out that their engagement in crime was and would continue to be their means to achieve and maintain 'house, bells and bliss'. It appeared that for some offenders the conventional pathway was simply not attractive and rewarding enough, so they turned to illegal means ('innovation', see Merton, 1938). As Carlsson (2013) described in his research on masculinity, striving to fulfil the role of a 'family man' is linked to a financial aspect, which can motivate the engagement in crime if it cannot be achieved legitimately.

Persisters indeed saw the role of a father primarily as being the breadwinner, as opposed to the nurturing role identified by desisters (Forste et al., 2009). None of the persisters in our study could draw from experiences of their own youth with stable and conventional father-and-son relationships (Purvis, 2013). This was problematic in the pursuit of wanting a family and becoming a good father, because they had no clear image of what it entails to be a good father and there were no 'scripts' available from which to enact this pro-social role (Rumgay, 2004). Yet, most desisters also had poor experiences with family and interpersonal relationships, which forced them to be creative and reformulate these scripts as they 'lived fatherhood'. In this context, the global identity of a father only provides a 'skeleton' script (Abelson, 1976) with just a glimpse of how this role must be performed, which may not be sufficient for the challenging circumstances of transitioning from prison to society. We suspect that the same can be said for conventional aspirations more generally: catch-phrase notions as 'house, bells and bliss' are not enough to trigger desistance, because they lack substance and a detailed and realistic blueprint for what this entails in the context of less conventional circumstances. Future longitudinal studies, particularly large-scale ones that aim to predict offending and desistance, should therefore work towards developing methods and measures to capture identity scripts and pathways, as opposed to values, a sense of self-worth and goals alone.

Findings of this study challenge some ideas of existing desistance theories that make a distinction between a criminal and a conventional identity (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The persistent offenders in this study seemed to have accepted a form of a criminal self that co-exists alongside other non-criminal identities, which illustrates the intricate ambivalence of having conventional aspirations while being engaged in (and in some cases, committed to) criminal activities. This study, then, proposes to more clearly distinguish between aspirations to quit crime on the one hand, and aspirations for a conventional life on the other, when studying processes of desistance. At the same time, our findings highlight the complexity of using subjective measures such as identity change to capture reintegration success and desistance. Subjective measures bring to the forefront the multifaceted nature of desistance, including any apparent contradictions between aspirations, values and behaviour. Yet, the meaning of conventional goals and discourse more generally is highly context-dependent. In particular, conventional 'talk' may be common as a response to criminal justice intervention, but frequently fail to translate into actual change given the interplay of a person's history, the impact of a sentence and many unforeseen obstacles and disappointments (see also Soyer, 2014). This brings up age-old and highly relevant questions including 'what are we really measuring?' and 'whose standards do we use to qualify something as an indicator of success or desistance?' and 'how do subjective measures of change relate to objective and persistent outcomes?'

The findings further illuminate the complexity of behaviour directed towards the achievement of goals and their role in continuing with or disengaging from crime. For the persistent offenders in our study, crime was not a goal in itself, but a means to an end. They were trying to attain culturally approved goals and expressed a desire to do so in a non-violent (and more socially acceptable) way, but most did not succeed by their own standards of success. Success was more likely, it appeared, for offenders who scaled down their goals and adapted them according to their (constantly changing) circumstances; in line with what Merton (1938) saw as 'ritualism'.

Nevertheless, offenders might hold different views of what is socially and morally acceptable in order to fulfil their goals. In particular, cultivating and dealing cannabis was not regarded as reprehensible by participants. This may be explained by the somewhat ambiguous moral and legal standing of cannabis growth and distribution in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, consumers can buy and use cannabis without legal repercussions (even though possession is still officially against the law) and so-called 'coffee shops' can sell cannabis to consumers in small quantities. Yet, the people who cultivate and sell cannabis to coffee shops are criminalised and subject to law enforcement; the supply of coffee shops therefore takes place through the 'back door' (Korf, 2008). Participants who were involved in this 'industry', viewed

it as a simple and harmless case of supply and demand, which provided them with a lucrative business opportunity. In addition, participants in our study viewed cultivating cannabis as a skill, an art to grow a good harvest and to be able to deliver (constant) quality. From this, offenders derived a sense of pride and self-worth that may be similar to the feelings non-offenders derive from conventional employment.

Strengths, limitations and implications

This longitudinal qualitative study has unpacked the forward-looking dimension of identity comprising aspirations and behavioural scripts, giving a critical insight into the conventional values, goals and roles of offenders convicted of serious offences, who had served relatively long prison sentences in the Netherlands. By doing so, the research is distinctive from previous qualitative studies that took a holistic approach to identity and makes concrete which elements are particularly important to consider, also in future quantitative research. The study benefited from a very good retention rate over three waves without prior selection of participants by a gatekeeper. A few limitations should be kept in mind.

First, our distinction between desisters and persisters relied on a binary categorisation of self-reported offending within a period of one year after release from prison. This is, admittedly, a rather simplistic conceptualisation of the complex construct 'desistance'. Given our sample size, it was not possible to say anything meaningful or reliable about the nature (e.g. frequency and severity) of offending in relation to the development of conventional aspirations and scripts. Yet, in this article, we have shed a light on the relationship between criminal behaviour and aspects of identity, which can be considered an element of desistance in itself (i.e. 'identity-desistance', see Nugent & Schinkel, 2016).

Secondly, our study touches not only on the process of desistance, but also on reintegration into society after release from prison. It is difficult to – conceptually and empirically – separate struggles associated with this transition from efforts to desist. It is likely that the transition process, as well as expectations associated with parole conditions, shaped aspirations to some extent. It would be worthwhile in further research to operationalise subjective and objective aspects of reintegration success and desistance and study them in relation to each other. Furthermore, since desistance is a gradual process, our one-year follow-up only sheds light on the early stages of desistance and future longitudinal studies should examine how conventional aspirations and, more importantly, conventional scripts evolve over longer periods of time.

Thirdly, the article focussed on the content and development of aspirations and scripts more than on the contextual or individual factors that could explain differences between people in the development of aspirations and scripts (although, where possible, we included this in our analysis). Given the qualitative nature of our

data and due to sample characteristics (i.e. fairly homogeneous), we were unable to say anything about correlations or predictors. We hope that our findings provide the impetus for further research, perhaps of a quantitative nature, to identify (1) the determinants of conventional scripts (rather than superficial aspirations) and (2) under what circumstances people choose criminal pathways to fulfil seemingly conventional aspirations. Here, it may be particularly relevant to consider a person's migrant and cultural background, to identify whether conventional aspirations and scripts have a cultural dimension (see Calverley, 2013, for important groundwork). Dominant cultural narratives about what is conventional may actually have an exclusionary or stigmatising effect if people deviate from norms, even within legal boundaries, or if they cannot meet societal standards of self-sufficiency. Similar considerations are relevant in relation to social class.

In light of our findings, we signal a need for practical support in the transition from prison to society. Currently, rehabilitation courses offered in (Dutch) prisons and by probation services focus on goal setting, cognitive skills and attitudes. Yet, the lives of (persisting and desisting) offenders are often infused with non-conventional experiences, so support in prison and on license should focus on helping offenders to formulate not just 'empty' universal goals, but positive life scripts needed to give real direction to their lives (Maruna & Ramsden, 2004). More concretely, this could consist of, for example, enabling parents in prison to invest in relationships with children and giving them support in these roles if needed. There are some promising initiatives, in the Netherlands and abroad, which try to facilitate this,[7] but they often depend heavily on volunteer and charity involvement and are not seen as a core aspect of reintegration efforts. It is important to recognise that scripts cannot be learned from the books, so offenders must be given opportunities to learn 'on the job', literally and figuratively. Naturally, scripts alone are not enough; many difficult life circumstances cannot simply be remedied by 'a little agency and planning'. Support and employment opportunities should not be reserved for people who have already proven their ability and motivation to behave according to conventional norms, as the transformative potential may in fact be greatest for the group of people who apparently struggle with this the most. Otherwise, we should not be surprised to find that the conventional social value of self-sufficiency is interpreted differently depending on the scripts and pathways that people have access to.

7 See for example: 'Ouder, Kinderen en Detentieprogramma' (Parent, Children and Imprisonment Programme), offered by Exodus (https://www.exodus.nl/okd).

WHO IS MILO?

Milo was 27 years old ("tomorrow 28!") at the time of the in-prison interview, was proud of his non-Western ethnic roots and was sentenced to five years in prison for an attempted manslaughter. He described himself as being ambitious, smart and someone who does not go looking for conflicts. Nevertheless, he had been arrested multiple times and the current sentence was his second long-term prison sentence, both for violent offenses. He grew up in criminal surroundings and had been criminally active since adolescence, mostly involved in drug-related crime.

Background

Milo was born the youngest in a family with six children. His father migrated to the Netherlands a few decades ago and by the time his mother joined him, five kids had already been born. Milo was the first and only one born in the Netherlands. He said he had always been on his own, and always been living alone. They were not allowed to speak Dutch at home (his father did not speak Dutch), they did not get any allowance and they took the occasional beating. Milo felt there were a lot of things he would do differently when he would become a father himself. At age 13, he started working on a farm, but soon he learned he could make a lot more money using other ways he learned on the streets: "By then, I knew that I was making 20 guilders a day and if suddenly you can make 100 guilders a day, yeah, you do the math. It's kind of a domino-effect."

Milo expressed clear ideas about what drove him (and other young boys) to spend so much time on the street: the age gap between his father and himself was too wide and made communication at home difficult: "So, what we [kids his generation] did: we went outside, to the street. And as long as you are outside, you automatically do the wrong things, because eventually you get bored. And when you start learning about making money… well, let's just say you are a long way from home." Milo hooked up with likeminded youngsters on the streets and got involved into fights and stealing. This evolved into dealing drugs which developed into maintaining his own drug network. Crime became part of his everyday life and it was hard for him to go back to a life without crime: "As soon as you earn more money than you can spend, you know it's hard to go back. You keep making excuses in your head, trying to justify your behaviour."

Milo got kicked off from multiple schools and had been to three elementary and three high schools growing up. According to him, he was an easy learner, yet he was a real troublemaker in the classroom, being too active: "I was rather on the streets than in class." In the end, he did finish an intermediate vocational education for plumbing from which he concluded he could be a brainiac if a wanted to. He even entered a national job contest where he finished third. Looking back on this time he reminisced: "Back then there were enough employers that said to me, if you're looking for a job, you can always come to me".

The death of his eldest brother in a car crash was considered to be the absolute low point in his life. His family turned very religious afterwards, which he could understand, because: "No one buries his own son. Everyone was personally affected by the situation, it was a turning point in our life." The consequence of this turning point, as Milo called it, was that he put his feelings away and did not talk about it: "Of course, you try to get some peace, but what do you do with it? Sorrow or grief will not do anything. He is not here anymore, and that's that." When Milo was 20 years old, he got arrested and convicted for the first time for an assault. He spent a year in prison (which he experienced as being really long) and after he got out, he expanded his drug dealing activities and stayed out of prison for a few years. When asked, he said that everyone in his hometown knew him and he is seen as a criminal. He himself did not feel he was a criminal:

> What is criminal? I see criminals being the burglars and robbers. I see this [dealing drugs] as another way of surviving. It's… yeah, you don't hurt people with it. At least, not how I see it. If someone is using drugs, he wants it himself right? If he doesn't get it from me, he will get is from someone else. [...] I have never caused someone pain in his life. Except for this man [victim of the current crime]. But that's a whole other story.

Milo's highpoint in this period was earning a certain amount of money, illustrating the value of attaining monetary aspirations. It was also during this time, he met his girlfriend whom he dated for a few years and before his next arrest, they were living together and it became serious. Acting on his lingering desire to educate himself, Milo took a 21+ test[8] at a higher vocational education institution and passed. He could enter a study in Economy starting in September, but in June of that same year, he was arrested.

8 Those who are 21 years or older and do not have the required prior education diplomas to enter a higher education institution, are given access when they successfully complete a so-called '21-test'.

Current imprisonment

Before Milo got arrested for the current crime, he was a fugitive for a month until he turned himself in at the police station. Thinking back, he vividly recalled how difficult it was to stay on the down low: You have to look over your shoulder all the time. You get really paranoid. They started observing me and my whereabouts, so I couldn't go anywhere anymore. Had to sleep somewhere else all the time. It became a nomads life." The crime he was warranted for was not drug related, but concerned an attempted manslaughter (first accused for attempted murder). His brother, who was also serving time in prison, was his accomplice. In court, Milo was sentenced to seven years in prison, but in appeal this downsized to five years.

Looking back, Milo said this prison term went fast, but acknowledged that maybe this was only possible to say in retrospect. The most difficult thing about imprisonment for him was to lose everything he had. At the start of imprisonment, he felt it being quite dramatic. He did not expect much from it though: "it's just doing time and leave. Of course it's tough, I am not going to lie. There were times I was lying awake, couldn't sleep. But yeah, you have to make the best of it, that's all you can do." It did feel less heavy than the first imprisonment, because he knew where he would end up, but he hastened to add that it would never get easy doing time, just more bearable. Milo had seen six or seven different correctional facilities during the current prison term and said he had never been sanctioned for violence, only for keeping cell phones. Furthermore, he emphasized he never accepted that prison was his 'house', like some prisoners do: "My thoughts are always on the outside. I'm on autopilot and I'm only concerned with things from outside. What happens inside, does not interest me." Reflecting on his motivation to participate in the study ("having a good conversation"), I asked him if he ever had a good conversation with someone in prison and he replied: "Never. It sounds weird, but I also did not feel like it. Maybe it will come, but I never asked and nobody ever asked me". He was able to keep his house and the relationship with his girlfriend about two years into his imprisonment, before he had to make an end to both. According to Milo, it is impossible to maintain a relationship in prison. He did not care much for visitors anymore. His ex-girlfriend visited every week and once in a while his parents and sisters would come until the relationship ended and his parents were spending longer periods abroad. Now near the end, phone calls were sufficient for him.

During his reintegration programme, he said it was obligated to enter a Choose for Change course and lifestyle training which he felt were 'useless'. Initially, he was also set up to enter an aggression regulation training, but according to him, this was then removed from his record by the probation offices and he did not have to do it. Aside from behavioural courses, Milo looked for reasons to leave his cell and committed to educating himself in prison as he successfully finished several courses.

Milo was technically eligible for the last step in his phased re-entry, being conditionally released with an ankle bracelet. However, since he had to report an address which was not located in his hometown (that was a restricted area for him because it was the city where the crime took place), Milo saw no other option than to finish his sentence, because everyone he knew lived in his hometown and he could not think of an address outside this area to stay. So he had no other option than to stay inside for a few more months, which also meant he would not be electronically monitored after these months. The lack of a suitable address also impeded opportunities to go on leave, so as a result, Milo had not been on any leaves during the 3.5 years in prison.

When I asked him if he thought he changed during this imprisonment, he mentioned a different way of looking at life. He appreciated more things than before and felt he became more mature: "Childhood is slowly fading away. Maybe it is because of me getting older, or maybe it has something to do with prison, I don't know. Your character does change. Yeah, there is a lot of patience here [prison], cause without patience you won't make it in here [prison]." Furthermore, he discovered that he lives an abnormal life, referring to the criminal lifestyle as "crime, the rush, kick, drama". Others think it's not normal, but he and others (meaning criminals) see it as normal and he could not really explain that. When prompted further, Milo admitted that growing up hearing how important it was to have money for your future went at the expense of school, which he kind of regretted: "Then, you don't think about what school represents, it's only until later that you will regret it. Yes, of course I would have rather stayed in school and get my diplomas. But yeah, [I] made some wrong choices."

Pre-release expectations

When asked about his in prison release preparations, he experienced it all to be a deception and pointed out that, despite all the courses they offer, he would be out on the streets again without any money. Social welfare would take at least two months before that was arranged, so he wondered what he was supposed to do in the meantime. He felt he was almost forced back into crime: "No one helps. If you say 'help', they all look the other way." He expressed a goal of starting a company of his own and admitted he thought about this idea a lot in the past: "I never acted on it out of a fear to fail. It would cost me, I would lose money, so I just distanced myself from the idea. The safest option was the road I was following already. That put food on the table."

After release, he was planning to live in the house of his parents for a while, because they were abroad, but he desired a place of his own. He felt it was too late to start studying, he felt he was too old for that now. Although Milo had bold aspirations, dreaming of building a holiday resort abroad, his slightly fatalistic outlook frequently rose to the surface, for example when he said about his future: "I don't want to do

what I did, but something else. Move into another direction, meet new people, a new life. A different life. I am now in a drag, a routine and once you are in, you will not get out. It is like a black hole." Although he expressed the desire for a different life, he also had doubts about having the right state of mind for a more conventional life when he disclosed that after release, he would pick up his old drug dealing business right where he left it:

> Unfortunately yes. Of course it's nice that it's there as a safety net, but it is no life anymore. Or at least, not the right life. But yeah, I have to do something. I can't wait two months for a salary or social benefits, that doesn't do anything. I can go to school or do some production work, but I don't want to do that till I am 60, please no. So the ambitions are there, just not the right one.

This fatalistic outlook that he was 'doomed to deviance' was enhanced by his belief that he had limited options to find employment given his record. More importantly, Milo himself was not a strong believer of second chances.

When asked to estimate the chance that he would be back in prison again, Milo firmly said that if he would return it would not be for a long-term again, but only for a short period: "Prison is, yeah, drug dealers get caught and released after two months. If you assault someone, you'll get five years! [...] So yeah, I won't make that stupid mistake again. That is what they taught me." When I asked him what he worried about the most, he replied:

> The future. It's still a bit blurry, I cannot envision it. Where will I be in 10 years from now? I don't care about 70 or 80 years, but in 10 years, how will I be? Will I be here [in prison] again? Will I, yeah. Somewhere else, married, children? Yeah, that's the question that haunts me.

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

As opposed to the scrawny Milo I met in prison, a 10 kilo heavier Milo opened the door when I met him a few months after release. He smiled and said: "I'm happy now and well-fed." He lived in his parents' house for a month or so after release and then moved in with his new girlfriend whom he already had known for 10 years, but only hooked up with after release. He was on the list for a house of his own, but needed to show paycheques of three months and those three months had not passed. Milo was smoking marijuana on a daily basis. He started early in the morning to simplify the process of getting up. He himself had no problem with his use, but his girlfriend preferred he used less.

In the first months out, Milo received social benefits and started working as a freelance plumber: "That was a difficult time. [...] If you work as a freelancer, you need to have some big clients otherwise you will not make it." He quit and applied for a job at a plumbing firm. He filled the gaps in his resume with work he had done in prison (such as construction work) and when he was invited within a few days for an interview, they did not ask anything about his past. He was hired and started working as a plumber, making long days leaving the house at 5.30 in the morning and returning at 5 PM. He slowly got used to getting up early in the morning and he enjoyed the degree of freedom and autonomy that came with the job. Still, he believed he was working beneath his level/ he felt he was capable of working at a higher level.

Milo was not electronically monitored, but had to check up with his parole officer every two weeks. Supervision was not really 'supervision', according to him: "You just go there, say hi, yes I'm fine. And then you leave again. That's it." Nevertheless, his parole officer made clear from the start he wanted to assist him in every way possible and Milo appreciated this, but it never resulted in anything concrete. He felt the role of the parole officer should start sooner, already in prison:

> They [parole officers] should visit you in prison. I had never seen a parole officer, yes one who came to write a report [on his conditional release], after that you never see them again. And then outside, you see them all the time. But outside, then it's done, then you are already outside, right? They should come inside, say things, help you with employment, housing, finances, everything, so yeah, you can't really say that the probation services is an organization that helps.

To show his motivation and avoid questions, Milo sometimes send a picture of him at work with a construction helmet on for in his file, then they leave him alone. Milo was not involved in criminal activity anymore and said he made the decision to "just go out and work". It felt better and gave him peace of mind, no fear and no anxiety. When I referred to our conversation in prison when he called his criminal life 'abnormal', he replied: "Yeah, maybe that's why I started a normal job now."

The relationship with his parents was strong and Milo saw them almost every day. His brother (the accomplice) was also out of prison and they were in touch occasionally: "we are not best friends, but we are also no enemies." Milo felt supported and motivated by his family and girlfriend and expressed high value for these family bonds. He had cut off ties with all his former friends and criminal networks and was mostly family focused.

The next step for Milo in achieving goals would be to start studying again and be a teacher, but he was not sure if he was eager enough and maybe this was the reason he did not start already. However, in five years from now he envisioned himself being a teacher, buying a house and having children.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

At our last encounter, Milo greeted me in his newly bought home and proudly started off with the big news he was about to be a father. He obtained a permanent position at the company he worked which enabled him to get a mortgage for a house to raise his family. Although he did not enjoy working there too much, he benefited from the goals he could achieve through this job: "I'm not going to lie and tell you I like it. Absolutely not. I would rather not work there, but yeah, you have to." He was excited to be a father and looking forward to his son being born. Since Milo did not have a good role model in his own father when he was young, he felt he had to 'invent' fatherhood for himself. Milo's social contacts were limited to his girlfriend and his family, those supported him during the past months. Milo still smoked marijuana and his use increased during the pregnancy as a way to retract at certain moments to contemplate all the changes occurring in his life. It was a lot to take in, but Milo felt happy and prosperous.

Milo was still under parole supervision, but had to attend check-ins once a month now. Sometimes, it would suffice to just make a phone call to his parole officer to say he is doing fine. These were rather short encounters. He had no problem with his parole officer, kind of even liked him, but he did not see the added value of parole. He even was convinced that if we would have continued crime, his parole officer would never have noticed it.

When I ask him what guided him to the road to desistance, he was convinced prison contributed to him being non-criminal: "Without prison I would still be on the old path." And he felt old now, having much more to lose and not wanting to take the risk to be incarcerated again: "You make a decision. Doing time is no problem, anyone can do time, that's why you're a man. It's about the damage around doing time, that is what counts." Although he gave credits to the prison system, he downplayed their role by pointing out that *they* didn't change him, *he* changed himself.

Future

A negative future in five years for Milo would be returning to prison ("horrible!") and failing as a father. He strived to do things right that went wrong in his own childhood. When thinking about a positive future, Milo was committed to finding another, better job in addition to his already present house, bells and bliss. After all, he bought a nice house, was involved in a good relationship and a soon to be father, so he felt he could now strive towards a higher level job. A job that would do him more justice.

CHAPTER 7

MANAGING RISK OR SUPPORTING DESISTANCE?▪

A longitudinal study on the nature and perceptions of parole supervision in the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Little is known about how ex-prisoners' parole supervision experiences support or hinder the process of desistance. The aim of this article is to analyse the nature of parole supervision of Dutch (ex-)long-term prisoners in terms of official conditions, as well as the way in which parole officers (POs) and ex-prisoners navigate these conditions. The focus is particularly on the supervision style (from PO and supervisee perspective) and how this interacts with different dimensions of efforts at desistance. 23 Dutch parolees were interviewed in depth at three waves starting in prison up to one year after their release from prison. A thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse the 69 interviews. In addition, the parole files of these ex-prisoners were examined containing information about conditions, violations and sanctions. Parole files revealed the practice of highly engaged parole officers, who worked with parolees to strengthen factors known to foster desistance and tried to accommodate the difficulties of navigating 'life outside' after a relatively long prison sentence. However, the interviews showed that most parolees found their parole experience predominantly surveillance-oriented and not very helpful for desistance. Parole was experienced as most beneficial when parole officers were viewed as social workers or mentors and used their discretionary power to adjust conditions creating 'space' for trial-and-error. This longitudinal study suggests that a policy culture and discourse of risk management do not necessarily preclude desistance support in parole supervision in the Netherlands, due to discretionary power of parole officers.

