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 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).