

**DEFYING THE ODDS OF RECIDIVISM: EX-OFFENDERS' NARRATIVES OF
DESISTANCE**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Mbongiseni Mdakane, declare that *Defying the odds of recidivism: Ex-offenders' narratives of desistance* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

When conducting research on crime, scholars are generally inclined to focus on the aetiology, hence our comprehension of biological and/or environmental factors as antecedents of crime. In this study, however, acknowledgement was given to ex-offenders who, once released from prison showed positive signs of disengagement from crime and posed the following questions: what are the lived experiences of ex-offenders who desist from crime and what are the reasons influencing their decisions to stop offending? Four adult male ex-offenders of African descent between the ages of 30 and 42 participated in the study. The researcher, inspired by his insider position as an ex-offender aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of other ex-offenders who had stopped offending, or who were in the process of disengaging from crime. An interpretive phenomenological approach including three theories of criminal desistance were used to ground the study. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Results showed that the processes of criminal desistance are unique and contextual, particular rather than universal, and that change can be attributed to intra-individual factors facilitated by strong quality social bonds.

KEY TERMS

South Africa; Criminal Justice System; Criminal Desistance; Incarceration; Interpretive Phenomenology; Recidivism; Correctional Service; Rehabilitation; Offender Reintegration; Prison; Offender Re-entry Programmes

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...societies that do not believe that offenders can change will get offenders who do not believe that they can change.

Shadd Maruna

Dedication

*I dedicate this study to my mother Mavis Mdakane,
my daughter Lebogang, my unborn son Angel-Yethu
and the rest of my family.*

ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ANC: African National Congress

DCS: Department of Correctional Services

CJS: Criminal Justice System

SAPS: South African Police Service

ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council

NIJ: National Institute of Justice

SA: South Africa

US: United States

USA: United States of America

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

NICRO: National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders

SES: Socio-Economic Status

UNISA: University of South Africa

IPA: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

VOD: Victim Offender Dialogue

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

Introduction

Relative to neighbouring countries and countries abroad, South African crime figures appear extra-ordinarily high. However, at national level, the crime figures for the past decade show an over-all decrease from the years 2004/2005-2013/2014 (South African Police Service, 2014). Yet, the incidence of crime in South Africa, regardless of whether the crime was committed by first or repeat offenders denotes that at any one point we are all directly/indirectly affected by the actions of criminal behaviour. While it is impossible to project the exact number of crimes for which returning offenders are responsible, it is nonetheless documented that the majority of released offenders will reoffend and contribute to a substantial share of the crime figures (La Vigne, Solomon, Beckman, & Dedel, 2009).

Furthermore, ex-offenders released without any form of preparation or training (such as correctional education) will experience difficulty connecting to services that discourage criminal behaviour once released into their communities and as such may be more prone to recidivating (Nunez-Neto, 2009). In addition to this, however, La Vigne et al. (2009) report that despite the high levels of all crimes committed in the United States by released offenders, not all are at equal risk of reoffending.

Against this background, a colossal body of research (see for example Gaum, Hoffman, & Venter, 2006; Muntingh & Gould, 2010; Schoeman, 2010; Tadi & Louw, 2013) has been generated in an attempt to address the reasons why some people engage in criminal behaviour, stop, only to start again. The research also includes the processes by which offenders are rehabilitated and resettled back into their communities, but there is not so much discussion around issues of desistance in terms of the processes and effective promoting factors involved in helping offenders desist from crime. Most alarming is the fact that when engaging with literature on desistance research, I find that relative to other countries, with the exception of Guse and Hudson (2014), research into criminal desistance is lagging behind in South Africa.

Consequently, there is minimal exploration and understanding of the processes and the structural factors inherent in the desistance process. Going forward, the salient question to ask is what can be done to assist ex-offenders to keep away from conditions that are likely to promote criminal activity (Waller, 1974)? This question is important insofar as South African studies report that high levels of crime, and by implication recidivism, are prevalent in communities where there are large proportions of people who are economically deprived (Burger, Gould, & Newham, 2010; Prinsloo, 1996; Siegel, 2013). According to this report then, living in deteriorated, crime-ridden communities exerts a powerful influence over behaviour that is strong enough to neutralise the effects of a supportive family and social ties (Siegel, 2013).

Background to the research problem

There is a strong conviction that offenders released from prison will either reform or relapse into criminal behaviour, a phenomenon commonly referred to as ‘the revolving door effect’ (Bushway, Brame, & Paternoster, 2004; Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). This implies that a specific group of offenders have a tendency to revert back into criminal behaviour upon their release and, consequently, this creates a vicious cycle of repeat offending. This claim, regardless of its validity, leaves unanswered a number of obvious but essential questions such as how is recidivism related to criminal desistance.

In my personal experience, when offenders are released from prison with little formal education, few economic resources and poor preparation for the labour market, they soon find that they are restricted to legally participate in the economy because they either do not qualify to work in decent-paying jobs or because of their criminal records. To remain economically active, a proportion of them choose to revert back to their criminality as part of the solution to the problem of acquiring wealth. Also, it must be noted that offenders released from prison go home with no monetary investment for the entire duration of the time they spent in prison.

Chances of relapse are therefore higher as suggested by the following research findings: in 2001, research findings approximated that between 85% and 94% of all offenders released from South African prisons recidivated to criminal behaviour (Goyer, 2001) while Muntingh (2001) estimated ranges of 55% to 97%. In 2003/4, the Draft White Paper on Corrections (2003) estimated that recidivism rates were hovering around the 94% margin. More recently, during 2010/11, Schoeman (2010) reiterated that recidivism is still prevalent

in South Africa and his claim was further corroborated by Jolingana (2011) who estimated figures between 67% and 94%. As illustrated here, a large number of research studies rather focus on, and report on, offenders who, once released from prison, relapse back into criminal behaviour than those who do not. In other words, these studies tend to disregard the minute number of offenders who do not recidivate once released from prison. Therefore, as a point of departure for the current study, it was imperative to pay special attention to that “almost forgotten” group of offenders who do not relapse into criminal behaviour once released from prison.

Rationale of the study

In one of the most influential books on desistance enquiry entitled *Escape routes: Contemporary perspectives on life after punishment* by Farrall, Hough, Maruna, and Sparks (2011) they report that one of the current trends in recent studies of criminal careers in general and desistance in particular, has been the efforts made to understand how processes of desistance manifest in particular contexts. Research findings around criminal desistance, particularly the papers presented as part of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) seminar series point to the direction that although there are similar accounts into the main reasons why people stop offending, nonetheless there are subtle variations in the processes associated with desistance and reform (Farrall et al., 2011).

Based on these research findings, it was also imperative for the current study to locate the processes of criminal desistance in relation to the wider political, social, economic and cultural landscape of South Africa. Doing so, according to Calverley (2011) forces us to examine issues of communities and their role in shaping these ‘varieties of contexts’.

Moreover, Calverley (2011) adds that if we are to understand the significance of these differences we need to explore the accounts of desisters from these different communities to better understand their experiences of desistance. Calverley’s (2011) study, which focused on the processes and experiences of desistance amongst one of UK’s poorest ethnic minorities found that even though study participants had much in common; the differences that existed between them had significant implications for their desistance from crime (Calverley, 2009). Sharing a similar understanding are Farrall et al. (2011) who also argue that it is highly unlikely that the processes involved in desistance are universal, transcending time and space. Viewed from this perspective, it also seemed probable that the unique and contextual nature:

history, culture, economics and politics of South Africa could also play a significantly fundamental role in the criminal desistance process of South African offenders.

Notwithstanding that there may be important similarities inherent in the desistance process, still, cross-cultural and cross-situational differences are equally important, and so this led to the motive of reviewing criminal desistance in the South African context in order to reveal, if any, the variety of processes and reasons implicated in the repertoire of desistance patterns.

Significance of the study

This study was designed to describe the lived experiences of criminal desistance among a group of ex-offenders who subjectively experienced themselves as having disengaged from crime and to explain how they made sense of this experience. In practical terms, this necessitated an understanding of the processes that participants went through as they desisted from crime, their reasons and motivations for having done so, as well as their ability to sustain a crime-free identity, post incarceration. For this reason, the study demonstrates potential in the way in which it can contribute to the body of knowledge on correction's research. Furthermore, since participants have been part of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) for many years (by virtue of committing crimes, evading police or sometimes getting arrested, going through the court processes, getting convicted and finally concluding their sentences by means of parole), this study also hopes to make a contribution to the field of criminology especially towards the understanding of criminal desistance.

In truth, the current study argues that while we may be aware of a variety of factors leading up to criminal desistance in other countries, and as much as there is a possibility that the phenomenon might be explored elsewhere in South Africa, still not very much has been reported. This is the key concern addressed by this study, namely, to explore and describe the lived experiences of ex-offenders who have stopped offending, or who are currently in the process of disengaging from crime. This has subtle, yet important implications to our overall understanding of the processes of criminal desistance. Case in point is the progress made by individuals across various stages leading to complete cessation including the possible identification of different patterns of desistance based on different structural supports. Thus, given the above argument, I wish to bring attention to the potential significance and contribution that the study can make in further developing dissimilar, yet equivalent

perspectives that could explore and describe criminal desistance among the population of South African offenders.

Aims of the study

This study aims to use interpretive phenomenology to explore the meanings and the lived experiences of desistance among ex-offenders who have stopped offending, or who are currently in the process of disengaging from crime. As such, the study pursued the following objectives:

To describe the meanings attached to criminal desistance as experienced by ex-offenders who have desisted, or are currently disengaging from crime; to determine the reasons that influenced their decisions to stop offending; and lastly, to determine how they have come to maintain a crime-free identity.

Statement of the problem

I am an ex-offender who has spent almost ten years in prison. Upon my release and through-out the six years that I have been on parole I have personally witnessed a growing rate of recidivism among friends and acquaintances. I can also testify that the majority of these repeat offenders, just like myself, have also undergone the prescribed correctional programmes during their previous conviction and yet they relapsed in large volumes (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). In light of this observation, however, there exists a minority group that does not reoffend and go back to prison. The main research questions, in as far as this minority group is concerned are: What are the lived experiences of ex-offenders who have stopped offending, or who are currently in the process of disengaging from crime? The following are sub-questions for the study: How do ex-offenders who have stopped offending experience desistance and what has motivated/influenced their decision to do so? How do ex-offenders who have stopped offending come to maintain a crime free-identity?

Research strategy and research methods

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was deemed feasible as it focuses on individual experiences (Creswell, 2013). I used observations and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews as instruments for collecting data. Although specific questions were asked during the interviews, the solicitation of such information and the way

in which I framed the interview questions allowed for freedom of expression by the participants while simultaneously maintaining a deeper exploration of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

In other words, the process of data gathering encouraged participants to share freely with me, reflecting the freedom of unstructured interviews (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013) yet keeping within the objectives of the study. Because qualitative researchers thrive on understanding peoples' experiences, the meanings they attach to these experiences and how people make sense of their world, the choice of using qualitative research for the current study was therefore informed by the premise above, including that it afforded me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the world of participants from their own point of view. De Vos (2002, as cited in Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013, p. 79) is in full support of this approach and describes qualitative research as the "research that elicits a participatory account of meaning, experience and perception" especially when aiming to understand participants' experiences of criminal desistance and the meanings they attach to these experiences. Accordingly then, it provides a platform wherein social phenomena can be understood and the meanings that people derive in their everyday lives (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). A narrative approach was also integrated within this study to report on the stories of positive experiences of desistance.

As a method, the procedure for implementing this type of research consists of focusing on studying a few individuals, gathering stories through conducting interviews, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2013). Likewise, this study was also designed along similar lines to those frequently used in desistance research where relevant theories are applied via a conceptual framework (Dufour, Brassard, & Martel, 2015) following the stories of successful desistance as narrated by the offenders themselves.

Since the data collected were verbal accounts, or stories of successful desistance, the participants' narratives were appropriate given that the aim of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of ex-offenders who have stopped offending. Participation in this study was voluntary and the criteria for inclusion were as follows: (1) research participants had to be African male adult ex-offenders who have served at least one or more previous convictions in a South African prison; (2) to have stopped offending, or at least shown

evidence of having made significant progress towards desistance (Calverley, 2009); and (3) to have completed their sentences including signing off their entire parole.

Study participants were recruited using two non-probability sampling techniques. The first sampling technique was purposive sampling where participants were deliberately chosen because they represented the target's populations' parameters and attributes (du Plooy, 2009). This technique was relevant because it led to selecting information-rich cases where one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The second technique used was snowball sampling. This technique involved research participants obtaining other potential participants. This technique was chosen precisely because of the hidden population of ex-offenders who have stopped offending. It was earlier envisaged that study participants would be difficult to identify and hard to locate. Because of this challenge, the selection of study participants was chosen on the basis of relevance rather than the capacity to be representative of a population whose characteristics were unknown (du Plooy, 2009). All ethical protocols were observed, including asking permission from the university to conduct the study, as well as the participants' permission. Interviews were recorded and captured in an audio format which were then transcribed to form a text. The text were then analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) technique of analysing qualitative data. Details on how the data were analysed will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Ethical considerations

The following ethical considerations were observed. First, permission and ethical clearance to conduct the study were requested and subsequently granted by the ethics committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) to ensure that the study abides by the ethical and scientific criteria. Second, participation in this study was voluntary and no one withdrew from the study. Study participants were recruited and fully informed of the procedures of the study, for example, that it forms part of the fulfilment of a Master's Degree. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were also observed, for example, participants were informed that all records pertaining to the study will be confidential and that pseudonyms, instead of their real names will be used to identify them. Ethical considerations will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Demarcation of the study

Only African male adult ex-offenders participated in this study, therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to females and to adolescents in other parts of South Africa or South African prisons as conditions may differ. However, the dissemination of these research results may be influential and useful in stimulating further discourse around research on criminal desistance.

Definition of concepts

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are used and defined below:

Ex-offender: someone who has been previously convicted of a crime.

Incarceration: incarceration according to Mabuza and Roelofse (2013) refers to the admitting, imprisonment and detention of a convicted person until his or her sentence expires. Webster (2013, as cited in Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013, p. 1) defines imprisonment as “to put in prison” or “to subject to confinement”.

Desistance: the process by which individuals stop offending (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014).

Recidivist: Prinsloo (1996, as cited in Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013) describes a recidivist as an offender who cannot learn from previous experiences.

Recidivism: refers to the re-occurrence of negative behaviour patterns.

Habitual offender: a person who has been convicted of the same crime several times.

Parolees: individuals who have served most of their sentences in a correctional facility and after having served a proportion of their sentence (typically half of their original sentence) and who are eligible to complete their sentences in their community under correctional supervision (Nunez-Neto, 2009).

The following terms will be used interchangeably throughout the study

Offender/Criminal will be used interchangeably to denote someone who commits crime.

Correctional centres will also be used interchangeably with prisons.

Resocialisation will also be used interchangeably be offender re-entry.

Outline of the study

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the literature review and theoretical framework adopted by the study. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study. Chapter 5 concludes the study, discusses its limitations, makes recommendations, and makes suggestions for future research.

Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study, including the background to the research problem, rationale for the research, significance of the study, aims of the investigation, statement of the problem, research strategy and research methods, ethical considerations, definition of concepts, and outline of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the literature review and theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature review and theoretical framework

Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature on criminal desistance and is separated into five sub-sections for easy and convenient reading. The first section defines what criminal desistance is, followed by the three major theories underpinning criminal desistance, then the psychosocial factors implicated in the desistance process such as marriage, employment, and families as providers of social capital. Finally, consideration is given to the challenges inherent in the desistance process such as the role played by the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The chapter concludes by looking at the importance of offender re-entry, also known as social reintegration of offenders.

The definition of criminal desistance

While criminal desistance can be broadly explained as the cessation of criminal activity; literature, on the other hand, indicates that not every scholar in the research community agrees with this definition. Consequently, due to lack of agreement as a result of the varying definitions, desistance from crime has become conceptually difficult to define (Dufour et al., 2015). Several definitions of desistance coalesce around the controversy of whether desistance is temporary or permanent. This is understandably so because, owing to the “zig zag” criminal trajectory of offenders (Laub & Sampson, 2003); it becomes “impossible to say with certainty that an offender’s criminal career has ended” (Dufour et al., 2015, p. 480).

Some scholars are of the opinion that permanent desistance can only be determined in retrospect, that is, only after the ex-offender has died (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth & Visher, 1986; Elliot, Huizenga, & Menard, 1989). Others contend that the term desistance should be used to describe declines in the frequency or severity of criminal activity (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Yet for others, desistance is more likely to refer to a state of “temporary non-offending” than a permanent change from one state to another (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001). In reviewing key issues on desistance research, criminologist David Farrington finds that the term desistance has been used both as an empirical variable and as an underlying theoretical construct (Farrington, 2007). As an empirical variable,

desistance is defined as the observed termination of offending. As a theoretical construct, desistance is used to refer to the decreases in the underlying frequency, variety, or seriousness of offending. In both definitions, some sort of behavioural change is implicitly implied; and given that most researchers use terms like “desistance”, “cessation”, or “termination” to imply permanent change in behaviour (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009), desistance from crime can therefore be conceptualised as a process by which a person arrives at a permanent state of non-offending. In other words, one first terminates offending, then desists or abstains from further offending (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009).

Yet a more comprehensive definition of desistance is provided by Maruna (2001) who describes desistance from crime as a process usually attributed to a range of desisting-promoting factors such as efforts from offenders themselves, social support from ‘significant others’ such as partners, family and friends, the business community (former and prospective employers), as well as assistance by professional agencies such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO). I fully agree and support this definition and propose that it also be adopted for this study.

As will be shown subsequently, these and several other indicators such as attaining a good job including the significance of critical moments have been put forward as desistance-promoting. On the other hand, Pogrebin (2012) suggests that desistance from crime may very well be related to fear and anxiety associated with reincarceration, maturational aspects of the offender, risks and disadvantages incurred for that person; as well as an introspective assessment of the offender’s life coupled with a strong desire to stop offending. In light of the above definitions, the following section will explore in more detail the theoretical explanations underpinning criminal desistance.

Theoretical explanations of criminal desistance

While there are several theories attempting to explain the cessation of criminal behaviour (see for example Archer, 1995; Dufour, et al., 2015; Farrington, 2007); the following section, however, aims to discuss only three main theories of criminal desistance as identified in the literature, namely, Age-graded informal social control theory; Theory of cognitive transformation and Identity theory of criminal desistance. Each of these are discussed in the subsequent section.

Age-graded informal social control theory

Several theories can be found in the literature attempting to explain the reasons for disengaging in crime. By far, the most prevailing theory of criminal desistance in recent years is by Sampson and Laub (1993) and it is called the Age-graded informal social control theory. The theory was initially unveiled in Sampson and Laub (1993); a decade later it was modified in Laub and Sampson (2003), and two years later in Sampson and Laub (2005a, b, c); and finally in Laub, Sampson and Sweeten (2006). This theory asserts that desistance from crime comes about primarily as a result of an increase in informal social control as ex-offenders find themselves in conventional roles like jobs and marriage. Social bond theorists argue that social bonds to family and employment generally serve as a deterrent to committing crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

In essence, proponents of this theory propose that multiple quality bonds like getting married, employed and participating in church activities prove more effective than a single tie or type of tie (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Another way of looking at it is that “Investments in relationships such as work and marriage generate social capital” (Savolainen, 2009, p. 286; see also Farrall, 2004). Here, the rationale is that one’s spouse, much like one’s employer, has the ability to provide a direct social control function, thus monitoring the conduct of ex-offenders in the process (Craig, Diamond & Piquero, 2014). Similarly, becoming a parent is likely to entail responsibilities and priority shifts that reduce situational inducements to offend. However, “although there is no consensus in the literature regarding the aspects of social capital that most favour desistance, it is clear that without minimal access to this form of capital, desistance is unlikely to occur” (Dufour et al., 2015, p. 491). Serving a similar and related function are religious participation and conversion. In this sense, religiosity and/spirituality is seen as a protective factor which promotes prosocial behaviour (Johnson, 2014).

At a minimum then, taking all of this together partly suggests that ex-offenders who are released from prison and secure employment, commit to a stable relationship and to some form of religion commit fewer crimes than those who do not. In fact, according to social bond theorists, attachments to these bonds significantly promote desistance while those without strong (quality) bonds are at an elevated risk of reoffending (Leverentz, 2012). Literature also reports that these offenders are most likely to drop out of school, experience difficulty in maintaining meaningful employment including difficulties sustaining their relationships with

their loved ones (Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995). In concluding, one can infer that these social bonds are not only dynamic but likely to grow and change over time (Maruna, 2001), be it several months or years; reflecting the inherent instability of the desistance process (Leverentz, 2012). In sum, informal social bonds (like marriage, family, school and a steady job) are said to impose limits on routine activities thereby reducing the propensity to commit crime (Warr, 1998).

Theory of cognitive transformation

The second theory is by Giordano (2014) and is called the Theory of cognitive transformation. This theory was formulated following an in-depth, mixed method study of longitudinal data (1980-1990) from juvenile male and female offenders from Ohio in the United States. The theory centres primarily on cognitive shifts and emphasises the role of cognitive processes in disengaging from crime and the importance of human agency in the deliberate decision of former offenders to stop offending. According to this theory, there needs to be a willingness on behalf of the ex-offender concerned to change behaviour. The overall change process takes place as a result of both cognitive and behavioural changes and both constitute an integral part of the desistance process. Giordano (2014) adds that individuals differ in what they bring to the change process, including variations in preferences and levels of motivation. Whereas the Informal social control theory focuses on identifying “multiple pathways to desistance”, the theory of cognitive transformation emphasises the types of cognitive changes associated with successful desistance.