Keywords: parole, desistance , supervision style, re-entry, risk management

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Various scholars have advocated in favour of desistance-focused parole supervision (Farrall, Hunter, Sharpe & Calverley, 2014; McNeill & Weaver, 2010; McNeill, 2016a). Supervision should be aimed towards factors known to influence desistance: promoting a non-criminal lifestyle, strengthening pro-social bonds and 'knifing off' criminal networks, which could encourage individuals to move towards a non-criminal identity and a crime-free life (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001). In the most ideal form, the parolee and the supervising officer work together to pinpoint a person's strengths as well as the obstacles that could impede desistance (McNeill, 2003).

However, many scholars argue that the current focus of parole in the US and Europe is dominantly on crime-control and risk management instead of maintaining the original dual focus on rehabilitation and compliance (Garland, 2001; McNeill et al., 2009; Petersilia, 2003). This shift has been attributed to the 'new penology' (Feeley & Simon, 1992), in which the social dimension has become less important and more weight has been given to supervising officers' controlling tasks to monitor supervised individuals (Garland, 2001). Supervisees are being perceived as individuals at risk who need to be closely monitored, while at the same time they are increasingly held responsible for their own change (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). Such policies favouring more risk-based and surveillance approaches may contribute to attitudes that supervision can be 'passed' by simply 'turning up' and 'signing in' (Robinson & McNeill, 2008, p. 442). As a result, successful supervision outcomes (i.e. compliance, Bottoms, 2001) do not necessarily display real change.

Given this background, navigating between rehabilitation efforts and complying with more strict parole conditions seems a challenging task for parolees, especially when combined with the numerous re-entry challenges they face when leaving prison (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013; Petersilia, 2003). The aim of this article is to analyse the nature of parole supervision of Dutch (ex-)long-term prisoners in terms of official conditions, as well as the way in which parole officers (POs) and ex-prisoners navigate these conditions. The focus is particularly on the supervision style (from PO and parolee perspective) and how this interacts with different dimensions of efforts at desistance. We used parole files to get an indication of the PO perspective and longitudinal interview data of a sample of 23 Dutch men, who were released after relatively long-terms of imprisonment,[1] to gain an understanding

1 In the Netherlands, the large majority of prisoners (93%) is released within a year after entering prison. The remaining 7 percent is incarcerated for terms longer than one year (De Looff, Van de Haar, Valstar & Van Gemmert, 2017).

of the parolee perspective. The literature review, below, discusses the significance of parole supervision in relation to desistance, which is followed by a brief overview of the Dutch parole context.

Prior literature on parole supervision and desistance

An increasing number of people are under some form of supervision in the community; a phenomenon that has been termed 'mass supervision' (McNeill & Beyens, 2013). This includes people who are released on parole after serving a prison sentence. In 2016, the USA had approximately 870,000 individuals under parole supervision (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018), England and Wales 70,650 and the Netherlands 1,692 individuals (Aebi & Chopin, 2018). This population is known to have complex needs in relation to, for example, housing, employment, mental health and substance abuse (Farrall et al., 2014; Petersilia, 2003). Parole is aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending, but its relationship with desistance is complex and variable, and appears to partly depend on the relationship between parolees and their parole officers (Healy, 2012; Shapland & Bottoms, 2010).

Previous research on the experience of supervision has distinguished two different styles of supervision as perceived by individuals being subjected to it: a caseworker and a surveillance approach, oriented more towards rehabilitation and control, respectively (Ditton & Ford, 1994; Glaser, 1964; Haggerty & Ericson, 2006; Rhine, 1997; Seiter, 2002). While a caseworker approach focuses on assistance with problems and making efforts in order for supervised offenders to succeed in achieving goals, a surveillance approach is mainly aimed towards monitoring and crime-control. Supervising officers can also combine or switch between approaches if this is felt to be better suitable for the case in particular (Ditton & Ford, 1994) or adjust their approach based on how they perceive the risk of reoffending (Ricks, Eno Louden& Kennealy, 2016). Previous research on the experiences of supervision suggests that supervisees perceive a casework style as more beneficial to their process of change and that parole officers can facilitate offenders in their efforts to desist from crime (Farrall et al., 2014). Overall, supervisees appreciate the provision of practical help, moral support, and a good relationship with their PO, which includes consistency in seeing the same PO, being listened to, being recognised as an individual and being motivated and encouraged to solve problems on the road to desistance (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; King, 2013; Leibrich, 1993; McNeill, 2009,: Rex, 1999; Schinkel, 2014; Shapland & Bottoms, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Yahner, Visher & Solomon, 2008). The impact of parole, therefore, may depend on building a reciprocal relationship between supervisees and their PO which heightens 'commitment to desistance' (Healy, 2012, p. 388).

However, supervision can also be perceived as a more punitive experience for individuals subjected to it, which is particularly related to forms of intensive supervision (frequent check-ins and home visits) and the rise of 'new surveillance' technologies such as profiling, drug tests and electronic monitoring (Lyon, 1994; McCahill & Finn, 2012). Parole supervision in general, and intensive supervision in particular, can amplify the fear of being sent back to prison in case of violation after short and longer terms of imprisonment (Liem, 2016; Munn, 2011). Other examples of so-called 'pains of probation' (Durnescu, 2011) are: deprivation of time and autonomy in the case of frequent check-ins, being obligated as part of the conditions to share information about income, the threat of (re-)imprisonment, intrusive home visits, feelings of stigmatisation due to the ankle bracelet and feelings of isolation because of banning orders from certain places, people and situations (Durnescu, 2011; Hayes, 2015; McCahill & Finn, 2012; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016; Opsal, 2009; Payne & Gainey, 1998). These aspects of supervision can make supervisees feel like they are being 'processed' or managed (Leibrich, 1993) and may hinder attempts at establishing a non-offender identity for those trying to desist. Moreover, these aspects could play a role in a 'parolee performance' of maintaining distance or deceiving their PO in order to simulate compliance (Irwin, 1970).

Nonetheless, some research also suggests that surveillance-based practices such as curfews and electronic monitoring contributes to desistance by removing offenders from criminal networks or places, which decreases anti-social capital, and creates opportunities to (re)connect with family and establish ties to legitimate employment (Hucklesby, 2008; Vanhaelemeesch, Vander Beken & Vandevelde, 2014).

The present study seeks to further illuminate the way in which official parole conditions and the interaction between the parole officer and parolee are experienced in the context of different dimensions of desistance. It will be explored whether different types of conditions and supervision styles (caseworker and surveillance) can be distinguished and to what extent they are seen to contribute to desistance (or possibly, to offending).

Scholars use a variety of definitions to define desistance. For a prolonged period of time, desistance has been defined in terms of the absence of criminal behaviour or the cessation of offending in criminal career research (Blumstein et al., 1986; Bushway et al., 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993). In the past decades, desistance has also been studied as a complex process in which identity change seems to play an important role (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002;Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009. We are especially interested in parolees' self-reported struggles and achievements related to supervision and the desistance process, and therefore examine supervision experiences in relation to the different dimensions of desistance as distinguished by Nugent and Schinkel (2016): act-desistance, identity desistance

and relational desistance. Act-desistance refers to the plain state of non-offending (no recidivism) while identity desistance includes a shift to embracing a pro-social identity, such as a family man, a good parent or a 'worker' (LeBel et al., 2008; Opsal, 2012) which helps individuals to move away from their identity as an offender. 'Hooks for change' such as employment and family can serve as an avenue to craft these (new) roles or identities as they provide meaning, a sense of purpose and an opportunity to present a changed self (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Opsal, 2012). Finally, relational desistance denotes another important dimension of desistance: others recognising a person's change.[2] Note that these dimensions of desistance are not mutually exclusive and are not necessarily ordered in a specific way.

Previous research in this area has tended to rely on parolees who were invited by their POs to participate in the study, were committed to desist, eventually desisted or were seen as successful in their supervision endeavours (see for example Hayes, 2015; Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; King, 2013; Leibrich, 1993; Rex, 1999; Schinkel, 2014). Therefore, current knowledge is primarily based on selective and more successful samples of parolees/probationers. A strength of the present study is that men were approached while in prison, and, therefore, included both men who were committed to desist and eventually desisted, and men who were not committed to desist and who continued with crime. Furthermore, by analysing parole files in addition to qualitative interview data, we were able to compare the official case files, which document the PO's perspective, with the experiences of parolees. It is also important to consider the national context in which the research was conducted. Compared with the USA, the Netherlands are known for having relatively short-term sentences, one of the lowest prison populations in Europe with 53 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants (Aebi, Tiago & Burghardt, 2016) and a more developed welfare system. Nevertheless, also in the Dutch mild penal climate it is possible to identify a trend towards greater surveillance of the population of ex-prisoners (Boone, 2016).

'To a safer society': Parole in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Public Prosecution Service (OM) officially imposes the conditions tied to prisoners' release;[3] then, the Dutch Prison Service gives the task of the actual supervision and support of these parolees to the Probation Service (*Reclassering*) (Boone & Beckmann, 2017; Flight, Nauta & Terpstra, 2011). The

2 McNeill (2016b) recently called this form 'tertiary desistance' in addition to primary desistance (non-offending) and secondary desistance (identity change).

3 According to the Conditional Release Act of 1 July 2008 prisoners who served two thirds of their imposed sentence are eligible for a conditional release under supervision with the general condition of not committing a new offense and additionally more specific, individually tailored conditions, such as drug tests and rehabilitative courses.

Probation Service professionalised its supervision task in 2010 with a project named 'Redesign Supervision' (*Redesign Toezicht*) which was focused on two main tasks: surveillance (control) and support (Boone, 2016). However, surveillance tasks for parole officers are described in much more detail than support, and findings from an evaluation study of this project pointed out that more attention should be paid to clear descriptions of supporting tasks and instructions on how to combine these tasks (Plaisier & Pennekamp, 2009). It was also suggested that supervision could be more effective if the role of the parole officer as a 'broker' could be expanded to a 'change agent', emphasising the impact of the relationship between the parolee and PO.

Each year, approximately 1,000 individuals are conditionally released which is 2.5 percent of all released prisoners (De Looff et al., 2017). This low percentage is mostly due to the fact that in the Netherlands only prisoners with a minimum sentence of one year are eligible for conditional release. The average number of specific conditions tied to release went up from 2.5 in 2012 to 3.5 in 2016 and these were imposed in 70 percent of the cases (De Looff et al., 2017). The number of *requests* for revocations as a result of violating conditions more than doubled from 95 in 2012 to 211 in 2013 and then decreased to 178 in 2015 (Boone & Beckmann, 2017; Public Prosecution Service, 2017). The number of *actual* revocations (fully or partially) appeared to have slightly increased in the period 2012–2014. While formal policy stipulates that violations of conditions are followed by an official response, little is known yet about how parole officers respond to violations and to what extent their discretionary power shapes informal reactions to violations (Boone & Beckmann, 2017).

7.2 METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to analyze the nature of parole supervision in the Netherlands and focuses on the supervision style and how parolees and POs navigate the conditions of their release during the transition from prison to society. Findings of the current study are therefore based on two primary data sources to include different perspectives: (a) 69 interviews were carried out as a sub-study of the Prison Project to get an insight into parolees' experiences and (b) parole case files were analyzed for the PO perspective. In addition, criminal records were consulted to explore if self-reported offending came to the attention of the criminal justice system. Data triangulation in parole research can be of added value in unravelling inconsistencies and offering additional understanding from another data source (Bauwens, 2010).

Interview data Prison Project

As part of a larger endeavour to study the consequences of imprisonment, longitudinal interview data were collected over three waves to gain insight into the subjective experience of supervision in a Dutch sample of (ex-)prisoners. The larger Prison Project was approved by an Ethical Commission and targeted men, born in the Netherlands and aged 18-65 (Dirkzwager et al., 2018). In addition to these criteria, this project also focused on men who (a) were imprisoned for a – to Dutch standards – relatively long time, i.e. between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release,[4] (b) were convicted for a criminal offence (not on appeal), (c) were not in a facility for 'revolving door' offenders, detained under hospital order or in a minimum security prison, and (d) were not convicted for a sex offence (see also Doekhie, Dirkzwager & Nieuwbeerta, 2017).[5] The Dutch Prison service provided a list of all men across the country fitting the eligibility criteria with already set (expected) release dates in the period September 2014 – September 2016. At that time, the list contained 84 men and during the first interview wave in October 2015, 44 were approached in prison in person by the first author. In a separate room where no staff members were present, they were informed about the study and received an information leaflet. Also, it was clarified that participation was voluntary and the decision to participate or not would not have any consequences for their sentence. After ensuring confidentiality, most prisoners (n=36) agreed to participate and the (on average) 1.5 hour interview was held individually in a private room. Eight interviews were excluded afterwards because they did not meet the inclusion criteria after all,[6] which resulted in 28 participants in the first wave (T1). Three months (T2) and a year after release (T3) all men were located using contact information gathered at the previous interview(s) or with help from the Dutch Probation Service. In total, 23 men consented to participate in both follow-up interviews resulting in a total of 69 interviews.[7] Locations of both post-release interviews were by default at the parolee's home or the assisted living facilities where they were staying (30%), unless they preferred to be interviewed at an alternative location including public areas (37%) and private rooms at the supervision office (13%). Some interviews were carried out in prison if they had returned (20%).

4 Sentence length was between 3 and 5 years.

5 In the Prison Project, the majority of participants had a short prison term so only four participants interviewed in the period November 2013 – July 2014 were part of the original Prison Project and extra participants were recruited

6 For two respondents we discovered that they were convicted for a sex offence after all, two respondents received another sentence while imprisoned, which meant they would not be released any time soon and therefore had to be excluded. One prisoner was detained for a shorter time than we initially thought and three prisoners were still in appeal.

7 Interview schedules can be obtained from the first author.

All interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper and as a token of gratitude; participants received € 10 cash after completing the interview. The men were on average 27 years of age (range 21–53) and had been serving sentences between 30 and 66 months. The average time spent in prison at the time of release was 38 months. The average anticipated length of supervision upon release was 20 months (range 12-26 months). Table 7.1 presents some descriptives of the sample.

Table 7.1. *Descriptives of parolees in this study (N=23)*

Alias	Age	Offence type	Partner T1	Partner T2	Partner T3	Employment T2[8]	Employment T3
Ab	25-29	Robbery	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Casper	35-39	Kidnapping, extortion	No	No	No	No	No
Dave	20-24	Robbery	No	No	No	Formal	Formal
Leon	20-24	Robbery	No	No	Yes	No	No
Peter	50-54	Fraud	Yes	Yes	No	Formal	Formal
Tom	30-34	Robbery	Yes	Yes	No	Formal	No
Tony	20-24	Robbery	No	No	No	No	Informal & illegal
Bart	20-24	Robbery	Yes	No	No	No	No
Chris	25-29	Robbery	No	No	Yes	No	Formal
Isaac	30-34	Robbery	No	No	No	No	No
Jack	25-29	Robbery	No	No	No	Informal	Informal
Martin	20-24	Robbery	Yes	No	No	No	No
Milo	25-29	Attempted manslaughter	No	Yes	Yes	Formal	Formal
Nathan	20-24	Robbery	No	No	No	Formal	Formal
Oscar	20-24	Robbery	No	No	Yes	No	No
Pascal	30-34	Robbery	No	No	Yes	No	Formal
Roy	25-29	Robbery	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Rudy	30-34	Robbery	No	No	No	No	No
Sam	20-24	Robbery	No	Yes	Yes	Education	Formal
Simon	20-24	Robbery	Yes	Yes	No	Formal	No
Vince	25-29	Burglary	No	No	Yes	Informal	Informal
Wessel	20-24	Attempted manslaughter	No	No	No	No	No
Xavier	20-24	Robbery	No	No	No	Education	Education

Although the semi-structured interview protocol included a broad range of topics, including the experience of imprisonment, motivation to desist and re-entry challenges, for this paper we were interested in how participants experienced

8 Working outside the formal economy, but not engaged in activities violating criminal law, was referred to as informal employment.

their supervision and relationship with their PO, and additional conditions, such as the curfews, location bans, orders to stay away from certain people (victims, co-offenders) and the use of electronic monitoring. The current analysis was focused on questions such as 'How do you feel about being supervised in your conditional release period?' asking about their experiences with complying with the rules, but also if they felt assisted by their PO in the process. These topics were present in all three interview waves (even in the first in-prison interview concerning expectations regarding supervision) and allowed us to gain insight into the lived experiences of supervision during the first year after release.

A thematic analysis was undertaken to analyze the longitudinal data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews of all three waves (a total of 69 interviews) were given codes of all topics concerning re-entry and desistance. Atlas.ti facilitated the process of data management and analysis. Figure 7.1 displays the thematic map of codes used across three waves, showing how the different dimensions of desistance were interpreted. For example, we explored identity desistance with fragments about, for example, *trying to be* a non-criminal, a non-drug user, a family man (good father, caring partner), a son or a 'worker' (LeBel et al., 2008; Opsal, 2012). We looked not just for the intention or desire to connect to such roles, but also for actively taking steps towards a pro-social identity, for example by signing up for drug treatment voluntarily, attending parent teacher meetings at school, going to job interviews or even cooking regularly at home for parents. When participants mentioned receiving support and appreciation from parents, partner, friends or from the parole officer in their efforts to go straight or how they fulfilled a new role, we identified this as relational desistance. In line with Nugent and Schinkel (2016), we did not assume a temporal ordering of the different dimensions.

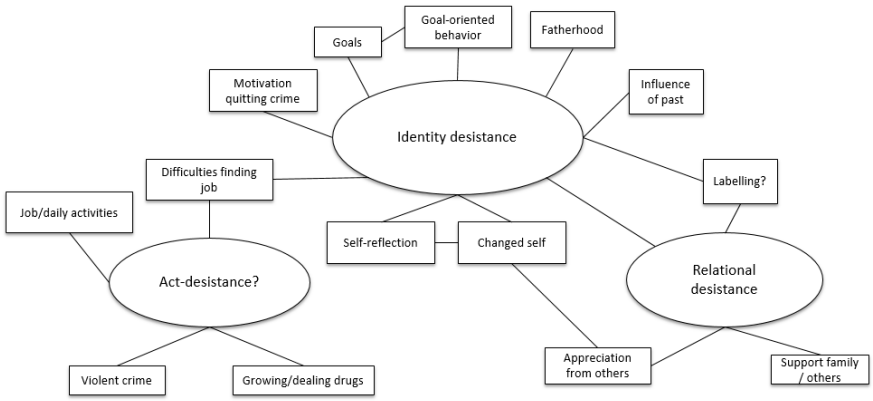

Figure 7.1 Thematic map showing the used codes of three interview waves to identify different aspects of desistance.

To examine act-desistance, all participants were given a pseudonym to identify quotes and in addition also a label consisting of three letters (A, C, N) in different combinations. These labels refer to the act-desistance (self-reported and official non-offending) from pre-release up to a year after release. The first letter was derived from the pre-release interview, where participants' expectations for future criminal behaviour were classified into criminal (C), meaning continuing crime; non-criminal (N), meaning refraining from crime; or ambivalent (A), meaning unsure about continuing or refraining from crime. At the two follow-up interviews, behaviour was classified as criminal (C) or non-criminal (N).[9] When no criminal activities were reported and no official offending could be found on criminal records in the period of the two follow-up interviews, we categorised participants as 'desisters' (*n*=14) (combinations NNN, ANN and CNN) and as 'persisters' (*n*=9) when involvement in crime was self-reported in at least one of the two post-release interviews (combinations NCC, CCC, ACC, NNC and CCN).[10] Official offending in criminal records corresponded to self-reported offending, but contained less offending than what was self-reported by participants. We consulted the criminal records for the purpose of triangulation of the theoretical construct of act-desistance. This also allowed to support certain findings, for example, that some parolees were indeed involved in a form of 'game playing' (Braithwaite, 2003), as will be discussed later in this article.

Parole case files

The 23 parole files of the men in our sample were examined. These files contained information from the Prosecutorial Office about the imposed specific conditions, such as check-ins, participation in courses and electronic monitoring. In addition, information about violations and sanctions up to a year after conditional release were examined. Aside from data about missed check-ins and official warnings, parole files also offered us insight into the practice of POs since almost all of them reported extensively about their contact with the parolees: doubts with regard to a parolee's rehabilitation efforts, contemplations concerning tolerance for missteps and considerations whether or not to sanction violations.

9 The letter classification (A, C, N) from the first interview wave concerning the pre-release expectations has been done by three researchers separately. There was high agreement and a few doubtful cases were discussed after which accordance was reached. The second letter classification (C, N) of the three months after release interviews was also done by three researchers and was solely based on the presence or absence of criminal behaviour. The last letter classification was done by the principal researcher, and was also solely based on the presence or absence of criminal behaviour.

10 Even if there was no official offending on the criminal records. There were no occurrences of official offending on the records which was not reported in the interviews.

7.3 FINDINGS

Conditions of release: Surveillance or rehabilitation?

In this section, first the findings from examining the parole case files will be presented. Initially, 87 percent of the sample was initially placed at the most intensive level (high-risk) of supervision which entailed weekly check-ins. The frequency of check-ins decreased for all participants who were still under supervision a year after release.

Table 7.2 presents information from the case files on (the co-occurrence of) parolees' specific release conditions, sorted by the total number of conditions. Mandatory check-ins were part of the specific conditions in all cases (n=23). Participants also had to comply with other controlling conditions such as home confinement with curfews (n=13) and location bans, sometimes for multiple cities (n=11), both enforced by electronic monitoring. Although the imposed specific conditions revealed a focus on surveillance and monitoring, importance was also given to more rehabilitative conditions. Almost two thirds of the sample were ordered to undergo psychological treatment (n=14), which usually involved an assessment to determine if someone needed psychological help and in case they did, the provision of treatment. Various participants had to live in an assisted living facility as part of their reintegration (n=10), take part in behavioural or vocational courses (n=7) and a few had to undergo drug treatment (n=4). Surveillance and rehabilitative conditions were combined in almost all cases. Only two parolees had to comply exclusively with surveillance conditions and the far majority (83%) was subjected to three or more specific conditions.

The labels of the trajectories refer to the act-desistance (self-reported and official non-offending) from pre-release up to a year after release. The first letter was derived from the pre-release interview, where participants' expectations for future criminal behaviour were classified into criminal (C), meaning continuing crime; non-criminal (N), meaning refraining from crime; or ambivalent (A), meaning unsure about continuing or refraining from crime. At the two follow-up interviews, behaviour was classified as criminal (C) or non-criminal (N).

