# 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 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.

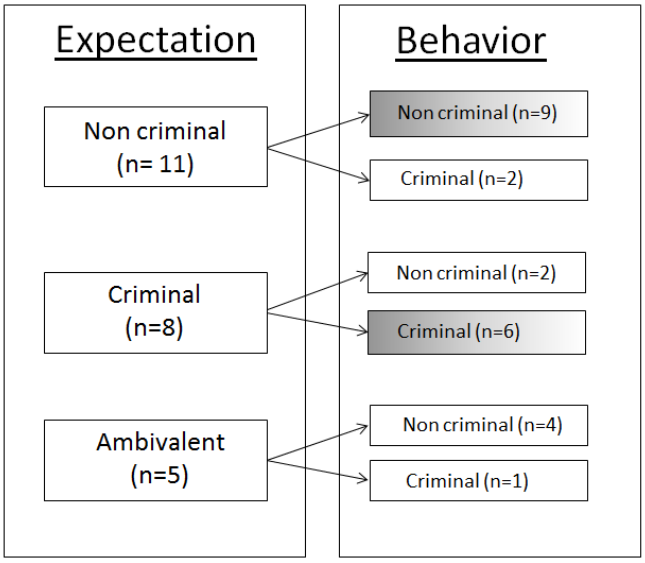


*Figure 5.1.* Pre-release Future Expectations and Post release Actual Behaviour of Long-term Prisoners

## 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.