There are four distinct types of cognitive transformation that occur as desisting offenders undergo change and these are: openness to change; receptivity to certain “hooks”; shifts in identity; and changes in the perceived desirability of criminal behaviour. Advocates of this theory propose that shifts in cognition are not only interconnected but inspire behavioural change as well. For example, in an ideal situation, an offender undergoing cognitive transformation must initially be in a state of readiness/openness to change; this change in turn encourages receptivity to one or more catalysts for change; this would then be followed by the third type of change which occurs when offenders begin to visualise themselves as non-offenders thus displacing the old deviant self. The fourth type of change occurs when identity transformation gradually reduces the importance of crime and this consequently leads to complete cessation of criminal behaviour (Giordano, 2014).

It is interesting to note that although this theory initially failed to corroborate findings by Sampson and Laub (1993) regarding the role of adult social bonds; however, Giordano (2014) conceded that these types of shifts are, nonetheless important in the desistance process. Parallel to the Informal social control theory then, catalysts for change, which include marital attachment, religiosity and employment play a critical role and provide a foundation important enough towards the construction of a new identity. This change in identity, together with cognitive transformations that occur encourage offenders to pursue a conventional, noncriminal relationship with a spouse that supports identity change. This is said to occur particularly when the ex-offender makes a deliberate decision to stop offending which in turn helps maintain the newly adopted behaviours and self-conceptions (Giordano, 2014). In sum then, changes in cognition as proposed by cognitive theorists are paramount to the desistance process. The four stages discussed above are regarded as having long-term but predictable rewards and contribute to a correspondingly noncriminal identity (Giordano, 2014).

Identity theory of criminal desistance

The third theory by Bushway and Paternoster (2014) is called the Identity theory of criminal desistance. What distinguishes the Identity theory of criminal desistance from other desistance theories is that it explicitly asserts that both “identity and cognitive changes within the current criminal offender must precede the arrival of structural supports for change, like jobs and marriages” (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014, p. 63-4). In other words, a change in one’s identity, implying the discarding off of the old offender self in favour of the new, non-offender self is necessary prior to conventional roles and opportunities like good jobs and marriage. Furthermore, this theory describes desistance from crime as grounded in intentional self-change (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014). In terms of this theory then, desistance from crime is deliberate and intentional.

Essentially, the argument being made is that identity change transpires when offenders begin to experience the crystallisation of discontent with their current working identity that they begin to dwell on and take initial steps toward change. The rationale behind this theory is that criminal desistance is more likely to occur when offenders begin to think of themselves as sufficiently dissatisfied with their offending identity that they, for instance turn toward legitimate employment, marry and settle down with conventional partners. Advocates of this theory further argue that “the best chance for desistance to take place is if offenders

decide they would like to change their life around, including who they are, take initial steps on their own to send signals that they have changed, successfully handle the small opportunities to reveal that new identity until better opportunities (like conventional partners, and good jobs) are provided” (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014, p. 72).

Conversely, offenders who are not prepared to change who they are probably because they still derive satisfaction from their working identities are unlikely to respond favourably to the direct social control efforts of a partner, and unlikely to be effective employees including maintaining their employment should they be hired. According to Bushway and Paternoster (2014), those who alter their identities will necessarily engage in a number of other behaviours that will organise and support their decision to desist (relocate, find employment, change deviant friends, assume responsibility for their children, go to church or attend Alcohol Anonymous (AA)).

These are overt behaviours that can shed light on the possibility that an individual has truly desisted. Although these authors do concede that conventional institutions such as legitimate social networks, stable jobs, and emotionally satisfying relationships are important, they believe that they are not important in initially causing desistance. Rather, they are the intervening causal mechanisms that link a change in an ex-offender’s identity and a change in their behaviour-desisting from crime. In other words, while these conventional institutions and social relationships are important and a necessary part of the desistance process, Bushway and Paternoster (2014) think that these are not accessed until offenders first decide to change, and begin to change their sense of who they are.

Comparing the above theories suggests that there are considerable overlaps on the causes of criminal desistance; and this, according to Bushway and Paternoster (2014) has sparked a contentious debate among researchers about the antecedents of criminal desistance. For instance, generic models of desistance pioneered by Sampson and Laub (1993) have been heavily criticised. This, in spite of the huge contributions they have made in the research field of criminal desistance. For instance, in their previous studies, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) and Bushway and Paternoster (2014, 2011) have consistently argued that due to the insignificant recognition given to the offenders’ agentic abilities such as intentional self-change, Sampson and Laub’s Age-graded informal social control theory comes across as deterministic in the way in which it disregards the importance of prior changes in offender’s identities and cognitions. This line of argument is also consistent with the Theory of

cognitive transformations by Giordano (2014). Therefore, in light of this evidence, I argue that considered in isolation, single theory models such as the ones discussed above lack the explanatory power sufficient enough to understand the complex and complicated nature of criminal desistance. As such, these theories will be integrated in this study to form a coherent and holistic understanding of the process of criminal desistance. In the next section, I discuss the psychosocial factors implicated in the desistance process.

Psychosocial factors implicated in the desistance process

A number of social attributes and to a lesser extent psychological factors have been implicated in the desistance process. Consistent with Maruna's (2001) view on the key markers associated with the desistance process are quality of marital attachment; job stability; religious affiliation; the important role that families and communities play in fostering desistance as well as the significance of critical moments. Supporting this view are Horney et al. (1995) who report that finding good quality employment, involvement in marriage, school as well as assuming family responsibility may be functionally important because of the role these institutions play in structuring daily activities. Research by Giordano (2014) also proposes that criminal offenders who experience the crystallisation of discontent eventually settle down, by for example, attaching themselves to prosocial crime-inhibiting mates.

In this regard, Giordano (2014) finds that for many offenders, the desire to go straight as evidenced by efforts of behavioural alignment to a noncriminal relationship appears to play a key role in the desistance process. On the psychological front, intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, that is, the belief about what one can accomplish as well as empathy, the extent of compassion about other people's views have also been implicated in the desistance process (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011; Giordano, 2014). Also strongly related to views about criminal desistance are current local-life circumstances of various kinds that the ex-offender must face and these include transition to parenthood or an offender's coming of age (Horney, et al., 1995; Savolainen, 2009). These are discussed next; starting off with marriage as an effective intervention in the lives of criminal offenders.

Marriage

Research on marital relationships and cohabitation, including same-sex marriages suggest that the quality of marriage and the normative orientation of a partner are essential towards attaining criminal desistance (Barry, 2006; Giordano, 2014; Savolainen, 2009).

According to Warr (1998) there is something unique about marriage that affects the daily activities of men. Recently coming to the same conclusion is Leverentz (2012) whose research showed that marriage plays a significantly important role through the facilitation of prosocial bonds. In another related study conducted more than four decades ago, Waller (1974) found that among his sample of participants, of those parolees who would be rearrested within 2 years, a consistently higher proportion were singletons (persons not married or in a long-term relationship) compared to the total population of parolees. This finding, together with the assertion that singletons who live alone or with parents all spend more time with friends than do married men suggest that the time spent with peers contributes to higher levels of offending.

By contrast, men who are married have been found to spend less time with peers (especially delinquents) and more time with their families (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Savolainen, 2009; Warr, 1998). Consequently, the bond and the attachment derived from these relationships lead to alterations in men's routine activities (Warr, 1998). Since women in these relationships are perceived to regulate and provide their partners with direct control and a stake in conformity; it can be argued that changes in offending behaviour can be attributed to these relationships. However, according to Laub and Sampson (2003) the mere existence of a marital relationship is insufficient to bring about desistance; the bond must be a strong one (Leverentz, 2012).

In addition to this, Giordano (2014) makes the important observation that the positive effect of relationships need not be limited to purely prosocial partners, but the grooming of the partner is equally important in terms of their orientation to crime. In her study, Leverentz (2012) reported that when both partners succeed in maintaining a crime-free lifestyle, they both provide support and empathy for each other. She also found that same sex relationships function just as heterosexual relationships do, both constructively and destructively in the sense that one partner usually gravitates where the other goes (Leverentz, 2012). Much like long-term relationships with offending partners, new relationships can be a source of strain that facilitate rather than inhibit a criminal lifestyle, thus effectively contributing to higher levels of reoffending (Leverentz, 2012; Savolainen, 2009). In the words of Savolainen then, (2009, p. 301) it seems more likely that "offenders who formed a union and became fathers enjoyed the greatest reductions in criminal activity".

Employment

There is a profound conviction among society and policymakers alike that employment is key in addressing issues of crime (Lageson & Uggen, 2013) and ultimately recidivism. In fact, marriage and employment are conceived of as two sides of the same coin effective enough in promoting criminal desistance. To date, however, it remains unclear whether finding and keeping a good quality job facilitates union formation to prosocial partners or prosocial partners motivate attachments to the labour market. In trying to explain this conundrum, Savolainen (2009) reports that ex-offenders who are employed stand a better chance to attract prosocial partners compared to unemployed ex-offenders.

Furthermore, according to literature, the decision to find employment may be preceded by cognitive changes as suggested by the Theory of cognitive transformation or shifts in identity as proposed by the Identity theory of criminal desistance (Savolainen, 2009). Either way, employment as an effective intervention in the lives of criminal offenders remains an important element in disengaging from a life of crime (Barry, 2006). In many informal discussions held with offenders, Waller (1974) reports that to determine whether an offender is involved in crime, we should find out whether he has a job.

Implicitly, this line of enquiry suggests that since most crime involves economic gain or remunerative incentive, one's relative access to legitimate and illegitimate work opportunities operate to strongly influence one's decision to commit crime. Yet what society and policymakers fail to acknowledge is that the meaning and social significance of both work and crime evolve over the life course such that being employed may have one effect in adolescence and quite a different one in adulthood (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). In this regard, Sampson and Laub (1993) find that when comparing the effects of employment for both youth and adults over the life course, work is more meaningful and effective in curbing criminal behaviour for adults over the age of 25 than it is for the youth between the ages 18 to 25.

Furthermore, a study conducted in the US on crime and employment has linked work in three major facets: first, in highlighting the importance associated with the quality of the job in attaining criminal desistance; second, in showing how conventional ties formed through legal employment act as a deterrent to crime; and third, demonstrating the relationship between unemployment and crime figures (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). Careful

consideration of extant literature on crime and work suggests that the quality of employment appears to be more salient; because, as Uggen (1999) reports, ex-offenders who obtain high-quality employment are less likely to reoffend than those who obtain low paying jobs. Similar studies seem to confirm that the quality of a job appears to matter than the mere presence of legal employment in its effect on reducing crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). In this respect, Barry (2006) and Lageson and Uggen (2013, p. 202) anticipate that a legitimate source of income such as a monthly/weekly salary becomes a key consideration with jobs functioning as an effective “money delivery system” that serves as an alternative to committing economic crime.

Converging to a similar finding are Bottoms and Shapland (2011, p. 70) who write that “for a persistent offender who has been committing crimes which bring in income, money is central to this process: desisting requires new or increased sources of income, and/or learning to do without much income”. Taking into cognisance the current state of unemployment in South Africa which is currently hovering around 26.7%, it makes sense that labour markets characterised by high unemployment rates and low-quality jobs such as those in South Africa are associated with increased crime rates (StatisticsSA, 2016).

Supporting this claim is Trimbur (2012) who found that for her 40 participants under- and unemployment posed the greatest threat for the participants in her study. She noted that roughly half of her participants were unemployed, despite actively seeking jobs. For those who could secure employment, they often had to settle for minimum or less than satisfactory positions (Trimbur, 2012). Despite these findings, a review of the literature suggests that desistance from crime and the assumption of adult work roles act as mutually reinforcing processes (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). Implicated as well in the process of criminal desistance is the role played by religiosity and/or spirituality.

Spirituality and/or religion

The relationship between religiosity and criminal desistance has long been a topic of interest in criminological literature. A close examination of the extant literature by Johnson (2014) reveals that the religiosity-crime relationship is a strong one and carries with it considerable implications at both the theoretical and public policy levels (Johnson, 2014). Similarly, while reviewing the processes of criminal desistance, Giordano (2014) found that a large number of her participants did mention some reference to God, suggesting that religion

is a robust factor that may shield or protect youth as well as adults from delinquency, crime, and recidivism. In the same way, research conducted by Johnson, Larson and Pitts (1997, as cited in Johnson, 2014) found that offenders who were most active in Bible studies were significantly less likely to commit crimes during the one year follow-up period.

Based on these and several other findings, the study conducted by Johnson (2014) actually confirms that religious participation influences the behaviour of many people including offenders and those who are in the process of disengaging from crime (see also Guse & Hudson, 2014; Leigey & Ryder, 2014). Many of these studies have focused on the effectiveness of faith-based programmes in working both with offenders and ex-offenders (Johnson, 2014). Results from a series of multilevel analyses indicate that church attendance (the frequency of attending religious services) appears to have a generally opposite effect on crimes (Johnson, Larson, Jang & Li, 2000a as cited in Johnson, 2014). In this regard, mounting evidence suggests that religious participation may reduce the risks of a broad range of delinquent behaviours, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behaviour (Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, Payne & Kethineni, 1996 as cited in Johnson, 2014).

With regard to the controversy surrounding whether it is the religion adopted or religiosity per se which alters or modifies in some way the trajectory associated with criminal desistance; Calverley's (2009) findings propose that religiosity and religion are complementary factors in supporting this process. This was applicable to both his Christian and Muslim participants. This assertion is also corroborated by Farrall et al. (2011) who remind us that the Social bonds theory by Sampson and Laub (1993) also recognises religiosity as a strong protective factor that serves to maintain desistance as it brings about a change in social circles with an additional set of values which, for the most part, are incompatible with offending.

In South Africa, with its multiple indigenous, cultural and religious convictions, it is interesting how the dynamics of these variances foster positive or normative behaviour, or prosocial friends formed through religion, which also offer support and protection against further recidivism. In sum, there is growing evidence suggesting that religious interventions (for example, Bible studies, faith-based drug treatment, faith-based dorms in prisons, and faith-based offender re-entry programmes) can be effective in promoting desistance from crime (Johnson, 2014). These findings, in general, suggest that youth who continue to attend

and participate in religious activities are less likely to commit a variety of illegal acts (Johnson, 2014). Next, I discuss families and communities as providers of social capital.

Families and communities as providers of social capital

Studies conducted in the United States have consistently shown that over the past two and half decades, the prison population and the number of ex-offenders released into the communities have been increasing (Nunez-Neto, 2009). In this regard, communities are confronted with an influx of ex-offenders and as a result this poses a dual challenge to the communities concerned, namely: (1) to provide ex-offenders with the services and the environment necessary to navigate the transition from prison to the community; and (2) to protect the public from potential harm.

In this respect, Barry (2006) explains that families and communities do occupy a privileged position in the lives of ex-offenders because they comprise their significant others, neighbours, and former and prospective employers, all of whom have the potential to regulate routine activities, in the meanwhile encouraging ex-offenders to engage in prosocial behaviours and refrain from breaking the law. Waller (1974) also arrived at a similar conclusion in reporting that support, especially from parents (in the case of a younger person) or husband or wife is important in preventing re-arrest and reconviction. By contrast, however, lack of family support which might also include difficulties securing employment with a criminal record; challenges of obtaining a roof over one's head; resumption of duty such as feeding oneself and paying for simple pleasures, means that the ex-offender may long for the 'comfortable' and 'secure' situation that existed prior to his release (Waller, 1974).

In this regard, literature shows that at times, building positive relationships between offenders and their families can help: like everyone else, offenders are most influenced to change (and not to change) by those closest to them and those whose advice they respect and whose support they value (Weaver & McNeil, 2007 as cited in Farrall, 2011). In keeping with the context of families and communities, it becomes imperative to understand the occurrences of critical events in the life-course of offenders as these are believed to navigate offenders away from a life of crime. These critical events are discussed next.

Significance of critical events

Decoding trajectories of criminal involvement in the life-course of offenders partly suggest that law breakers will not offend consistently throughout their lifetime. This implies that participation in criminal activity is not a permanent manifestation as changes vary depending on the immediate local life circumstances of the offenders (Horney, et al., 1995; Pogrebin, 2012). A variety of these circumstances, defined as ‘critical events’, ‘turning points’, ‘wake-up calls’ or ‘fateful moments’ are used interchangeably to describe a personal and psychological re-orientation of the mind that can influence an individual to desist from a life of crime (MacDonald, Webster, Shildrick & Simpson, 2011).

As explained by MacDonald et al. (2011), these events are experienced as critical events reflected in the narratives of offenders and are interpreted as being highly consequential. For example, one of the key markers reported to signify a reorientation towards desistance, also reported in the relevant criminological literature is the usually unplanned coming of parenthood (MacDonald et al., 2011; Maruna 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Recently confirming these findings is Giordano (2014) whose sample of female participants associated the birth and maturation of their children with their own lifestyle changes. Another study argued that these lifestyle changes could be attributed to shifts in identity, during the replacement of the offender identity with the much valued parent identity (Meek, 2011).

In a similar study, Graham and Bowling (1996, as cited in Giordano, 2014) found that for women in their British sample, desistance often occurred abruptly and was tied to childbearing as a key transition event. Therefore, based on the above findings, we may infer that the transition to becoming a parent while incarcerated encourages desistance which also provides a useful example of the function of cognitive changes that offenders go through. However, gender differences seem to exist as female participants in Giordano’s (2014) study were more likely to prominently focus on their children as a catalyst for change relative to their male counterparts.

Despite these findings, Giordano (2014) reveals two important points: first, she notes that cognitive processes and not simply the presence or absence of children are important elements of successful change; and secondly, she maintains that exposure to a new condition (in this case the presence of children), or even a high level of attachment to one’s children

does not on its own constitute a powerful motive for desistance without some accompanying cognitive changes. Thus, the overall conclusion that can be drawn on the transition to parenthood is that cognitive transformations are important and should be regarded as an integral part of the change process.

So, inasmuch as becoming a parent brings forth opportunities for a deep introspection of the self, nonetheless, it is the self that must be actively embraced (Giordano, 2014). In a much similar way to childbearing, the death of an offender's parent in their early twenties was found to act as a critical event that reorients one's life away from drug and criminal careers (MacDonald et al., 2011). Calverley (2009) also found in his study that the death of a father, or both parents also meant that the interviewees were burdened with extra responsibilities and a duty to provide for other family members. Over and above, this section has highlighted the importance of critical moments in the way in which they can turn people's lives around and away from a life of crime. Looked at this way, these critical events could very well represent a life changing transition leading criminal offenders to reconsider desisting from a life of crime (Savolainen, 2009). Having considered the importance of these events in the desistance process, the focus of the discussion now turns to the relationship between age and desistance from crime.

Age and desistance from crime

There appears to be a strong relationship between age and criminal desistance as proposed by the 'age-crime curve'. In terms of this relationship, those who reoffend more tend to be relatively young and that with advancing age, the rate in which they commit crime declines significantly. In fact, a large body of research (see for example Farrington, 1986; Giordano, 2014; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1993) proposes that with the onset of adulthood, the great majority of persistent offenders, once in their twenties; do not wish to continue with a life of crime.

Based on these findings, Bottoms and Shapland (2011) as well as Tadi and Louw (2013) have also recently reconfirmed that the criminality of even recidivist offenders declines sharply in the age range 20 to 30. In as far as the transition into adulthood is concerned; MacDonald et al. (2011) found that most of their UK's sample of youth offenders succeeded in desisting from crime when they transitioned into real adult roles. This included

returning to a more conventional lifestyle such as engaging in purposeful activity like parenthood, employment and separation from peer groups (MacDonald et al., 2011).

Several other propositions have also been put forward to try and explain the relationship between age and criminal desistance. However, major strides regarding our current understanding of how change occurs in the life-course of offenders were pioneered by Sampson and Laub (1993) who demonstrated that stability or continuity of offending alone is insufficient for comprehending adult criminality. Horney et al. (1995, p. 671) also concluded that “continuity and change are not opposites, but rather are two faces of intertwined causal processes”. Other researchers interpret desistance as a natural process of maturation and the transition to adulthood (MacDonald et al., 2011).

Essentially, it has two ‘findings’ in it. These findings partly explain why different studies converge on different findings in as far as they view desistance as a normal process of maturation (Barry, 2006; MacDonald et al., 2011). However, as discussed previously, by indicating how adult social bonds like marriage and employment alter life trajectories, Sampson and Laub (1993) were successful in showcasing that maturation does contribute to the desistance process. In fact, in discussing the nature of change, Laub and Sampson (2003) provided illustrations of three kinds of change. For the purpose of consistency, these three kinds of changes may be perceived as correspondingly similar to the three categories of returning offenders as illustrated under the section ‘The three categories of ex-offenders’ later in this chapter.

Cognitive transformation theorists, on the other hand, hold that offenders undergoing the desistance process can think actively for themselves as they negotiate potential desistance-related transitions in young adulthood. This also indicates that maturation is very much implicated in the desistance process and this could be in the form of a personal philosophy that one sets for him/herself (Giordano, 2014).