Table 7.2 *Specific release conditions of parolees in this study (sorted by the total number of conditions), their perceptions of the parole experience at T2 and T3 and their desistance trajectories (N=23).*

Alias	Check-ins	PT	HC	LB	ALF	DB	No contact order	Courses	DT	Other	Perception of parole by parolees T2	Perception of parole by parolees T3	Trajectory
Casper	x							x			Casework	Casework	ANN
Milo	x						x				Surveillance	Surveillance	CNN
Roy	x		x								Surveillance	Surveillance	CCC
Tom	x	x									Casework	Casework	NNC
Ab	x	x	x								Surveillance	In prison	CCC
Dave	x	x			x						Surveillance	Surveillance	NNN
Peter	x	x	x								Casework	No supervision	NNN
Simon	x				x					x	Surveillance	Surveillance	NNN
Tony	x	x						x			Surveillance	Surveillance	CCC
Nathan	x		x					x		x	Surveillance	Surveillance	NNN
Sam	x	x	x	x							Surveillance	Surveillance	NNN
Vince	x					x		x	x		Casework	Casework	ANN
Bart	x		x	x			x	x			Surveillance (P)	In prison	NCC
Pascal	x		x	x		x			x[11]		Surveillance	Casework	CNN
Rudy	x			x	x	x	x				Surveillance	Surveillance	CCN
Xavier	x	x			x	x		x			Casework	Casework	NNN
Wessel	x	x	x	x	x	x					Casework (P)	In prison	CCC
Chris	x	x	x	x	x					x	Casework	Casework	ANN
Martin	x	x	x	x			x			x	Surveillance	Surveillance (P)	ACC
Isaac	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			Casework	Casework	ANN
Jack	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		Surveillance (P)	Surveillance	NNN[12]
Leon	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	Surveillance (P)	Surveillance	CCC
Oscar	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	Casework	Casework	NNN

Note: PT= psychological treatment, HC= home confinement (with curfews and electronic monitoring), LB= location ban (with electronic monitoring), ALF= assisted living facility (sometimes with additional curfews), DB= drug ban/drug tests, DT= drug treatment. (P)= in prison at the time of the interview. When someone was back in prison at the time of the interview, they were asked about their experiences with parole supervision after release until they were imprisoned again.

11 Pascal only had to participate in drug treatment if he violated the specific condition of the drug ban.

12 Three months after release, Jack was in prison again for violating his license conditions, because he had no official registration address which was needed for the conditional release. We classified him as non-criminal (N) at all three waves, even though he was in prison at the time of the second interview.

With regard to violations of the conditions, ten men missed at least one, but usually multiple check-ins, eight men ignored a curfew at least once and five had at least one positive drug test (mostly for cannabis) or relapse.[13] Not all violations were sanctioned. Responses to violating specific conditions mostly consisted of an official warning or a reprimand,[14] while revocations were almost exclusively requested when a new crime was committed. A total of 30 sanctions (of 14 participants) could be found in the parole files: almost half of the sanctions were official warnings, a quarter concerned revocations of conditional release and a few were reprimands. A typical reason to give an official warning was to stress the importance of following the rules and allow for second (or final) chances if the parolee was perceived to be motivated and to have good intentions (see also Beyens & Persson, 2018). The following note of a PO is a good illustration of the deliberation of such a response:

> Given the motivation he shows to get his life back on track, the Probation Service advices to give Mr. [name parolee] an official warning which serves as a second chance in order to successfully finish his supervision and the programme at [name reintegration organization]. (Note from parole file Nathan)

Alternative responses from POs to unsanctioned violations included having a serious talk with the parolee and denying a request for minimising curfew hours in order to gain more freedom.

It is worth mentioning that, despite supervision literature pointing out a shift towards a surveillance approach (which is also reflected in the imposed conditions), the PO's *practice* in the far majority of the cases reflected a caseworker approach. Sometimes, this turned into a surveillance approach focused on monitoring and sustaining compliance when the parolee seemed reluctant to cooperate (see Maguire et al., 1996). Yet in general, POs mediated in problematic family situations, showed understanding for the impact of imprisonment and requested to slightly adjust curfew hours or location bans if they were thought to hinder reintegration opportunities. Parole files indicated that issues such as parolees getting used to

13 It was difficult to establish a total number of violations, because violations were not always exactly counted and documented (as opposed to sanctions). More often, notes in parole files stated that the parolee missed 'several' check-ins or failed 'multiple' drug tests. We could however, examine accurately how many parolees violated a specific conditions and if this was an incident or somewhat of a pattern (as opposed to knowing exactly how often).

14 A reprimand (written or verbal) is to make clear to the parolee that he reached a limit and to point out what the consequences can be if he continues this way. It is milder than an official warning; in the case of the latter, the Public Prosecution Service is also notified. In case of a serious violation, it is also possible to notify the PPS right away instead of giving an official warning.

freedom and practicing with aspects of pro-social life (such as taking a date out for dinner or visiting children in the restricted area) were seen as valuable by POs and were reasons to use their discretionary power to adjust conditions. Examples of POs calling credit bureaus to manage debts and assisting with administrative matters were also found. Furthermore, POs 'defended' parolees when they were being subjected to criticism from external organisations, such as job agencies. Illustrations of the above can be found in the following notes from POs found in the parole files:

> I agree that Mr. [name parolee] cannot always be relied upon with appointments, but I also think a lot is expected from him. He was in [prison] for a long time and right now, what he needs is an encouraging approach but the focus currently seems to be merely on keeping his appointments. (Note from parole file Martin)

> [Parolee] wanted to extend his curfew hours this weekend so he can take his girlfriend out for dinner. I gave him permission so he can practice with aspects of social life.
> (Note from parole file Pascal)

In sum, analyses of the case files of the participants yielded evidence of both a surveillance and a rehabilitative approach. On the one hand, a multitude of requirements characterised the conditional release of the current sample. Moreover, conditions indicated high levels of supervision intensity as a result of the nature of the offences combined with individual risk scores. On the other hand, notes from POs in the parole files suggested that they are understanding of the difficulty of meeting all these conditions and the trial-and-error nature of the desistance process. Violations of conditions were common, but often did not result in immediate revocation of release. Instead, alternative options were first deployed before official warnings were sent out.

Experiences of parole supervision

The parole experience as reported by participants was not in all cases consistent with the impression from the parole files. Three months (T2) and a year after release (T3), the parole experience of (more than) half of the sample (n=14 at T2 / n=11 at T3) could be characterised as being primarily focused on surveillance, while for others (n=9 at T2 / n=8 at T3) the supervision by the PO was perceived as engaged and supportive, resembling a caseworker approach. Most participants were consistent at both follow-up interviews in how they experienced their supervision (see Table 7.2). Only one participant shifted from experiencing his supervision as controlling

in the first months after release to more focused on his desistance process at the one year after release follow-up. Furthermore, perceptions of parole supervision did not necessarily seem to be related to the co-occurrence of conditions, nor to desistance. Table 7.2 shows for example that the four men who had to comply with two conditions were equally likely to characterize their supervision as surveillance-oriented (or caseworker-oriented) as the seven men who had to fulfil six or more conditions.

A distinction was often made by the parolees between the requirements officially imposed by 'the system' (surveillance), and the human element of the supervision: the interaction with the PO caseworker).

However, the human element in supervision did not automatically reflect a caseworker approach. In fact, only men who reported they felt their PO was supporting their journey in any way were assigned to the 'caseworker-group'. When supervision according to the parolees predominantly entailed the monitoring of their compliance to the strict conditions and the PO was just doing his or her job, with no perceived extra effort in their view, the reported supervision style was classified as surveillance. In this sense, the PO was seen more or less as a pawn of the system, for example: "I thought they would be able to help you more instead of you just attending check-ins and explain what you have been doing" (Sam, T3). Participants who experienced a surveillance approach were less positive about the parole experience although they usually described their PO as a nice person. They just did not find the supervision helpful in any way. For example at the in-prison interview, Tony (CCC) who was involved in crime from a young age, showed some insight into his deficits and his strengths when thinking of the future: "*My dream is to open my own garage. I can fix any vehicle that needs to be fixed. I don't have any papers, but I am creative. I know how to solve things and make money"* (T1). Then, three months after release, he said he'd expected more from his parole supervision towards his goal, yet he thought his PO officer was a nice person:

> JD: How is your parole officer?
> Tony: A *flex* chick, very relaxed and also honest.
>
> JD: What is the role of parole supervision?
> Tony: they don't really help. She [PO] also says I have to wait with jobs, because I have to finish this aggression regulation course. She says, this is court ordered so we have to do it. […] I think it would be really good if there was some help with finding ways to get through the day. Even a project [unpaid] to have ex-prisoners sweeping the streets after a night out. Just to keep busy, you know. Parole supervision is more of an information desk: you come in with a question and they give you information, but help… No. (T2)

At the final interview, Tony expressed frustration after a string of unsuccessful job interviews, including at garages:

> Tony: They want people with diplomas. Yeah well, I don't have one, but I am ten times more experienced than someone with papers. If I only got the chance to prove that…
>
> JD: And the role of your PO?
> Tony: She [PO] does arrange some things for me, if I can't come to a check-in for example. But I feel the things she does are not helping me. [...] If you really want the best for me, please help me to gain some work experience. At least then I can put something new on my resume, something that's real. (T3)

Tony's expectations about parole supervision entailed strengths-focused building of capital, particularly in the area of employment. He was aware of skills he had, but at the same time lacked the opportunity to employ them and expected help from his PO, especially considering his own efforts to find a job. His disappointment with the experience of parole supervision (and thus the qualification of 'surveillance-focused' approach) may partly be explained by unrealistic expectations about what a PO can achieve and is within the remit of supervision.

The perception of supervision as a caseworker approach was characterised by the following: (a) the use of discretion, for example to adjust conditions in order to accommodate personal situation and tolerating missteps. This aspect of the PO resembles Lipsky's (1980) notion of the street-level bureaucrat, who is a mediator of official requirements; (b) a PO being perceived as going above and beyond official duties to help a parolee. Here, the PO is viewed as a social worker and advocate, assisting in rehabilitation efforts; and (c) a PO as being very supportive, listening, offering guidance, confronting bad behaviour. Here, the PO is experienced as a mentor. Reactions illustrating the caseworker style included: "He supports me in every choice I make" (Xavier, T2), "She already put in more hours than she officially was allowed to arrange everything asap" (Casper, T3) and "He supports me, he helps me, he watches me" (Oscar, T2).

The parole experience and dimensions of desistance

In this section, it will be explored how supervisees navigated the release requirements and how this interacted with different dimensions of desistance. These dimensions of desistance are not mutually exclusive and are not necessarily ordered in a specific way. Thus, a person can report evidence of act desistance and relational desistance; only identity desistance; or any other combination of dimensions (including, of course, no form of desistance at all). More than half of the sample (n=14) were act-desisting

up to a year after release and the majority (n=16) mentioned some attempts at identity desistance in their interviews (even some men who were not act-desisting), for example as an employee, a parent, a loyal partner or a 'good' son. Half of the sample (n=11) reported some form of recognition and/or support coming from either significant others, their PO, or both. Finally, three men did not report on any of the dimensions at all. To clarify the ways in which the parole experience may help or hinder the desistance process as perceived by parolees, we analysed the reported experiences from pre-release up to a year after release in relation to the three dimensions of desistance.

Act-desistance

Two thirds of the men who reported a supervision experience resembling a caseworker approach were refraining from crime up to a year after release, while this was the case for half of the men who experienced supervision as surveillance-oriented (see Table 7.2 for offending across the three waves). The men who experienced a caseworker approach were generally positive about the (practical) help they received in their efforts to desist. The men who reported a supervision style that was classified as surveillance-oriented were less positive about their supervision experience, but nonetheless, for some of them act-desistance seemed to be facilitated through constrained or instrumental compliance (Bottoms, 2001). This compliance, then, was considered the best choice given rational calculations about the consequences of not adhering to the conditions (recall to prison). For example, Milo (CNN) made up his mind after release that he did not want to go back to prison and dealt with parole in the following way: 'Whatever they say, I just say "ok". I am not going to argue with them, they are my key to the outside world.' (T3)

The use of electronic devices to monitor curfews and location bans created an externally imposed structure emphasising routine and self-control, placing physical restrictions on parolees' conduct. The ankle bracelet was experienced as helpful in initial stages after release when it helped resistance of temptations, but became a hindrance when people were spending more months in society and were moving beyond this to establish new routines and relationships. For example, in prison, Sam (NNN) had mixed feelings about the upcoming tag ('I get an ankle bracelet like a dog' T1), but admitted to the positive effect it had on him three months after release when he was still unemployed:

> It provides some structure. I don't know what would have happened if I did not have the ankle bracelet. Maybe it would be the same, maybe not. (T2)

A year after release, Sam was full-time employed and reflected back on the past year of electronic monitoring:

> I think I needed it back then. Especially then, when I did not have a job, yeah. You don't do much all day. And inside your head, it's chaotic, you are just out, your social welfare has not been arranged, you have to get used to outside. Then it's a good thing you have a curfew and you have to be inside and all that. (T3)

However, he was still bound to the ankle bracelet a year after release and now felt it had lost its purpose and was nothing more than, literally, 'a burden to his leg.'

Although half of the parolees who said their parole experience was surveillance-oriented refrained from offending up to a year after release, the other half continued to offend. For them, surveillance-oriented conditions did not facilitate constrained nor instrumental compliance. The conditions were also easily 'cheated' and could even mask the disengagement from the supervision for some individuals continuing crime. A few parolees who continued crime described in the interviews how they were able to fool their PO and the criminal justice system in thinking they were doing well and refraining from offending, when they were actually back committing crime instead (but no official offending on criminal records). One of them got caught by the end of the research period which then revealed his criminal activities to the criminal justice system and the PO, while the others managed to hide it from the officials throughout the follow-up period. Frequent check-ins as part of intensive supervision may then offer the illusion of control and surveillance, but may in fact fail to uncover a form of deceit (Irwin, 1970) or 'game playing' (Braithwaite, 2003), which refers to having little respect for regulation and seeking ways to fool the system. For example, three months after release Martin (ACC) said:

> You have to give them that idea, or they are not going to leave you alone, you know what I mean? See, you have to step in here like you're a whole other person otherwise you are not going to make it, man.
> JD: Otherwise they are going to pay a lot of attention to you?
> Martin: Yes, a lot of attention. And you can tell them you want to work, but you also have to show it, you understand? So I go to a job interview and I really go, because they can verify it with GPS. And I take the business card along with me. I just give them the idea that I'm changed. (T2)

Martin's quote suggests that his parolee performance (Irwin, 1970) resembled the role of a reformed offender in the interactions with his PO; part of this role was a commitment to find a job.

Identity desistance

Many participants reported a real commitment to a worker identity, but also indicated that supervision requirements (mostly surveillance, but also rehabilitative) impeded identity desistance in several ways. First, on a practical level it stood in the way of exercising new roles, particularly in the area of employment, but also the building of relationships, which became more of a concern (and frustration, due to the constraining conditions) after participants had been released for a few months. Dave (NNN) had to visit his PO weekly during working hours and expressed frustration and fear with regard to his newly acquired role of worker:

> Every week, I have to take half a day off work to travel to [location of parole office] and report myself. Then it's a 10 minute talk about how you are doing and what you are doing at the moment. I say 'I work and everything is fine' and I am dismissed. (T2)

> Every week is the same. One time, I told her: no, I am not fine [...] I'm trying to get my life back in order, but you prevent me from doing so. You want me to come here [parole office], I have to leave my work for you. If I will be fired, don't be surprised if I end up on the wrong path again. (T3)

Dave's initial feelings with regard to supervision as being 'processed' (Leibrich, 1993) evolved into feelings of pessimism and fatalism when he was interviewed a year after release. The check-ins, psychological assessments and courses[15] all took place during working hours, which in his perception continuously limited chances of fulltime employment. In addition, location bans could block opportunities to re-establish social ties. Pascal's location ban, for example, successfully removed him from his old criminal network but also made it difficult for him to invest in the relationship with his ill mother who lived in the restricted area. Although feeling hindered in 'moving on', both Dave, Pascal and many other men did not resort to crime.

Secondly, the use of electronic monitoring to enforce conditions such as curfews and location bans could be a constant reminder of the offender identity, instigating feelings of stigma. For example, Oscar (NNN) who was being subjected to the ankle bracelet for over a year after release, talked about his constant awareness of 'the system' at the final interview:

15 Dave was assigned to live in an assisted living facility (see Table 7.2), but requested to live at his parents' house instead. His request was approved and in turn he had to participate in a few courses.

> Oscar: I know exactly what time I have to be inside and exactly when it has to be recharged, because they will call you within the next five minutes. The system is completely in my head.
> JD: Is it normal now?
> Oscar: No, certainly not! I got used to it, but I don't think it's normal. Because of the ankle bracelet, I am not free. (T3)

Also, feelings of constantly having to prove oneself attacked the non-offender identity some men worked hard to maintain. Xavier (NNN) felt the mandatory drug tests he had to take became humiliating and lost their monitoring purpose a while after release:

> After a while you think, is it really necessary? When in my case [after release], I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, in prison I didn't smoke, I didn't drink and now for over ten months you have seen I'm clean and it remains a constant. It is just a humiliation you know, constantly. (T3)

Although surveillance and rehabilitative parole conditions could be experienced as restrictive, sometimes the PO offered (practical) support further along the way and illustrated that a casework approach could be helpful in creating the necessary 'space' for clients to, aside from refraining from crime, also build their non-offender identity. For example, Pascal (CNN), who, in the pre-release interview, actually expected he would be involved in less serious crime after release, tried to adhere to the parole conditions and made attempts to live crime-free at the second and third interview. This was indeed a bumpy road as he had two major drug relapses after the first follow-up interview, but he confessed this immediately to his PO. Although it came as a surprise to his PO, she advised not to revoke his conditional release, because he had continuously showed motivation since release to set things straight.

> The Probation Service thinks that sending him [Pascal] back to prison will not have the desired effect. This is because he is getting more and more insight into the motives of his drugs use and he is cooperative to be treated psychologically. (Note from parole file Pascal).

> Pascal: I was really happy when I got another chance and did not have to go back to prison, it would be the same road when I would get out, so that's not a solution. But I got an official warning and it really opened my eyes […] I've had some nightmares about the crime I was in for. I wanted to talk to a psychologist and she [PO] arranged that for me. [...] And fortunately, I could also enter the course [drug treatment] I had to finish in the evening. (T3)

In contrast to experiencing parole as solely surveillance-oriented the first months after release, Pascal mentioned it to resemble a caseworker approach a year after release because of his PO creating an opportunity for him to continue to build his non-offender identity and present his changed self. This was done by assisting him with the things he needed and downgrading his supervision to a less intensive level in order for him to work full-time**.** Thus, although strict supervision conditions could hinder attempts to fulfil new roles in the area of employment and relationships, POs could help to shape ways of achieving identity desistance when they actively assisted parolees' efforts to change. This was more apparent in the one year follow-up interviews than shortly after release.

Relational desistance

Receiving some recognition for attempts to go straight was reported by 11 out of 23 men. Three of these men, however, did not mention the role of the PO in supporting their desistance journey, but only their family and/or partner as a source of recognition. For the other eight men, the contribution of supervision to their relational desistance stood out as the most positive theme in their interviews.[16] When POs affirmed parolees' efforts to desist, they were seen as supportive and as mentors. Isaac (ANN) illustrated this view when he said he believed his supervision officer was an important factor in his attempts to stay straight when he slowly started to experience the 'pain of goal failure' (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016): "Every step I took [since release] was a red sign. No one hired me for my passion and capacities because of my past. (T3)" Although Isaac had difficulties fulfilling the role of a good father and a worker (attempts at identity desistance), he still felt supported by his PO and managed to stay crime-free throughout the research period:

> Isaac: She [PO] is the only person who believed in me. […] She showed me she was not just a PO, but a person. And that's what is [important] to me, you know. You have to be able to forget your job sometimes and just experience it together with this person.
> JD: What did she mean to you?
> Isaac: She gave me confidence not to do stupid things. Because I will make it on my own, but it's hard to believe it yourself. You have a label, so relapsing is easy. Hanging in there is the hard part. And she motivated me 'don't blow it! Think about what you want and what you want is what you are going to do!' […] She says that the way I think [about myself], that is how I have to present myself in life, so I can move on. (T3)

16 Although most of these men did not have a partner, they did receive some support from family members aside from their PO.

Isaac's strong desire and movement towards desistance was recognised and appraised by his PO, which facilitated a process of pro-social labelling in line with the 'looking-glass self' as discussed by Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples (2004). Put differently, Isaac was able to view himself the way he believed his PO came to see him. She helped him gain confidence to maintain a crime-free life and verified the reformed pro-social identity of a non-offender he was working at (King, 2013; Stone et al., 2016). The role of the PO in contributing to relational desistance seemed even more salient given the limited contact with other people after release. Some participants (Isaac, Pascal, Xavier, Simon, Casper, Oscar) were 'knifing off' old criminal networks, but due to strict curfews and location bans, possibilities to (re)connect with non-criminal others were scarce. Some participants (Casper, Pascal) even lacked or had limited contact with their family and in their case the PO was the main contact with the world outside their home (see also Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). As a result, chances for recognition and praise for their attempts at desistance were low.

7.4. DISCUSSION

Our analysis of longitudinal interview data with Dutch parolees combined with their parole files and criminal records provided a number of key findings. First, release conditions for men returning to society after prison predominantly involved risk management conditions such as curfews and location bans, enforced by electronic monitoring. However, importance was also given to addressing criminogenic needs, reflected in the fact that a majority of parolees were subjected to psychological assessment and treatment and/or placement in assisted living facilities. The parole files suggested that most parole officers employed a caseworker approach and seemed to be committed, engaged and making efforts to assist with rehabilitation. This finding supports the argued inconsistency between discourse and the everyday practice of criminal justice workers as documented by scholars in the US and Europe (Lynch, 2000; McNeill et al., 2009; Phelps, 2011). Also among other criminal justice actors (such as correctional officers in prison) it has been found that their practice does not always match formal penal policy (Dirkzwager and Kruttschnitt, 2012). Furthermore, the way in which parole officers responded to violations was also suggestive of a rehabilitative approach, which resonates with recent comparative research carried out in several European countries concerning breach processes (Boone and Maguire, 2017).

Secondly, parolees' perceptions of their parole supervision did not necessarily correspond with the caseworker approach we had identified from the case files. Although the parole files suggested that most parole officers intended to employ a caseworker approach, half of the parolees perceived their officers' supervision style as oriented more towards surveillance, aimed at monitoring them and making little

effort to offer assistance (see also Opsal, 2009). In some ways, what we described as a caseworker approach could be characterised as defiance of controls imposed 'from above'. In the Netherlands, surveillance tasks for the supervising officers are described in much detail in manuals (Boone, 2016), but practice shows that POs have some 'space' (and creativity) in making decisions. This also illustrates the difficult position POs find themselves in handling discretionary power and balancing between supervision tasks in the context of the culture of control (Garland, 2001). While we found some negative attitudes about the ability of POs to help, parolees were not as unequivocally negative as reported in earlier research with (ex-)prisoners in the USA (Helfgott, 1997). These findings are in line with supervision literature describing these two approaches (Glaser, 1964; Haggerty & Ericson, 2006; Seiter, 2002; Rhine, 1997; Ditton & Ford, 1994).

To understand how supervision perceptions were associated with efforts at desistance, it was helpful to distinguish between the three dimensions of desistance outlined by Nugent and Schinkel (2016): act-desistance ("non-offending"), identity desistance ("internalisation of a non-offending identity") and relational desistance ("recognition of change by others"). Strict supervision requirements appeared unsuccessful in preventing future criminal behaviour (act-desistance) for parolees who continued crime immediately after release. Ironically, this 'illusion of control' may lead to an underestimation of risks (Robinson & McNeill, 2008). Nevertheless, some participants saw the benefits of electronic monitoring in the first chaotic months after release, for example through the provision of structure and guidance in daily activities. This finding is in line with some previous research done on electronically monitored individuals (as a stand-alone measure), which showed that curfew orders are linked to constraint-based compliance hereby reducing crime by 'knifing off' criminal networks and encouraging individuals to reconnect with pro-social bonds (Hucklesby, 2008; Vanhaelemeesch et al., 2014). However, strict supervision conditions such as check-ins, curfews and location bans were often felt to complicate efforts towards identity desistance by hindering chances of legitimate employment, (re)connecting with social ties and contributing to the experience of stigma, especially after the initial months after release. This could sometimes foster a pessimistic and fatalistic outlook, making desistance seem rather fragile (see also Halsey, Armstrong & Wright, 2016).