Thus, in concluding, one can expect that with advancing age, assuming adult roles and responsibilities could trigger the return or attempted return to a more conventional lifestyle due to the sheer realisation that continued offending into adulthood will be counterproductive at many levels. How these obstacles manifest in the desistance process is explored in the following section.

Challenges inherent in the desistance process

More often than not, offenders released out of prison undergo a variety of obstacles when they aspire to “go straight”. In particular, literature points to two overarching themes that act as obstacles to successful desistance namely, structural and individual limitations (MacDonald et al., 2011). According to Fletcher (2009), ex-offenders go through a variety of challenges which include housing, post-incarceration stigma and employment needs that must be promptly addressed so that they are not experienced as insurmountable barriers to the desistance process. In accordance with the aim of this section, which is to report on the challenges inherent in the desistance process, I also discuss literature on the trials and tribulations described by offenders as they transition and reintegrate into their communities (Pogrebin, 2012).

Reviewing literature uncovers layers of complexity beginning with inadequate support from family and community members, lack of accommodation post incarceration and reduced employment opportunities which, more often are accompanied by such things as substance abuse, keeping delinquent friendships, and the ex-offenders’ long-term alienation from their communities which in turn impact their perception of authority (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013; Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015; Ngabonziza & Singh, 2011; Tadi & Louw, 2013). Of course, upon release, many ex-offenders are released into the nation’s poorest communities where they struggle to maintain stable social bonds and support networks, and where there are limited resources and services that can assist them start over with their lives (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015).

Furthermore, the communities to which they return are generally overpopulated with high rates of ex-offenders (Leverentz, 2012). Aggravating matters even more badly is that first, they are expected to join a prejudiced society that is not only reluctant to accept them but is also discriminatory based on an individual’s ex-offender status, and second, they have to conform and abide to a code of conduct that is disapproved of by the criminal underworld (Pogrebin, 2012). In this regard, I find the metaphor “double edge sword” appropriate in trying to capture the essence of what ex-offenders exactly go through upon their return from prison. And so far, it can be discerned that starting on a clean slate for most ex-offenders is extremely challenging because abandoning a criminal lifestyle hinges very much upon adherence to conventional values, together with continued association with conventional others as well as opportunities for reintegration (Pogrebin, 2012). A recent study by Bereswill

(2011) has also reaffirmed the notion that release from prison is not an easy transition; it is a daunting challenge which many ex-offenders find complicated.

In light of these challenges, Craig et al. (2014) warn that achieving desistance is not, for most recidivist offenders a linear process. Where desistance occurs, it usually involves a deliberate act of self-change (Kiecolt, 1994 as cited in Bushway & Paternoster, 2014; Kiecolt & Mabry, 2000 as cited in Bushway & Paternoster, 2014). It is a gradual process, not a simple or sudden process. Farrall et al. (2011, p. 1) have also acknowledged that “One of the most difficult tasks facing those who wish to leave behind a criminal past is proving to those around them that they are ‘more than just the sum of their crimes’”. Researchers such as MacDonald et al. (2011) stress the fragility of the desistance process. These researchers found from the biographies of their sub-sample that desistance is replete with failed attempts and that success was contingent on several factors beyond individual motivation. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the desistance process relies profoundly on individuals’ relationships with others and that the provision of family and community support is key in addressing issues of crime and recidivism (Dufour et al., 2015). In explicating these views further, the following subsections centre very concisely on the structural limitations, individual obstacles, delinquent friendships as well as financial obstacles described by ex-offenders as challenges inherent in the desistance process.

Structural limitations

Schoeman (2002, as cited in Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013) states that during incarceration, offenders are isolated from society and when released out of prison they are expected to conform and positively reintegrate into society but it is often the case that most ex-offenders do not have the necessary skills or support to cope with this transition. This state of affairs has implications for those attempting to desist from crime as research findings indicate that someone who has committed a crime remains at a greater propensity to reoffend (Tadi & Louw, 2013). For instance, in a study conducted by Mabuza and Roelofse (2013), the researchers noted that life post imprisonment was never the same for their participants. The participants reported having limited access to adequate support, reliable resources and infrastructure within their communities which could have assisted them with their reintegration. Consequently, when communities are not actively involved in the lives of offenders, this gives rise to structural limitations which have been found to contribute to a sub-culture of offending (Tadi & Louw, 2013).

Viewed this way, it becomes clear that for many ex-offenders with aspirations to disengage from crime, the desire to reform quickly turns into a disappointing nightmare upon realisation of these challenges. From the discussion so far, it may be concluded that those wishing to desist from crime will, from time to time, encounter several challenges culminating in the difficulty to maintain and support the decision to desist from crime. These may be in the form of tempting offers of lucrative criminal activity from former delinquent friends or from the difficulty of finding legitimate employment. Thus, the key factor that emerges from the descriptions above suggests that reintegration into society for most ex-offenders wishing to disengage from crime ends up being an obstacle course of overcoming structural limitations.

Individual obstacles

In trying to disengage from a life of crime, there is the challenge of ex-offenders coping with their own process of change. Attributes such as age, race and gender are usually cast in stone and therefore hard to alter. Viewed as individual limitations, these attributes can be discerned as criminogenic factors impeding the desistance process (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). Elements which can be changed such as mental health issues, substance abuse issues, the types of friends one makes, and joblessness, are all referred to as criminogenic factors (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015). In their UK study entitled *Paths of exclusion, inclusion and desistance*, MacDonald et al. (2011) reported that most of their participants described how they themselves acted as the main obstacle to desistance. This finding grounds personal responsibility and accountability right at the heart of the desistance process. As Mnguni and Mohapi (2015, p. 54) rightfully describe, “Offenders have to work on changing aspects of themselves that led them, in the first place to commit crime”.

In this respect, Bottoms and Shapland (2011) find that changing a pattern of behaviour is more difficult for potential would-be desisters than forming the wish to change behaviour. As these authors find, it is much easier to form sincere intentions to change than it is actually to alter patterns of behaviour. In a similar way, after examining the range of desistance stories, Giordano (2014) came to the conclusion that long-lasting change will frequently need to be built upon processes that are more tangible than desire and good intentions. Given these individual obstacles and the huge gap between ex-offenders’ complex challenges and their limited opportunities for addressing them (Fletcher, 2009), it is hardly surprising why a greater proportion of black male offenders regard crime as an acceptable

way of life or making money. Next, I discuss peer groups as a source of interference with the desistance process.

Delinquent friendships as obstacles

Another commonly cited factor that poses as a hindrance to the desistance process is the influence of delinquent friends (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). In this regard, research indicates that peer influence poses a much greater threat to the desistance process even when offenders decide to “go straight”. Nevertheless, the risks posed by their long-term primary allegiance to antisocial friends may be displaced when ex-offenders attach themselves to prosocial bonds which reduce time spent in high risks situations (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014; Warr, 1998). Another explanation is provided by Bushway et al. (2001, p. 493) who wrote that “as individuals age, exposure to delinquent peers diminishes while associations with nondelinquent individuals increase”. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that even though new friends can be positive influences, individuals themselves play a significant role in staying away from antisocial friends, all the while working on friendship networks that are more appropriate with the new lifestyle (Giordano, 2014).

Converging on a similar finding again is Barry (2006) who found, for her juvenile participants that conventional friends acted as an incentive to stop offending while delinquent friends, especially drug-taking friends served as a catalyst to start offending. Equally plausible in this context is Agnew’s (1992) General Strain Theory which, among other things, focuses on negative relationships with others. For instance, a recently released offender may not own a car or a house, but may be aware of other ex-offenders who own cars and houses. If the ex-offender wants and believes that it is possible to own these assets but finds it difficult because of some financial strain, then, to counter this strain-such an offender may commit crime with a financial incentive in order to be able to be on the same par as his ex-offender friends. Perceived this way, peer pressure becomes one of the implicated factors leading one to infer that being financially unable disadvantages many ex-offenders upon their return from prison (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). This issue is briefly explored in the next section

Financial obstacles

The financial aspects of criminal desistance have been rather neglected in criminological literature (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011). However, according to Bottoms and

Shapland (2011) and Mabuza and Roelofse (2013), one of the main obstacles facing those who wish to desist from crime, and among the more salient in their perception, is the struggle to cope financially once released from prison. In this regard, Schonteich (2015, p. 14) concludes that imprisonment “disrupts the lives of dependent-supporting men...reduces their income...pushes their families toward poverty and damages the education and income potential of their children.”

Similarly, in their study: *Steps towards desistance among male young adult recidivists* Bottoms and Shapland (2011) found that there were many suggestions along the lines that, in attempting to desist, ex-offenders were in effect taking a self-imposed pay cut, entailing a significant transformation of their lifestyle. It must be noted that committing crime for most offenders is a way of life that could date back for several years, and, like any ingrained habit, it will generate behaviours that may be difficult to get over. After all, in the perceptions of most offenders, there are both practical (cash-related) and emotional (excitement-related) reasons for continuing rather than stopping (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011).

In other words, for persistent offenders who commit crimes which generate money (for example, burglary, theft, or drug peddling) financial gain becomes central in this process. Thus desisting from crime involves acquiring new or increased sources of legal income, and/or learning to do without so much income. But there are other disconfirming cases as well. For example, in reviewing the socioeconomic position of his participants, Calverley (2009) found that despite inadequate access to employment, correctional education, housing and many other indicators of social well-being, his participants were still able to make the break away from crime. These results are in direct opposition to the findings cited above. Having explored the challenges and the obstacles inherent in the desistance process, the following section focuses on the role of the CJS in the desistance of South African offenders.

The role of the criminal justice system in the desistance of South African offenders

As scholars, perhaps one of our main weaknesses in dealing with offending and re-offending in general could be that we prioritise studying criminogenic factors and as such we put in place mechanisms for ensuring that prior offending is not forgotten, such as the archiving of a criminal record, but not so much attention to documenting or even reviewing those who are successfully making their return back to conventional society, including those who have already desisted from crime. According to Tadi and Louw (2013) those who are

released from prison and desist from crime (albeit at a lower rate) must be monitored closely. The various ways in which desisters come to maintain their desistance is thus critical in this regard.

As Bottoms and Shapland (2011) succinctly remind us, the CJS is there not only to clamp down on crime, but also to celebrate conformity. Given that the South Africa's Criminal Justice System endorses a tougher stance on criminal offenders, especially those offenders who are caught in the vicious circle of reoffending; Farrall et al. (2011, p. 16) ask the question, "Why feel pleased about having successfully desisted from crime when the Criminal Justice System is going to claim that its own policies and procedures were what 'worked' in securing your rehabilitation?" In this regard, the authors further warn that "a criminal justice system which does not recognise offenders and ex-offenders as active agents in their own change and which does not allow them to claim credit for what they did will not produce desistance as readily as one which does" (p. 17)

In fact, careful examination of the extant literature suggests that the impact of the CJS may hinder rather than promote criminal desistance (Farrall et al., 2011; Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015). McAra and McVie (2011) also found evidence suggesting that early incarceration encouraged young people to continue on their offending trajectory rather than encouraged them to desist from crime. In this way, instead of playing its primary role which is to reform offenders, the CJS may be seen as desensitising habitual offenders such that they progress on their criminal trajectories from early childhood to adulthood. This also implies that the further the child is drawn into the CJS, the less likely they are able to break free and desist from crime.

The discussion so far strongly suggests that instead of coercing change upon offenders, the CJS can contribute by empowering them to assume responsibility (and ownership) of their own individualised process of self-change. Furthermore, scholars such as Weaver and McNeill (2007, as cited in Farrall et al., 2011) find discrepancies in how relapses are handled by the CJS relative to the addiction recovery fraternity, where failure to 'stay clean' is often expected, tolerated and treated as a learning curve. Taking into cognisance the considerable challenges faced by ex-offenders upon their return from prison, which at times include being detained six days a week under house arrest, perhaps the CJS also realises that relapses are common and that change often takes time.

In this regard, the readjustment process of ex-offenders can stall, owing to lack of family and community support, including the ex-offenders' restrictions as prescribed by their parole conditions. It must be noted that violation of these conditions such as failure to appear before one's parole officer can lead to further criminal sanctions (LaVigne et al., 2009). A consequence which may involve the parolee being reincarcerated to serve out the remaining portion of his sentence (Nunez-Neto, 2009). According to Trimbur (2012) these conditions of parole often produce rather than preclude criminality as well as feelings of powerlessness. Over and above, the argument posed in this section lends support to McAra and McVie's (2003) proposition that if the corrections fraternity wishes to reduce offending, then it should concentrate on minimal intervention and maximum diversion.

To accurately depict how ex-offenders re-enter their communities, I begin by paying special attention to the process and varied pathways employed by the DCS in releasing offenders from custody; this is followed by a snapshot discussion on the transition from prison to community. Finally and very concisely, I provide an overview of the research conducted on offender re-entry (also known as resocialisation), after which I differentiate the three categories of ex-offenders with the aim to lay the foundation for discussing the challenges and limitations facing offender re-entry and as well as "what works" in offender re-entry programmes. To begin, I first discuss the release policy guiding the DCS.

The process of releasing offenders from prison

To fully grasp the issue of resocialisation in the South African context as well as how it relates to the desistance process, I contend there is a need to explicitly engage with both national and international literature regarding the dynamics of what happens to ex-offenders as soon as they are released into their communities. Moreover, it must be noted that the process of leaving prison is not straightforward as it includes ex-offenders who recidivate and desist from crime. In South Africa, for instance, the parole policy "is the policy that directs the release of an incarcerated offender under community correctional supervision. This is done on the basis of an undertaking between the parolee and the Department on condition that he/she will not abscond and will comply with the conditions of parole..." (Department of Correctional Services, 2005, p. 43).

In other words, the supervision of parole occurs under the guidance of community members and correctional officials as stipulated by the Parole Board on the basis of an

evaluation of the parolee. Furthermore, as part of the release policy and function of the Correctional System in South Africa, granting parole promotes the principle of resocialising ex-offenders into their communities (Department of Correctional Services, 2005). Although a variety of mechanisms exist worldwide for releasing ex-offenders back into their communities, however, three types of methods are worth discussing here.

The first one is where an ex-offender is released unconditionally into the community after having served his/her entire sentence in a correctional facility; in this case, the ex-offender is not supervised by a parole officer implying that he or she is not eligible to abide by any special conditions of supervision (LaVigne et al., 2009). The second type of release is where compliance with parole conditions is enforced. In this case, ex-offenders who have served a predetermined period of their sentences in a correctional centre (typically half of their original sentences) automatically become eligible for parole and are then released into their communities to finish the remainder of their sentences on parole (Nunez-Neto, 2009). This method of release is known as the mandatory parole system and it would appear that the South African statute employs this parole system as offenders are expected to serve only half of their sentences as prescribed by the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998.

The third and most controversial mechanism of releasing ex-offenders into their communities is known as sentence remission. Sentence remission occurs under very specific and intermittent conditions when the country's President resolves to reduce the sentences of all sentenced offenders based on their crime classification (Department of Correctional Services, 2005; LaVigne et al., 2009; Nunez-Neto, 2009). In South Africa for example, offenders incarcerated for aggravated crimes such as rape, robbery and murder receive six months' reduction of their original sentences, while offenders serving sentences for non-aggressive crimes such as theft, assault and housebreaking receive twenty months' reduction of their original sentences. In light of the evidence presented in the next section, it is shown that these release mechanisms have a bearing on the adjustment and resocialisation of ex-offenders as they make their transition back into their communities.

The transition from prison to community

After long and protracted periods of incarceration, Bereswill (2011) writes that the release from prison can often times be experienced as a severe disruption in the lives of ex-offenders. Coping with life post-imprisonment is therefore a challenging process that requires

constant re-adjustment and resocialisation. Hence Waller (1974) advised that for most parolees, the sort of adaptation that they make during the first few days on the streets may be crucial in relation to their subsequent adjustment as the transition back to their communities is likely to be characterised by both exhilaration and uncomfortable anxiety.

Furthermore, Waller (1974) observed that the various emotions experienced by ex-offenders upon release - which may include a sense of relief, daze, depression, fear and/or anxiety - may last beyond the first day. Supporting this view are Nelson, Deess, and Allen (1999, as cited in La Vigne et al., 2009) who also found that the first few hours after release are critical for ex-offenders on parole, presenting both pros and cons. Conversely, other researchers find that for many ex-offenders, the first few weeks of adjustment after release are less daunting than the prolonged period of community reintegration (Taxman, 2002 as cited in Nunez-Neto, 2009).

In this regard, experts in the corrections fraternity advocate that ex-offenders' reintegration into their communities must be assessed by several indicators. These indicators, according to Nunez-Neto (2009) include, but are not necessarily restricted to the ex-offender's attachment to social networks such as reconnecting with their families, taking care of their children, finding and keeping employment, as well as attending church activities, and not by just whether the ex-offender comes into contact with the CJS again.

Perceived this way, coping with life after imprisonment can be experienced as a roller-coaster ride according to Bereswill (2011) because the transition from prison to community is filled with mandatory activities that are neither linear nor shaped by the cognitive capacities of the ex-offender. Thus, in the following section, it seems fitting enough to steer the discussion on offender re-entry, also known as social reintegration. As discussed subsequently, literature on offender re-entry centres on topics such as difficulties to re-entry, invisible punishments, post-release supervision, recidivism and desistance, as well as evidence-based practices (Trimbur, 2012).

Offender re-entry/social reintegration

La Vigne et al. (2009) define offender re-entry as the process of leaving prison and returning to society. Bereswill (2011) describes this process as a complex psychosocial process which requires ex-offenders to regulate their conflicting emotions and anxieties with the very often contradictory expectations and limitations of the social world. Other authors

maintain that offender re-entry is the natural by-product of incarceration, contending that all offenders who do not die in prison will, at some point, go back to their communities (Nunez-Neto, 2009). A variant of this approach is premised on the idea that social reintegration, “simply defined, includes all activities and programming conducted to prepare offenders to return safely to their communities and to live as law abiding citizens” (Nunez-Neto, 2009, p. 190).

For the most part, research on offender re-entry focuses on the repercussions of reoffending including factors and interventions that reduce recidivism and promote post-prison success (Trimbur, 2012). From the definitions above, one can discern that social reintegration comprises all activities and processes that an offender engages in while incarcerated (Nunez-Neto, 2009) and these may include, for example, correctional education and behaviour modification programmes. As stated in the preceding section, our understanding on how ex-offenders reintegrate into their communities may be enhanced by reviewing both national and international literature.

Indeed, unlike South Africa, international research suggests that there are many re-entry initiatives in America which are geared towards assisting ex-offenders to obtain housing and employment (La Vigne et al., 2009). Such developments are encouraging considering that over four decades ago, Waller (1974) lamented the paucity with which sufficient research is conducted in relation to the transition of ex-offenders especially when they re-enter their communities.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been accomplished thus far; still, a dearth of studies have questioned how ex-offenders experience and interpret successful re-entry (Trimbur, 2012). For instance, with the exception of Maruna (2001) and Trimbur (2012), very few studies have reviewed how ex-offenders feel about their ability to re-enter their communities. The studies that do consider the perspectives of ex-offenders are studies mostly conducted internationally. As such, for a comparable understanding of what transpires to South African ex-offenders as they re-enter their communities, the following discussion on the three different categories of ex-offenders will draw mostly upon international research.

The three categories of ex-offenders

It is almost undeniable that all offenders currently detained in our correctional centres today will one day be released into their respective communities. Evidence gathered from the

USA seems to suggest that more offenders are transitioning into the community today than ever before. The disconcerting reality is that, while in prison, not all offenders would have made sufficient progress in terms of addressing their criminal tendencies. Providing a brilliant piece of work into the topic is Trimbur (2012) who differentiates at least three categories of ex-offenders. In her analysis, Trimbur, (2012) finds that there are: (1) ex-offenders who go back to their communities with no plans to refrain from criminal enterprises and immediately resume committing crime upon release; (2) ex-offenders whose hopes and aspirations are geared towards actualising their intentions to desist from crime as seen through their practices of self-control and restraint; and (3) ex-offenders who begin their post-prison journey with a desire to desist from crime but whose good intentions subsequently collide with the reality of material conditions and immediately recidivate into criminal behaviour. These categories are briefly discussed next.

Category one offenders

Category one offenders are ex-offenders who re-join society with no intentions of disengage from crime. Ex-offenders who pledge their loyalty to the criminal underworld find that the prestige, financial gain, as well as the identities derived from committing crime surpass the potential rewards of securing a decent paying job and immediately revert to committing crime upon their release from prison (Trimbur, 2012). Occasionally, these ex-offenders do anticipate interactions with the CJS including brief stints in prison. For them, reincarceration is experienced as annoying but an inevitable “occupational hazard” (Trimbur, 2012, p. 309).

This is similar to ex-offenders released unconditionally on parole because upon release, these ex-offenders once again become free, which means they resume making their own decisions that might be tainted by criminal enterprises. In this way, it is almost conceivable that without some form of restraint such as families, many ex-offenders released unconditionally into their communities are presented with multiple opportunities to relapse. In this case, the huge amount of time spent unsupervised on the streets offer remarkable opportunities for the re-establishment of criminal enterprises.

As previously noted, the difficulty of managing in the free community, given the unique circumstances and conditions of South Africa might also be expected just as a result of release from a total institution (Waller, 1974). The impact that this has on most ex-

offenders finds expression in criminality and may be partially ascribed to lack of proper re-entry programmes or social reintegration initiatives. Based on this argument, one may infer that these ex-offenders consider crime as a long-term endeavour that is both satisfying and financially rewarding.

Category two offenders

Category two offenders are ex-offenders who leave prison with the intention of disengaging in crime. These ex-offenders are able to actualise their goals through committing to particular disciplinary techniques and discourses (Trimbur, 2012). This could be, for instance, a commitment to stay away from friends to attend a church service. In this regard, research has consistently shown that ex-offenders who use therapeutic or religious loyalties take a long-term approach to achieving desistance and that they interpret their daily struggles as preparing the foundation for eventual reward (Guse & Hudson, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Leigey & Reider, 2014; Trimbur, 2012).

During the implementation of these techniques, ex-offenders who desist from crime firmly apply rules, restrictions, and disciplinary practices to avoid potential crime situations. According to Trimbur (2012), it is through and around disciplinary practices such as self-help, therapy, or religion that these ex-offenders are able to maintain their desistance. They see desisting from crime as their responsibility rather than looking to social structural entitlements. As such, change is envisioned as coming from within rather than being based social and economic circumstances. In short, ex-offenders who draw upon disciplinary practices and discourses seem to suggest that criminal desistance is a matter of individual will and personal choice (Trimbur, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on Category two offenders, that is, ex-offenders who leave prison and re-enter communities with the desire to terminate participation in criminal labour and who are actually able to realise their goals through commitments to particular disciplinary techniques and discourses.

Category three offenders

Similar to Category two offenders, Category three offenders start off their post-prison journey with a desire to stop offending. Sometimes it is through the occurrence of critically significant events such as parenthood that these offenders decide to stop offending. Alternatively, they may find employment through lawful means and establish themselves in ways that conform to the norms and expectations of dominant theory (Trimbur, 2012). As

suggested through-out this chapter, desisting from crime can be a difficult endeavour, but despite that, Category three offenders start out optimistic about their ability to earn a living and succeed in traditional ways. They also attempt to improve their occupational, educational, and parenting skills by taking classes, accepting petty jobs so that they can gain work experience or a work history, and spending time with their children (Trimbur, 2012).

These ex-offenders will accept struggle for a short while, but after the actual passage of time, in as much short-term sacrifice is tolerable because it paves the way for future reward, optimism eventually collides with the reality of material conditions and the challenges of reintegration. Resilience diminishes and inevitably, these ex-offenders relapse into criminal behaviour. This group of ex-offenders finds that any aspirations for crime cessation are riddled with lack of education, employable skills, as well as long histories of job-inactivity. An interesting point of note with the work of Trimbur (2012) is that she was able to demonstrate that social reintegration processes are not always contingent on the level of internal motivation. At this stage, it seems logical to examine what works in offender re-entry, but first, I discuss the limitations and challenges facing offender re-entry programmes.

Limitations and challenges facing offender re-entry initiatives

Seiter and Kadela (2003, as cited in Nunez-Neto, 2009) have listed numerous complicating factors affecting how offender re-entry works in a given community, including among others: the types of programmes provided in correctional systems, the family and community support available to the ex-offender, the kinds of social services available in the ex-offender's community, and the status of the local economy and the ex-offender's ability to obtain employment.

Fletcher (2009) also finds that establishing and implementing effective mentoring programmes for formerly incarcerated offenders is not a simple task. According to Fletcher (2009) very few social programmes have attempted to provide high risk adults-and particularly, ex-offenders with mentors. Thus, in reality, there are few resources that offer practical recommendations and helpful strategies for mentoring this population based on its distinct needs, assets and challenges. Third, it is invariably difficult to facilitate ex-offenders' reintegration into the community after long periods of incarceration. Without the development of effective approaches focusing on offender re-entry in the South African context, the problem of reducing recidivism is certain to grow. As stated previously, almost

all offenders incarcerated today will eventually be released, and, unless the reintegration of ex-offenders become prioritised, more than half of them will not be successful in re-entering their communities and will return to prison (Fletcher, 2009).

Also, according to the US Government Accountability Office (GAO), post-release planning should begin as early as possible, ideally as soon as the offender is admitted into prison or even immediately after sentencing (Nunez-Neto, 2009) which is something which does not occur in South Africa. This poor depiction of offender re-entry in South Africa has clear implications for the individual challenges ex-offenders face in leading productive, law-abiding lives; yet these challenges also pose a distinct threat to public safety (La Vigne et al., 2009). This section has discussed the challenges facing offender re-entry initiatives. The next section builds on the preceding one by looking at what works in offender re-entry.

What seems to work in offender re-entry?

Literature on offender re-entry seems to suggest that re-entry programmes emphasise an all-inclusive, supportive approach dedicated at helping ex-offenders reintegrate into their communities (Fletcher, 2009; La Vigne et al., 2009; Nunez-Neto, 2009). Broadly speaking, the objectives of offender re-entry programmes are twofold and both seek to encourage desistance from crime by addressing the criminogenic needs that lead to reoffending. According to Nunez-Neto (2009), there are (1) programmes that take place during incarceration, which aim to prepare offenders for their eventual release; (2) programmes that take place during offenders' release period, which seek to connect ex-offenders with various services they may require; and (3) long-term programmes that take place as ex-offenders permanently reintegrate into their communities, which attempt to provide offenders with support and supervision.

Similar to the DCS's Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD), these programmes are important in as far as they provide both ex-offenders as well as their communities with an opportunity to make amends for prior wrong-doing (La Vigne et al., 2009). Other researchers agree and advocate for the importance of pro-social relationships in keeping people out of prison (Fletcher, 2009). Nunez-Neto (2009) also concurs and cites contemporary research indicating a number of services that can assist ex-offenders to reconnect with their communities and lower recidivism rates, including programmes focusing on providing

vocational training, substance abuse prevention, mental health services, and alternative housing.

All these programmes are geared toward preparing ex-offenders for their successful reintegration via pre-release planning and social service support followed by continued support and enhanced post-release supervision (La Vigne et al., 2009). However, in as much as the other programmes such as drug rehabilitation and treatment programmes, halfway house programmes, and mentoring were effective in reducing recidivism rates, correctional education, for example, was found to raise educational achievement scores but not reduce recidivism (Nunez-Neto, 2009). As such then, it can be seen that the process of offender re-entry/resocialisation is a complex issue that touches on social and governmental networks and programmes (Nunez-Neto, 2009).

Chapter summary

Conducting a review of the literature on criminal desistance proved to be essential in understanding the dynamics and motivations for disengaging in crime as well as the various theoretical perspectives on criminal desistance. Pathways to criminal desistance are varied and complex. The information gathered from the literature suggest that criminal desistance can be facilitated by increasing informal social control such as getting married and securing employment which in turn brings about a change in one's social networks. Furthermore, the literature review also highlighted the role of cognitive processes and the importance of identity change as well as the efforts of intentional self-change. The importance of criminal desistance was also highlighted as an important field of the criminal justice sector, but because crime permeates all facets of humanity (race, gender and creed) it is also psychologically important to understand criminal desistance. Hence, the focus of this study is to describe the meanings attached to criminal desistance as experienced by ex-offenders who have desisted, or currently disengaging from crime; to determine the reasons that influenced their decisions to stop offending; and lastly, to determine how they have come to maintain a crime-free identity. The literature reviewed assisted me in contextualising my research study within an accepted body of knowledge. Furthermore, it provided a good, solid background knowledge. It helped me to refine questions in order to address the aims of the investigation. Furthermore, literature provided a guideline for the research methods and techniques used by other researchers in similar studies and which proved successful. I then adapted the research

instruments for use in this study. Those research methods are discussed further in the next section.

Chapter 3

Research design and method

Introduction

In this chapter, the research method will be discussed in detail. This will involve discussing the methods used as well as a detailed account of the processes followed during the course of this study. A combined methodology approach was followed by making use of methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation denotes a study where multiple methods are used to study a single topic (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). How these methods inform data collection, analysis and interpretation will also be highlighted. Because of shared and similar experiences between myself as researcher and the study participants, I will also highlight my position from an insider-outsider standpoint. This will be followed by ethical considerations taken into account in this study. Finally, the transferability and dependability of the study will sum up this chapter. But first, I provide an overview of the research process.

Overview of the research process

This section aims to provide a brief overview of the research process as well as discuss what transpired prior to data collection and immediately thereafter. Data collection occurred over a period of one month and feedback sessions were held approximately three and a half months later. All procedures ensuring research quality were adhered to, including ethical requirements. For example, participants' identities in this study were protected by use of pseudonyms and any possible identifying information was amended.

The aim of the study, including that of the researcher's interest were also communicated prior to the interviewing process and participants were subsequently afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns. Because the study embarked on the lived experiences of ex-offenders who have desisted from crime, Kvale (1996) advises that the researcher should acquire a profound familiarity with the research question so as to plan for the interview questions. The interview process should then be guided towards the research question, steering away from leading participants and thereby compromising the validity of the study. Kvale (1996) also suggests that equilibrium should be maintained in terms of

employing neutral impressions during the interview process, facilitating spontaneous interaction, and sustaining the fluidity of personal accounts from participants.

After consent was duly obtained from the participants, and in an environment of mutual trust and cooperation, interviews were conducted at each participant's home. To guard against "interview fatigue", the length of the interviews was kept to a maximum of 1 hour 2 minutes to 1 hour 10 minutes. All interviews were informal in style permitting for the comfort of the participants and myself as the researcher. In general, study participants seemed calm during the interviews and one of them was even documented as saying that this platform had provided him with a voice to be "heard". In this instance, I quote Akhona who appeared elated during the process that he was providing academia with a service that had the potential to benefit fellow ex-offenders regardless of the notion that this study would probably not benefit him personally.

Despite all of this, he said...*these are the kinds of people* (people in academia) *I see myself talking to...associating myself with*. In retrospect, this suggested to me that the interviewing process was comfortable enough to have allowed participants the opportunity to freely share their personal stories with me. After all four interviews were conducted, I transcribed each of them myself. I read and re-read each transcript trying to familiarise myself with the data as much as is possible, all the while trying to identify themes. At this stage, intra-conversations ensued between myself and the data as well as between my personal self and my academic self.

One highlight worth-mentioning as I immersed myself in the data (both during data transcription as well as during data analysis) was the interconnectedness of the experiences between myself and that of my study participants. Without deliberate intent, I sometimes struggled to sever my own experiences from those of my participants as I found myself from time to time reliving some of the thoughts and emotions I felt and continue to feel as an ex-offender. Admittedly, at Master's level, an objective, external frame of reference is required to construct an academic dissertation. Yet, to this end, I still maintain that it is precisely because of these shared experiences that I have been able to attain an in-depth understanding of my participants' experiences. Confirming this notion are some of Fletcher's (2009) study participants (ex-offenders) who indicated that someone who has never "walked in their shoes" would not be able to comprehend the situations they were facing. This reinforces the argument that someone who has never been incarcerated can never accurately comprehend

the experiences of imprisonment; which, to some extent creates discrepancies in terms of arriving at a common understanding.

Although my role in the interview process did not subscribe to the confines of trans-subjective observer (Foucault, 1972), it was, however, centred on facilitating as well as trying to make sense of my participants' lived experiences. At this stage, the question that revolved in my mind was whether any human-related study can remain purely devoid of the human experience within which each of us finds ourselves. The conundrum concerning this argument is explored in the following section: perspective from an insider-outsider position.

Perspective from an insider-outsider position

Ex-offenders who conduct qualitative research with other ex-offenders hold an inside perspective. Given that I, as the researcher, share common experiences with the study participants it qualified me as possessing an inside perspective. By definition, an individual who possesses inside knowledge of a community and its members due to historical and on-going association with that community and its members is referred to as an insider (Labaree, 2002). Because I approached this dissertation with neither intent nor desire to hide my insider position, one can conclude that how I have positioned myself in relation to other scholars who conduct research with populations, communities or identity groups of which they are also members, constitutes a perfect example of insider researcher (Kanuha, 2000).

Of the various examples listed by Kanuha (2000) such as people of similar racial or ethnic backgrounds studying each other, feminists studying other women, and people of the same sexual orientation studying each other, I also add to this body of literature by contributing research conducted by an ex-offender on other ex-offenders. This section is therefore based on my dual position as an ex-offender and a researcher. Having been influenced by experiences of incarceration, I noted, for instance during the course of the study that the implications of this dual position represented the potential to benefit but also bias the study (LaSala, 2003). Shortly, I reflect on the impact this has had on the research process and this will be followed by the lessons learned. But first, I discuss the importance, as well as the assumptions, on which insider-outsider research are based.

The first and probably well-known assumption is that being an insider offers clear-cut advantages in terms of accessing the community under study and its members (Labaree, 2002). The rationale, thereof, is that the privileged positionality of being an insider

significantly lowers the need for preliminary negotiation normally expected from an outsider in order to gain access to the community and conduct research with key research informants (Labaree, 2002). Literature also describes insiderness as holding a special position that can provide a unique perspective that can never be penetrated by an outsider (Labaree, 2002). In other words, possessing an intricate knowledge and understanding of the prison culture also implied that, as an insider, I was conversant with the unique terminology used in prison as well as the accompanying rules, values and belief systems. These in turn helped me construe the hidden meanings as well as construct and deconstruct presumptions of truthfulness in ways that could have been different from an outsider (Labaree, 2002).

More importantly, it is worthy of note that what I regarded as reality from the perspective of an insider was likely influenced by my previous and continued orientation to the prison culture. Because of shared and similar experiences including the familiarity of the desistance process between study participants and myself, LaSala (2003) suggests that our orientation might have the potential to spark a special kind of empathetic understanding which could in turn maximize participants' trust and honesty (see also Perry, Thurston & Green, 2004).

Similarly, Labaree (2002) found that being an insider contributes to the establishment of initial levels of trust which can lead to increased participation from the participants. This also proved essential in building trust and establishing rapport with the study participants (Perry et al., 2004). Yet throughout each stage of the research process, my insider status continued to result in methodological implications from the conceptualisation of the study, to brainstorming of research questions including disclosure and positioning of myself during the recruitment phase, data collection and finally during analysis (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Labaree, 2002). In this respect, Perry et al. (2004) warn that during the conceptualisation of the research process, qualitative researchers should remain highly attuned to their own experiences to circumvent placing particular emphasis on certain aspects of the study to the detriment of others due to their ideological underpinnings.

Despite the fact that it has historically been the norm to rely on extant literature for assistance on how to design research questions, Hayfield and Huxley (2015) report that those who hold an inside perspective might have some leverage over outsiders in developing nuanced and meaningful research questions. As stated previously, the familiarity that comes with insiderness empowers researchers to think of research questions that might not

necessarily occur to outsiders (LaSala, 2003). Where I found insider knowledge to be particularly interesting is at the data collection level as it allowed me to probe and delve deeper into issues considered important from the perspective of the participant (and this was particularly the case with semi-structured interviewing) and at the data analysis level (Perry et al., 2004). This has had particular relevance in so far as it impacted the outcomes and the interpretive conclusions of the study (Labaree, 2002).

In terms of my positioning, when I initially approached this study I was totally consumed by my sheer insiderness to the extent that I became oblivious to the dual insider-outsider position. For instance, at the beginning phase of the study, I perceived myself as purely an insider because of my ex-offender status but subsequently realised that I am also an outsider due to my researcher status. Owing to the alternating roles of researcher/researched, the imaginary line separating the two roles became even more blurred during the course of the study and this actually suggested to me that “the boundaries of insiderness are situational and defined by the perceptions of those being researched” (Labaree, 2002, p. 101). Hayfield and Huxley (2015) also concur that to create boundaries of insider/outsider is to oversimplify the complexities of the researcher’s relationships with their participants.

Occasionally, we are similar to our participants as we are different from them (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). This implies that a researcher can seamlessly move between the two categories of insider/outsider positions. As previously highlighted, ex-offender participants may more willingly want to participate in a study conducted by another ex-offender making recruitment less daunting. The perception, according to LaSala (2003), is that the researcher shares the desire and the commitment to rectify societal misconceptions of the group.

Indeed, due to our emotional dimension as human beings, we will, invariably and inevitably experience fluctuating degrees of emotional involvement with our participants (Perry et al., 2004). For instance, the deeply personal and often identical life experiences described by the participants echoed almost similar experiences I had endured (Kanuha, 2000). Yet against this backdrop, Kanuha (2000, p. 442) warns that “the most critical aspect of the native researcher role is the need to distance from the project, the participants, and indeed even the process of studying one’s own people.”

Initially, it seemed nonsensical that while I considered the process of personal distancing as salient in order to bring clarity to the research process (Labaree, 2002), others were advocating that complete detachment from the object of the study is neither achievable nor desirable (Perry et al., 2004). In this regard, Perry et al. (2004) advise us that the interpretive capabilities of the researcher can be enhanced by balancing the emic with the etic perspective. This premise has an element of truth because good research emphasises the blending of both perspectives because in isolation, each viewpoint has its own shortcomings (LaSala, 2003).

So in order to achieve a scientifically valid perspective, I incorporated both the etic and the emic perspectives and there were some valuable lessons learned (Perry et al., 2004); chief among them was that as an insider researcher I should always strive for an equilibrium in as far as the representation of the researcher/researched in a manner that reveals the interconnectedness of the symbiotic relationship between the two in the co-creation of truth.

Also one must not assume that being an insider necessarily implies that the insider researcher has intimate knowledge of the particular and situated experiences of all members of the group (Kanuha, 2000). In this regard, Labaree (2002) cautions that as an insider researcher one should always question the familiar because possession of advanced knowledge may lead us to ignore our very own assumptions of truth. More importantly according to Labaree (2002) is that advanced knowledge only provides cues for approaching the setting as an insider. Similarly, shared experiences are not to be confused with the need to work toward achieving insiderness and nurturing an on-going level of trust (Labaree, 2002). In short, one could say that there are both strengths and potential weaknesses of having an inside perspective (LaSala, 2003). Next, I discuss the reasons for approaching this study qualitatively.

Rationale for using qualitative approach

Inherent in this study was the exploration of how ex-offenders experience desistance; the reasons that motivated them or influenced them to stop offending, as well as the strategies they use to maintain a crime-free identity; as such, a qualitative research design was deemed the most suitable for this study.

There are several reasons for this choice. First, the choice to use qualitative methodology was made with the intention of serving to complement the already existing data

acquired through international studies (see for example Bushway & Paternoster, 2014, Giordano, 2014; Maruna, 2001, Sampson & Laub, 1993). Though methodologically dissimilar to these studies, the current study opted for an exploratory-descriptive research design because the aim was to explore and describe the lived experiences of desistance among ex-offenders who have stopped offending, or who are currently in the process of disengaging from crime.

Second, within an exploratory-descriptive research design, the researcher explores social phenomena while using descriptive research to provide systemic information about a social phenomenon (Mabuza & Roelofse, 2013). According to Kvale (1996), an exploratory-descriptive research design is useful to this kind of study as it embraces the sensitivity of study participants and upholds the use of compassionate dialogue while situating individual participants in their unique contexts. Construed this way, a qualitative research design was regarded as the best option for soliciting meanings of desistance as experienced and lived by the participants.

Third, it allows the researcher to explore and systematise knowledge by bringing insight into the identified phenomenon (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). Qualitative methodology further explores the social milieu of the area of interest as well as the perspective of the participants (Berg, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004).

Fourth, it considers the collaborative processes between researcher and participant and is both descriptive and analytic (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Berg (2001) further explains that qualitative research is concerned with deriving meaning from the participants' perspective and is aimed at understanding the meaning that people attach to these everyday events. Equally important as well is that in qualitative research, the number of participants is minimized in order to obtain a more contextualized understanding of people's lives and experiences (Smith, 2008).

From this premise then, it seemed appropriate that the nature and purpose of my study also did not require a large sample as in quantitative research studies. Consequently, four interviews were conducted. I was content with four participants because the focus of my study was not on the sample's representativeness; it was, however, on the participants' ability to help clarify and enhance my understanding around criminal desistance. Also, given the

descriptive nature of this study, four participants seemed appropriate and well suited to describe the meaning and lived experiences of ex-offenders who have stopped offending or are in the process of disengaging from crime. The information solicited from the participants provided a large enough amount of data for saturation to occur and for the analysis to be meaningful.

Rationale for using interpretive phenomenology (phenomenological-hermeneutics)

The philosophical stance assumed in this study is phenomenological in nature in that central to this study was the importance of understanding the lived experiences of desistance as narrated by study participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary broadly defines phenomenology as the branch of philosophy that deals with our perceptions in contrast to what may actually be real or true about the world (Hornby, 2010). In other words, every aspect of human understanding is already interpretive (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, other scholars define phenomenology as the study of the life world as we immediately experience it, pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualise, theorise, categorise, or reflect on it (Adams & van Manen, 2008).

In the past century, from the times of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), phenomenology has evolved into a philosophical perspective sufficient enough to be used as a research method that examines the lived and subjective human experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Variants of phenomenology include seven different schools of thought, but according to Lopez and Willis (2004) as well as Wojnar and Swanson (2007) two approaches that guide the majority of phenomenological studies are descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology.