Finally, the men who reported that their PO's supervision style was caseworker-oriented tended to report more success with act, identity and relational desistance. Attempts at desistance tended to be supported when POs acted as mediators of requirements (similar to Lipsky's street-level bureaucrat, 1980), made serious and visible efforts to assist in rehabilitation goals and were supportive on a more emotional level. In line with previous research, these findings show that a positive relationship with the PO can have an important contribution to feelings of support and confidence in attempts at desistance, even when the parolee falls back into old behaviour.

A few limitations of the current study should be taken into consideration. First, the one-year follow-up period of the current study is too short to gain an understanding of the perceived long-term impact of supervision. Processes of desistance take time to unfold and it could be possible that the meaning parolees give to supervision is better examined when they have had more time to reflect and think about life events (Farrall & Calverley, 2006). In this context, it is known from previous research that the impact of the relationship between parole officer and parolee may not be experienced as substantial at first, but this can change over time – even after supervision has ended – when faced with life events and advice from the past suddenly seems to make sense (Farrall et al., 2014). Maybe parolees who described their supervision as surveillance-oriented, would in retrospect describe it as a caseworker approach after all. A second limitation is that no parole officers were interviewed about their supervision style; in order to get information about their perspective, we relied on (very detailed) notes, suggestions and remarks in the parole files. Thirdly, although our sample may be small, it overcomes some selectivity issues compared to samples used in previous research. And finally, in our analysis of the interviews we focused on the parole experience and the different dimensions of desistance. It did not focus on contextual or demographic factors that could explain differences between the experiences and desistance process. For example, for individuals with strong social networks or legitimate ties to the community, the impact of supervision conditions and style may be quite different than for individuals who have less social or community support.

Future research could further explore the discrepancy in perceptions of 'the system' and of the people operating within this system, particularly the parole officers. Different scholars have pointed out that due to the shift from rehabilitation to risk management, the Dutch Probation Service has lost its original identity (of social workers) and now struggles to establish a new one balancing both tasks of surveillance and support (Boone, 2016; Van der Laan, 2017). It could be the case that working on a pro-social identity is not only relevant for parolees, but also for the Probation Service if they want to increase the likelihood of accumulating psychological legitimacy in the eyes of those subjected to their supervision (Braithwaite, 2003).

McNeill (2003, p. 155) suggested to move towards a more desistance-focused supervision practice determined by the purpose of the intervention rather the offence precipitating it. The question arises what desistance-oriented supervision would look like. It has already been noted that, since desistance is a subjective and individualised process, parole should also be tailored as much as possible and pay attention to issues of identity (Weaver & McNeill, 2010). The present study yields evidence that POs in the Netherlands who supervise prisoners returning to society after a relatively long imprisonment, for the most part already take such an individual approach instead of solely relying on risk principles. Despite the strict surveillance conditions, POs seem to make efforts at supporting supervisees to a crime-free life rather than on reporting

them as soon as they violate one of these conditions. This seems in line with other research done on the impact of one-to-one interactions between supervising officers and the supervised individual, which illustrated the possible positive role of motivational and client-centred communications strategies (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson & Alexander, 2014; Viglione, Rudes & Taxman, 2017). This longitudinal study suggests that a policy culture and discourse of risk management do not necessarily preclude desistance support in parole supervision in the Netherlands, due to discretionary power of parole officers. However, parole supervision in the Netherlands can possibly be more desistance-focused by working with, and/or discovering of, the strengths of the parolee (McNeill, 2016a). One of the men in this study provided a compelling account of possibly 'missed chances' during supervision in recognising and extending his self-reported strengths. In this context, Lowenkamp et al. (2014) point out that the highest risk individuals probably need much more of a rehabilitative approach than is provided by most supervision systems. So there might be considerable potential in this area to improve parole supervision. That said, even well-intended interventions can be experienced as burdensome and counterproductive (Hayes, 2015; McNeill et al., 2009).

Yet, it does not suffice to have individual efforts from parolees and social support from significant others and supervisors; desistance also needs broader societal and political support in order to validate non-offender identities and full citizenship (Farrall, Bottoms & Shapland, 2010). POs can be helpful in keeping parolees motivated to surmount their problems and serve as a catalyst to implement the desire to desist in their lives (Healy, 2012), yet structural opportunities remain scarce. For example, creating support among employers to offer a second chance for ex-prisoners on the labour market can be a worthwhile endeavour. For the men in this study who did eventually find employment, these 'hooks for change' (Giordano et al., 2002) solidified their delicate non-offender identities and therefore seemed to support identity desistance. Although POs can serve as a social bridge, searching for suitable help or connecting the parolee to external agencies, the extent of their power to create opportunities remains limited. While POs may not be miracle workers, they can sometimes soften the impact of the bumpy road after release from prison.

LIFE STORY 6 PERSISTER 'GAME PLAYING'

WHO IS MARTIN?

Martin is a 21-year old guy with non-Western ethnic roots sentenced to four years in prison for an armed robbery. Before this sentence, he was arrested four times mostly for burglaries and drug dealing and he already spent several months in juvenile detention. When I came to visit him, he was quite surprised that he was called to come to one of the prison offices (and almost refused), saying: "no one has ever come to visit me, to help me". At the start of the in-prison interview, he couldn't answer the question to describe himself. When prompted further he mentioned: "I am not stupid. Yet every now and then I am involved in stupid things". Martin wasn't afraid to talk about his criminal activity and although he was still young, he came across as someone who knew little fear.

Background

Martin was the eldest of three children and recalled having moved a lot when he was young, but he had a good upbringing. The divorce of his parents was the low point in his life. He was around 10 years of age and his father left his mother with a large debt and he believed this was part of the reason he turned to crime. Although in another interview, he thought about if crime was just 'in him' and if his dad wouldn't have left them, he would have become involved in other types of crimes such as drug dealing. Anyway, from the time his parents got divorced, he felt burdened asking his mother for things and he wanted to be independent. However, he never worked a day in his life but instead got involved in criminal activities. Although his little brother and sister are living a conventional life, he mentioned to have a close connection to his little brother and sister. His little brother knows what he does, he even showed his gun to him, but Martin said his brother would never ever do the things that he does: "he doesn't have to. He can just finish school, he is interested in computers and will start an education in this field."

Martin was a troublemaker growing up. According to him, he could not sit still at school, was annoying and did not feel challenged at school. He could not handle authority, so he deliberately started to push his limits. He said he liked to provoke. He doesn't really recall his first real criminal activities, it was a gradual process. He always had quick hands and started stealing small stuff from people, he could make things disappear easily. Then he got into burglaries from residential homes which surprised him that it went so easy, and also that he didn't get arrested. He started dealing, and doing actually anything to make money. He smiled when asked what

crime was his specialty: burglaries, because he was small and could fit into anything and slide through everything. He got arrested a few times though for handling stolen goods and he got his first community service. When I asked him how his mom (whom he was living with) reacted to this he said she just thought it was small stuff and it went along with his age: "But she could never know that I would grew up in this, I would build on this. So in that sense I can't blame her." When he got home with new clothes, he lied and said he won with some gambling. When he was 14, 15 years old he got into a string of fights with a group of 9 boys. Just provoking other boys their age for fun. Looking back he said it did not make any sense. This was also the time he committed his first armed robbery. Together with an older boy who asked him to go along. He agreed, but the robbery failed, they panicked and ran away without any money. He remembered thinking by himself that this robbery was something totally different than stealing from people. They did not get caught for this attempted robbery.

At age 16, Martin got convicted to his first prison sentence and he was placed in a youth detention centre. This experience did not impress him, mainly because his partner in crime whom he got arrested with, had already spent eight months in juvi, so when Martin was placed on the same floor as him, he got accepted immediately because everyone knew his friend. He spent multiple prison terms in youth detention and he believed it was not really a punishment: "You are with kids your age, time flies, it didn't do anything for me. I did not come out worse and also not better than when I went in". He does admit he was always aggressive in youth detention, immediately throwing with plates or the microwave when there was an argument.

Cannabis also came to play a prominent role in his life starting incidentally at the age of 14 up to smoking hasj on a daily basis when he was 17. He smoked for € 10 a day (a gramme), which was not a lot according to him compared to his friends. He explained it gives him peace in his head and tempered his aggressive behaviour.

Current imprisonment

After the last prison term in the youth detention, he managed to stay out of prison for 8 months but was still engaged in crime. He strived to be financially independent and to find a wife, children and be able to build a family. After he was broadcasted on national TV with the message they were looking for him concerning an armed robbery, he was arrested again and although six years was demanded, he was sentenced to four years.

There was one word to describe his current prison experience: 'chaos'. Elaborating on this, he recalled a recent incident where they took his phone away. He got a punishment of 14 days [they take away your TV and everything and you have to stay in your cell all the time] and he had nothing to do, so he started counting all the times he got punished for these things. This totalled up to six months of punishment (out

of 40 months he was already in) which kind of shocked him. His incapability to deal with authority has a lot to do with him receiving so many punishment he thought. So now, near the end, he is trying to be more on the down low, not causing trouble. Martin is quite pessimistic about rehabilitation in prison. He came in when he was 18 and expected to receive more assistance, but according to him, he had seen his case manager only one time before she got pregnant and ever since he is waiting for someone else. He said he even complained and won, but still no case manager around. He said it is not in his nature to keep asking , waiting and expecting, so he just does his time: "For me, the two most important days in prison are the day you come in and the day you get out. Anything in between , it's all bullshit."

Martin participated in a rehabilitation programme where he finished a Cognitive Skills Training and a Choose for Change course. He laughed when asked about his opinion of these courses: "They ask me, do you want to change? I said I cannot answer that question, because my case has not been to trial yet. But still…I got my certificate! It doesn't make any sense." The Cognitive Skills Training does not teach you anything new, Martin said he thought about the course 0 times. He would have liked to get some assistance with housing after release. Martin has his own thoughts on what was wrong with the prison system, claiming that it is weird that only 'green' prisoners can go on leave, while 'red' prisoners are spending more time in their cells while they might be the prisoners with behavioural or even psychological problems. All Martin's requests to go on leave were rejected on the account of him being a 'notorious' repeat offender. Martin said he does not know what 'notorious' means.

When asked if he thought he changed since this prison spell, Martin pondered for a while and then explained he is now more interested in the story behind people. He used to have absolutely no interest in where people came from or how they got to be who they are now, but now he wants to know because he thinks he can learn from it. Who can set an example and who represents how he does not want to become: "I'm still young, I still have a whole life ahead of me. People of 40–50 years who are still in prison, I want to know why, you know? Because I don't want to be that person. At that age, either you've made it big or you've stopped. If you still don't have anything by then, then it's really bad."

With nothing to do all day (being red and in his cell a large part of the day) and a lot of cannabis being available in prison, his cannabis use increased rapidly during this prison spell. He said he quit for a while but he believed it was better to start again for it calms him down to smoke hasj and is also beneficial concerning his behaviour towards guards. Martin's mother visits him every two or three months and also for his little sister he wished not to see the prison all that often, so at his request they visit him every two or three months. However, weekly visits are done by friends from his neighbourhood mainly to supply him with cannabis and other things, but

also to catch up. Martin enjoyed all the visits, he indeed wanted to hear all about the stories from the outside world and have a good conversation with his father every now and then.

There was a negative advice to conditionally release Martin, because of his violent behaviour in prison and all the incidents during the past few years, but the court eventually approved his conditional release.

Pre-release expectations

Martin expressed concerns about meeting the conditions of his release. He acknowledged it would be "fucking" difficult to lay low, because he had to wear an ankle bracelet for 1,5 year, he was being supervised and he had regular urine checks for drugs. The latter was no problem according to him since he frequently resorted to fraud with urine samples in prison so he would continue this during release. He was mainly concerned about having to find employment, because he had not worked a day in his life and was not motivated to do so: "it is just not in me". So he knew he needed to refrain from crime for at least two years, yet he had no idea how he was going to pull this off. When talking a bit more about the future, Martin said he wanted to be financially independent and if this would be possible via a conventional job he was very interested. He also expressed a desire to leave crime as he grows older, stating he didn't envision himself being in crime in 10–15 years. Yet he was quite doubtful in prison about the future, this being illustrated by an example from him:

> My dad said you should go and be a driving instructor, that's the best you can do. I said to him, you are right! And then I checked and it appears you need a certificate of good conduct to be a driving instructor. And with my case now, It will take at least 5 years before I will get that certificate. And then what am I going to do in these 5 years to earn money? Even people with an education and diplomas have a difficult time finding a job, so then who am I? I don't have a diploma, I have nothing you know. I'd prefer to have a diploma, my own business, a wife, children and my mom being proud of me. That's is what matters. Now they just think… I will not have empty pockets though. But I just want them to be proud and give my mother some grandchildren, then I will be satisfied. I just have to lay low, behave myself, that's for the best. And maybe just go to school , you never know. It can happen, I think I will pass level 3 easy.

Before release, nothing was arranged for Martin in the context of rehabilitation. He was going to return to his mother without any prospect on a job, education or other meaningful daytime activities.

First months out – transitioning from prison to society

The day before Martin got released, they already connected him up to the electronic monitoring system. The next day, a friend picked him up at the prison where they first smoked a joint and then went to his mother. He had trouble finding her house, because she moved during his imprisonment. The parole officer was there before him and together with the local police officer (*wijkagent*) and someone from the municipality, they introduced the conditions of his release. The man from the municipality mentioned to have a lot of job opportunities for him and Martin started his act and replied he would grab anything with both hands.

From the day he got out, Martin said he did everything in his power to give his parole officer the idea that he changed. He spoke well about his parole officer, he liked her and said she was 'relaxed', but he wanted to give her the impression that he was doing his best to try and live a conventional life. Since release, he got some certificates, but according to him there was no work in this field. Yet, he went to job interviews, he showed contact cards from employment agencies and he attempted to mislead the psychologist he had to see as part of his conditions. But in fact, Martin was indeed involved in criminal activity, but only with regard to people who were also involved in the criminal milieu, such as ripping dealers or dealing. He had to be careful, because of the GPS tracking device on his ankle bracelet which they used to monitor his whereabouts. The double life he was living was also reflected in his belief about making your own choices: "Everything is predetermined. You have some choices, but it in the end it is determined".

The time ban on his ankle bracelet meant he had to be at home before 9 PM and he was not allowed to go within the area of his old home town. This resulted in problems when he had to travel to the probation office for his weekly check-ins, because he more or less had to go through the forbidden area if he did not go by car. He brought up this issue and eventually they changed the restricted area so he could travel to the big city. He experienced the ankle bracelet as restricting his freedom in daily life, but he was determined to not let it have that effect. When people asked about it, he spoke open and because he knew that he was a criminal, he did not care what people would think about him when they would see the device around his ankle. Martin said he got used to life outside prison pretty quickly. He expected it to be quite hard, because he recalled how he had experienced the first time he was released after a prison sentence, thinking his cell door was opened every time he heard a set of keys. Him adjusting easily meant to him that prison did not affect him, only his family. Of course, he did experience problems dealing with practical issues concerning his financials, requesting social benefits and other paperwork.

Process of reintegration – a year after release

In the period after the last interview, Martin worked for four days. When his mask needed for the job was lost and he thought he did not got paid sufficiently, he quit. Throughout the interviews, he kept saying things are not within reach for him or weren't in his hands, implying he did not feel in control of his own life. About finding a conventional job his thoughts were quite …"

> It is not for me, otherwise I would have started it a long time ago. It's easy to find a job that's pays 15–1,600 euro, but I don't want it. I have friends who did it and in the end they ended up in crime anyway, because eventually it will break you. Everyday getting up at 5 o clock, working until I don\'t know what time. It doesn't work for me.
> JD: Can you imagine the value of money changing when you work?
> Martin: Of course! Cause you put in long hours, your body feels you've battled for the money. Then of course the money has more value and you will spend it less quickly. But yeah… that's not for me.

Martin had to adhere to weekly checkups alternating between the police and his parole officer which went well. After a while, his ankle bracelet was removed and according to him there was no obligation that he had to work. From his parole officer there were no questions on how he got by and how he made ends meet, which was quite strange because he was struggling with debts.

After that he derived money from rip deals and at the time of the third interview, I learned that Martin was re-incarcerated again for a new crime which was a rip deal and he got caught in the middle of the act. Aside from the crime he was arrested for, he revealed another serious crime since our last interview which he had not been caught for. Although he was not afraid, he did realise this was something else than what he had been doing up until now.

Being imprisoned again did not seem to affect Martin in any way. He did not think prison is all that bad. Of course, his parents were sad, and you lose time and your freedom. But he knew he would get out eventually: "you just have to accept what you've done and do your time. Period. And don't stand there and cry like a baby." He recognized that with his criminal lifestyle "he served life", always being in and out of prison as his future perspective. When asked how he thought he changed as a person, he mentioned to have gotten smarter as a criminal and admitted he also learned from other criminals in prison: "people from The Hague are known for their good burglary skills."

His cannabis use continued in prison and the frequency depended on what was available in prison, he admitted that the more he was able to smuggle in, the more he used: "It depends on how much you get in. It is not always in your control. For example,

if I get seven grammes in, I just smoke a gramme a day until my next visitation. If it's less, you smoke half a gramme. But yeah.. if it's 20 grammes…. You'll smoke a lot more." He still resorted to fraud with urine sample to try and avoid punishment.

Future

Although Martin was facing a new sentence, thinking about a positive future he envisioned himself with a partner, child and house. The ideal would be if his future partner knows what he does from the start and accepts his criminal life, because it would be hard if she doesn't. In the case she would have issues and had enough of it, he thought he would tell her that he would quit, but then continue his criminal activities behind her back. Because he cannot really envision a life without crime. He would rather not be involved in 'active' crimes anymore at a certain age, such as burglaries and robberies, but instead have a good harvest six times a year and deliver to the coffee shops. And maybe some transport involving hard drugs. In that case he would not transport it himself, but he would finance it. He said he is always committed to using the lowest amount of violence needed for the job, but when he had to use it, it is only instrumental to getting access to money. It is never his intention to hurt people and he said he is aware on the impact it has on people when someone with a gun is in your house asking for money. A negative future was one where he would be the reasons his family gets hurt. But if that were to happen, he mentioned to kill that person anyway, no matter what the consequences are.

When talking about boundaries concerning crime, Martin said he will not involve the elderly, because they are "about to die" and why would you take their last pennies. He pondered a while and said he would not kill someone for 50,000 euro. When I asked him if he would do it for a million, his reply was:

> I would think about it, but you know, people nowadays kill someone for 15,000 euro! So that million that you are talking about… that doesn't even get offered anymore. And that is too low, that's not worth it.
> JD: What's not worth it?
> Martin: It's not worth a life. That person also has family. While, killing someone… is actually the easiest thing you can do. You follow someone and you pull a trigger. It doesn't involve any skills. Effort-wise, it's the easiest crime of all.

CHAPTER 8
GENERAL DISCUSSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Desistance research has expanded rapidly in the last decades. In the past, many influential studies in life-course criminology and criminal career research have contributed a great deal to understanding why and how some offenders quit crime and others do not (Blumstein et al., 1986; Bushway et al., 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Desistance was often viewed as the absence of criminal behaviour and it was predominantly explained by external social factors and life events fostering change. A growing number of scholars, however, is studying desistance as a process that supports the eventual termination of offending (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001). These scholars have argued that desistance is more than solely the absence of criminal behaviour and that desistance is also explained by more individual factors, such as cognitive shifts and developing a new sense of identity (Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

For quite some time, research focused on getting grip on when someone had truly desisted or, in other words, had completely disengaged from crime and adopted a non-offending identity. This is referred to as the 'end station', *secondary* or *identity desistance*. Such secondary desistance generally follows a period of non-offending, referred to as *primary* or *act-desistance* (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). More recently, a third dimension of desistance was proposed: *tertiary* or *relational desistance* (McNeill, 2016b; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), referring to support from others in someone's effort to go straight appealing to a sense of belonging. This dimension views desistance as a social process in which change is 'negotiated' by interaction of the offender with significant others (Shover, 1996). Support can be experienced from both formal and informal social controls, such as partner, parents, the criminal justice system and the wider (formal) society. So, different existing frameworks are helpful to study desistance as a process: (a) primary, secondary, and tertiary desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2016b), and (b) act-, identity- and relational desistance (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). While the former one assumes a temporal ordering of the different dimensions of desistance, meaning each phase is followed by the next, the latter framework questions this sequencing in time implying that each dimension can progress on its own and in its own pace.

The two frameworks have the notion in common that the process of desistance seems to entail different dimensions: non-offending, identity change, and support from others in attempts to quit crime.

Although the desistance process can be seen as a highly individualized pathway belonging to the individual, criminal justice policy and practice play a role in the process of reintegration for individuals returning from prison to society. Some scholars have for example advocated in favour of desistance-focused parole supervision referring to practice aimed towards factors presumed to impact desistance: promoting a non-criminal lifestyle, strengthening pro-social bonds and 'knifing off' criminal networks, which could encourage individuals to move towards a non-criminal identity and a crime-free life (Farrall et al., 2014; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; McNeill & Weaver, 2010; McNeill, 2016a). In light of the shift to a predominantly risk-based policy culture and the fact that an increasing number of people are under some form of supervision in the community – a phenomenon that has been termed 'mass supervision' (McNeill & Beyens, 2013) – it seems a worthwhile effort to extend knowledge of how supervision practice may support or hinder the process of change.

While desistance theories have become more prominent in the criminological literature and many empirical studies have provided valuable information on the desistance process, important questions remain unanswered. For example about how the desistance process unfolds over time, what can be viewed as identity, which aspects of identity may be important for desistance, and how parole supervision for released prisoners can contribute to these dimensions of desistance. Expanding knowledge on desistance, and factors associated with it, among individuals making the transition from prison to society is highly relevant given that crime is still a major problem in society. Although recidivism rates of returning prisoners have slowly been going down since the millennium, statistics in the Netherlands show that still 45 percent of all released prisoners comes into contact with the criminal justice system again within two years, 35 percent even in the first year post-release (De Looff et al., 2018; Weijters, Verweij & Tollenaar, 2017; WODC-Recidivemonitor, 2018). Reducing recidivism in a high risk group of former prisoners, therefore, remains high on the societal and political agenda.[1]

To advance knowledge in this area, this thesis sets out to explore different dimensions of desistance: the absence or presence of criminal behaviour (primary or act-desistance), the role of identity change (secondary or identity desistance), and the role of support from others in one's attempts to go straight (tertiary or relational desistance). More specifically, this study focused on the following two aspects

1 See for example the increased attention for offenders convicted for High Impact Crimes (HIC) (Ministry of Security and Justice, 2014; 2016).

of identity: future expectations and conventional aspirations, and investigated how these related to (non-)criminal behaviour over time. Furthermore, this study examined how support from the criminal justice system in the form of parole officers and supervision is associated with act-, identity, and relational desistance. As such, the central aim of this study was to gain more insight into different dimensions of desistance, relating to primary, secondary and tertiary desistance as well as act-, identity and relational desistance among prisoners transitioning to society.

To address this aim, data from a qualitative, longitudinal study were used, in which 28 male prisoners serving a long-term sentence in the Netherlands were followed during their transition from prison to society and were interviewed on three separate occasions up to a year after release. This study focused on adult, male prisoners who were born in the Netherlands and who were (a) imprisoned for a – to Dutch standards – relatively long time, i.e. between 2 and 4 years at the moment of release, (b) convicted for a criminal offence (not on appeal), (c) not in an ISD or TBS programme or a minimum security prison, and (d) not convicted for a sex offence.

The first interview took place in prison approximately three months pre-release (T1), the second interview was carried out on average three months after release (T2), and the third interview was conducted a year after release (T3). A total of 75 in-depth interviews were carried out across all interview waves and 23 men could be interviewed on all three occasions. The design of the in-prison and both post-prison interviews was semi-structured and included a broad range of topics from the literature and previous research. Questions concerned the meaning given to and experience of intimate relations, friends, children, parents, parole and employment (possibly contributing to relational desistance), as well as questions about goals, obstacles, change, different selves (aspects of identity change) and past, current and future criminal activities (act-desistance). In addition, information from official criminal records and parole files was collected to allow for triangulation.

This concluding chapter first summarizes the key findings and discusses these in the context of desistance theories. Then a methodological reflection on the strengths and limitations of the present study is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible policy implications.

8.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Expectations regarding the future (non-)criminal self

Chapter 4 and 5 of this study focused on a specific aspect of identity desistance, i.e. prisoners' expectations regarding their future criminal or non-criminal behaviour. The aim of *Chapter 4* was to explore the future expectations regarding criminal behaviour of soon to be released prisoners and to examine how social factors –

such as employment, housing, and social support –, and individual factors – such as feelings of control, a belief in one's own capabilities, – are related to these future expectations.

These analyses used the information collected during the interview held in prison, a few months before the prisoners' release (T1). In these interviews, the men were asked what their expectations were when thinking of their future self after release with regard to criminal activities. They expressed three different types: non-criminal, criminal, and ambivalent expectations regarding their future behaviour. Eleven participants expected to quit crime after release, ten of them were certain that they would continue with crime (although most expected to be engaged in less serious crime) and seven of them did not have clear expectations about their future offending behaviour.

Based on theory and prior research emphasising the importance of social and individual factors for desistance, the participants were classified into four different types based on whether they scored high or low on these factors. In other words, whether they indicated to have a strong or weak social network, or whether or not they believed in their own capabilities and felt in control. Participants with strong social bonds and a strong belief in their own capabilities expressed a non-criminal future self. More specifically, having a place to stay after release or having a job, feeling supported by parents, partner and/or children combined with a confidence in one's capacities and feelings of control seem to be related to expectations to refrain from criminal activity. Vice versa, having weak social ties (or no social ties at all) and a weak sense of agency or self-confidence seems to be related to criminal expectations.

Furthermore, prisoners with a high sense of agency and confidence in one's capabilities but an absence of social ties still predominantly expressed a non-criminal future self. The absence or weakness of the social ties seemed to trigger more motivation to strive towards a non-criminal future. Interestingly, prisoners who showed low or average faith in their own abilities, but who had strong social ties and support networks, predominantly expressed ambivalent expectations regarding their future criminal behaviour. They were not sure whether they would (be able to) refrain from criminal behaviour. Although previous research has shown the importance of family and partners as a source of social support in the process of rehabilitation (Ramakers et al., 2014; Naser & La Vigne, 2006), the findings from Chapter 4 also support the importance of strong social ties, but cautiously question its conditionality. A lack of social support did not necessarily link to a criminal future self-image in this group of prisoners. In sum, scoring high on individual factors was associated with predominantly non-criminal future expectation but solely having a high score on social factors did not seem to be enough to imagine a future without crime.

Expectations and behaviour after release

In *Chapter 5,* the relationship between prisoners' expectations regarding their future criminal behaviour and their actual primary or act-desistance after release was explored. More specifically, the aims of *Chapter 5* were to examine (1) how prisoners' pre-release expectations regarding their future criminal behaviour relate to their actual criminal behaviour after release, and (2) what reasons prisoners present for these expectations coming true or not. To address these aims, information of 24 men was used from the interviews held in prison (T1) and the interviews a few months after release (T2). The expectations for future crime expressed in T1 were combined with the information at T2. Enabled by the qualitative nature of the study, the stories of these men could be examined to understand why they did or did not meet their pre-release expectations.

The results suggested a strong match between non-criminal expectations and act-desistance post-release, as well as between criminal expectations and criminal behaviour shortly after release. Fifteen out of 19 men were accurate about their post-release behaviour. Of course, a few exceptions emerged with some men reoffending while their initial interviews demonstrated an image of a non-criminal future self, and some men refraining from crime while they visualized a criminal self in the future. Moreover, almost all men with ambivalent forecasts refrained from criminal activity at the follow-up interview.

Four underlying mechanisms were identified from the reasons given by the men to explain the results. First, men who refrained from criminal behaviour in line with their expectations seemed to visualize a possible self that was not involved in criminal behaviour, combined with some notion of a feared self, in line with the Identity Theory of Desistance, IDT (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). These possible selves comprised notions of parenthood (e.g. 'being a good father') or certain role models, while the feared selves referred for example to a desire of not wanting to hurt others anymore. Participants with ambivalent and criminal expectations did not seem to have such a clear image of a future possible or feared self. Second, men who expected to refrain from crime and indeed were not engaged in crime after release actively sought social support and mentioned that their bonds with partners and family were facilitating their attempts to refrain from crime (contributing to relational desistance). Weak social support and an unstable housing situation seemed to play a role in overestimating the chances to refrain from crime for some participants with optimistic pre-release expectations as they found themselves imprisoned again shortly after release.

Third, the men who successfully predicted to abstain from crime took concrete action immediately after release to maximize chances of finding a job. In other words, they demonstrated high levels of agency, which supports previous work emphasizing the importance of agency (King, 2013; Liem & Richardson, 2014;

Maruna, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 2003). The difference in agency between the early desisters, the ambivalent group and the ones continuing with crime, was whether or not they ascribed their actions to themselves or not. Those who expected to desist and who did, appraised their own effort for this success on the outside, whereas those who expected to reoffend and who did indeed, attributed their behaviour largely to external factors and circumstances.

Finally, the role of supervision was mentioned as a reason for abiding by the rules. Being monitored closely and the risks associated with a misstep helped some of the ambivalent men to refrain from criminal behaviour. To avoid temptation, thinking they may not be able to resist, some had more or less retracted from (risky) social life (see Schinkel, 2014; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). However, new opportunities for social interactions were scarce. The social burden of the ankle bracelet was mentioned repeatedly (across all types of expectations). For the ambivalent group, the strict supervision rules seemed to inhibit the tendency towards crime, but it is worth mentioning that with weak social networks, strict supervision conditions and an ankle bracelet may hinder the chance of new (supporting) social encounters.

Conventional aspirations

Chapter 6 examined another aspect possibly reflecting identity change, i.e. the nature and development of conventional aspirations, or aspirations to live a conventional life – e.g. partner, kids and house. Elaborating on the evidence found in Chapter 5 for the role of the possible self in attempts to refrain from crime shortly after release, Chapter 6 zoomed in specifically on the theoretical concept of the possible *future self*, which belongs to the heart of the Identity Theory of Desistance (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Given the recurring theme in criminological literature of a desire to live a conventional or normal life as part of the possible self (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Maruna, 2001; LeBel et al., 2008), also among persistent offenders, *Chapter 6* therefore aimed to examine the nature and development of conventional aspirations and how these aspirations related to primary or act-desistance. Data of 23 men from all three interview rounds were used: before release (T1), shortly after release (T2) and a year after release (T3); a total of 69 interviews.

The interviews showed that conventional aspirations – as illustrated by the catch-phrase 'house, bells and bliss' (in Dutch 'huisje, boompje, beestje') – were present for almost all men in the sample across all interview waves. Consistent with some important desistance research (Burnett, 1992; Farrall, 2002; Bottoms & Shapland, 2011), no association was observed between conventional aspirations and desistance as conventional goals in prison and after release were expressed by both desisters and persisters. It turns out that these conventional aspirations were not always imbued with meaning particularly in prison, as they often were quite

empty and superficial. Their meaning and interpretation became more concrete, detailed and realistic when time passed on the outside and (small) successes were achieved. Furthermore, participants seemed to lack conventional role models that might provide them with some guidelines in fulfilling conventional roles and the desired identity. This was challenging for their pursuit of wanting a family and becoming a good father, because they had no clear image of what it entailed to be a good father and had no 'scripts' available from which to enact this pro-social role (Rumgay, 2004). None of the men who continued crime in this study could draw from experiences of their own youth with stable and conventional father-and-son relationships (Purvis, 2013). However, most desisters also had poor experiences with family and interpersonal relationships. Findings suggested that these men adjusted superficial identity scripts of 'being a father' to their own situation and created their own scripts.

Interestingly, there appeared to be no clash in conventional and criminal values, as criminal pathways to achieve conventional aspirations were mentioned repeatedly, and this did not seem to be related to strain (Merton, 1938). It appeared that for some offenders the conventional pathway was simply not attractive and rewarding enough. In fact, some persisters in this study pointed out that their engagement in crime would continue to be their means to achieve and maintain 'house, bells and bliss', revealing aspects of masculinity as a motivation to continue crime (see Carlsson, 2013). These findings show that a conventional self and a criminal self can co-exist to a certain extent when no dissonance is experienced between conventional social values and criminal aspirations. This is, somewhat contrary to desistance theories emphasizing the role of casting off a criminal identity in favour of a conventional one (Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), and 'using' the criminal identity to redeem oneself and move towards a 'true' self (Maruna, 2001). In fact, for some men, the criminal self even seemed to provide self-worth, pride and a chance to move towards a conventional self, possibly the only chance in their view. One participant who was deeply involved in the drug dealing business even said the opposite of Giordano's "someone like me does not do something like that", when he stated that while being a father (someone like me) he was indeed involved in crime (something like that) to take care of his family. Elaborating on Liem and Richardson (2014), who found a good core self among persistent offenders, findings of this study suggest that persisters may also continue offending despite, or perhaps even because of, a positive (father) identity.

Parole supervision

Chapter 7 set out to broaden the criminological lens beyond the micro-level of the individual and incorporated the parole experience during conditional release. It aimed to investigate the nature and development of parole supervision of Dutch parolees

and how parole as experienced by parolees interacted with the different dimensions of desistance. Longitudinal data, a total of 69 interviews with 23 men from three interview rounds, were used: before release (T1), shortly after release (T2), and a year after release (T3). In addition for the purpose of triangulation, parole files of the parolees were analyzed and their criminal records consulted, also to include the view of the parole officer and the criminal justice system.

Release conditions of the sample revealed a focus on surveillance and monitoring with high intensity supervision levels entailing weekly check-ins for all men, and home confinement with curfews and location bans enforced with electronic monitoring for the majority of the sample. Yet, importance was also given to more rehabilitative conditions such as psychological treatment and housing in an assisted living facility. Furthermore, based on an examination of the parole files, it appeared that parole officers were often committed, engaged and making efforts to assist with rehabilitation. This was for example reflected in the way they mediated in problematic family situations, showed understanding for the impact of imprisonment and requested to slightly adjust curfew hours or location bans if they were thought to hinder reintegration opportunities. Although violations of conditions were common, they often did not result in immediate revocation of release. Instead, parole officers first deployed alternative options before official warnings were issued.

The interviews illustrated that these efforts to assist were not always experienced as such by parolees since half of the parolees described supervision as being predominantly focused on surveillance. Strict supervision conditions such as check-ins, curfews and location bans added to the perception of a surveillance-oriented supervision in which the emphasis seemed to be on monitoring their compliance to these conditions. Here, the parole officer was seen more or less like a 'pawn of the system'. The other half reported they felt their parole officer was supporting their journey in any way possible, resembling a caseworker approach. This approach was characterized by the following: the use of discretion, for example to adjust conditions in order to accommodate personal situations and tolerating missteps, the parole officer as a social worker, assisting in rehabilitation efforts, and the parole officers as a mentor, being supportive, listening, offering guidance, confronting bad behaviour. It was also examined how parolees navigated the release requirements and how this interacted with different dimensions of desistance.

Strict supervision conditions, enforced by electronic monitoring, were reported by some parolees to provide structure that helped to refrain from crime, particularly in the initial phase after release. However, the ankle bracelet was experienced as an obstacle when men were spending more months in society and were attempting to establish new routines and relationships. Strict conditions were often felt to impede efforts towards identity desistance by hindering chances of legitimate employment, (re)connecting with social ties and contributing to the experience of stigma.

Furthermore, while strict supervision conditions seemed to facilitate act-desistance for most parolees, for some persistent offenders, these surveillance conditions tied to their release were *not* successful in preventing re-offending. These men were 'fooling' the system by 'combining' their supervised conditional release with dealing drugs to be able to 'take care' of themselves or even more serious crime, resonating with the 'parolee performance' (Irwin, 1970), and Braithwaite's (2003) 'game playing'.

Although surveillance and rehabilitative parole conditions could be experienced as restrictive, sometimes the PO offered (practical) support further along the way and illustrated that a casework approach could be helpful in creating the necessary 'space' for clients to build their non-offender identity, as well as from refraining from crime. Parole officers were for example able to create some leeway by adjusting conditions, thereby increasing opportunities to find a job or practice with aspects of social life. This way, parolees got a chance to slowly replace or supplement the non-offender identity by for example a 'working-employee' identity. Also, parole officers expressing recognition for attempts at going straight and trying to change, contributed to relational desistance.

8.3 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on its findings, the current study partly supports the current desistance frameworks examining different dimensions of the desistance process, and proposes some ideas to advance these. Below, the following five considerations are discussed in relation to theory: (1) examining desistance not as a linear process, but acknowledging that different dimensions can progress in their own way; (2) suggesting to include (among other things) offenders' expectations and aspirations when 'measuring' the concept of identity; (3) exploring more in depth the co-existence of the criminal and conventional identity; (4) investigating act-desistance not solely as the absence of criminal behaviour; and (5) attempting to work towards more uniformity and clarity in relation to the concept of identity and (other) subjective factors.

First, in line with the primary/secondary desistance framework (Maruna & Farrall, 2004) and the act- and identity desistance framework (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), the findings of this study pertaining to expectations, aspirations, and parole supervision support the idea of desistance as a process instead of an event that happens (Maruna, 2001, p. 17). This process can already start in prison (and perhaps even long before imprisonment) as notions of identity seem to be related to behaviour. However, findings provide more support for the idea that non-offending and identity shifts progress in their own way and pace (as in the act- and identity framework, Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) instead of (a period of) non-offending preceding identity shifts (as in the primary/secondary desistance framework; Maruna & Farrall, 2004).

Chapter 5 illustrated that the accounts of men that were not engaged in crime after release contained possible selves and identity shifts, while they had not (yet?) internalized a pro-social identity and went through an identity change as needed for secondary desistance. In one case, refraining from crime and attempting to fulfil more conventional roles was prosperous, but at the end of the research period, this individual was offending again. To state that this person was solely 'stuck' in primary desistance, since his non-offending period could be seen as a mere lull in offending, does not seem to do justice to the complex process of "going straight", "making it" or "doing all right" he was involved in (Irwin, 1970). Also, in Chapter 6, some persisters were trying to fulfil conventional roles (and therefore making attempts at identity desistance according to theory) whilst still offending. This provides some support for recognizing the value of making attempts at identity desistance by persisters, especially in light of the reduction in the seriousness of the crimes the persisters were involved in (a point which will be discussed later). In addition, pre-release expectations highly related to actual behaviour after release for most men, implying that, when expectations are presumed to reflect identity, identity shifts may contribute or coincide with act-desistance (which would not be possible in the separate phases of primary and secondary desistance). Thus, while primary and secondary desistance indeed were present in the findings of the current study, developments in these dimensions did not seem to be necessarily chronological. Based on the findings of this study, both dimensions seem relevant to acknowledge as part of the desistance process. The current study therefore provides support for theories that include the dimension of identity as well as behaviour when studying the desistance process. However, more research is needed to examine to what extent identity change is a precursor for non-offending (Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

Second, in an attempt to advance the dimension of identity, this study suggests to include expectations regarding criminal behaviour and (conventional) aspirations of offenders when examining the identity dimension in the desistance process, enriching, extending and bringing more depth to the term identity change or 'identity desistance' (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Chapter 5, for example, illustrated that men who were refraining from crime shortly after release expressed possible selves that were not involved in offending in both their pre- and post-release interviews. This in contrast to men who were ambivalent about their future when interviewed in prison before release, their narratives revealed a lack of possible selves, which was the same for persisters. The latter group could barely imagine a positive non-criminal self given the re-entry challenges that awaited them, and they admitted to be better of continuing the criminal life. However, they did express conventional aspirations – partner, children, house – , as Chapter 6 illustrated. But, for persisters, the positive possible self in relation to conventional aspirations was not necessarily

a self who disengaged from crime (opposed to what is outlined in the Identity Theory of Desistance; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). One could argue that they had not yet experienced a, so-called 'crystallization of discontent' (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), a realization that crime brings more harm than good to their life and that this harm will keep existing in the future when they continue offending. However, while most persisters showed insight into the harm caused by their criminal activities, criminal life still seemed to outweigh the benefits of attempting to succeed in conventional life. This study scratched the surface of the interplay between identity (expectations, aspirations) and behaviour. Future research should seek to further explore the link between expectations and aspirations as a reflection of identity. When looking up the word 'aspiration' in the dictionary, it relates to a *desire* to achieve something; expectation refers to a certain *belief* that something will happen or is likely to happen (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d). One way to interpret this is that aspirations may be more associated with dreams and goals, possibly more long-term, while expectations relate to the near future in relation to the current reality. Expectations therefore could reflect how an individual assesses the current situation in light of his aspirations and therefore might reveal perceived obstacles in achieving these. Future research could also include other elements of identity in the process of desistance, such as the nature and development of a *feared self* and the current *working self*. Despite increasing research on the dimension of 'identity', it has many connotations and therefore remains a 'fuzzy'[2] concept.

Third, the findings of the present study challenge some ideas of existing desistance theories concerning the criminal and conventional identity. Changing the criminal identity towards a desired and future pro-social identity has received a lot of attention in the desistance literature. What one might wonder here concerns the so-called 'criminal identity'. The findings of this study illustrate the intricate ambivalence of persistent offenders that hold conventional aspirations when at the same time committing criminal activities. Although they seemed not to have actually internalized a criminal identity, they have accepted a form of a criminal self which can co-exist next to other non-criminal identities. This could of course be a reflection of the extent to which possible selves of persisters coming from unconventional socially disadvantaged backgrounds, are socially determined or constrained (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In other words, the magnitude of possible selves may be limited by the cultural or social context. Existing desistance theories assume a change from a criminal identity to non-criminal identity (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The findings of the present study are in line with research done by Liem and Richardson (2014), who also found

2 In similar vein, Burnett & Maruna (2004, p. 395) used this word to describe the vagueness of the concept of 'hope' which is increasingly being used in desistance literature.

that re-incarcerated lifers, similar to successfully desisting lifers, had a good and pro-social self-image. The persistent offenders in the present study also mentioned their good qualities versus their 'bad' behaviour, or as Vince said: "*I'm a good guy with bad habits*". This finding is rather complicated, for identity theories in the desistance process distinguish between a criminal and conventional identity. Indeed, psychological multiple-self models suggest that individuals consist of multiple selves that are temporally distinct, but may overlap (Parfit, 1986; Hershfield, Cohen & Thompson, 2012) and in psychology it is presumed that when dissonance arises between different selves within the same person, action can be triggered to dissolve the dissonance (Festinger, 1962). Findings from this study, however, suggest that little dissonance was felt by some men between criminal and conventional identities, indicating that either they have not yet linked the failures of one identity to the possible gains of the other conventional identity, or that these identities collide in some way. This seems in line with the thought that "complete criminality and complete conformity are for the vast majority, points never likely to be reached" (Bottoms et al., 2004, p. 383).

Fourth, the present study suggests that the theory and investigation of primary or act-desistance and how it is operationalized, should not solely be based on the absence of criminal behaviour. In general, primary or act-desistance is defined as non-offending or refraining from criminal behaviour. The findings of this study raise questions about whether or not behavioural change – i.e. primary or act desistance – can be manifested in the reduction in crime as well, e.g. its frequency and/or seriousness. Moving from violence-related crime to less serious crime like growing and/or dealing cannabis, as was the case for some of the men in this study, could be viewed as some form of act-desistance when desistance is viewed as a process in which the frequency and variety in crime may decrease (Bushway et al., 2001; Maruna, 2001). In 1995, Nagin, Farrington and Moffit found that some men who were classified as desisters (having terminated their criminal activities), continued to be involved in more socially acceptable forms of anti-social behaviour, such as drinking and drug use. It could be argued that some men in the current study also tried to be involved in, more 'socially acceptable' forms of *criminal behaviour*. In line with this, one of the four elements described by Loeber and LeBlanc (1990) in order to elucidate desistance is called de-escalation: reducing the seriousness of criminal behaviour. The present study also used a dichotomous classification of offending and classified the men who were involved in less serious crime after release as persisters. However, it is possible that they were making some attempts in the desistance process, not only by reducing the seriousness of their crimes, but maybe also by making attempts at secondary or identity desistance. Nonetheless, near the end of the research period most of these men were involved in more serious violent crime again and apparently could not maintain their involvement in less serious

crime. Most of these men expressed the desire to refrain from serious crime in the future, and some were making an effort to fulfil other conventional roles in society. Given the conceptualization of desistance as a process in which one moves from criminal to conventional behaviour, many avenues are open for desistance theories and future research efforts. For example, theories could target questions such as: How much change needs to occur in order to be classified as making a step in the desistance journey? To what extent does a reduction in seriousness reflect motivation to change? Future research should also explore more categories of desisters and persisters, maybe based on presumed identity (change) to elucidate this dimension in the desistance process.

Also, the wider cultural context should be taken into consideration when looking at the nature of 'less' serious crime and aspirations to be involved in this type of crime. For example, cultivating and dealing cannabis was not regarded as reprehensible by participants in this study and this point of view becomes more clear when seen in light of the somewhat ambiguous moral and legal standing of cannabis growth and distribution in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, consumers can buy and use cannabis without legal repercussions (even though possession is still officially banned) and so-called 'coffee shops' can sell cannabis to consumers in small quantities. Yet, the people who grow and sell cannabis to coffee shops are criminalized and subject to law enforcement; the supply of coffee shops therefore takes place through the 'back door' (Korf, 2008). There are interesting developments in this area to regulate the production of cannabis, since there are plans to conduct an 'experiment' (in Dutch: Wet experiment gesloten coffeeshopketen) to examine if and how quality controlled cannabis can be grown and sold to coffee shops without legal percussions (*Kamerstukken II* 2017/18, 34 997, no. 2). This grey area in Dutch penal policy might affect the theoretical conceptualization of moving from a deviant to a non-criminal identity. In this context, Irwin (1970) described half a century ago that prisoners' perceived styles of 'doing all right' after release can be conventional, marginal or criminal. In this study, aspirations to be involved in the cannabis growth seem to align with marginal and criminal styles: although the cultivation of cannabis is currently illegal, it balances on the margin of legality and illegality.

A final theoretical consideration worth mentioning concerns the variety of concepts, terms, labels and definitions in desistance theory that (partly) share the same meaning or refer to similar phenomena; the present study does not pretend to have done otherwise. This study was invoked by various prominent theories of desistance that put forward the idea of offenders changing their criminal identity to a non-offending one in order to disengage from crime. When looking at 'identity', Paternoster and Bushway's notion of the *possible future self* (2009), Giordano and colleagues *replacement self* (2002), and Maruna's *real me* (2001) all seem to embody a (future) identity or a (conventional) 'self'. Also, the operationalization (although

not always labelled as identity) varies greatly from self-reported likelihood of re-offending, deviant senses of the self to pro-social characteristics (Burnett, 1992; Crank, 2016). Also, 'subjective factors' seem to be an umbrella-term for a wide array of things, including: personal or human agency, level of motivation, openness to change, hope, criminal attitudes, self-efficacy, internalizing stigma, alternative identities, shame and regret (Braithwaite, 1989; Giordano et al., 2002; LeBel et al., 2008; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Snyder, 1994). In order for scholars to be on the same page when studying complex issues, such as subjective factors and identity, it is crucial to work towards uniformity, clarity and unequivocality to truly advance desistance scholarship.