In principle, both types entail a thorough investigation of the participant's life world through the exploration of personal experience while simultaneously focusing on an individual's personal perception of an account or an object or event (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Despite both approaches emphasising the importance of understanding the human lived experience, there are key distinctions setting the two approaches apart. Leaning more towards the aims of this study, I was instantly drawn to the tenets of the interpretive phenomenological approach.

First, as a data collection strategy, interpretive phenomenology yields a rich narrative account with descriptions of the lived experiences of participant's knowledge regarding a topic of interest and this was consistent with the study's objectives (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In line with this assertion, data gathering therefore centred primarily on the participants' meanings and experiences of criminal desistance.

Second, since all descriptions are always already interpretations (Adams & van Manen, 2008), hermeneutic phenomenology offers more than a mere description of core concepts and essences, it searches for meanings shrouded in a web of common everyday life experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In fact, this approach advocates for an holistic view of the individual taking into consideration their culture, social context and the historical era in which they find themselves (Geanellos, 2000 as cited in Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Third, interpretive phenomenology "is grounded in the belief that the researcher and the participants come to the investigation with fore-structures of understanding shaped by their respective backgrounds, and in the process of interaction and interpretation, they cogenerate an understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 175). In this regard, due to my insider position, Lopez and Willis (2004, p. 729) write that "presuppositions or expert knowledge on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to enquiry and, in fact, make the enquiry a meaningful undertaking". In this sense, interpretive phenomenology points to the usefulness and significance of possessing intimate knowledge of the subject under study. In this context, it is worth-mentioning that my experience as an ex-offender who is also in the process of desisting from crime prompted this study, particularly this philosophical approach which seemed most congruent with the research purpose of interpreting and understanding the experiences of criminal desistance.

As explained above, these fore-structures proved essential as they mediated how we (researcher and participants) understood our world and deriving such an understanding in turn helped us interpret what we perceived as reality (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Finally, the crux of interpretive phenomenology is that it is founded on the principle of co-constitutionality also known as the hermeneutic circle of understanding which reveals a combination of meanings as interpreted by the researcher and the participants (Adams & van Manen, 2008). This process occurs in a dialectical pattern whereby the interpretation of the data is continually referred back to the relevant literature and the literature is then exposed in

relation to the data, thus facilitating better awareness of the experience being interpreted (Shank, 2002). This interpretive process of moving back and forth also includes the researcher's fore-structures of understanding as well as the knowledge acquired throughout the investigation (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Accordingly then, in demonstrating the principle of the hermeneutic circle of always remaining open to other information that might advance my understanding of the phenomenon under study, I drew on the iterative process of qualitative research as advised by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2004) in reviewing literature pertinent to the topic to assist me in gaining a strong theoretical foundation and insight about the analysis and interpretations of the data collected. This approach was deemed appropriate to the study's topic and paradigm as it yields in-depth, rich data for qualitative analysis (Silverman, 1993). According to Giorgi (2000), phenomenology searches for psychological understanding in any study grounded in the discipline of psychology. This is undertaken by investigating meanings and interpretations of participant's lived experiences. As such, in order to generate valid phenomenological data for hermeneutic exploration, participants should be interviewed on a particular experience; the data transcribed and interpreted using relevant literature (Shank, 2002). Phenomenological data for this study were therefore collected by means of semi-structured interviews as discussed in the following section.

Data collection

Data collection was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews informed by an interview guide. I chose this mode of data collection because I wanted all participants to 'tell their story' in its entirety, but also bearing in mind the relevant issues to explore with reference to my research question. A semi-structured format thus allowed for this balance and flexibility. Furthermore, I regarded this approach as a feasible method in the way in which it allowed participants to subjectively describe themselves while observing their nonverbal behaviour. Therefore, semi-structured interviews, as a mode of data collection sought out to create a space where study participants could talk about their lived experiences especially in the way they in which they have come to desist from crime. Seidman (2006) points out that semi-structured interviews are one of the most commonly used methods of collecting data and these are usually accompanied by an interview guide drawn up by the researcher as they allow for the experiences of the participants to follow naturally as in normal conversation.

During the initial stages of constructing the interview guide, I consulted with my supervisor and two critical readers in the Department of Psychology at UNISA on the clarity of the interview questions as well as the format of the interview guide. The interview guide had been prepared to draw upon the salient issues identified in the literature and phrased and structured in a way that will elicit narratives rather than content areas.

However, in carrying out this activity, my own experience as researcher and ex-offender was a factor to be considered. For instance, I was able to gain insight into the impact this had on the initial draft of the interview guide in terms of my fundamental beliefs and ideas. Under the auspices of the critical readers mentioned above, and my supervisor, the interview guide was carefully reconsidered and some of the questions were subsequently revised. As such, the revised interview guide enabled me to probe for more information and provided more in-depth data-generating questions than conventional questionnaires. See Appendix A for a copy of the interview guide.

Bryman (2001) and Kvale (1996) have suggested a few pitfalls of interviewing. In this regard, we are advised to use the flow of semi-structured interview questions to guide the participants toward the research problem and refrain from asking leading questions. It is also recommended that questions interchange from general to specific and that the opening question is factual rather than opinion-oriented (Bryman, 2001; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006). Accordingly then, the choice of questions covered in the interview guide ranged from exploring the social background of participants before and after their incarceration, their experiences with the Criminal Justice System, as well as how they experienced the resocialisation process. This exploration culminated in participants talking in depth about their experiences of criminal desistance as well as how they have come to maintain and embrace their newly adopted identity.

Selection of study participants: criteria for inclusion

Criteria for selecting study participants are generally consistent with the techniques used to collect data. For instance, qualitative researchers rely heavily on non-probability sampling techniques to recruit study participants. In the current study, two non-probability sampling techniques were used. The first sampling technique is referred to as purposive sampling and is defined as the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities and attributes the participant possesses (du Plooy, 2009). At this juncture, the researcher is at

liberty to decide what needs to be known and to recruit participants who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge and/or experience.

In practical terms, this meant recruiting an ex-offender who possessed a particular knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of criminal desistance in order to obtain the desired information and to accurately report on it. Also, the logic behind choosing purposeful sampling derived from the endeavour to gain insight and in-depth understanding from issues that are central to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2001). Similarly, at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest to understand the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). One participant was therefore recruited through this technique; and three others were recruited through the second sampling technique known as snowball sampling.

The second technique involved study participants obtaining other potential participants (du Plooy, 2009). Because it was difficult to locate and recruit study participants as set out in the inclusion criteria, snowball sampling was used precisely to identify the hidden population of ex-offenders who have stopped offending.

The challenges I experienced with regards to recruiting participants who fully met the inclusion criteria ranged from participants who initially agreed to participate in the study but subsequently declined due to reasons unknown to me. One potential participant explicitly declined participating in the study because he claimed not to have entirely desisted from crime. Two other potential participants were approached but subsequently excluded from the study because they were still under parole and henceforth this condition disqualified them.

Because of the nature of snowball sampling, I was eventually directed to three other ex-offenders fitting the profile of participants appropriate for inclusion in the study, and in that regard I was able to address sampling challenges. In total, four participants were approached to take part in the study. To the extent that all four study participants were incarcerated at a maximum security prison implied that they had been part of the prison culture for many years but still defied the odds of recidivism. It was precisely because of this attribute that the participants were selected for this study. In other words, participants were eligible to participate in the study if they were (1) adult male ex-offenders who have served one or more sentences in a South African correctional centre; (2) subjectively experienced themselves as having desisted from crime or at least shown evidence of having made

significant progress towards desistance (Calverley, 2009) and (3) have completed the full period of their parole.

This selection represented a process of discussing in detail the purpose of my study with the chosen participants. The process was enriching in the sense that it prepared me for the nature of the actual interviewing that was to follow. It also primed me for the reflexive processes that would become an intricate part of my study. Over and above, the process of selecting participants had a dual purpose. First, to assess whether the participants met the selection criteria; and second to utilise the opportunity to gain a modicum of trust, and to establish some form of rapport for the interviews that were to follow. Taking all of this together then, it becomes clear that the selection of study participants was chosen on the basis of relevance rather than the capacity to be representative of a population whose contextual characteristics were still unclear and unknown.

Study participants

Four adult male ex-offenders of African descent participated in this study. They were selected because they met the inclusion criteria as stipulated in the section above. According to Creswell (2012), four participants fall within the prescribed range because samples as small as this one have been previously used in qualitative studies. Three participants can also be used as seen in a recent South African study by Guse and Hudson (2014). Participants were, at the time of the study, in different stages of their re-integration process but appeared relatively well-established following their release from prison. Gaining insight into participants' experiences of desistance, the aspirations with which they negotiate their re-entry process is important in as far as it affords us the opportunity to develop a fuller account of participants' lived experiences (Trimbur, 2012). Yet at the same time, it is almost always impossible to summarise the true essence of an individual given the parameters of this study which are for instance, that each interview took little over an hour and that the grounding of this study does not subscribe to a single case analysis where an in-depth understanding of each participant can be fully explored.

In this study, however, participants' lived experiences captured in the form of extracts from the transcribed interviews were used to draw the true essence and the meanings attached to experiences of criminal desistance. The content of each interview extract is based on the participant's story as documented in the transcripts and this is symbolic of the participant's

lived experiences of criminal desistance. In line with the holistic aim of this study, which is to understand the lived experiences of ex-offenders who have desisted from crime, a broad range of aspects relating to participants' experiences of imprisonment, their separation and subsequent reintegration with their loved ones were tapped into, including questions on their education, their religious or spiritual conviction, as well as experiences relating to their adjustment and how they coped with these. This also required that I give attention to the participants' thoughts, feelings, and conation. True to the essence of qualitative inquiry, interpretation of the participant's information drew upon resources relating to both practical and theoretical convictions available within the domain of psychology. As such then, applying a postmodern philosophy strongly recommended an approach necessary in the understanding of the phenomenology of desistance.

Participant information at the time of the interviews

Participant 1

Pseudonym: Akhona

Time spent in prison: 10 years 5 months

Age: 30 years old

Akhona was born in the mid-eighties and spent most of his youthful years in Soweto. Despite his delinquent tendencies while growing up, he indicated that he used to play soccer and still regarded himself as a gifted soccer player. Using the below extract as a reference point, I picked up a strong sense of family attachment from Akhona especially when he said...*I have never really disconnected with my family...emotionally, spiritually we have always been attached...there was always this sense of unity...it was only a matter of separation...physical separation.* In addition to this, there are other descriptions attached to Akhona, and the one that seemed particularly outstanding was his spiritual conviction as was evident in his frequent referencing to God and to scriptures in the Bible. Akhona defined himself as God-fearing, a Christian and a youth pastor; he regarded himself as ambitious and a go-getter.

Among his many attributes, one that I could not miss was an element of philanthropy in his life after imprisonment. He indicated that not only does he go to schools and prisons to

give motivational speeches to school children and offenders respectively, but he also sponsors events inside correctional centres. On the home front, Akhona reported to have a step-son and that he was a father-to-be; although he was not married, he was however, in a stable relationship. The fact that Akhona had been arrested on three separate occasions (at 17, 18 and 19 years of age) it qualified him as a repeat offender; he acquired his matric while in prison and thereafter enrolled for a BA (Communications Science) Degree with UNISA but subsequently dropped out to pursue his business endeavours.

Participant 2

Pseudonym: Hlamalani

Time spent in prison: 10 years

Age: 39 years old

Hlamalani was born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal until the age of 16 when he relocated to Gauteng. In a very thick, yet soft-spoken voice, he provides a brief but descriptive account of how he was lured into a life of crime after dropping out of school. He reported to have considered other alternatives like enrolling in short learning programmes, but that also did not materialise. So, in trying to emulate the life he saw from others, Hlamalani ended up idolising the wrong role models. One could argue, given his age, and probably that he moved provinces from the rural areas to the glitz and glamour of life in Gauteng, that these are the main instigators behind him readjusting to a life he did not fully comprehend. His became a life of crime that finally ended up with him being in prison.

Hlamalani stated during his interview that he was arrested at the age of twenty-two and was subsequently convicted for 30 years. He was released after serving one third of his sentence and reported to be in full-time employment. Hlamalani was engaged and described his fiancé as his friend and pillar of strength and the two are planning to get married soon. Hlamalani reported to have three children (two daughters from his previous relationship and one step-son). He described himself as a church-goer. Although he did not participate in any educational programmes yet, he took part in community engagement programmes, support groups and feeding schemes. He reported to have been recently nominated as the chairperson of a School Governing Body (SGB) in a nearby school where he resided.

Participant 3

Pseudonym: Gothatso

Time spent in prison: 10 years

Age: 42 years old

Gothatso has two previous criminal convictions; he was first convicted in 1995 at the age of 21 for a five-year sentence of which he served three years and the remaining two years were suspended. Shortly after his release in 1998 he was re-arrested for a second offence and was re-convicted for 10 years of which he served seven and a half years. Gothatso reported that during his youthful years he was deeply involved in the struggles of the African National Congress (ANC) with the unqualified expectation that a new political dispensation will usher in new opportunities for previously disadvantaged youth especially in black communities.

Consequently, post-1994, some groups benefitted as a result of the new political dispensation and some did not. Gothatso was among the latter. He recalled that some of his comrades became employed and were subsequently integrated into different forces. As a result, some of them lived relatively well-off; but when he turned around to look at himself, life had stagnated and what aggravated matters even more was that he had no skill he could rely on.

In an emotionally intensifying way, Gothatso provided a description of how circumstances became unbearable for him when the ANC government took over after the 1994 elections which, he said, brought about a lot of changes in the country. I would imagine, through relative deprivation together with the realisation that their expectations were far from being met, Gothatso, together with his associates felt cheated by the very system they helped put in power. Of particular significance here was the arsenal of weaponry left at their disposal plus a worldview which subscribed to the notion that...*a hungry stomach take[s] no order* soon paved the way for Gothatso and his accomplices to procure money through illegal means.

This inevitably became a way of life until his arrest. Gothatso also reported to have begun his education during his second imprisonment - he has a matric certificate and two qualifications (a diploma in Marketing Management and Information Technology). He

reported to have a 15-year-old son from a previous relationship; he was not married but has “someone” in his life he considered marrying.

Participant 4

Pseudonym: Michael

Time spent in prison: 9 years 6 months

Age: 32 years old

Despite frequenting prison on several occasions, Michael explained that he had one previous criminal conviction; he was arrested when he was twenty years old; he said he came from a broken family with an absent father and was brought up by his mother and grandmother. Similar to the other two participants, (Akhona and Gothatso), Michael also obtained his matric while in prison. He reported to have a Project Management certificate and also studied towards a B Com (Law) Degree with UNISA but since decided to convert it into a Bachelor of Business Administration so as to align it with his business interests. One of his business interests, which Michael appeared extremely elated about involved entrepreneurship - starting and owning a business as he had done so himself.

As part of his self-development, Michael began learning how to organise events while in prison to complement the variety of experiences he had accumulated which include the facilitation of various therapeutic/prison programmes as well as subjecting himself to mainstream education. Within this context, I regarded Michael as the perfect illustration of the idiom “you reap what you sow”. For the record, Michael stated during his interview that he co-owns and co-directs an Events company, together with a friend and business partner whom he met while they were still both in prison and further stated that the business was doing relatively well. On the home front, Michael reported living with his girlfriend and describes his relationship as stable with the intent to get married. Michael said he did not have children but has set aside plans to buy a house, get married and have children within the next five years.

Participants’ lived experiences

The current study intended to describe participants’ lived experiences and the meanings they derived as a result of disengaging from crime. Participants were interviewed

once through one-on-one interviews as ex-offenders who subjectively identified themselves as having stopped offending and as such, the interviews centred mainly on their lived experiences (Guse & Hudson, 2014). Here, it is worthwhile indicating that the information solicited from the participants included experiences and recollections spanning a decade and beyond. Of particular note is that participants were in prison between nine and 11 years. In addition to this period, when the interviews were conducted, participants had already been released from prison for between five and nine years. Consequently, given that information from one's past is susceptible and subject to recall bias, and that information relating to current life circumstances may be consciously and/or unconsciously distorted, it has to be noted, contrariwise, that the qualitative nature of this study permits for such ambiguity.

In addition, what is more important in this study are participants' lived experiences as narrated by the participants themselves and their attempts to make sense of these experiences (Smith, 2008). Therefore, in recognition of the traversing of experiences, this study does not only acknowledge diversity and ambiguity but accepts subjective truth, in terms of how participants experienced their desistance process.

Moreover, in such a study where I, as the researcher, share similar experiences with the participants but aim, nonetheless, to make sense of their lived experiences, a co-creation of truths may occur. These discourses of truths, according to Foucault (1972) are unisubjective and intersubjective truths. Truths which are entirely personal are unisubjective whereas intersubjective truths occur between two people who jointly claim truth or falsehood. In this regard, it is acknowledged that during the process of meaning-making and co-creation of truths (known as the double hermeneutic), the process could have been "tainted" by issues of adaptation and maturation - but with this vulnerability lies the magnificence of qualitative research.

Because of this, the truth claims generated from an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) work are not always cast in stone but invariably tentative and subjective (Smith, 2008). In short, this translated to a commitment of understanding each participant's lived experience from his own point of view which facilitated the co-creation of intersubjective truths between myself as researcher and my participants (Smith, 2008). This was profoundly underscored by my appreciation for diversity as well as ambiguity in the way in which I acknowledged each account as being honest, truthful and authentic.

Setting up the interviews

After participants had agreed to be included in the study, each individual interview was arranged with them at a location of their choice. We agreed on an environment that would create an atmosphere typical of the social milieu in which participants found themselves on a daily basis. Allowing participants the freedom to choose when and where they would like to be interviewed showed respect on my part and provided some level of comfort which I regarded to be conducive to sincere and honest responses by the participants. However, distractions on the periphery, like ringing cell-phones and external voices which were also captured on the audio recording, meant that I did not enjoy an ideal degree of privacy or control as all interviews were conducted in the participants' homes.

Yet on a positive note, my own experiences, observations, thoughts and ideas as the researcher suggested that the familiarity of the setting allowed for the safe and secure experience of participants and enhanced their responsiveness during the interviews. Also, to the extent that participants and I share a similar experience in the sense that we were all at some stage incarcerated, I considered it necessary to build further rapport with my participants and not take advantage of our common situation.

To accomplish this goal, I began by contacting potential participants telephonically, introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the call which was to request permission as well as secure an appointment to conduct the interviews. The arrangement included informing potential participants about the setting and format of the interview and that for instance the interview required at least 1 hour 30 minutes of uninterrupted time. This initial engagement with the participants (prior to the interviews) proved worthwhile and contributed immensely in achieving the necessary level of trust with study participants. Also, our shared experiences contributed to a sense of security when we eventually engaged in the interviews. Our mutual interest manifested itself in the way in which participants were able to put aside enough time to give the interview sessions their undivided attention.

During the interviews

Prior to each interview, I made sure that I was fully equipped with an audio recorder, spare batteries, consent forms, an interview guide and a set of pens, plus a note book. In order to facilitate the generation of reliable data, all sessions were audio-recorded and the reasons were provided to the participants prior the interviews. Participants were also informed about

the purpose of the study; for example, that the study is towards the fulfilment of a Master's Degree with UNISA and that the results would be available in the form of a research report/dissertation. This included reminding participants that they reserve the right to refuse to participate should they wish they no longer want to continue with the interview. In as far as anonymity and confidentiality were concerned, participants were re-assured that their identities will be safeguarded (for instance, through the use of pseudonyms). This aspect will be further discussed under the Ethics section of this chapter.

Each participant was asked to complete the following:

- An information sheet (see Appendix B) stating the nature of the study and the telephone numbers of my supervisor should they wish to enquire more about the study.
- An informed consent form providing consent for the interview to be conducted (see Appendix C).

I started each interview by welcoming the participants and thanking them for their participation. To the extent that participants were ex-offenders who had officially signed off their entire parole yet still subjected to the stigma of labelling, I wondered what the term ex-offender meant to them. This question served as the opening question. As the interviews proceeded, the questions moved from general to specific. The proceedings did not, however, follow any particular sequence, but tended to develop around topics raised by participants during the interviews. A fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is that it is possible to use a conversational style of interviewing, or integrate this approach with an interview guide consisting of a pre-determined set of questions while leaving other items as topics to be explored at the interviewer's discretion.

My strategy, as such, could be described as reflective of the combined approaches. It provided a framework within which participants were able to express their own understandings in their own terms. According to Patton (2001), this strategy offers the researcher much needed flexibility in as far as probing is concerned. It is also useful in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects at length. It allows the interviewer at his or her discretion, space to pose questions about the areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated.

Each interview carried on for just over one hour. During the interviews, I made every effort to pay attention, listen attentively, and not to respond in ways that would influence the participant's responses either through showing approval or disapproval. Throughout each interview, the voice recorder had always been placed between myself and the participant to capture the best quality sound. The visibility thereof resulted in participants frequently eyeing the recorder especially at the beginning of the interview. After a couple of minutes, however, participants seemed relaxed enough, and through their reactions I relaxed as well, convinced that at times they were not even aware of the recorder. On ending the interviews, I thanked each participant for their attendance and contributions to the study and asked if they had anything they would like to ask or perhaps add.