8.4 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The present study had some important strengths, such as its longitudinal design following the participants repeatedly both in prison and after their release from prison, and its qualitative approach, which was particularly suitable to look at dynamics and changes in the desistance process using the stories people tell (narratives) and the meaning they ascribe to them (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Maruna, 2001). Furthermore, while prior studies on desistance generally failed to take into account the experiences of persisters, this study included a less selective sample of imprisoned men. As a consequence, this study included both individuals who were motivated and successful in their efforts to quit crime, individuals who were motivated and unsuccessful, and individuals who were not motivated to refrain from crime.

Despite the methodological strengths of and the improvements made in this study, this study – like any other study – also has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations in turn provide important guidelines for future research avenues. The limitations and suggestions for future research relate to (a) the length of the follow-up period, (b) the sample size and representativeness of the study, (c) the generalizability of the findings, and (d) the method and analysis used.

The length of the follow-up period

The first limitation relates to the follow-up period. In this study it was one year after release from prison and during this year almost all prisoners were under parole supervision. Although motivated by recidivism rates, feasibility and in line with previous longitudinal work (e.g. Bachman et al., 2016; De Looff et al., 2018; Opsal, 2012; WODC-Recidivemonitor, 2018), the follow-up period could be considered as short in the context of desistance. Desistance from crime is a gradual process and the impact of certain events take time to unfold and might even take years, so the

meaning participants ascribe to it now might not be the meaning they would describe after a few years. This would in turn not be discussed in the interviews as the participants were, of course, not aware of the future impact. However, the difficulty in the attribution of meaning is that looking back on events in retrospect can suffer from known issues of recall bias relating to memory loss, unconscious distortions, selection and framing (Aldrovandi, 2009; Farrall, 2006). This is problematic, because one might wonder whether desisters or persisters ascribe a different meaning to past experiences to make it consistent with their life story (Maruna, 2001). The prospective longitudinal design of this study allowed to follow the sample through time and attempted to grasp how they framed current experiences with re-entry and parole and how this related to primary or act-, secondary or identity, and tertiary and relational desistance. Additional follow-ups would of course advance knowledge of the process of desistance and how these re-entry experiences and perceptions unfold beyond the first year after release. Particularly given the relatively young age of the sample, as some men would possibly slowly mature out of crime and experience future life events such as getting married and having children (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Moffit, 1993; Matza, 1964; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Sample size and representativeness

The second limitation relates to the sample size and its representativeness. Although the sample size might be seen as small, it was in line with previous research using qualitative interviews, concluding that the most common sample sizes were between 20 and 30 (Mason, 2010). Also, it has been noted that the number of participants needed in a study can be reduced when the research design involves multiple in-depth interviews with the same sample, such as in the current study. Although a relatively small sample of Dutch male prisoners was interviewed, the sample selection was based on a list which contained all the imprisoned men in all Dutch prisons who met the inclusion criteria. Every prisoner who was scheduled to be released within the timeframe of the data collection could be included in the research. However, it must be noted that motivated men serving relatively long prison spells in the Netherlands have the possibility to apply for a penitentiary programme which replaces the final phase of a prison sentence outside regular prison walls. It turned out that a substantial part of the list obtained from the Dutch Prison Service had already started their penitentiary programme and did not reside in prison anymore. As soon as this was known, efforts were made to approach others from the list sooner than planned in order to speak to them before they started a penitentiary programme. However, this was not always possible because in some cases men did not fit the selection criterion of a minimum imprisonment of 2.5 years anymore. Because of the fact that starting a penitentiary programme is only granted to prisoners who show pro-social behaviour and motivation to live a conventional, crime-free life, the possibility exists

that this study has an overrepresentation of men who did not qualify for detention phasing (anymore) and therefore could be seen as the 'unmotivated' ones. This might have had some implications for the interpretation of this study's findings. It is, for example, imaginable that participants that did not show pro-social behaviour in prison and as a result were not granted to start a penitentiary programme, were also the ones in this study lacking clear goals, or the ones pursuing criminal goals. The current sample then, possibly holds an overrepresentation of the group with the highest risk to recidivate, which might explain part of the findings regarding criminal activities, goals and, if it exists, the 'criminal ' identity. However, future research should maximise efforts to include the seemingly 'unmotivated' ones as well as the 'motivated' ones as much as possible. Especially since a review of qualitative research on desistance noticed a lack of more representative samples as studies tend to rely on convenience samples (Veysey, Martinez & Christian, 2013). It was suggested that also the hidden population of those individuals "least connected to programs and services" (p. 257), the seemingly 'unmotivated' ones in the context of the current study, needs to be identified when examining desistance.

Generalizability

The third limitation relates to the generalizability of the sample. This study involved (mostly younger) men, born in the Netherlands that have been imprisoned for relatively long terms according to Dutch standards. Being a specific group, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire prison population in the Netherlands. However, this was not the intention since qualitative research is in general not set up to generalize findings from this sample to a whole population (Polkinghorne, 2007). Instead, this study aimed to uncover the meaning these men gave to the process of returning to society and the desistance process and uncover underlying mechanisms through the in-depth interviews which provided a wealth of rich data. That being said, further research is warranted to explore if findings of this study also apply to other prison populations such as short-term prisoners, women, revolving door prisoners, sex offenders, and first generation immigrant offenders.

In addition, findings may not be applicable to correctional and re-entry practices in other countries. Although the sentence length of the sample of prisoners used in this study may be more comparable to other countries where longer prison spells are more common, The Netherlands have long been known for their mild penal climate. This penal climate entails mild conditions of confinement and attention for rehabilitative conditions in prison such as visits and leaves. In addition, the Netherlands has a widespread welfare system with health care insurance and well-arranged social benefits for everyone, which accounts for a different social context than, for example, the USA.

In similar vein, a significant part of the sample was a second generation immigrant (born in the Netherlands), yet there were no specific questions in the interviews regarding the role of their migration background since it was beyond the scope of this study. The topic however did come up sometimes when discussing notions of identity and in particular in Chapter 7 this cultural dimension was briefly touched upon. Nevertheless, it is uncertain how this could have impacted the findings. Future research could focus on considering a person's migrant and cultural background, to identify whether (non-)criminal expectations, conventional aspirations and experiencing parole have a cultural dimension (see Calverley, 2013, for important groundwork on different processes of desistance for various ethnic groups). Dominant cultural narratives about what is a conventional goal or future image may actually have an exclusionary or stigmatizing effect if people deviate from norms, even within legal boundaries, or if they cannot meet societal standards of self-sufficiency. Interestingly, quantitative longitudinal data has shown that persistence is more common among some ethnic minorities when transitioning to early adulthood, but that these ethnic differences between various groups tend to fade away when a longer follow-up is included (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Piquero, 2015; Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2007). Similar considerations could be relevant in relation to social class. This area then offers a plethora of opportunities to advance desistance research.

Methods and analysis

A fourth limitation concerns the choice for qualitative interviews. While the qualitative longitudinal approach seemed to be most suitable for studying the process of change and answering the research question of this study, this is not without its limitations. Qualitative research may be prone to some form of researcher bias since the researcher is his or her own instrument to gather data (Bersani & Doherty, 2017). Indeed, a value-free inquiry was not presumed to be the case in the analyses done in this study, neither a naïve view of simply 'giving voice' to the participants in this study since this is also a process of selecting and editing pieces of participant's evidence to deploy the arguments (Fine, 2002, p. 218). Nevertheless, in an attempt to minimize researcher bias, two other members of the research team were separately involved in the initial coding of the data to assess the thematic analysis and coding decisions (King & Horrocks, 2010) and an external researcher who was unfamiliar with the data was given access to the raw material to examine if we would come to the same conclusions (for *Chapters 6* and *7*) independently. In addition, to address the concept of reflexivity, an effort was made in *Chapter 2* to provide an informative and honest account of how interaction with participants took shape, the problems faced and how these were dealt with (Bachman & Schutt, 2018, p. 209). It is hoped that such an account enables others to evaluate and assess whether and how the findings of this study might have been affected by the researcher.

A final limitation related to the coding and analysis of the data. Many possible approaches are available to the qualitative researcher for analysis, yet "there are no clearly agreed rules or procedures" as in quantitative analysis (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 270). Also, it must be noted that labelling data is not subjected to a 'wrong' or 'right' way, rather the aim is to generate a meaningful account of the concepts being studied and that this account is produced in a transparent and systematic way (Spencer et al., 2014). A thematic analysis was applied to all interview rounds since I felt this was best suited for longitudinal data involving interviews with a broad range of topics, and to be able to address the specific research question in the various chapters (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is known for its theoretical freedom and it facilitates working through large amounts of texts systematically identifying topics that are integrated into higher-order key themes (Spencer et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there were other approaches of analysis which would also have produced an in-depth analysis when studying the attribution of meaning and sense, such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2003) or grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) but these also have their limitations. For example, while there are no strict rules on the sample size for using IPA, the amount of participants included is usually small, some even 'suggest five or six as a reasonable sample size' (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). This way, a comprehensive analysis can be generated about specific participants' experiences rather than presenting an account of a group or specific population. In addition, participants are usually selected purposefully. And contrary to the thematic analysis deployed in this study, which allowed combining inductive and deductive approaches, grounded theory methods revolve around inductive strategies to analyse data with the aim to develop theory (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher starts from a single case and then works his way up by analysing more cases and creating more abstract themes or categories. In addition, the sample is aimed to be as heterogeneous as possible which was not the aim in the current study.

8.5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The topic and findings of the current study are of societal relevance for criminal justice actors working with individuals in prison and returning offenders and for society at large for several reasons. In light of the findings of this study, some implications for policy are presented.

Early interventions in prison

First, the findings suggest that it could be a valuable avenue to target and support prisoners in enhancing their feelings of self-esteem, confidence and thus agency. This study illustrated the importance of individual factors such as believing in one's own abilities and motivation to desist in the context of pre-release expectations regarding future criminal behaviour. In fact, strong individual factors were linked to prisoner's non-criminal expectations regardless of weak or strong social factors. Also, prisoners' own expectations about their future criminal behaviour before release quite accurately predicted their actual behaviour after release. These findings offer guidelines for early interventions in prison for offender rehabilitation. The Dutch criminal justice system primarily targets several social areas such as assistance with regard to income and housing, and prisoners who get promoted to the plus-regime can participate in prison-based behavioural interventions if they qualify for these treatment programmes based on their risk and need scores (VNG & Ministerie van VenJ, 2014). To a certain extent, the correctional system seems to make an effort to integrate notions from desistance theory and research with the aim to increase offenders' motivation to change and facilitate actual behavioural change. Attention is being paid to impulsivity control, perspective taking and moral reasoning or taking responsibility, for example in the prison-based intervention CoVa course (a Cognitive Skills Training) or the Reflector, a questionnaire to map where prisoners 'are' in their mind and which way they would like to go. But also the Choose for Change course includes questions resonating with possible and feared selves and tries to figure out the pathways someone desires to take (Nelissen & Schreurs, 2008). However, finishing the Choose for Change course is a condition for prisoners who would like to be promoted to the plus-regime which could diminish its impact because of a possible lack of intrinsic motivation. An evaluation study of the CoVa course showed a small to non existent effect in the area of perspective and responsibility taking, and another study incorporating recidivism concluded there was weak evidence for proving the effectiveness of CoVa in the period 2008-2011 (Buysse & Loef, 2012; Henskens, 2016; Verweij, Tollenaar & Wartna, 2015). One way to interpret these initial results is that it may be a fruitful avenue to explore how more individual factors could be addressed in prison in other ways.

Findings of this study suggest it could be valuable to also pay attention to (other) individual factors such as increasing self-esteem, confidence and thus, enhancing feelings of agency. Research shows that 70 percent of all detainees in the Netherlands has a low score on self-esteem and that this area is not fully covered with the existing behavioural interventions offered in Dutch prisons (Fischer et al., 2012). One of the possible pitfalls here may be that, in the words of a reintegration worker in Maruna's study: "*you can't teach people self-esteem*" (2001, p. 155), yet, you can encourage it. One avenue worth exploring is to supplement current

interventions with for example mindfulness focused approaches, such as the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) implemented in the USA (Fischer et al., 2012; Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton & Singh, 2008) which is showing promising results. Mindfulness focused approaches aim to change the relationship of an individual to feelings and thoughts through acceptance and compassion (for the self and for others). Although such an approach could be helpful 'to train the mind' and possibly enhance feelings of agency, there are several issues that need to be addressed, such as how to 'measure' and 'quantify' mindfulness to be able to evaluate effectiveness since some of the methods are rooted in ancient Buddhist traditions (Singh et al., 2008). In similar vein, enhancing feelings of agency might also benefit from 'doing well' or experiencing success in performance tasks (Caspi, 1993; Maruna, 2001). In this context, it can been seen as unfortunate that the creative departments within Dutch prisons, where prisoners could make, paint, build, or create things, were announced to be closed down (and were almost all closed down) due to budget cuts (*Kamerstukken II* 2014, 24587 no. 588). Furthermore, the introduction of the basic prison regime, which has become the regular regime for most prisoners in the last decades (Boone, 2007), leaves limited room for extracurricular activities that might develop, or boost self-esteem and confidence in one's own abilities, such as education and other activities focusing on self-development and self-expression. The moral climate of a prison according to Liebling and Arnold (2004) is reflected in possibilities for personal development, such as the option to participate in meaningful activities (Boone, Althoff & Koenraad, 2016). However, large-scale prison surveys show that prisoners themselves in general do not experience their stay in prison to be meaningful and feel mostly negative about the before mentioned daily activities explicitly focusing on reducing recidivism (Henneken-Hordijk & Van Gemmert, 2012).

It might prove beneficial for rehabilitation purposes to investigate the potential of activities that are regarded by prisoners as meaningful, rewarding and giving purpose, such as music, art, education, (song)writing, poetry and so on (see e.g. Cox & Gelsthorpe 2012; Digard & Liebling, 2012; McNeill, 2017). A recent evaluation of several projects aimed to stimulate autonomy among prisoners also put forward some promising (small) projects in which prisoners are involved, such as making and selling vases on demand, translating documents, training shelter dogs (Dutch Cell Dogs) and helping with the intake of new prisoners (De Jong, Willems & Van Burik, 2015). Another project worth mentioning is the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program, which originates from the USA and brings 'traditional' college students and incarcerated 'students' together and invite them to engage in dialogue and take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other issues of social concern. [3] Aside from evident benefits for college students, there can also be great added value for the incarcerated ones through this form of

3 See http://www.insideoutcenter.org/ for extensive information.

transformative learning. The exchange programme has set foot on Dutch soil since one of the Dutch universities has just completed the programme in a Dutch prison and another one is setting up the same programme. Reactions were enthusiastic, suggesting that incarcerated students gain more self-esteem and "experience they might be smarter than they thought they were" (VU.nl, 2018). It may be worthwhile to explore such other ways to broaden prisoners' horizons, prepare them better for release and the challenges facing them after release. If they leave prison feeling more confident and free to take charge and direct their life towards personal goals upon release, maybe they will be more resilient and better equipped to cushion setbacks in the process of re-entering society.

Second, efforts to enhance the limited ability of some (ex-)prisoners to visualize a future, possible self and investing in positive life scripts for individuals coming from non-conventional social backgrounds could be fruitful. This study's findings revealed that goals can be vague and minimal before release, becoming more concrete and detailed when men are outside and encountering (even small) successes. *Chapter 6* showed that goal-setting in itself might not be a problem, since almost all men in the sample expressed conventional aspirations, but it seemed that a substantial part did not have an idea of what certain goals entail, making it more difficult to actually visualize their future self in relation to these goals. Moreover, they had no idea which pathway to take in getting there as they lacked conventional scripts. Creative ideas to enhance the limited ability of some (ex-)prisoners to visualize a future, possible self could be stimulated. For example, there is already some experience with writing letters to your future or best possible self in relation to health benefits and deviant behaviour (King, 2001; Van Gelder, Hershfield & Nordgren, 2013). This could be an interesting and simple possibility to explore with prisoners in the context of their reintegration plan, or with parolees as part of their supervision. Also, a more ambitious, but promising development in the digital world entails the use of immersive virtual reality (IVR) to create a confrontation/interaction between an individual's present and future self (Van Gelder et al., 2013). It was expected that seeing an age-morphed version of the self would account for a more vivid impression of the future and therefore might intensify emotions linked to that future (Loewenstein, 1996). Research suggests that strengthening the vividness of the future self could indeed affect choices concerning crime since it provides individuals a chance to think through more long-term consequences of their behaviour instead of focusing on immediate gratification (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Van Gelder, Luciano, Weulen Kranenbarg & Hershfield, 2015), a characteristic often assigned to delinquents. When these technological developments become (financially and technically) available to the criminal justice system, it might prove beneficial to test the effectiveness of incorporating such a virtual reality session in

prison or under supervision to let them 'feel' and experience their future self, perhaps making it easier to imagine what they envisaged for their future self and this way giving more substance to an individual's aspirations and goal setting.

Concerning the lack of conventional scripts and pathways to take, investing in positive life scripts for individuals coming from non-conventional social contexts could be beneficial to give meaning and create expectations associated with conventional roles. These meanings and expectations in turn can guide behaviour and offer a direction to life (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; 1991; Maruna & Ramsden, 2004). For example to fulfil the role or identity of a father, there are some opportunities in prison enabling parents to invest in relationships with children, such as specific 'parent-child days', and recently the launch of two so-called 'fatherwings' where fathers can spend more quality time with their children. Nonetheless, this may not provide more concrete guidelines on 'how' to be a father and how to deal with difficult situations. There might be some potential here to provide education via e-learning[4] to, for example, practice with hypothetical situations reflecting real-life difficulties which can be encountered as a parent. Ideally, this 'theoretical' learning could be combined with learning through experience. For incarcerated mothers near the end of their prison spell, an intervention known as A Better Start [in Dutch: Betere Start] is offered with the aim to reduce recidivism by strengthening parenting skills (Menting, Orobio de Castro, Wijngaards-de Meij & Matthys, 2014). A recent evaluation into the effectiveness of this intervention showed significant benefits on parenting behaviour, for example by reducing inconsistency of discipline (Menting et al., 2014). Such an intervention could also be beneficial for imprisoned fathers. Workshops on fatherhood in prison, such as the Dutch 'Vrij Verantwoord Vaderschap' and its improved version 'Mijn kind en ik' (roughly translated 'Free and Responsible Fatherhood' and 'Me and my child'), are already offered by a reintegration organisation (Exodus) in several Dutch prisons for fathers, giving them support in the role they are trying to fulfil.[5] The training centers around questions such as 'how to be a father' and 'what if you never had a good role model yourself?' A recent evaluation of the 'Vrij Verantwoord Vaderschap' workshop showed that overall it seemed to make imprisoned fathers more aware of fatherhood and the responsibility that comes with it (Reef, Ormskerk & Van Es, 2018). As promising as this is, this training solely depends on volunteer involvement and

4 In the Masterplan DJI 2013-2018 (DJI, 2013), there were plans to invest in ICT possibilities for prisoners to contribute to meaningful and useful ways to spend time in their cells, for example by offering forms of e-learning and the Dutch Prison Service is increasingly thinking of ways to offer digital services in prison safely.

5 See for example https://www.exodus.nl/diensten/training-mijn-kind-en-ik for more information (only in Dutch).

as such, is not seen as a core aspect of reintegration efforts. More importantly, this training, as many other prison-based interventions, is only accessible to prisoners showing motivation and pro-social behaviour, which brings us to the next point.

Rehabilitative activities and the role of motivation

A third point worth reflecting on in the context of correctional practice is that rehabilitative activities should not only be reserved for people who have (already) proven their ability and motivation to behave according to conventional norms, as the transformative potential may in fact be greatest for the group of people who apparently struggle with this the most. As of 2014, the Dutch prisons have implemented a system of promotion and demotion in which prisoners who show pro-social behaviour and motivation to work on their future are 'upgraded' from the basic, sober regime they came in at the start of imprisonment to a so-called plus-regime. The plus-regime allows prisoners to apply for leaves and to participate in behavioural interventions (Boone & Van Hattum, 2014). Kelk (2015) pointed out that current policy seems to increasingly focus on prisoners who have the highest chance to succeed (probably from an economical stance), but can we expect all prisoners to find motivation in themselves? Since a substantial part has both low social and low educational backgrounds – contexts where motivation and pro-social behaviour might be rare phenomena. Kelk (2015) claims that motivation is something that some people should *learn to know,* to discover this in themselves. And some people need (professional) help in doing so.

Also, the increasing responsibilisation of offenders may reach a new level with a recent proposal to abolish automatic conditional release for long-term prisoners after two thirds of the sentence and replace it with a critical investigation of each prisoner individually to determine if they will qualify for conditional release. Consequences attached to good and bad *behaviour* will be magnified and the focus also extends to the start of imprisonment, how the prisoner has behaved from the beginning to the end (Dekker, 2018). Thus, much is at stake for prisoners in acting 'good'. However, previous research suggested that when rehabilitative services are connected to a system of rewards and punishments, offenders frequently adopt the appearance of compliance to mask their disengagement from the treatment and their underlying distrust of rehabilitative workers (Crewe, 2007). This relates to the finding of this study concerning deceit and game playing (Braithwaite, 2003) of some men in the sample. Similar to what Robinson and McNeill (2008, p. 442) described about passing supervision by simply 'turning up' and 'signing in', such a new bill could possibly contribute to (ex-)prisoners attitudes that being promoted to the plus-regime is about setting goals and 'acting motivated'. Then, a successful Choose for Change course, filling in the Reflector, or finishing a COVA course does not necessarily display real change.

Parole practice

Fourth, the findings of this study have implications for supervision and the practice of parole officers. Chapter 5 illustrated that the external constraint of supervision seemed to provide some support to refrain from crime for men with ambivalent future expectations regarding criminal behaviour since almost all these men were not engaged in crime shortly after release. Also, findings from *Chapter 6* showed that electronic monitoring was felt to be helpful in the first chaotic and 'messy' months after release, but could be experienced as hindering when men were spending more time on the outside and trying to rebuild their life. In brief, parole supervision for prisoners returning to society was often experienced as hindering or not very helpful when supervision, or 'the system', seemed to be just about complying to strict supervision conditions. It was seen to be most helpful when the people operating within this system – the parole officers – were experienced to make serious and visible efforts to assist with rehabilitation goals by using their discretionary power, for example to act as a mediator in the strict supervision conditions. Thus, findings suggest that a policy culture and discourse of risk management does not necessarily preclude desistance support in parole supervision in the Netherlands, due to discretionary power of parole officers.

These findings illuminate the complex, ambiguous position parole officers find themselves in handling discretionary power and balancing between supervision tasks in the context of the culture of control (Garland, 2001). Although manuals of the Dutch Probation Service contain detailed information about controlling tasks of supervising officers (Boone, 2016), less guidelines are offered to put the rehabilitative aspect of supervision into practice. On the one hand this is beneficial, since it creates 'space' (and therefore creativity) for parole officers to make decisions, on the other hand it may help to give some more support in arriving at decisions towards a more desistance-focused supervision as proposed by McNeill (2003). It has been suggested that, since desistance is a highly individualized process, parole should also be individually tailored as much as possible and pay attention to issues of identity (Weaver & McNeill, 2010). The current study illustrated that instead of focusing solely on estimated risks, parole officers in the Netherlands who supervise prisoners returning to society after a relatively long imprisonment term already seem to deploy an individualized approach. However, it could be of merit to give more visibility to the work of the parole officers, since a substantial amount did not report an experience resembling this individualized approach. Nevertheless, parole supervision in the Netherlands could possibly improve by findings ways to work with, and/or discover, the strengths of the parolee (McNeill, 2016a). Some of the men in this study were not aware of what their strengths were or perhaps could be, which then relates to the previous point of gaining confidence. Supervision may well play a more prominent role in recognising and extending self-reported strengths, as well

as discovering possible strengths, and this way be more desistance-focused. In this context, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson and Alexander (2014) pointed out that the highest risk individuals, such as the sample used in the current study, probably need much more of a rehabilitative approach than is provided by most supervision systems. So there might be considerable potential in this area to improve parole supervision.

Structural support

Fifth, this study underscored the importance of rehabilitative support being offered before release and beyond the gate because individuals are likely to face the greatest obstacles to desistance after release from prison. As also found in other research, most offenders have intentions to "do good", yet these intentions could deteriorate when faced with structural impediments (Burnett & Maruna, 2004; King, 2013). Recent research into desistance among Dutch female offenders suggested that, out of all social factors, it is pivotal to ensure housing after release in order to profit from other structural support, such as employment (Rodermond, 2018). Although the findings of the present study showed that most men's post-release behaviour regarding crime aligned with their pre-release expectations, it also revealed the pain of failure for men attempting to refrain from crime (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), mostly relating to employment or housing issues. *Chapters 4 and 5* also illustrated that weak social support and an unstable housing situation seemed to play a role in overestimating the chances to refrain from crime for participants with optimistic pre-release expectations as they found themselves imprisoned again shortly after release. These findings illuminate the importance of 'hooks for change' and increasing opportunities for structural support. More concretely, this could be regarded as investing in internships or perhaps volunteer work for ex-prisoners so they could not only learn a work routine and gain skills, but also to discover their strengths and gain a sense of purpose and belonging. At best, this could possibly even lead to paid employment and offers chances for parolees who are trying to solidify and validate the still delicate non-offender identity to present a 'changed self' (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Stryker, 1968). Various activities and initiatives are already undertaken. Based in a former police station, a promising initiative for example is the coffee house 'Heilige Boontjes', which aims to guide young individuals with a criminal past towards paid employment by for example training them to be a professional barista.[1] Such initiatives can, when led and supported by the right parties (the co-founder of 'Heilige Boontjes' for example is someone who embodies street culture) significantly contribute to all dimensions of desistance. The above

1 See www.heiligeboontjes.nl. In 2017, the project won a Hein Roethof price, which was created by the Ministry of Justice and awarded to organizations who contribute to preventing and reducing recidivism in a creative and innovative way.

mentioned Inside Out Prison Exchange Programme may also be fruitful in this context. Because the meaning we give to our self and the world is constantly "being tested, supported, or reshaped within situation of interaction with others" (Irwin, 1970, p. 117), desistance is also a social and interactive process (Shover, 1996). Creating chances for ex-offenders to practice, present and therefore strengthen their changed self, validates particular identities (Stryker, 1968) and therefore denotes a sign of acceptance by society and their effort at 'co-producing' desistance (Weaver, 2013).

APPENDIX I.
INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

PRISON PROJECT.NL

Why this study?

I am interested in the experiences of long-term prisoners in the Netherlands. That is why I interview a group of long-term prisoners in the final stage of their sentence and I plan to follow them after they are released to see how they are doing.

What does participation mean?

Everything you say is confidential and no information will end up with prison staff, the Public Prosecution Office or to the Probation Service. After release, I will contact you a few more times to see how you are doing and to ask if I can interview you again.

Do I have to participate?

No, participation is completely voluntary. The choice is entirely up to you. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interviews, you will receive a monetary compensation for your time and effort.

How does it work?

The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours. With your permission, I would like to record the interview so I can transcribe your answers accurately afterwards. No one else will be able to hear your recorded interview except for me and maybe my supervisor or team member.

What happens to the information I give to you during the interview?

All information from you and the other participants will be used for the purpose of my research at the university. Your name will not be used in the report or in publications, so no one will be able to identify you when they read the report. We could even choose an alias name for you together.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

My person of contact in this prison is …… If you have any questions, you can direct these to him/her. He or she will then pass your questions on to me. If you are released from prison and you have any questions, you can contact me directly via:

Jennifer Doekhie
Leiden University
prisonproject@law.leidenuniv.nl
071-527 5301

PRISON PROJECT.NL

CONSENT FORM

The PRISON PROJECT is a scientific study carried out by Leiden University, Utrecht University and the NSCR. The aim of this sub study is to gain insight into the experiences of long-term prisoners in the Netherlands and their lives after imprisonment.

Data of long-term prisoners is being collected by:
a) Conducting face-to-face interview, both in prison and after release
b) Consulting registered data: criminal records, and prison data.

The data gathered for the purpose of this study will be handled with confidentiality and measures will be taken to ensure anonymity. Prison staff, police staff and other criminal justice actors will not be able to obtain this information.
I confirm that:

- I understand the purpose of the study
- The opportunity was given to me to ask additional questions about the study and these questions were answered.
- I give my permission to participate in this study
- I give permission to use a tape recorder to record the interview. This recording will only be used for transcribing the interview.
- I give permission to use my interview for research purposed; my name will never be used.

Name participant: _____
Signature:_____

Name interviewer: _____
Signature: _____

APPENDIX II.
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE IN-PRISON

I. Intro

1. Oral review of informed consent (if not already signed)/ permission to tape.
2. Warm up questions: Age, place of birth, ethnicity, religion.
3. Describe yourself in 3 words:

II. Before imprisonment

How would you describe your living situation before prison?
• Who, where, how
Please tell me about your partner and child(ren)?
• Age, sex
• How often did you see them before prison?
• Living situation, care before prison
• Divorce/breakup because of prison?
What kind of work did you do? Lost your job?
Can you describe your use of alcohol and drugs before prison.
• Frequency/type of drugs
• Dependency/addiction
What was your first encounter with crime? First arrest?
Have you served any previous sentences before this sentence?

I'm trying to get a sense of who you were before entering prison.
How did you see yourself back then?
What were your ambitions before entering prison (this time)?
Before this imprisonment, what has been your high point? And your low point?

III.During imprisonment

Now I will ask you about your experiences in prison. I will start with some general questions and after that we will talk about your social contacts with people inside and outside of prison.

How did you experience your time in prison in general?
What does a 'good day' in prison look like? And a bad day?
What was your high point in prison? And your low point?

What was/is the hardest thing for you to deal with in prison?
• Freedom/restrictions/No contact with the outside world/dugs
What was the most positive thing about your time in prison?
How has your experience in prison been difficult/different from what you expected it would be?
• Expectations when entering prison

I would like to ask you some questions about your contacts with people inside and outside prison.

What were your relationships with other prisoners like?

• Who did you trust/provided support/made life harder?
What were your relationships with prison officers?
• How much impact did these relationships have on you?
• Any events/relationships with a lasting positive/negative effect?
What were you relationships with other prison staff (psychologist, pastor/priest) like?
• How much impact did these relationships have on you?
• Any events/relationships with a lasting positive/negative effect?

What contacts were you able to maintain with family members and others close to you during your imprisonment?
Who were the most significant/important people who came to visit you?
Please describe what these visits were like for you.

Parents
Did you stay in contact with your parents and how?
• Telephone calls/ visits / letters
How was it to keep in touch with your parents/mother or father during your time in prison?
• Difficult/supporting
• Did not want to have close contact/ parents did not want to have close contact
• Distance/too expensive/shame/prison is an evil place/visiting hours/hard to reach location
Did they come to visit? How did you experience these visits?
• Frequency, intensity, emotion
How has your relationship with your parents changed as a result of your incarceration?
• What do your parents think of the fact you are incarcerated? How do you feel about that?

- Do you think your parents will be there for you after your release? In what way?
- Do you expect that your parents will support you when you are released? If so, in what way?

Partner

Did you stay in contact with your partner and how?

- Telephone calls/ visits / letters

How was it to keep in touch with your partner during your time in prison?

- Difficult/supporting
- Did not want to have close contact/ she did not want to have close contact
- Distance/too expensive/shame/prison is an evil place/visiting hours/hard to reach location

Did she come to visit? How did you experience these visits?

- Frequency, intensity, emotion

How has your relationship with your partner changed as a result of your incarceration?

- What does she think of the fact you are incarcerated? How do you feel about that?
- How do you expect your relationship to be after your release?

Children

(When applicable) How did you experience visits from your children in prison?

- Frequency-intensity
- Father-child day
- Living situation and care
- Do you consider yourself a good father? Are there things you would have done differently?
- Future plans for children

Friends

How much have you kept in touch with your friends since you've been in prison?

- Who of your friends do you look up to?
- Have your relationships with friends changed and how?
- How much do you expect to be in touch with your old friends since you've been in prison?
- Do you expect to pick up your friendships where you left off? Why?

Where there any significant events in your life while you were in prison?

- Death, wedding, birth?
- When? Impact? Leave prison?

Drugs and alcohol

Could you tell me a little bit about drugs and alcohol in prison.

- Frequency & why
- Type of drugs/Dependency/treatment
- Ever got caught? Consequences?
- Do you expect to use after your release & why?

Education & Corrections

Now some questions about educational courses and other courses/treatments (corrections) in prison.

(When applicable) How did you experience educational courses during your time in prison?

- What courses?
- Were you encouraged to do these by anyone (who)?

To what extent were you given any specific preparation for release?

- What / when / how
- Help with housing/work/debts/addiction/psychological problems
- Participation voluntary?
- Role parole officer

How useful do you think they have been?

Looking back on your own experiences, are there forms of preparation that you did not get but which would have been helpful? Who should provide these?

Are there current forms of help/support which you need but are not getting? Why?

Should the process of release be handled differently?

How do you think you've changed during your time in prison?

- Characteristics
- Values
- Self image
- Cope with conflicts

IV. After

We 're almost moving on to the questions about life after your release, but before doing so I'd like to know something about your conviction and how you look back on it.

You are convicted for ……

How do you look back on the crime and your trial?

When do you expect to be released? Parole?

Did you have home leaves? How were those like?

Where do you plan to live after your release?
• Who, where, how
• Long-term plans for housing
• If you don't know where you are going to live: what are you going to do to find a place to live? Do you expect any problems?

Do you have any plans for getting more education after your release?
• What kind of education? Why? What have you already done to make this happen?

What do you want to do to afford a living after your release?
• Types of work
• What kind of job?
• People who can help you find a job
• What is the role of the parole officer?
• Problems/obstacles in finding a job (because of criminal record)?

How do you think people will react when you will be released?
• Family, parents/employers/friends

How would you like to be treated?
• Do you think you will be labelled? Why?
• Do you think people will treat you differently if they know you were in prison? Why?

What worries you the most about life after prison?
What are you looking forward to the most about life after prison?

How do you see your life after prison?
• Do you think you will engage in criminal activity in the future? Why?
• What is the most important reason for you to 'quit crime'?
• Do you believe you can 'quit crime' on your own/by yourself?

What is your definition of success?
Do you think life happens to you or do you think that you can control your own fate?
Do you feel you control your own life?
What do you want to achieve in life?
• Personal goals
• Do you believe you can achieve this? How are you going to achieve this?
• Obstacles

Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now?

V. End

Are there any other important aspects of your life in prison that we have not covered?
Do you have any other questions?

APPENDIX III.
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE POST-RELEASE[2]

Oral review of informed consent/ permission to tape record.
Describe yourself in 3 words:

First, I would like to hear from you what happened on the day of your release?
• Where did you go?
• What did you do?
• Was there anyone to meet you outside? Who?
How did you feel that day?
• How was it to be with other people/loved ones again?
• Was there anything different from what you expected it to be?
Did you have accommodation to go to?
• Previous home?
• Have you had difficulties with (finding) accommodation?
Where are staying now?
• Are you satisfied with your accommodation?
How has it been for you to be on parole?

Optional: supervision by the Probation Service
How do you feel about being supervised in your conditional release period?
• Ankle bracelet
• Conditions
• Added value?
• Parole officer

2 The interview schedule for the two post-release interviews were similar, except for the question 'Where do you see yourself in five years from now?' in the interview held a year after release. Participants in the final interview were asked to answer this question in two parts: a positive future perspective ('What *would you like* to happen in the following chapters of your life?'), and a more negative, or feared, perspective ('What *could* happen in the following chapters of your life of which you do not want that to happen?').

I would like to get a sense of how you've experienced the external environment after being in prison for several years

Did you feel things had changed during your time in prison?

- Technology
- Mentality/morality

What changes had the most impact on you? Why?

How did people react when you were released? How did this make you feel?

- Family, parents/employers/friends

How were you treated? How was that different from how you expected to be treated?

- Do you think you are being labelled? Why?
- Do you think people are treating you differently, because they know you were in prison? Why?

Education & Income

Did you get more education after your release?

- What kind of education? Why?
- Who helped or encouraged you?
- Performance?

In the last interview you talked about doing…… to afford a living

How do you afford a living now?

- Types of work
- What kind of job? Paid/unpaid?
- People who helped you find a job
- What is the role of the parole officer?
- How hard has it been to find work (because of criminal record?)?
- Are there any skills you've mastered in prison, that you can use now in 'normal' life?

If working now, do you think you are working below your level?

If not working now, what did you do to find a job?

- Job interviews / obstacles / motivation?

How do you find it to cope with the working life?

- Rules/discipline/authority

How do you think your imprisonment affected the way people think in relation to employing you?

- Has this been changing over time?

Drugs & Alcohol

Can you describe your use of alcohol and drugs immediately after release and now?

- Frequency/type of drugs
- Dependency/addiction
- Expectations from previous interview. Differently?

When applicable: You did some educational courses and other courses/treatments (corrections) in prison.

Now that you are out of prison, how useful have they been?

- Help with housing/work/debts/addiction/psychological problems
- Role parole officer / other organizations

Are there forms of preparation that you did not get in prison but which would have been helpful? Who should provide these?

After experiencing your own release, should the process of release be handled differently in your opinion?

I now have some questions about your relationships with family and people closest to you after you release.

Interviewer: first discuss expectations from previous interview.

Then ask following questions separately for parents, partner and friends.

Was your relationship the way you expected it to be after your release? Why (not)?

- How did this affect the relationship between the two of you?
- Who supported you?

How has this changed since your release until now?

- Stayed the same/improved/got worse?

Outside the family, who has provided you the most support?

Children

How is the relationship with your child(ren) since your release?

- Frequency-intensity
- Living situation and care
- Do you consider yourself a good father? Are there things you would have done differently?
- Future plans for children

Next, I was wondering if you still keep contact with people inside and outside prison.

Do you still have contact with other (ex)prisoners? How do you feel about these contacts?

Are you still in contact with other prison staff (psychologist, pastor/priest)?

- How did this relationship change after your release?
- How much impact does these relationships have on you?
- Any events/relationships with a lasting positive/negative effect?

The last time we talked about your experiences in prison. Now that you're released, I would like to ask you a little bit more about that.
How do you look back on your time in prison?

What was the most positive thing about your time in prison?
What has been the hardest part about adjusting to life outside of prison?
Is there anything you miss about prison?
How do you think you've changed during your time in prison?
• Characteristics
• Values
• Self image
• Cope with conflicts
How do you see yourself now?
How have the missed years affected your place in society?
What are your ambitions now? What are you trying to achieve (even on a daily basis)?
Since your release, what has been your high point? And your low point?

In our last interview, you told me the thing that worries you the most about life after prison, was ……
Do you still worry about that/what are you going to do about this/how did you resolve this?
You said you were looking forward the most to ……
How did that go?
Last time we spoke I asked you how you saw your life after prison?
• Is your life now the way you pictured it?
• Are you engaging in criminal activity? Why?
• What is the most important reason for you to 'quit crime'?
• Do you still believe you can 'quit crime' on your own/by yourself?
How worried are you to be back in prison in the next year?
What is your definition of success (now)?
What do you want to achieve in life?
• Personal goals
• Do you believe you can achieve this?
• How are you going to achieve this?
• Obstacles
Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now?

I. End
Are there any other important aspects of these first months of your life after prison that we have not covered?
Do you have any other questions?

APPENDIX IV.
CODEBOOK

Theme	Codes T1	Codes T2	Codes T3
Social factors	Housing	Alcohol/drugs	Alcohol/drugs
	Employment – legal/illegal	Contact inmates	Contact inmates
	Partner	Contact children	Contact children
	Alcohol before	Contact parents	Contact parents
	Drugs before	Contact friends	Contact friends
	Children before	Partner	Partner
		Independent accommodation	Independent accommodation
		Difficulties finding work	Difficulties finding work
		Work/daily activities	Work/daily activities
		Living situation	Living situation
		Support from family	Support from family
		Support outside family	Support outside family
		Education future	Education future
		Reaction others	Reaction others
Identity	Describe three words	Describe three words	Describe three words
	Identity before	Goals	Accept punishment
	Goals before	High point after release	Goals
	High point before	Low point after release	High point after release
	Low point before	Where in 5 years	Low point after release
	Changed self	Fatherhood	No regrets
	Dealing with conflict	Changed self	Influence of past
	Achieving goals	Role model others	Where in 5 years –
	Where in 5 years	Appreciation from others	Where in 5 years +
	Meaning of succes	Insight into self	Fatherhood
		Value money	Changed self
		Meaning of succes	Role model others
		Future perspective	Appreciation from others
			Insight into self
			Value money
			Meaning of success
			Future perspective
Individual factors	Labelling	Goal oriented behaviour	Goal oriented behaviour
	Reaction others	Belief in self	Belief in self
	Feeling of control	Feeling of control	Feeling of control
	Definition success	Labelling	Labelling
		Saying no	Saying no
		Definition success	Definition success
		Obstacles	Obstacles

Theme	Codes T1	Codes T2	Codes T3
Criminal behaviour	Expectation future crime Growing/dealing drugs Motivation crime Motivation quitting crime Disadvantages crime	Limit of crime Growing/dealing drugs Motivation crime Motivation quitting crime Disadvantages crime Criminal opportunities Chance future imprisonment Violent crime New conviction New imprisonment	Limit of crime Growing/dealing drugs Motivation crime Motivation quitting crime Disadvantages crime Criminal opportunities Chance future imprisonment Violent crime New conviction New imprisonment
Pre-release Future expectation	Expectation living situation Living – long-term Expectation education Making money after Difficulties finding work Partner future Expectation support partner Expectation bond parents Support parents Future plans kids Expectation friendship Expectation drugs *Regarding crime* Expectation crime What needed to quit Quit on your own Obstacles	-	-
Experience of imprisonment	Prison experience Good day prison Bad day prison High point prison Low point prison Hardest in prison? Most positive prison Other expectations Visitors Chance future imprisonment	Fear of prison Missing prison Chance future imprisonment Most positive prison Reflecting on imprisonment	Fear of prison Missing prison Chance future imprisonment Most positive prison Reflect on imprisonment Accept punishment
Release preparations	Phased re-entry Courses prison Education prison Help with re-entry Role parole Change process re-entry? Leaves	Change process re-entry? Courses useful	Change process re-entry? Courses useful

Theme	Codes T1	Codes T2	Codes T3
Experience of parole	Experiencing supervision	Ankle bracelet (EM)	Ankle bracelet (EM)
	Role parole	Experiencing supervision	Experiencing supervision
	Role parole officer	Role parole	Role parole
		Role parole officer	Role parole officer
		Violating conditions	Violating conditions
Post-release experiences	-	Experiences outside	Experiences outside
		Help external agencies	Help external agencies
		Obstacles	Obstacles
		Getting used to	Getting used to
		Changed world	Changed world

APPENDIX V.
FORMAT LIFE STORIES AND USED DATA SOURCES

Topics		Data sources		
		Interviews	Parole reports	Criminal records
Who is?	Age	x		
	Crime	x		x
	Sentence length	x		x
	Previous arrest / imprisonment	x		x
	Describe yourself in three words	x		
Background	Childhood	x		
	Entering crime	x		
	Transition to more serious crime	x		
Imprisonment	Experiencing imprisonment	x		
	Courses	x	x	
	Leaves	x	x	
	Visits	x		
	Promotion/demotion	x	x	
	Changed self?	x		
	Estimated risk at recidivism		x	
Pre-release expectations	Future criminal behaviour / criminal intentions	x		
	Goals (possible selves) / conventional aspirations	x		
	Other expectations	x		
First months out	Social factors	x	x	
	Supervision/ankle bracelet	x	x	
	Criminal behaviour?	x	x	x
	Motivation / Identity /achieving (conventional) goals	x	x	
One year after release	Social factors	x	x	
	Supervision/ankle bracelet	x	x	
	Criminal behaviour?	x	x	x
	Motivation / Identity / achieving (conventional) goals	x	x	
Future perspective	Five years from now? Negative Positive	x		

A

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING
(SUMMARY IN DUTCH)

Dimensies van *Desistance* (stoppen met criminaliteit). Een kwalitatieve longitudinale studie naar het proces van stoppen met criminaliteit onder langer gestrafte gedetineerden in Nederland.

INLEIDING

Onderzoek naar criminaliteit en crimineel gedrag richt zich de laatste decennia vaak op de vraag waarom en hoe personen stoppen met criminaliteit (ook wel *desistance* genoemd). Theoretische invloeden vanuit de levensloopcriminologie en onderzoek naar criminele carrières hebben belangrijke inzichten opgeleverd met betrekking tot waarom personen stoppen met criminaliteit. Desistance is lange tijd onderzocht als de afwezigheid van crimineel gedrag en deze afwezigheid werd verklaard vanuit sociale, externe factoren en specifieke levensgebeurtenissen, zoals bindingen met werk en partner, trouwen, en kinderen krijgen. Steeds vaker wordt desistance echter bestudeerd als een geleidelijk proces van stoppen met criminaliteit. Desistance is meer dan alleen de afwezigheid van crimineel gedrag en kan tevens verklaard worden door individuele, subjectieve factoren, zoals een verandering in zelfbeeld of identiteit. Het creëren van een (nieuw) pro-sociaal, conventioneel zelfbeeld dat haaks staat op de criminele identiteit staat centraal in deze stromingen.

Lange tijd richtte onderzoek op het gebied van desistance zich op de periode dat een persoon zich compleet had terug getrokken uit het criminele leven en daarnaast een niet-criminele identiteit had aangemeten (*secondary* of *identity desistance)*. Deze 'eindfase' zou vooraf worden gegaan door een periode waarin men niet crimineel actief is (*primary* or *act-desistance*), maar dat mogelijk wel weer kan worden. Recentelijk is een derde dimensie aan het desistance proces toegevoegd: de ervaren steun en erkenning van anderen voor pogingen om op het rechte pad te blijven (*tertiary* or *relational desistance*). Deze steun en erkenning kan verkregen worden vanuit formele en meer informele sociale relaties, zoals de partner en ouders, maar bijvoorbeeld ook reclasseringswerkers. Op basis van verschillende theorieën en eerder onderzoek wordt dus momenteel verondersteld dat desistance drie 'dimensies' heeft: 1) de afwezigheid van crimineel gedrag 2) een identiteitsverandering van een 'criminele' naar een 'conventionele' zelf, en 3) de ervaren steun en erkenning van anderen voor pogingen om op het rechte pad te blijven.