According to Patton (2001), immediately following the end of the interview session comes an ideal period for the researcher to note what transpired during the interview. This is the period where the interview is "dissected" to reflect and consider what has been created. Patton (2001) also states that this is fundamentally important to manage the interview process as it provides time to make observations about, reflect on, and learn from each interview. As advised, I made notes immediately following each interview, noting down my feelings, reactions or anything that stood out from the interviews. In turn, these notes were helpful in assisting me to recall specific details about the setting, outcome and general observations made before, during and after the interview (De Vos et al., 2011).

Transcribing the interviews

Permission to record and transcribe the interviews was obtained verbally from each participant. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated word-for-word by myself. The decision to carry out the activity myself was partly influenced by the consideration that this would allow me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data as much as is possible. Also, by far and most crucial was the fact that transcribing and even translating the interviews would require outsourcing the services of a transcriber who, at least, possessed a basic or general understanding of the languages spoken in prison. A lack of this linguistic understanding could lead one to easily get "lost in translation" with terms like "is'jumbana", "uk'tola" or "akuna phuma phaka ngaphandle". As noted by Kelly (2006) the meaning elicited later when analysing the data is usually contextual so it was imperative that I transcribed the interviews verbatim. The overall process involved in transcribing as well as

translating the data took several weeks because I attempted as much as possible to reflect in the transcriptions.

At this stage, based on my reflection notes, I encountered numerous challenges during the initial phase of analysis and the one question that kept bothering me was to what extent should I, as the researcher, be magnified in the study (Mullings, 1999 as cited in Labaree, 2002)? Or put differently, the ability to accurately represent, without distortion, the voices of study participants based on my own personal experience and understanding. Once again, the advantage of being an insider was that I was more attuned to understand, interpret and represent participants' experiences from their own perspective (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

Furthermore, through self-awareness and the use of peer debriefing as primary mechanisms for safeguarding against bias, I was able to reflect on the multiple positions and identities I held and consulted with my supervisor to advise me on what would be considered adequate levels of involvement with the study (Perry et al., 2004). Indeed, establishing and maintaining links with both insiders as well as outsiders helped me balance the emic and the etic perspectives referred to earlier on (LaSala, 2003). How these reflections were captured, their impact on the analysis including member checking as well as my own reflections are discussed subsequently under measures of trustworthiness. Non-linguistic expressions such as exclamations, pauses, laughter, sighs and utterances that reflected feelings at the time of the interview were also noted to further enrich the content of the interview data. These were bracketed in the transcriptions.

Once all the interviews were transcribed as advised by Kelly (2006), and later translated from IsiZulu to English, they were once again read through while listening to the recorded data and careful notes were made of what might have been left behind accidentally. Next in the process was the daunting task of analysing the data.

Data analysis

The aim of this section is to discuss the results generated by this study and show step-by-step how data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) technique. Guse and Hudson (2014) have also recently used a similar technique in their study. It involves, basically, three sub-processes which are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. As explained subsequently, analysing the data included making comparisons, observing patterns and themes and clustering. The themes that transpired during the analysis are

discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Suffice to mention that as the themes appear to be related, they are neither presented with any sequential significance nor order. Within this context, it seems fitting enough to provide the reader with an overview of the analysis process.

Data analysis involved two phases. At the outset, I familiarised myself with the data by repeatedly listening to the audio recordings before reading the transcripts so as to thoroughly immerse myself in the data. This assured me that the participants would remain the focus of my analysis (Smith, 2008); and this demarcated the beginning my own search for meaning in their themes. Undoubtedly, one cannot deny that this search for meaning also forms part of an academic exercise. The latter part involved underlining repeated words, phrases and metaphors. Squares, circles and triangles were used to categorise themes that appeared more or less related or which surfaced frequently; the intention being to foster a process whereby these themes could be more comfortably juxtaposed against themes in the existing and relevant literature. At this stage, the traversing of themes, in addition to the ever-growing list of themes that continued to surface added to my confusion.

The task that specifically posed a challenge for me was categorising metaphors, sentences and key phrases that seemed to intersect with other themes. Trying to discern what was not said was even harder. However, applying my mind in the midst of all this confusion assisted me in realising that none of these themes were actually static. Placing them into sections and subsections only serves the means of organising information into what may seem like a coherent whole.

In my opinion, the themes generated by this study are interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation. Sub-themes interfaced, minor themes supported superordinate themes, and major themes continued to remain hidden. Suffice to mention that a number of superordinate themes were, however, identified in terms of the salient reasons for leaving behind a life of crime.

Based on the frequency of the narrated themes, superordinate themes were constructed. For instance, the superordinate themes “On becoming” and “Enduring a painful process of change” were illustrated by their majority, and at times, by all four participants. Subordinate themes which appeared less frequently like “Religiosity” and “Criminal record as “Death sentence””, yet have some liaison with superordinate themes, have also been included in order to invigorate the data and inform the context of the superordinate themes.

While some of the extracts from the transcribed interviews appear to have common themes which affect each participant, each of these themes are shaded by each participant's subjective experience thereof. Hence, a cyclical pattern of similarities and variance seems to co-exist thematically. Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 represents the themes that emerged during the analysis and is followed up with an individual discussion of each superordinate and subordinate theme.

Ethical considerations

Ethics in social sciences research can be described as a set of moral convictions that emphasise two major roles. The first is the physical and emotional protection of the participants, implying that participants may not be harmed as a result of the study (Berg, 2001; Patton, 2001; Seidman, 2006). The second guarantees that the interests of the study, meaning the transparent generation of dependable data for analysis and interpretation, are protected. Permission and ethical clearance to conduct the study were sought from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at UNISA which also stipulated the ethical and scientific guidelines to be observed. After following the prescriptions enshrined in UNISA's ethics guidelines, all reasonable measures were observed to safeguard all ethical requirements.

Because study participants had already signed off their entire parole, this implied that they were no longer under the care of the DCS and as such, the study only required permission and consent from the study participants. Consequently, in doing so, avoidance of harm, informed consent and confidentiality were observed in this study (Berg, 2001). Avoidance of harm was guaranteed by open discussions with participants and ensuring that they fully understood the implications of the agreement especially as their first language was IsiZulu and not English. Also, to ensure that strict codes of ethics were followed while conducting the study, informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of the interviews (Kvale, 1996). According to Seidman (2006), confidentiality also forms part of the ethical requirements in social sciences research despite Patton's (2001) observations that confidentiality norms are challenged by new directions in qualitative research.

Researchers have historically been advised to conceal the locations of their fieldwork as well as alter names of their participants, usually identifying them by codes or by providing

pseudonyms as a way of protecting their identities. The presumption, according to Patton (2001) has always been to protect the privacy of the study participants, but this presumption is now challenged by participants who insist on “owning their stories and identities”. My encounter with this “confidentiality clause” presented a similar challenge in that some of the participants willingly wanted their identities to be revealed. This occurred on two occasions when I went back for the feedback sessions with the participants to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. According to Shenton (2004) participants may also be asked to review their transcripts upon finalisation of the transcription. Likewise, each participant in this study was afforded the opportunity to view the transcribed data to ascertain the accuracy of the transcription including changing anything that was inconsistent with their lived experience.

It was at this stage that two participants enquired about the possibility of their identities being revealed. Regardless of our prior agreement before the interviews, I explained to the two participants that as much as I understood their desire to “own their stories”, however, because the other two participants could not ascertain their position on the matter, for consistency, it was decided to remain with pseudonyms as it was in the original blueprint.

Measures of trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the correct use of the research design, method and analysis will most probably answer the research question with what is known as validity. Validity refers to issues of truth whereby the researcher honestly reports on the findings of the study and indicates how the research unfolded, from providing a thorough description of the methods used, including how data were collected and analysed. Kvale (1996) reconfirms that the data collected should not rely on generalisations but on known truths. In phenomenological circles, this refers to the lived experiences as illuminated by the participants in depth and in detail.

In a qualitative study such as this one, results “are valid to the extent that they resonate with the experiences of others who have experienced the phenomenon in question” (Osborne 1994, p.180). As such, the aim was not to produce any conclusions of certainty, but rather for the study’s findings to be ‘well grounded’ and ‘supportable’, retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Other scholars agree that the objective is not to produce a single true account of the research information (Osborn & Smith, 2008), implying that the emphasis is not on facts, but rather, on the gained

enlightenment by the audience such as the readers of this dissertation. Needless to say, but in qualitative studies, a finding is significant insofar as it is relevant (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In other words, data are considered to be valid insofar as they present an account that is sound and grounded in the research information.

According to literature on measures of trustworthiness, the use of different methods compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits (Shenton, 2004). So, in ensuring the trustworthiness of this study I selected four criteria. They are: (1) data triangulation, (2) member checking, (3) peer examination, as well as (4) keeping a reflexivity journal. Each of these four aspects were aimed at boosting the credibility and dependability of the study. In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. In the current study, measures of trustworthiness were accomplished via data triangulation which involved the use of multiple data sources, chief among them being individual interviews.

As additional sources of information, the interviews were supplemented by personal notes, observational notes and field notes. These notes were written at different points during the research process. Member checking was also incorporated to bolster the study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by means of going back to the participants to check and verify whether the information was captured correctly and accurately. In this study, member checking was conducted at the end of the data collection process. The emphasis was primarily focused on whether participants considered that their responses matched what they actually intended.

The third criterion was peer examination. Peer examination was incorporated to mainly enhance the study's credibility. As per the researcher's expectations, opportunities for scrutiny and feedback abounded. To begin, this study formed part of UNISA's Department of Psychology Inside-Out Outside-In South African Corrections Interest Group. Therefore, peer evaluation opportunities came in the form of colleagues in the Department of Psychology and several other critical readers at UNISA. Other peer evaluation opportunities included three conferences, two national and one international conference. For example, there were comments and questions raised during the presentations that enabled me to refine my method and approach, and in the process this assisted me to develop a greater explanation of the

research design including strengthening my own arguments in the light of the comments that were made.

Last but not least, all throughout the dissertation I kept a reflexivity journal. Contained within my reflexivity journal were contents of my meta-thinking. Thinking about my thinking. Here, I also incorporated reflective notes, justifying and interpreting what I thought happened during participant recruitment, data collection and subsequently thereafter. This included issues such as the “confidentiality clause” referred to earlier, as well as reflections on the challenges encountered, such as the struggle in locating suitable participants who fully met the inclusion criteria and how I went about solving these challenges. Some of the entries in my journal also included methodological notes for example, the impact of insider-outsider position in conducting an interpretative phenomenological study such as this one.

Here, I specifically noted the inherent challenges but also the critical advantages of interpreting the meanings and experiences of criminal desistance from two distinct positions; (1) from the researcher’s perspective and (2) from an ex-offender who is in a perpetual state of desisting from crime. Theoretical notes zoomed in and reflected on the theories selected for the study. At this point, I noted that although these theories emphasise different viewpoints and advocate diverse factors as being responsible for criminal desistance, yet when studied together, there are many similarities and overlaps between these theories such that severing them apart adds to more confusion than clarity.

Chapter summary

The focus of this chapter was on discussing the method used in conducting this study. This chapter also highlighted the rationale for using the specific qualitative methodologies chosen for this study. Fundamental premises of qualitative research were tapped into, as well as a discussion on the philosophical underpinnings (interpretive hermeneutics) including a discussion on my insider/outsider position. Interviews as a data collection strategy were also discussed in depth. This involved discussing how study participants were approached (sampling methods and the criteria for inclusion). Attention was also paid to the ethical implications of the study. How data were analysed was also highlighted in this chapter by way of presenting superordinate and subordinate themes. Lastly, the profile of the participants was also presented.

Chapter 4

Results and discussion

Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology used in this study. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed in relation to literature. In essence, I will focus on the phenomenon of criminal desistance by exploring each participant's lived experience while noting the uniqueness of each participant's experience and relating it to the range of research findings. Furthermore, each identified theme will be linked with the personal experience of the participants in order to reflect observable patterns, contradictions, or anything outstanding between my experiences as researcher and those of study participants. To contextualise, yet still retain the authenticity of the findings, participants' experiences will be linked to conditions unique to South Africa by way of referring to their demographics, economics, history, socio-politics, as well as the cultures they subscribe to. Supporting and contradicting extracts from the transcribed interviews will be highlighted to clarify and refine the findings harvested by this study. Included within this chapter as well is Table 4.1 which lists the superordinate themes and subordinate themes that surfaced during the analysis.

Table 4.1 Superordinate themes and subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
<i>The questioning self: who am I, what am I doing here?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The impact of incarceration on the self 2) Identity transformation 3) Change starts from "within" 4) Re-writing the past: where to from now, the journey to self-discovery
<i>Enduring a painful process of change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Pains of imprisonment 2) The concept of time 3) Criminal record as "death sentence" 4) Key life events/critically significant events
<i>On becoming</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Employment as breakthrough 2) Education as coping mechanism 3) Marriage as turning point

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Parenthood 5) Families as institutions of reform 6) Religiosity and/or Spirituality as a catalyst for change
<i>Digging deep</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Discovering one's true potential 2) Willpower to change 3) Actions versus discourses of positive change
<i>All in the past</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Disguised blessing 2) Looking back: incarceration as character-building 3) A strong sense of achievement

The questioning self: who am I, what am I doing here?

This theme was constructed from the four sub-themes listed in the first section of Table 4.1 above. Central to this theme are questions relating to the self - such as 'who am I, what am I doing here?' Responses to these questions not only have the ability to bring about changes in the perception of the self but more importantly, they suggest a search for meaning in one's life. It was only after his experiences of the Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz and Dachau that Victor Frankl (1905-1997) argued for the self-transcendent person. Frankl (1969) postulated that people are always in a perpetual state of creating meaning in their own lives in response to the demands of everyday life.

Compton and Hoffman (2013), on the other hand, report that meaning is created in three ways: (1) by taking some form of action, (2) via deep first-hand experience of a phenomenon, or (3) through distress. In the context of imprisonment, it could be said that the search for meaning in one's life, or the will to meaning becomes the offender's primary drive and preoccupation (Frankl, 1969). Because the search for meaning in life culminates in a lifestyle that is self-transcendent rather than self-actualising (Frankl, 1969), it remains fundamentally important how offenders create meaning in their own lives during incarceration and whether or not they would like to change their lives around. It has to be noted, however, that turning one's life around requires a strong mind-set and constant dedication; and as such, not every offender will be successful in their attempts to desist from crime.

Successfully desisting from crime requires a shift from the old offending self to a new non-offending self. As Foucault (1977, p. 234) explains it, “this transformation must be one of the internal effects of imprisonment”. In other words, a possible self or non-offender self will initially need to be contemplated and further aligned in accordance with a new crime-free identity. This new non-criminal identity is underscored by new non-criminal preferences providing new and alternative social capital in addition to the offender’s own self-determination to change who they are. This in turn, signifies an important element in crafting one’s way to criminal desistance.

For example, in describing himself, Michael expressed feeling a strong sense of relief that he is no longer the same person as he was before and he spoke about how he had changed his perception of life in general. In his interview, Michael expressed the following...*my perception to life was influenced by the kind of lifestyle I led...I couldn't see something positive...I didn't see myself working...going for legal money...so...this person that I have become and the person that I was when I offended and committed criminal acts are not the same person.* Now that he is an entrepreneur and co-directs his own company, life looks different from before and this suggested to me that living through this experience could have fostered a process where Michael identified himself as a non-offender. When an offender begins to conceptualise himself as someone who would like to change his offending identity, Giordano (2014) regards this as the third type of cognitive transformation.

This new understanding, compatible with an evolving identity are said to trigger the initial motivation to break away from crime. In many respects, the Identity Theory of criminal desistance (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014) seems to strongly validate the findings derived from this study in assuming that (1) identity transformation comes prior to entrance into conventional roles like jobs and marriage; and that (2) offenders’ own personal agentic resources are significantly important in the desistance process.

For example, when I asked Akhona what motivated him to stop offending, he said...*discovering who I am...now that I know who I am, I know my identity. I know the purpose I am serving and my purpose for living. That's what stopped me from doing something that was not meant for me.* According to Akhona, people need to discover who they are; their real identities. His view was that...*there is a serious crisis with people that live with a lost sense of identity.* As far as he was concerned, the problem with such people was trying to fit in with anything that moves. His advice was that...*if you have an identity, you*

will know what's right and what's wrong for you, you will know what to do and not what to do... [so having an identity] provides you with a sense of settlement and belonging. You know your dos and don'ts... [so] people need to try and search deeper into who they really are. He made an example of himself and said...I thought I was a thug...that's what my thinking told me...I was lost.

Unsurprisingly, while discussing his role as an agent of change, I noted the complete absence of a criminal identity in the many descriptions that Akhona had attached to himself. Among these, he described himself as a youth pastor, a mentor and a motivational speaker. He said that...*there are a lot of people who look up to me...people who just listen to my story and draw inspiration.* What I found particularly interesting during the interview with Akhona as well as with the other participants was that they all, to some degree, apportioned their change process to the impact incarceration had on them. As such, when I considered the extracts above, it appeared plausible that it had to take the experience of imprisonment for Akhona to eventually find meaning in his life and answers to the questions of who he was and his reasons for being in prison. In the following subordinate theme, I discuss how the impact of incarceration contributed to the change process of study participants.

The impact of incarceration on the self

Prisons are extremely powerful social institutions. They are exceptionally influential and well-known for the power dynamics that exist in and around them. To varying degrees, prisons limit sovereignty and impose certain rules and routines that are not only inflexible but embrace the highly restrictive nature and concept of institutionalisation. The term institutionalisation refers to the means in which offenders are shaped and transformed by the very institutions in which they are kept (Haney, 2006). Systems of institutionalisation, just like imprisonment have the ability to shape behaviours; they dictate how offenders think and carry themselves and overtime this has a bearing on their cognition and behavioural repertoire.

From the participants' extracts, I chose two which reflect similar sentiments. The first one is by Michael who said...*prison granted me a space to reflect, to do an introspection and make decisions that will later impact or build the person I am today.* The second one is by Hlamalani who said...*I learnt how to deal with myself [while in prison]; introspection...for me to ask myself who am I and what do I want? At least that makes you focus while you are*

in there. I dedicated myself to studies, eh...programmes inside there and successfully so and we developed these programmes by ourselves [as inmates] to rehabilitate ourselves without officers-and they were a success. We were able to deal with issues that resulted in answering questions as to why are we here and build from there and do what's right. Given the extracts above, I agree that there is an important connection between “cognitive shifts” as suggested by Giordano (2014) and the manifestation of behavioural change which is fundamental to the desistance process.

Depending on the length of conviction and other related factors, imprisonment can impact offenders' lives in many different ways, both constructively and otherwise. In a myriad of cases, the consequences of incarceration have been found to be far from transitory for those serving long-term sentences (Haney, 2006). The psychological effects are usually long-lasting and often result in not so beneficial effects. Haney (2006) further explains that many profound psychological changes occur unobtrusively and this is further aggravated by offenders' concealment of their internal feelings and reactions which result in them being unaware of the transformation they have undergone. Yet for some, this transformation may not necessarily be a negative one. As is indicated in the extract below, there seem to be positive spin-offs and constructive ways in which imprisonment can impact the lives of offenders. Some of these were particularly evident such as in the aforementioned comment by Hlamalani...*prison has taught me a lot of things...now I can look after myself, look after my family, love them, love everybody and give respect to every one of which that thing, it was far from me before I went to prison.*

The quote above seems to perfectly complement the one below in which Akhona provided...*I don't do crime at all. Basic morals...Ubuntu...even when I follow you and you happen to drop your wallet I wouldn't take it...I would tell you...hey my brother here's your wallet. I think that's the level of consciousness that has risen up within me. The conscience is awake, it's alive...my conscience was dead...I didn't feel pity for anyone.* To the extent that study participants envisioned themselves living a crime-free life, it also seemed reasonable enough to expect their “cognitive shifts” to be incorporated and reflected in their behavioural repertoire as Giordano (2014) mentioned above.

Accordingly then, in an attempt to confirm whether incarceration has had any cognitive shifts leading to behavioural changes on behalf of the study participants, I prepared three questions tracking participants' change over time. The questions requested participants

to provide a description of themselves before and after their incarceration. The aim was to encourage them to think about and possibly distinguish the two selves and come to a conclusion as to whether they still perceived themselves as being the same person as they once were before they went into prison. Nevertheless, I understood their responses as reflecting some form of behavioural change as well as cognitive shifts in as far as the personal thinking of participants was concerned.

For example, providing a description of himself before and after prison, Akhona commented...*I am completely not the same. As an individual, there is a whole lot of things that has changed...I was a drug addict at first, I did drugs, I did alcohol, I did anything that was intoxicating [but] at this moment I don't smoke I don't drink, I don't touch anything that contains alcohol.* For Michael, the experience of imprisonment...*was a life-changing moment...like it was rehabilitation.* He reported that his criminal identity and lifestyle stood in the way of procuring money lawfully - for example, he said...*I didn't see myself working.* However, changes in identity ushered in by the experience of imprisonment brought in *drastic changes* for Michael, *from quitting smoking...everything...cigarettes, drugs [and] dagga.* Besides construing prison as a turning point in his criminal career, Michael also recalled going through a series of changes in his *perception to life in general.* In this regard, it could be said that changes in the participants' perceptions could have influenced their thinking which in turn impacted their behaviour. Next, I discuss how participants' identities evolved over time.