Ondanks toenemend onderzoek op dit gebied, ontbreekt het bij veel bestaande studies aan een longitudinaal onderzoeksdesign waarbij dezelfde personen over de tijd gevolgd worden. Dit is opvallend omdat zo'n onderzoeksopzet noodzakelijk is om het *proces* van desistance en identiteits*verandering* te onderzoeken. Daarnaast richt een deel van het eerder onderzoek zich op personen die niet in detentie verbleven of die (in het geval van longitudinaal onderzoek) pas gevolgd worden na hun detentieperiode. Om (een deel van) deze lacune op te vullen, volgt de huidige studie een groep Nederlandse (langer gestrafte) gedetineerden die meerdere keren zijn geïnterviewd voor en na hun vrijlating. Al is de detentie populatie in Nederland langzaam dalende, elk jaar komen nog steeds ongeveer 30.000 personen vrij na een korte of langere gevangenisstraf, en een deel komt onder toezicht te staan. Hoewel de recidivecijfers ook een dalende trend laten zien, komt nog steeds een derde van de ex-gedetineerden binnen twee jaar weer vast te zitten. Langer gestrafte gedetineerden zijn veroordeeld voor meer ernstige criminaliteit met een vaak grote impact op de samenleving. Het is daarom van belang om meer te weten te komen over hun terugkeer naar de samenleving na detentie en het proces van stoppen met criminaliteit, zodat eventuele beleidsmaatregelen zowel in detentie als na vrijlating dit proces mogelijk specifieker zouden kunnen ondersteunen.

Het huidige onderzoek

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om meer inzicht te verkrijgen in de verschillende dimensies van desistance in een groep Nederlandse gedetineerden die bijna vrij komen en terugkeren naar de maatschappij. Met een kwalitatief, longitudinaal onderzoeksdesign zijn 28 Nederlandse gedetineerden geïnterviewd gemiddeld drie maanden voor vrijlating, en twee keer na vrijlating: drie maanden (n=24) en een jaar daarna (n=23). Het huidige onderzoek is een deelstudie van het Prison Project waaraan mannelijke gedetineerden - tussen de 18 en 65 jaar en in Nederland geboren – hebben deel genomen. Aanvullend op deze criteria kwamen gedetineerden voor het huidige onderzoek in aanmerking voor deelname als zij a) voor een relatief lange periode in detentie hadden gezeten (tussen de 2 en 4 jaar), b) waren afgestraft en hun zaak niet in hoger beroep diende, c) niet in een ISD/TBS instelling of BBI/ZBBI verbleven,[1] en d) niet veroordeeld waren voor een zedendelict. De respondenten zijn door dezelfde onderzoeker door heel Nederland persoonlijk benaderd waarbij uitleg over het onderzoek is gegeven, anonimiteit en vertrouwelijkheid gewaarborgd, onafhankelijkheid is benadrukt en schriftelijke toestemming voor deelname is gevraagd. Op het moment dat de deelnemers uit de gevangenis kwamen (het in werking treden van hun voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling na twee derde van de straf),

1 ISD= Inrichting voor Stelselmatige Daders, TBS= Ter beschikking stelling van de staat, BBI= Beperkt Beveiligde Inrichting, ZBBI=Zeer Beperkt Beveiligde Inrichting

hadden ze gemiddeld 39 maanden vast gezeten waarbij straffen tussen de drie en vijf jaar waren opgelegd. Deze groep is naar Nederlandse standaarden aan te duiden als langer gestrafte gedetineerden, aangezien het overgrote deel van de gedetineerden in Nederlanden straffen korter dan zes maanden uitzit. De gemiddelde leeftijd van de mannen was 27 jaar (range 21-53) en de meesten waren veroordeeld voor geweldsdelicten, zoals gewapende overvallen en poging doodslag. Aanvullend op de interviewdata zijn de dossiers van de huidige onderzoeksgroep bij de Reclassering Nederland onderzocht. Daarnaast zijn de strafbladen van de onderzoeksgroep geraadpleegd om te bekijken of er criminele activiteiten na vrijlating aan het licht waren gekomen bij het Openbaar Ministerie, los van wat de onderzoeksgroep zelf had gerapporteerd. Tot slot zijn de levensverhalen van de respondenten in kaart gebracht waarvan er een aantal uitvoerig is beschreven tussen de hoofdstukken in.

TOEKOMSTVERWACHTINGEN CRIMINEEL GEDRAG NA DETENTIE & DE ROL VAN SOCIALE EN INDIVIDUELE FACTOREN

In hoofdstuk 4 zijn de toekomstverwachtingen verkend die de 28 mannen aan het eind van hun detentie voor vrijlating hadden ten aanzien van criminele activiteiten na vrijlating, en de rol van sociale en individuele factoren bij deze toekomstverwachtingen. Op basis van de interviews is een onderscheid gemaakt tussen criminele, niet criminele of een meer ambivalente toekomstverwachting. Op basis van theorieën over desistance waarin sociale factoren – zoals werk, woning, steun van partner of familie - en individuele factoren – zoals geloof in eigen kunnen en een gevoel van controle (*agency*) – een rol spelen, zijn vervolgens vier groepen langgestraften beschreven, gebaseerd op de mate en/of sterkte van sociale factoren gecombineerd met individuele factoren.

In totaal verwachtten 11 van de 28 respondenten om te stoppen met criminaliteit na detentie, tien respondenten hebben aangegeven er zeker van te zijn dat ze door zouden gaan met criminele activiteiten (de meesten overigens met minder ernstige criminaliteit), en zeven respondenten hebben een meer ambivalente toekomstverwachting geuit waarbij ze twijfels hebben over toekomstige criminele activiteiten. Respondenten die een niet-criminele toekomst voor zich zien na detentie, 'scoren' over het algemeen hoog op de individuele factoren: Zij hebben een geloof in eigen kunnen en het gevoel controle te hebben over toekomstige gebeurtenissen. Meestal is dit in combinatie met een hoge 'score' op de sociale factoren zoals het beschikken over een huis of baan, de ervaren steun van ouders, partner en/of kind (groep 1). Echter, dit is niet in alle gevallen zo. Een gebrek aan bindingen bij personen die wel een hoge mate van agency lijken te hebben, is tevens gekoppeld aan een niet

crimineel toekomstbeeld (groep 2). De afwezigheid of zwakte van deze bindingen lijkt in die gevallen juist een stimulans te zijn om een niet criminele toekomst na te streven, zodat het doel van 'huisje, boompje, beestje' binnen bereik komt. Personen met meerdere en/of sterke pro-sociale bindingen, maar een matig geloof in eigen kunnen, hebben een overwegend ambivalente verwachting met betrekking tot crimineel gedrag (groep 3). Tot slot, lijkt het gebrek aan (of zwakke) bindingen gecombineerd met lage agency samen te hangen met de verwachting door te gaan met criminaliteit (groep 4). Waar familie en partners uit eerder onderzoek als een belangrijke bron van steun worden gezien en kunnen bijdragen aan een gevoel van stabiliteit in het reintegratie proces, blijkt uit huidig onderzoek dat deze sociale factoren inderdaad een rol spelen bij een niet criminele toekomstverwachting, maar dat een gebrek hieraan niet meteen samenhangt met een criminele verwachting na detentie. Met andere woorden, ook een deel van de respondenten zonder of met zwakke sociale bindingen zagen een niet-criminele toekomst voor zich.

TOEKOMSTVERWACHTINGEN VOOR VRIJLATING EN GEDRAG NA DETENTIE

In hoofdstuk 5 is met behulp van longitudinale data van 24 respondenten bestudeerd in welke mate de toekomstverwachtingen van gedetineerden voor vrijlating overeenkomen met hun gedrag na vrijlating en welke redenen zij zelf hiervoor aandragen. Volgens de bevindingen komen verwachtingen sterk overeen met daadwerkelijk (crimineel) gedrag na detentie. De overgrote meerderheid van de mannen die een niet criminele of criminele verwachting uitte, is na detentie overeenkomstig de eigen verwachting niet of wel weer betrokken bij criminele activiteiten. Uiteraard zijn er uitzonderingen waarbij mannen tijdens het interview na vrijlating aangaven niet betrokken te zijn bij criminele activiteiten, terwijl zij wel gedacht hadden dat te zijn voordat ze vrij kwamen, en vice versa. Vrijwel alle mannen die een ambivalente toekomstverwachting hadden geuit voor vrijlating, waren niet betrokken bij criminele activiteiten in de eerste paar maanden na vrijlating.

Uit de verhalen van de respondenten zijn vier verklarende mechanismen naar voren gekomen. Ten eerste, respondenten die in overeenstemming met hun verwachting niet crimineel bezig zijn geweest in de periode na vrijlating lijken een toekomstige zelf voor zich te zien die niet betrokken is bij criminele activiteiten, zoals 'een goede vader' en/of een rolmodel willen zijn. Hiernaast bestaat soms een gevreesd beeld van een toekomstige zelf, een 'ik' die ze liever niet zouden willen worden. Een voorbeeld is de wens om anderen niet meer te willen kwetsen met tegelijkertijd het besef dat dat wel kan gebeuren mits het criminele leven wordt voortgezet. Respondenten met zowel een meer ambivalente verwachting als een criminele verwachting lijken een minder

duidelijk of geen beeld te hebben van een toekomstige zelf. Ten tweede, respondenten die verwachtten te stoppen met criminaliteit en die inderdaad niet betrokken waren bij criminele activiteiten kort na detentie, lijken actiever op zoek te gaan naar sociale steun en geven aan dat de band met hun partner en/of familie een ondersteunende rol heeft gehad bij hun pogingen om op het rechte pad te blijven. Respondenten die in het eerste interview verwachtten niet meer in de criminaliteit te belanden en kort na detentie toch weer vast bleken te zitten, gaven tijdens het interview aan weinig sociale steun te ervaren. Dit in combinatie met voornamelijk een onzekere situatie met betrekking tot de sociale factor huisvesting. Ten derde, respondenten die volgens hun eigen verwachting niet meer betrokken waren bij criminele activiteiten, lijken meteen na vrijlating actie te hebben ondernomen om de kansen te vergroten op bijvoorbeeld het vinden van een baan. Dit in tegenstelling tot degenen die een criminele verwachting hadden. Ten vierde, (intensief) toezicht in het kader van de voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling is vooral door de respondenten met ambivalente verwachtingen genoemd als reden om de regels te volgen en zich aan de voorwaarden te houden. Hoewel dit gezien kan worden als een positieve bevinding met betrekking tot toezicht na detentie, laten de bevindingen ook zien dat situaties waarin nieuwe sociale bindingen kunnen worden aangegaan beperkt zijn in het kader van de enkelband en de opgelegde restricties. De ervaren sociale zwaarte van de enkelband is overigens een thema dat frequent is genoemd door respondenten met zowel niet criminele, criminele als ambivalente toekomstverwachtingen.

CONVENTIONELE DOELEN

In hoofdstuk 6 zijn conventionele doelen van 23 van de 28 respondenten van de onderzoeksgroep in kaart gebracht in relatie tot crimineel gedrag. De respondenten zijn op drie verschillende momenten geïnterviewd: voor vrijlating, ongeveer drie maanden na vrijlating en een jaar na vrijlating. Op basis van de interviews blijkt het streven naar conventionele doelen, geïllustreerd door 'huisje, boompje, beestje', voor bijna alle respondenten in elke interview ronde van toepassing, zowel respondenten die zijn gestopt met criminele activiteiten als degenen die door zijn gegaan. Voor vrijlating lijken deze doelen vaak nog wat oppervlakkig, vaag of weinig omvattend. Over het algemeen worden deze concreter, gedetailleerder en realistischer na vrijlating wanneer vooruitgang wordt ervaren op de verschillende levensdomeinen, bijvoorbeeld uitgenodigd worden voor een sollicitatiegesprek, een cursus kunnen volgen of een kind op komst. Een belangrijke bevinding is dat conventionele rolmodellen ontbreken bij de meeste respondenten, terwijl die juist een soort richting kunnen geven aan hoe een conventioneel leven eruit ziet en de stappen om daar te komen. Zo had het merendeel geen duidelijk beeld van wat het inhoudt om een 'goede vader' te zijn vanuit eigen ervaringen in de jeugd.

De bevindingen in hoofdstuk 6 laten verder zien dat er geen conflict ervaren lijkt te worden tussen conventionele en criminele doelen aangezien het criminele pad frequent is genoemd om conventionele doelen te bereiken, gewoonweg omdat het lucratiever is dan via de conventionele weg (niet noodzakelijk omdat ze geen andere optie zien). Een conventionele en criminele identiteit lijken dan tot op zekere hoogte naast elkaar te kunnen bestaan, terwijl theorieën vaak uit lijken te gaan van het distantiëren van de oude, criminele identiteit om een conventioneel zelfbeeld te kunnen aanvaarden. Sterker nog, voor sommige respondenten lijkt de criminele 'ik' bij te dragen aan eigenwaarde en gevoelens van trots, en biedt het de kans op toch die conventionele doelen te bereiken (of behouden). De bevindingen uit dit hoofdstuk laten zien dat personen juist door kunnen gaan met criminele activiteiten ondanks, of mogelijk juist door, een positieve conventionele identiteit (vader).

TOEZICHT RECLASSERING

In hoofdstuk 7 staat het Reclasseringstoezicht en de bijbehorende opgelegde bijzondere voorwaarden in het kader van de voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling centraal. Interviews van 23 respondenten op drie verschillende momenten zijn bestudeerd in combinatie met dossiers van de onderzoeksgroep bij de Reclassering Nederland. Vanuit de dossiers komt een beeld naar voren van intensief toezicht voor deze specifieke groep, zeker in de eerste maanden na detentie. De nadruk lijkt te liggen op (een combinatie van) meer controle gerichte voorwaarden, zoals wekelijkse meldplicht, locatiegeboden, en gebiedsverboden, veelal ondersteund door elektronisch toezicht. Echter, voorwaarden gericht op begeleiding worden ook veelvuldig opgelegd (altijd in combinatie met op controle gerichte voorwaarden), zoals begeleid wonen of een behandelverplichting. Op basis van de dossiers lijken toezichthouders over het algemeen heel betrokken te zijn bij hun cliënten, tonen ze begrip en doen hun best te assisteren waar nodig. Verder reageren toezichthouders op een overtreding van voorwaarden eerder op een alternatieve manier dan meteen een officiële waarschuwing uit te sturen of schorsing van de voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling te adviseren. Interviewdata van drie meetmomenten laten zien dat de helft van alle respondenten het toezicht beleeft als overwegend gericht op het controleren van het naleven van de regels. De andere helft ervaart het toezicht op de één of andere manier als steunend, en dit lijkt te maken te hebben met de discretionaire bevoegdheid die toezichthouders soms inzetten. Op deze manier kan ´ruimte´ gecreëerd worden in het intensieve toezicht voor vallen en opstaan, om te leren van fouten, of om maatwerk te kunnen leveren.

Sommige respondenten vinden dat de strikte voorwaarden, waarvan de naleving gecontroleerd wordt met behulp van de elektronische enkelband, zeker structuur aanbrengen in de dagelijkse routine en op die manier wellicht helpen om op het rechte pad te blijven (dimensie afwezigheid crimineel gedrag), voornamelijk in de eerste maanden na detentie. Echter, voorbij die eerste chaotische fase na vrijlating wanneer respondenten proberen hun leven op te pakken en andere rollen te vervullen (dimensie identiteit), zoals bij het zoeken naar een baan of (nieuwe) sociale contacten, kan de enkelband als belemmerend worden ervaren. Daarnaast lijkt het menselijke aspect van toezicht, namelijk de toezichthouders, bij te kunnen dragen aan de derde dimensie van desistance door openlijk waardering en erkenning te uitten voor pogingen van respondenten om hun gedrag te veranderen en op het rechte pad te blijven. Tot slot moet genoemd worden dat er een groep respondenten is die het naleven van de regels in het kader van hun voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling een periode na vrijlating heeft weten te ´combineren´ met ernstige or minder ernstige criminele activiteiten. Sommigen worden uiteindelijk toch gearresteerd, sommige sluiten het toezicht succesvol af.

CONCLUSIE

Samenvattend, leidt deze studie tot een aantal conclusies. Ten eerste, aan het eind van detentie voor vrijlating zien de respondenten uit de onderzochte groep een niet-criminele, een criminele, of een meer ambivalente toekomst voor zich. Niet-criminele toekomstverwachtingen lijken meer gekenmerkt te worden door individuele factoren, zoals geloof in eigen kunnen en een gevoel van controle over toekomstige gebeurtenissen, dan sociale factoren zoals werk, woning, steun van partner of familie. Ten tweede, de toekomstverwachtingen van de onderzoeksgroep voor vrijlating komen sterk overeen met hun gedrag na detentie. Voor degenen waarbij het niet overeen komt en die bijvoorbeeld weer in detentie zijn komen te zitten, terwijl ze dit niet verwacht hadden, lijkt weinig sociale steun en een onzekere huisvestingssituatie een rol te spelen. Deze bevinding impliceert dat hoewel toekomstverwachtingen een sturende rol *kunnen* hebben bij (crimineel) gedrag, het ervaren van vooruitgang met betrekking tot sociale factoren (zoals huisvesting en sociale steun) bijdraagt aan dit proces. Ten derde, alle respondenten in de onderzoeksgroep uiten tijdens de drie verschillende interviewmomenten het verlangen naar conventionele doelen, ofwel 'huisje, boompje, beestje'. De inhoud van deze doelen zijn in detentie nog vaag en/of onrealistisch, maar lijken concreter te worden na detentie wanneer er vooruitgang is op de verschillende levensdomeinen. Daarnaast lijken criminele en conventionele doelen voor een deel van de onderzoeksgroep naast elkaar te bestaan en ervaren sommige respondenten hierin geen inconsistentie. Ten vierde, toezicht

in het kader van de voorwaardelijke invrijheidstelling van de onderzochte groep wordt gekenmerkt door een combinatie van meerdere bijzondere voorwaarden; voornamelijk voorwaarden gericht op controle, maar bijna altijd gecombineerd met voorwaarden gericht op begeleiding. Hoewel toezichthouders betrokken en ondersteunend lijken te zijn op basis van dossiers, wordt het toezicht niet altijd zo ervaren door de respondenten zelf. Ten vijfde, de bevindingen illustreren dat toezichthouders een belangrijke rol kunnen spelen bij het desistance proces van langer gestrafte gedetineerden door waardering te uiten voor pogingen om gedrag te veranderen en op het rechte pad te blijven. Waardering en steun die wellicht niet vanuit het beperkte sociale netwerk wordt verkregen en daardoor extra waardevol kan zijn. Tot slot, de ervaren (sociale) zwaarte van de enkelband is een thema dat frequent is genoemd door de interviews heen. Al wordt erkend dat de enkelband nuttig is om (een dagelijkse) structuur aan te brengen in de chaotische periode direct na detentie, daarna wordt de enkelband veelal als belemmerend ervaren bij het vervullen van rollen en verder gaan met het leven.

BELEIDSAANBEVELINGEN EN SUGGESTIES VOOR VERDER ONDERZOEK

Volgens de bevindingen uit deze studie kan het waardevol zijn om meer aandacht te besteden aan individuele factoren in detentie, zoals manieren om het zelfvertrouwen te vergroten, dan dat nu getracht wordt via de verschillende interventies in detentie. Het goed uitvoeren van bepaalde taken kan bijvoorbeeld zelfvertrouwen vergroten. Echter, het basis regime waarin gedetineerden starten bij binnenkomst laat weinig ruimte voor extra curriculaire activiteiten, zoals onderwijs of activiteiten gericht op zelfexpressie en zelfontplooiing, die vertrouwen in eigen vaardigheden zouden kunnen ontwikkelen of ondersteunen. Met het oog op resocialisatie kan het lonen om mogelijkheden te verkennen voor het aanbieden van activiteiten die door gedetineerden zelf als waardevol worden ervaren en betekenis kunnen geven aan het (gevangenis)leven, zoals muziek of onderwijs. Wanneer gedetineerden met meer vertrouwen in hun eigen vaardigheden de gevangenis verlaten, zijn ze wellicht veerkrachtiger om de uitdagingen die hen te wachten staan na vrijlating aan te gaan.

Daarnaast laat deze dissertatie zien dat, hoewel conventionele doelen door vrijwel iedereen in de onderzoeksgroep worden genoemd, velen geen duidelijk beeld hebben van de inhoud van die doelen en ook niet van de wegen om die mogelijk te bereiken. Daardoor kan het moeilijker zijn om een conventioneel zelfbeeld in relatie tot die doelen voor te stellen (bijvoorbeeld een goede vader of werknemer zijn), en manieren te bedenken om die doelen te bereiken. Hoewel er bijvoorbeeld steeds meer aandacht is voor het behouden en versterken van het contact tussen de gedetineerde

vader en zijn kind, bieden de huidige interventies weinig concretere richtlijnen over 'hoe' je een vader kan zijn en hoe om te gaan met moeilijke opvoedsituaties. Hier lijkt wel geleidelijk verandering in te komen, maar er is nog ruimte voor groei. Aangezien de Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen (DJI) zich steeds meer bezig houdt met digitalisering in detentie en het aanbieden van e-learning, is het een idee dat gedetineerden bijvoorbeeld al in detentie zouden kunnen oefenen met hypothetische opvoedsituaties via e-learning. Een aandachtspunt is dat wat *wel* wordt aangeboden in detentie (bijvoorbeeld Vrij Verantwoord Vaderschap) grotendeels afhankelijk is van vrijwilligersorganisaties, zoals Exodus, en daardoor dus geen vast onderdeel is van het aanbod reintegratie activiteiten. Een ander mogelijk problematisch punt is dat bovenstaande interventies en cursussen in detentie veelal weg gelegd zijn voor gemotiveerde gedetineerden, terwijl dit wellicht niet noodzakelijk de groep is die de interventies en cursussen juist het hardst nodig heeft. Kan worden verwacht dat alle gedetineerden (een bepaalde mate van) motivatie 'in zichzelf' vinden?

Op basis van deze dissertatie kunnen ook suggesties met betrekking tot het Reclasseringstoezicht worden gedaan. De bevindingen laten zien dat toezicht als steunend wordt ervaren wanneer de toezichthouder zijn of haar best lijkt te doen in de ogen van degene die onder toezicht staat om te assisteren waar nodig, en de discretionaire ruimte gebruikt als dit nodig wordt geacht. Hoewel de bevindingen laten zien dat vrijwel alle toezichthouders van de onderzoeksgroep een betrokken en begeleidende werkwijze erop na te lijken te houden, kan het toezicht voor ex-gedetineerden mogelijk nog meer desistance-georienteerd worden door bijvoorbeeld manieren te vinden om de sterke eigenschappen van degene die onder toezicht staat te benutten, bevorderen, en versterken.

Deze dissertatie heeft een bijdrage geleverd aan inzichten op het terrein van de levensloopcriminologie, het proces van stoppen met criminaliteit, en verschillende aspecten van identiteit. Een aanbeveling voor vervolgonderzoek is om andere aspecten van identiteit uitgebreider te analyseren, zoals bijvoorbeeld de toekomstige zelf die iemand juist vreest te worden, en het huidige zelfbeeld. Hoe verhouden deze zich tot toekomstig gedrag? Daarnaast zou vervolgonderzoek zich kunnen richten op het ontrafelen van verschillende categorieën van personen die wel of niet doorgaan met criminaliteit om de nuances van het complexe desistance proces nauwkeuriger in kaart te brengen. Tot slot zouden meer herhaalmetingen over een langere periode bijdragen aan het genereren van inzichten met betrekking tot de *verandering* in identiteit, waar deze dissertatie hopelijk een begin mee heeft gemaakt.

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