Identity transformation

This subordinate theme focuses on changes in identity (that is, change from a criminal self to a non-criminal self) and argues that identity transformation is an undertaking that every desisting offender should essentially go through. Profoundly influenced by writings of Maruna (2001), and recently by Giordano (2014) and Bushway and Paternoster (2014), I discuss results that strongly suggest that identity change comes first and that it is deeply rooted in thoughts of change prior to participants' release from prison. In other words, criminal desistance, or the desire to want to change can be realised early in one's sentence.

Such cognitive shifts, or "upfront" work as described by Giordano (2014) occur as an integral part of the desistance process and entail an orientation to change, a new initial identity, as well as changes in preferences and social networks. However, relative to, and

contrary to most stories of successful desistance, I find that the requisite cognitive work necessary to kick-start the desistance process was first realised, for both myself and the study participants while still in prison. This phenomenon is discussed extensively under subordinate theme “Change Starts from “Within””, below. This finding is deemed significant and remains so for two important reasons; first because studies of criminal desistance tend to frame desistance as only occurring after offenders are released from prison; and second because the present study provides evidence from a South African perspective showing that even with the provision of structural supports for change, without identity transformation, an understanding of the possible self as a non-offender is less likely to occur.

As I have consistently done so throughout this chapter, I enhance my own personal understanding in support of the notion that desistance is in fact an act of intentional self-change (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014). For Michael specifically, change was deliberate and imminent as suggested by the extract below...*during awaiting trial, there would be those quiet times where I would be alone...where I would feel and say okay you know what, this kind of lifestyle does not benefit me. I am not going forward. I have been in and out of prison, you know?* Similarly, crime was seen as a waste of time by Hlamalani who reckoned that the time used to commit crime could have been put to good use. He went further on to say...*there are a lot of opportunities for us to explore and see what we can find.*

In this respect, Bushway and Paternoster (2014, p. 72) offer a useful explanation when they say, “the best chance for desistance to take place is if offenders decide they would like to change their lives around, including who they are, take initial steps on their own to send signals that they have changed, successfully handle the small opportunities to reveal that new identity until better opportunities (like conventional partners, and access to good jobs) are provided”. This premise is particularly emphasised in the Identity Theory of criminal desistance because “intentional self-change is understood to be more cognitive, internal and individualist...” (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014, p. 67).

Essentially, advocates of this theory argue and support the notion that attaining criminal desistance requires both identity transformation as well as cognitive changes on the part of the offender. They emphasise, quite vehemently, that these must occur prior to conventional institutions for change such as legitimate social networks, stable jobs and emotionally satisfying relationships. In clarifying the process of identity transformation, Bushway and Paternoster (2014) theorise that offenders’ identities are intricately linked to the

crimes they commit. To the extent that this “working identity” remains intact and operational, an offender, according to this perspective is projected to offend until the costs outweigh the benefits and crime as such is seen as being too dangerous, disrupting social relationships and no longer financially beneficial. In other words, “the incentive to alter one’s identity comes when failures and dissatisfactions begin to mount up and can no longer be attributed to benign things like a streak of bad luck but rather seem to be consequences of the kind of life one is leading” (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014, p. 65).

Similarly, I also found that it is precisely at this intersection where thoughts relating to current failures and perceived dissatisfactions become “crystallized” (or integrated) and projected into the future. Anxiety-provoking questions such as ‘what am I going to do when I’m released?’, or ‘how will I survive post-incarceration?’ seemed to prevail in the minds of the participants. To affirm, I quote Hlamalani who was in prison for a 30-year sentence; during his interview he said...*I was tired of prison [and] I had had enough*. This is known as the crystallisation of discontent and seems prevalent in each participant’s subjective perception of the future. What seems to happen here is that with the prospect of a bleak future ahead, such thoughts become a source of apprehension in the minds of offenders that they trigger regular and dissatisfying experiences of crime.

In explicating this further, Hlamalani commented that...*crime is a lot of work and takes up a lot of energy...you are constantly on the run*. On another occasion he stated that *getting in prison is easy [but] getting out is difficult*. Specifically within the context of this research area, it can be inferred that elements of cognitive change are indeed evident as indicated in some of the participants’ extracts. However, such cognitive changes do not occur automatically on their own or in isolation - they need to be further aligned with a crime-free identity; hence the research question: in what ways do ex-offenders who have stopped offending come to maintain a crime free-identity? In this regard it appeared, convincingly so, that true change, which seems indispensable in the desistance process comes from within the offender (Horney et al., 1995; Maruna, 2001; Waller, 1974) which is the subordinate theme discussed next.

Change starts from “within”

Quoting the profound words by Mahatma Gandhi who once said: “You must be the change you want to see in the world” (Brainyquote, 2016) read in conjunction with research

findings by Giordano (2014, p. 50) who report that “in the aggregate, prison and even most treatment strategies do not fare well as catalysts for lasting change”, firstly tell us that “some of the recidivists do not learn from their previous experiences. They adapt to life in a correctional facility, and therefore lose any fear of imprisonment” (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015, p. 55); and secondly that the decision to want to cease offending emanates within the offender himself. At the very least, change can be construed as the essence of our very own existence - how we think, feel, and make sense of the world around us. In other words, as we evolve, we are constantly grappling with issues of change in our everyday lives.

In the same way, the process of criminal desistance, as I understand it and later corroborated by the study participants, occurs on a continuum as manifested by internal changes felt during and after one’s incarceration. I deem this to be an interesting feature given that prior research has generally concluded that “it is difficult to ascertain when the process of desistance begins” (Laub & Sampson, 2001, p. 11). Paradoxically, as suggested by the results of this study, the process of criminal desistance starts from within, while an offender is still in prison and this process is maintained throughout the release process and into the future.

In support of this claim, for instance, Hlamalani believed that he became aware of his change while he was still in prison. He said...*change began inside of me a long time ago. I was ready to have faced the world positively and become what I wanted to become.* And elsewhere in his interview again he was quoted as saying...*change comes from within...at a very early stage, [approximately] 3-4 years with no hope to come out...the remaining years serve no purpose...[but] you will feel the change while still inside.* Also, serving the role of a sign-post, Hlamalani cautioned that negotiating the desistance process is challenging...*you need to be strong to all dimensions.* Here, I noted the emphasis with which he said this, probably to underscore the fact that disengagement from crime is not an easy endeavour. Because one cannot do it alone, friends and family become involved and this soon develops into a collaborative effort. Over and above, Hlamalani expressed excitement and pleasantries that he had *made it*, referring to his successful reintegration back into the community.

As illustrated above, change appears to be inevitable for some ex-offenders like Hlamalani; but for others it can be profoundly resisted due to difficulties involved in managing it. For instance, to trigger the desistance process, agency is required on behalf of the offenders (Dufour et al., 2015) and this usually involves identifying and addressing the

needs and conditions that initially led them to commit crime in the first place (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015). For as long as these reasons are not held in contempt but still perceived to be advantageous, desistance is unlikely to occur.

It is therefore not surprising, given the many complications why personal transformation during incarceration is not always easily welcome or accepted. Perhaps this is because it occurs in an environment characterised by coercion which can unsettle one's worldview, all the while generating many conflicting emotions. Interestingly enough, I think it is precisely during those very moments when everything looks bleak and hopeless that offenders have a real chance to start afresh in their lives and develop into something better. In support of this claim, I quote an extract from Akhona which strongly suggested that change lies inherently within oneself...*I don't think you should shift the responsibility to society to make sure you don't reoffend. Take that responsibility; carry it on your shoulders, run with it. Why should society ensure you don't do certain things (reoffend)? Why should we always be treated like animals, be shackled, be caged so we don't do certain things? Those are all self-limitations. What is going to happen when we remove all those cages? You gonna go back to the same person you were. For me it shouldn't be about police, it shouldn't be about neighbours, it shouldn't even be about society. It should start with you to say I do not want to reoffend. That's it. At first no one pushed you to offend; now why should they pull you out? Pull yourself out as much as you pushed yourself in.*

Seemingly then, the conundrum of where exactly during the process of criminal desistance does personal transformation begin appears to be a relatively simple and straightforward answer: in prison. For all four study participants, the responses to the question below were strikingly similar in that the decision to disengage from crime was considered and made during incarceration and long before their release.

For example, I asked Michael to think back and reflect on his change process and tell me when he first became aware of his transformation; he said between two to three years into his nine and a half year sentence. He was quick nevertheless, to point out that the first year is usually spent in denial. I agree with Michael and find this to be particularly common among newly-sentenced offenders who still hope that the Appeals' Court will arrive at a different verdict and their cases will be acquitted somehow. Michael added to this viewpoint, he said...*that thing of criminality is still in your blood, it hasn't left you, but with time, while serving your sentence, that's when that...what is that thing that speaks to you...what's it*

called...yes conscience...yes...that's when it started after several months, maybe a year towards the second year, that's when it started communicating with me.

From this extract, one can infer that it is precisely during the period of imprisonment that change is first realised. Sharing a similar sentiment is Hlamalani who said...*at the end, I cannot coerce you to change [so is the next person] but you will force yourself to change. Change comes from within at a very early stage. The remaining years serve no purpose...change comes after three or four years with no hope to come out. You'll feel the change while still inside.* Gothatso made similar comments as with the other participants, he said...*ja, change starts from within while you are still in prison...if you fail to change while inside prison...I don't see how you'll be able to change outside.*

As evidenced from the extracts above, quitting crime is a conscious decision that begins with oneself. This experience, as lived and narrated by the participants also reinforces the notion that criminal desistance is an inherently individual decision (Dufour et al., 2015). In fact, all four ex-offenders who participated in this study felt that the decision to stop offending rested entirely upon them and that no any other external force/s motivated them to decide as such.

Although families (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015); employment (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014); correctional education (Wake, Farley, Bedford, Murphy & Denham, 2013) and entrepreneurship might have supplemented the participants' chances of change, the decision which initially triggered the change process was made within and while still inside prison. It is for this reason that this subordinate theme was identified and explored in terms of where exactly does the process of criminal desistance begin; likewise, the following subordinate theme builds on the architectural journey to self-discovery: where to from now?

Re-writing the past: where to from now, the journey to self-discovery

Re-writing the past, according to the ex-offenders interviewed in this study involved a reflection of the past, present and the imagined future. In other words, contemplating change involved a deep introspection of the offender's life before imprisonment, during imprisonment, and how the desired future should pan out (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). Maruna (2001) terms this writing as the narrative scripts of offenders.

There are generally two types of narrative scripts: a narrative script of condemnation and a narrative script of redemption (Maruna, 2001). Both distinguish those who will successfully disengage from crime from those who will not. A narrative script of condemnation is characterised by despondency and hopelessness because authors of these scripts perceive themselves as having very little opportunity to cease their offending. Conversely, scripts of redemption are characterised by optimism complemented by positive attitudes from ex-offenders who are determined to become the architects of their lives and do what is good.

Integrating all these pieces together partly suggests that when participants began embarking on their own desistance process, they were also acutely aware that they needed to start preparations for their own reintegration while inside prison and that in the process they would also be required to redefine, realistically so, who they were, and who they wanted to become (a businessman, an employee or a student). In a more recent study conducted among a sample of high-risk offenders in a correctional facility in New Zealand; Dickson and Polaschek (2014, p. 1442) sought to examine the relationship between participants' release plans and their rates of recidivism; these scholars found that "prior to release, men who had plans for post-release employment and men whose plans were better overall were less likely to be reconvicted in the following 6 months".

In this regard, it is also worth considering whether behavioural interventions administered in correctional centres such as Life Skills programmes, Anger Management programmes, or Sexual Orientation programmes could not have facilitated this process seeing that yet again, all four study participants converged on the belief that prison rehabilitation programmes assisted them in their change process. To some degree, I found a level of consistency between the participants' beliefs and the report made by Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) that therapeutic interventions designed to reform and reintegrate offenders are premised on the belief that they are capable of modifying behaviour in a positive way.

For instance, Hlamalani said...*the programmes we attended while in prison helped me a lot...they are effective...if you are prepared to listen... but [they] cannot be good so much as to change you if you don't believe that you are capable of change.* Likewise, even though at first hesitant but after a moment of consideration, Gothatso also seemed to be in agreement that prison rehabilitation programmes worked for him; but quickly added a condition...*they play their role in what you have [already] decided...like I said before, everything comes from*

within you. By emphasising that...everything comes from within you suggested that quitting crime for Gothatso was a proactive rather than a reactive decision. He further said...if you haven't changed your inner being, you will attend that programme for convenience' sake so that you have it...but it will not have contributed to anything.

Michael, on the other hand, expressed his views this way...*you cannot force a horse to the river to drink water if it is not thirsty. [Similarly]...you can register any inmate to undergo prison rehab programmes but before that particular individual mentally becomes prepared or having made the decision to attend those rehab programmes and feel that it's going to impact him positively or somehow in his life, then it cannot work. I went through those programmes because I believed that these programmes will have an impact in my life...one way or another. It impacts on someone who believes that can have an impact on them.*

From the extract above, one can infer that there could be a variety of reasons why offenders join these programmes; to meet the requirements of the parole conditions before release, or simply because they are “tired of sitting around and doing nothing” (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012, p. 97). Ironically, however, this did not seem consistent with the results of this study which found consistency with the narrative scripts of offenders as explicated by Maruna (2001) and also lent support to the idea that it is the quality rather than the types of plans which offenders make that will ultimately determine the outcome of their journey to self-discovery (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014).

To illustrate with an example, Hlamalani, who reported to be a shareholder and co-employee at an Exhibition company indicated his blueprint this way...*I had already prepared myself of the things I wanted to do upon my release. I had planned to register a crèche and take care of children of which I did that. Everything went according to plan but then I failed because my fiancé fell sick. I was stressed and this led to the closing down of the crèche. In the same way, Gothatso also had plans of starting up a business in the event that he would not find employment. He said...I had two options that I'll look for work. If I'm not able to find work then I'll establish a business related to what I've studied for because I have marketing skills, at the same time I have computer skills. In view of the preceding accounts, together with the following quote from Akhona's transcript...I had already found what I wanted and that was to figure out where to begin exemplified participants' willingness to operate within*

the confines of societal norms as well as attempting to live and conform to society's expectations.

This is a good sign according to Maruna (2001) indicating that participants were more concerned with 'making good'; including a preoccupation with discourses of starting their own projects as well as seeking employment opportunities upon their release. In what follows next, I discuss reasons why this change is painful including the psychological pains inflicted by imprisonment.

Enduring a painful process of change

This superordinate theme was constructed from the four sub-themes listed in Table 4.1 earlier in this chapter. These sub-themes were clustered together because they share an attribute insofar as the psychological pains of imprisonment were experienced and described by study participants. In essence, these four sub-themes capture and highlight how the experience of imprisonment unfolded as a painful process of change for study participants; how they experienced their time in prison and whether they felt they had lost or achieved something as a result of their incarceration, including dealing with key life events such as the death of a loved one while in prison; and the irony of incurring a criminal record. Drawing on similar experiences with regards to the pains of imprisonment, author Haney (2006) in his critically acclaimed book, *Re-forming punishment: psychological limits to the pains of imprisonment*, reflects on the criminogenic factors that precipitate offenders to adapt to the difficult conditions of imprisonment.

To the extent that issues of incarceration tend to involve an element of subjectivity in them, it is often quite the case that as individuals we hold within ourselves certain underlying beliefs about prisons and prisoners in general. Personal experience dictates that public opinion on the incarceration of offenders can be generally categorised into two paradoxical views; those who believe prisons are "five-star hotels" where offenders do as they wish and those who proclaim that prisons are "universities of crime" with little or no rehabilitative value on behalf of those incarcerated in them (see also Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015 for a similar description).

Although I do not agree by any stretch of the imagination, either way, a point of convergence between the two camps is that both discern prisons as dangerously useless. A similar view can be traced back almost four decades ago to Michael Foucault who wrote that

correctional institutions are at their most dysfunctional when they are not useless (Foucault, 1977). In recent years, however, with the advent of more criminological research and subsequent policy adjustments, this populist notion has given rise to the get-tough stance which has made unfounded claims about the capacity of pain to act as a deterrent to crime and criminals in general (Listwan, Sullivan, Agnew, Cullen & Colvin, 2011). In particular, advocates of this movement make the assertion that lengthy sentences and higher levels of security which enforce more restrictions on offenders constitute more painful living environments (Listwan et al., 2011).

From an intersubjective point of view, exposing offenders to harmful prison environments such as harsh living conditions where they perceive their environments with apprehension, as potentially risky, at best dangerous and personally harmful, will instil a culture of defiance and more than likely result in negative emotional states such as anger and resentment. Previous studies conducted among offenders have consistently shown that the experience of imprisonment varies among offenders. For example, in their argument, Ngabonziza and Singh (2012, p. 92) make the assertion that “the pains of imprisonment carries a certain psychological cost as there are psychological changes that many prisoners are forced to go through to be able to survive the prison experience”.

It is therefore not surprising that subjecting offenders to the pains of imprisonment which has been thought of as a strategy to educate offenders that crime does not pay, has been questioned by many in the research community. For instance, the study by Listwan et al. (2011, p. 152) challenged claims by officials that painful prison conditions have the propensity to reduce recidivism by showing instead that “inmates who found the prison environment to be fearful, threatening, and violent were more likely to recidivate”. As suggested by these findings, the painfulness associated with the experience of imprisonment may augment levels of reincarceration. Yet despite having gone through these painful experiences, research by Guse and Hudson (2014) has indicated that some ex-offenders do succeed in reintegrating into society and avoid committing further crimes.

Implicitly, this means the observed patterns between the pains of imprisonment and recidivism levels are not universal for each and every offender. From this perspective then, it seems fair to assume that some offenders experience the pains of imprisonment differently from others. In line with this assumption, I would also like to believe that “prisons...shape choices by influencing how inmates think and feel, whether they become angry and defiant,

and perhaps whether they can sustain the human agency to overcome the rigors of re-entry” (Listwan et al., 2011, p. 153).

In contemporary South Africa, we find recourse in the form of the White Paper on Corrections (2005). One of the fundamental premises stated in the White Paper on Corrections (2005) is that correctional facilities do not serve a punitive goal but rather the purpose of incarceration is to correct offenders’ deviant behaviour with the primary aim to prevent recidivism. However, contrary to this premise, which I deem misleading because in its entire seven years of existence, Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) still found that due to the punitive and painful nature exerted by imprisonment, ex-offenders still showed signs of long-term psychological anguish. As such, given the realities and the current state of affairs in South African prisons, one could thus infer that the pains of imprisonment can have an untoward effect thus making prisons facilitators of criminal behaviour (Sykes, 1958).

Some of the extracts cited in Hlamalani’s transcript pretty much affirm that incarceration can serve as a painful process of change. The one extract that seems to perfectly do so is the following...*prison has changed the person I was...under difficult circumstances whereby you have to be locked up, stand in queues, be counted...everything that happens in there happens without your willingness. So there are people that control you obviously, but I have learnt more. I have learnt how to respect people regardless of their shortcomings. I learnt how to deal with myself, introspection...for me to ask myself who I am and what I want.*

The pains of imprisonment

The experience of imprisonment can be both painful and unpleasant to the offender (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). Also, I found that it is that much harder for me to put into words as it is difficult to imagine the psychological pain inflicted by the institutionalisation of imprisonment. In Haney’s (2006, p. 175) words, “it is not surprising that during the initial period of incarceration, most prisoners find the harsh and rigid institutional routine, deprivations of privacy and liberty, stigmatised status, and sparse living conditions to be stressful, unpleasant and difficult to tolerate.” Having been incarcerated myself, I can attest to the notion that imprisonment can be experienced as a highly stressful environment.

In many instances, it deprives one of his/her personhood and strips them of their individuality (for example, being reduced to a number and the sameness that comes with

every other offender). Prisons also have the ability to evoke extremely deep-seated emotions such as profound feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, anger, frustration, sadness and resentment. Sometimes, these emotions collide with one another and what feels like a volcanic eruption, the inner turmoil resulting from this emotional state is experienced as the psychological pain of imprisonment and includes a degraded sense of self-worth and personal value (Haney, 2006). Compared to other systems of institutions, prisons are designed to make people relinquish any form of privacy and autonomy.

According to the ex-offenders who participated in this study, the usually taken-for-granted issues of personal choice (when to wake up) and personal freedom (what to eat) become ideal concepts divorced from the reality once known. These are almost always replaced “by informal rules and norms that are part of the unwritten, but essential, culture and code that prevail inside prison and among prisoners themselves” (Haney 2006, p. 178). With the passage of time, daily routines and activities become part of an ingrained programme that is regulated by institutional decision makers. And as observed by Haney (2006, p. 179; see also Haney, 2001) “prisoners who internalise these habits, values and perspectives - all normal reactions to an abnormal situation - will experience greater difficulty transitioning back to free world norms”. Compounding the pains of imprisonment seems to be the infamous prison culture that permeates correctional centres all around the globe. In many prisons, whether locally or internationally, prison culture assumes both formal and informal roles with the latter usually expressed in very subtle forms.

According to Haney (2006) prison norms are invariably imposed on offenders and the effects can be powerful and long lasting. In the words of Frank et al. (2012, p. 30), the problem with the prison culture “is that after prisoners subscribe to this convict code for an extended period of time, they forget that these beliefs, attitudes and resulting behaviours that are forged within the prison environment should be left at the prison gate upon their release”. Yet without much choice and deliberation, compliance and conformity to this code automatically become key survival strategies in prison.

For instance, it is often required of newly-sentenced offenders to observe the power structures as well as the explicit and the implicit rules that apply in prison; the different forms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour including distinguishing myths from facts. It is often the case that the discrepancy between the known and the unknown results in a painful state of confusion which can be overwhelming. Understanding the different types of

languages spoken in prison is but one example and the most affected by far seem to be the newly-incarcerated offenders who begin their sentences still in denial of the court's verdict. More often than not, they have not come to accept their fate and therefore find it difficult to make sense of their new "home". Not only does this delay their adaptation, but it also clouds their judgement. Consequently, they feel lost, and rightfully so, because they are strangers who have to adapt to a new lifestyle that is unknown to them. This is experienced as culture shock.

Culture shock, in the context of imprisonment usually manifests itself during the early phases of imprisonment and is experienced as feelings of confusion and uncertainty that offenders normally go through when they come into contact with a culture that is vastly different from the one they were once comfortable with and originally accustomed to. An explanation provided by Leigey and Ryder (2015) suggests that as newly-sentenced offenders begin their sentences, they feel irate but over time they take responsibility for the actions that landed them in prison. Bringing all of this together, I am inclined to argue that psychologically resilient offenders are able to move through the initial and even subsequent stages of their incarceration seemingly intact "because - like all people - offenders can only tolerate so much suffering before attempting to transform the experience to reduce its painfulness" (Haney, 2006, p. 164). To remain psychologically sound, and to achieve a healthy adjustment to the prison environment, offenders are required, among other things, to adapt to the pains of imprisonment. However, in an attempt to do just that, a substantial number of offenders are likely to manifest psychologically-related symptoms.

Yet over time, realising that there is little they can do to turn their situation around, they begin to resist the struggle to remain unchanged and inevitably conform to many of the prison demands. This could suggest that prison adaptation is a prolonged process contingent on one's readiness to conform. These changes, as explained by Haney (2006) are normal and natural adaptations made in response to the authoritarianism of prison life and also serve the role of a coping mechanism. The role of such strategies, I would assume, differs for short-term as opposed to long-term sentenced offenders. The rationale supporting this claim comes from the observation that all four ex-offenders who participated in this study were subjected to long-term prison sentences (each not less than 15 years) and arguably, the effect of long-term incarceration seems to impact individuals differently.

As explained by Akhona, imprisonment impacted him in...*more than one way...positively and negatively*. He recalled that during his term of incarceration there were...*moments of rejection, hopelessness, [and] failures*. But despite all of those setbacks, he acknowledged that...*there is a positive side to it* (incarceration). He insisted, unequivocally that...*that's where your character gets built up, you are shaped up, you learn what patience is, you become more resilient*.

However, as in a variety of instances, truth is subjective and as explained by Haney (2006) people do not have the same understanding of the psychological effects of the conditions under which offenders are subjected to and expected to adapt to. Because these conditions can sometimes be harsh and inhumane, much is expected from the ex-offenders to avoid going back to prison and also because this would restrict their freedom.

In summarising his prison experiences, Hlamalani succinctly narrated the following...*incarceration is painful*. And in support of this claim is Haney (2006, p. 162) who reports that “prisons are painfully unhealthy places for guards and prisoners alike”. This again, supports the contention that imprisonment can involve a painful process of change, in particular because, as Hlamalani put it...*conditions in prison are difficult*. Gothatso shared a similar view...*Ja, eish it (prison) was bad. It was really bad because now the things that you usually do and the things that you get are not provided. You are in place where there is no movement. You are confined in one place and you are guarded*. This premise resonates perfectly with Gothatso's extract who was quoted as saying...*it was bad so much so that I ended up deciding that if I'm going to stay here in prison and serve this sentence and not do anything and then if I go out...I will go out and how will I look at the community? [moreover] What do I have? Meaning I will go back to what I have been doing before because now I'm coming back and I have nothing*. The above extracts highlight the fact that desistance from crime or maintaining a non-offending lifestyle can be a challenging endeavour for those contemplating to stop offending.

The concept of time

Criminological literature suggests that there is a strong link between age and criminal desistance (see Farrington, 1986; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In general, the premise being advanced here is the manner in which age relates to offending such that there is a change in peoples' personal conceptions as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Hunter,

2015). In this respect, both Michael and Hlamalani suspected their maturity might have played a role in their change process. Growing up in the rough neighbourhoods of Soweto, Michael grew up believing he had to be streetwise to achieve recognition among his peers (Barry, 2006); but subsequently reported that...*but after maturity struck* (and I assume this was during his imprisonment) [I realised that] *that's not actually the truth and that influenced my decision-making process*. Similarly, Hlamalani was noted as saying...*maturity is involved as one of the reasons that has affected my thinking but I am also doing something on the side to assist my own maturity*.

In line with these results, literature also reports that advancing age brings with it a heightened awareness of the risks involved in continual offending and this instils fear in those contemplating a life of crime (Barry, 2006). Another possible explanation forwarded by Giordano (2014) ascribes this change process to some kind of wearing down or battling physical exhaustion associated with committing crime and the criminal justice process that ensues following arrest. In accordance with these findings, the relationship between age and crime has remained a relevant subject of interest for this study and hence required to be analysed within the broader social, political, and economic landscape (Barry, 2006).

At best, the association between age and crime is described by the age-crime curve which, in its simplified form states that juvenile offenders reoffend more often than older offenders (Dufour et al., 2015). In this regard, a sturdy advocate of the age-crime curve is Farrington (1997) who wrote extensively on the topic. For example, he found that most young juvenile offenders initiate their criminal careers at around age 14, peak in late adolescence and only begin declining around their late twenties (Farrington, 1997). A graphic representation of this relationship can be easily depicted in the form of a bell-shaped curve characterised by onset (when the initial offence is committed), followed by peak period (the highest point in the curve where most offending occurs) and finally a downward-slope when an individual's criminal career comes to an end. This line of enquiry is important in so far as it highlights the relationship between the age of onset and offenders' criminal careers such that earlier recruitment into offending is predictive of a longer criminal career.

Consistent with this claim, Akhona affirmed that...*I started at a very young age to practice criminal activities*. He described how he started shoplifting sweets at the age of eleven or twelve (I presume this was where his criminal career took off); owned a firearm in Grade Nine which he took to school and started smoking when in Grade Eleven. At the age of

sixteen or seventeen he described himself as having turned into...*something else*. However, with the inevitable passage of time, forfeiting year after year in prison and realising the difficulty they have put themselves in by offending became significant catalysts that influenced their decision to stop offending (Barry, 2006). All too often though, it is only a case of perception wherein offenders are believed to desist from crime when the risks of committing crime become too high (Dufour et al., 2015). It is precisely at this latter part of the offenders' criminal careers that I was intrigued and inspired to carry out this study, to seek ex-offenders' views as to what events and triggers precipitated or confirmed the desire or propensity to stop offending (Barry, 2006).

Almost all of the reasons cited by the study participants varied in nature but typically involved an increased awareness of the destructive elements of their delinquent past as well as feeling a sense of maturity, empathy and accountability. Advancing age also brought with it the realisation that imprisonment was a waste of time; this was further tied with the disconcerting issue of the minimum sentencing act which imposes longer sentences for repeat offenders. Such realisations, as explained by Hunter (2015) induce a re-assessment of the future such that offenders become imminently aware of the approaching dead end should they decide not to turn their lives around. Furthermore, those contemplating this change ought to feel they have something to lose such as a reputation, a partner, or an opportunity for a legitimate status (Barry, 2006) should they continue with their offending lifestyle.

To validate this claim, I asked Gothatso to pre-empt his girlfriend's reaction should she find out he is involved in criminal activities; he responded this way...*definitely she will discourage me to the extent that if I insist she will leave me*. Here, Michael displayed an understanding that part of the reason he conformed was because there was a lot at stake. Added to these risks are possibilities of being ostracised by one's family and thereby losing their support. Corroborating this claim is Michael who had a slightly different story to tell but with a similar outcome...*because it was not the first time being arrested, I felt that I had broken their [my family] hearts...like I'm hurting them because I would go in and out...whether bail or free bail [but still] they use their money*. In this extract, Michael made it explicitly clear that he was increasingly becoming aware that his delinquent past had resulted in dire financial implications for his family.

It also appeared as if being future-oriented proved considerably helpful for the participants as this did not only create the awareness of what has been lost, but of what can

still be accomplished in the future. Equipped with this positive attitude in mind, the participants succeeded in taking advantage of the few opportunities available to them in order to reprioritise what they considered important in their lives.

Confirming this notion was Gothatso who said...*so I grabbed the opportunity that no...let me try school. If I can try and achieve some qualification [then] upon my release, I can be employable.* This is called ‘appropriating hooks for change’ and it refers to exploiting possibilities of change provided by the environment (Giordano, 2014). Yet still, in order for the hooks to become effective, it is important that the offender feels able to desist, takes recognition of, and acts on these possibilities for change. However, this may not always be achievable due to peer pressure. Generally, not until they are well into their twenties do young male offenders find this transition negotiable (Barry, 2006).

All in all, the general feeling among study participants was that continual involvement in crime represented a precarious life fraught with disadvantages of constantly running away from the police to avoid rearrest and reconviction. Yet despite the inevitable loss of time that accompanies imprisonment, all four study participants demonstrated having gained rather than lost as a result of having been incarcerated. Within this subordinate theme as well, there seems to be a strong emphasis among study participants on framing their incarceration in positive, rather than negative terms. This attribute also complements the theme where study participants viewed their...*incarceration as a blessing in disguise.* In as far as this relates to the concept of time, Hlamalani said...*for me I am happy that I was in prison although I am not happy with the time I wasted. But for my change I am very happy.*

What seems quite obvious in this extract are mixed emotions in the sense that Hlamalani claimed to have felt elated about his change but instantaneously felt that his incarceration was a waste of time. In explaining this further, he said...*I lost time only...but I don't regret the time I lost because what I have gained is for a life time...[also]...I am not sure whether I would have survived or still be alive had I not been arrested. [So] I didn't lose that much [instead] I have gained.*

Gothatso shared what appeared to be similar sentiments with Hlamalani; a theme underscored by mixed emotions in as far as deciding whether incarceration was experienced as a loss or gain. Of this he said...*I have achieved something. Yes, with regards to life there's somewhere I have lost like because eh...most of the time I was unable to raise my son. I left*

him while he was still very young but I have achieved something and that is education. To reaffirm the notion of mixed emotions, Michael recalled two distinct stages of his incarceration; one characterised by feelings of denial where his incarceration felt more like a...curse or bad luck followed by another completely different stage characterised by the acceptance of his sentence where he now began viewing his incarceration differently. He said...after I had accepted my sentence...that's when now...I started viewing my incarceration in a positive light.

The three examples provided thus far suggest that incarceration is not as detrimental as it is always made out to be. Instead, as has been demonstrated throughout this discussion chapter-imprisonment can have beneficial effects. For example, in illuminating his experience of incarceration further, Akhona described his time in prison as follows...*personally; I have lost a lot to achieve a lot. I have lost ninety per cent of my negativity and I have gained ninety per cent of positiveness.* In this extract, I picked up the enormous significance which the participant attached to his transformation. He explicitly attributed 90% of his change comprising, among other things, a loss of...*attitude and a negative mind-set* to imprisonment. While this is commendable on the one hand on the other hand, when Akhona reminisced to his earlier delinquent years and as if somehow in regret mode, he explained that because of the life he used to live he lost some of the abilities he was passionate about which included the opportunity of becoming a professional soccer player. I instinctively probed further on this “lost ambition” for which he said...*I got shot above the knee so I couldn't play soccer anymore [and that is] what got me deeper into crime.*

Criminal record as “death sentence”

There is uncontested agreement among researchers that procuring employment is likely to get harder with a criminal record than without (Hunter, 2015; Perry & Bright, 2012). The reality is, for many potential employers, a job-seeker with a criminal record is representative of an untrustworthy person who could later ‘bite the hand that feeds the employee’ (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). Ex-offenders too, believe that their criminal record status and reputation as law breakers serve an insurmountable challenge in as far as future employment prospects are concerned (Dufour et al., 2015). In this regard, a review of the literature shows that having a criminal record is one of the strongest predictors of persistent unlawful behaviour (Hickey, Yang, & Coid, 2009 as cited in Tadi & Louw, 2013).

Indeed, from the extract below, I could discern a similarity between Hlamalani's comments together with the results by Raphael (2010) in reconfirming the notion that potential employers who usually check criminal backgrounds are less likely to hire people with criminal records. In this regard, Hlamalani said...*it's hard for ex-offenders seeking employment with a criminal record especially if you are well educated. It's difficult for those people. Their CVs must be thoroughly checked even though you mean no harm and intend to do well. As a result, you'll be discriminated because of your criminal record.*

In addition to this, and against this background, Lageson and Uggen (2013) further report that a significant body of research indicates that male ex-offenders earn less and experience more unemployment than comparable men who have not been incarcerated (Western, Kling & Weiman, 2001 as cited in Lageson & Uggen, 2013). They also found that incarceration reduces later earnings and employment opportunities by disrupting connections with potential employers (Western, 2002); and finally that criminal punishment, especially incarceration, can also disrupt the acquisition of new job skills, entry into high quality employment, and the development of social networks that aid in obtaining legal employment (Western et al., 2001 as cited in Lageson & Uggen, 2013). Taken all together, this line of inquiry demonstrates how individuals with criminal records are both discriminated against and turned away from future employment (Lageson & Uggen, 2013).

Overtime, it seems reasonably true given South Africa's high unemployment rate, to assume that holding a criminal record coupled with inadequate job preparation and work experience builds frustration among the majority of ex-offenders seeking employment. This frustration is then interpreted as strain on behalf of the ex-offender which in turn has the propensity to trigger criminal relapse among those who cannot find legitimate employment (Agnew, 1992).

Yet in complete contrast, all four ex-offenders who participated in this study were either self-employed or full-time employed when this study was conducted; this, despite all of them holding criminal records. Also, none of the study participants seemed overly concerned with their criminal records or expressed extreme frustration or even felt that the criminal record was a "death sentence" to them.

In contrast to being rejected like many other ex-offenders who are stigmatised due to their criminal records, Akhona believed that...*I accepted myself for who I am...I did not go*

around looking for acceptance. In fact, he felt so strongly about this issue that he provided a list of potential offenders who are likely to complain about being stigmatised; among these, he included...*people that come out and become idle and people who run after people for employment.* Here, he was essentially referring to ex-offenders who go into the work market and seek employment with hardly any skill or level of education that might render them employable. In probing as to how he was different from the others, he indicated that... *I use the status of being an ex-offender and it works for me, that's where I get accepted for being an ex-offender.*

However, Gothatso steadfastly believed that having a criminal record jeopardised ex-offenders' chances of procuring employment and his view fascinated me. Yet it was not until I probed further that it became overwhelmingly clear that he was subjected to slightly different experiences compared to the other three participants. These experiences, as he recalled, occurred on two separate occasions; first at a company where he did one of his two internships; and the second when he applied for a vacancy at a well-known giant cell phone company. Having come out of prison and determined to change his life around, Gothatso had two plans in mind: seek employment with the qualifications he had acquired and if all else failed, open up some sort of a business. He was later excited to find out he had been selected for an internship programme where, as part of the first phase of the project, they had to interview those in the legal fraternity such as judges, lawyers, magistrates and prosecutors.

Gothatso thought the internship paid relatively well considering that it was supposed to last for five years. However, Gothatso only worked there for two weeks. He was not selected for the second project and no explanation was offered. So naturally, he enquired and was told of an error that had been made and was referred to the Human Resources department of the company and that is where it was explained to him that the information they were working on was sensitive and involved private companies which made it hard to employ people with criminal records. On that note the company rejected him based on his previous criminal convictions.

Given his experiences, the conundrum of whether an ex-offender should declare his/her criminal record when applying for a job once again arose with Gothatso's experiences. He said...*it was not easy for me to apply for this job with a criminal record. I was worried that if these people should ever find out [I have a criminal record] they wouldn't even short-list me for the interviews...but then I became brave.* By brave, he meant he did not

disclose his criminal record. When unpacking this issue, I find that there is a general and common belief among the general public and ex-offenders alike which suggested that ex-offenders battle to secure employment as a result of their criminal records. The act of stigmatising and labelling ex-offenders tarnishes their self-worth and this helps turn it into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Enduring a tainted identity, according to Haney (2006) becomes intractable particularly if ex-offenders are continuously subjected to stigmatisation and marginalisation by others in the community. Community, in the context of this discussion also includes the business community as later explained under the theme: All in the past.

Key life events/critically significant events

In the volume *Youth Offending in Transition*, author Monica Barry draws our attention to the ‘trigger points’ implicated in the desistance process. She outlines an important discrepancy in the life course of offenders, noting that criminal desistance is well explained and accounted for when ‘trigger points’ exist, but that the same cannot be said when such ‘trigger points’ are non-existent (Barry, 2006). As discussed in this section and consistent with the study’s results, not all social ties encourage criminal desistance. Sometimes criminal desistance can be triggered by key life events also known as critically significant moments. These trigger events can either be negative or positive (Barry, 2006); for example, they can include the death of a loved one, estrangement from one’s partner and dissolution of a marriage, or perhaps the birth of a baby.

Viewed this way, I am rather convinced that trigger events are almost always personal and subjective. Not only can they exert pressure and encourage desistance among offenders; but with the assistance of the trigger event itself, as well as the required agency on behalf of the offender, they have the ability to influence offenders’ decisions to stop offending (Barry, 2006). However, it is equally important to note that trigger events do not necessarily cause desistance by themselves; they do, nevertheless, serve an important symbolic and psychological function (Maruna, 2001). In her research, Barry (2006, p. 106) observed, and I would agree with her, that “if an offender feels that s/he has made an active decision to change his/her behaviour because of a so-called turning point, this should not be discarded as insignificant, not least when such turning points appear to be dramatically more important in the decision to stop rather than to start offending.”

To illustrate the influence of trigger events with an example, I asked Gothatso during his interview to recall the reason why he stopped offending; and somehow, as if he had anticipated the question he straightway said...*my father and grandmother passed on while I was in prison*. He further explained that losing both his father and grandmother and not being there to bury them was painful enough and this served as an eye-opener as well as the root cause of him desisting in the first place. **This key life event did not only demonstrate the care and welfare he has for his loved ones but it also articulated the sadness and the regret he had harboured for being unable to play a more active role in their burial (Leigey & Ryder, 2015).**

Based on the example provided above, we can tentatively infer that key life events such as the death of a loved one have the ability to trigger certain key questions or realisations in those contemplating change. Gothatso, for example, reported that while still grieving for his loved ones he realised that...*things are starting to get tough* and so decided that...*let me try to change*. However, when contemplating this change, Gothatso asked himself... *what is that I can do that will make me change?* Given the multitude of choices and activities at his disposal like working, studying and/or participating in sports/gangsterism which can have profound consequences; Gothatso, on the other hand, decided that...*let me change my life by going back to school*. As stated previously, he attributed his change to the fact that...*my father and grandmother passed on. I was unable to bury them. How is it possible, being the eldest son that you cannot bury your own father?*

It was not until Gothatso fully narrated his story that I eventually came to understand where his frustration with imprisonment emanated from. It was his father's wish to be buried by his son and when that did not happen, the experience left Gothatso scarred. So far, this discussion has sought to demonstrate the myriad of pathways in which desistance can be attained and as exemplified in the paragraph below, and prior to discussing each individual hook for change, I engender the various strategies brought into the desistance process by the study participants. While doing so, I respectfully oppose some of the initial writings in the field of criminal desistance by showing that even though there seems to be strong commonalities within research findings; criminal desistance is a unique, complex experience.

At best, criminal desistance is a personal journey interwoven with one's personality traits and cultural preferences. Moreover, of particular significance is the contextual reality in which we find ourselves as ex-offenders. This, I can never overemphasise as it contributes tremendously into the various strategies brought into the desistance process. Given these

contextual realities, one can infer that desistance from crime is far from universal with each and every desisting offender influencing and simultaneously being influenced by different catalysts of change. In this regard, it needs to be noted that the narratives generated by this study do not only reveal how such change unfolded for the participants, but more importantly, they show the depth and variation intrinsic within the desistance process.

On becoming

The six sub-themes making up this theme capture the role of the various informal social controls, shifts in identity, as well as cognitive and behavioural changes implicated in the desistance process. These sub-themes are located within this particular theme because they seem to have provided some sort of recourse for the study participants. For example, the first sub-theme focuses on offender employment as an alternative means to earn legitimate money; the second sub-theme looks at how correctional education may be of benefit to those who study during their incarceration; the third sub-theme considers the relationship between marriage and desistance; while the fourth, fifth and the sixth sub-themes look at the role played by parenting and families, as well as how participants' religiosity or spiritual conviction contributed to their change process. Also inherent in this theme are theories of criminal desistance. As discussed subsequently, there appear to be several points of convergence and divergence among the seemingly polarised theories of criminal desistance.

Within this phenomenon, two concepts can be differentiated; one views desistance as an outcome computed largely by reconviction data and the other views desistance as a process determined mostly by narrative data (Barry, 2006). Having systematically reviewed all three theories (the Age-graded informal social control theory by Sampson and Laub (1993); the Theory of cognitive transformation by Giordano (2014); and the Identity theory of criminal desistance by Bushway and Paternoster (2014), a common thread that appears to bind them together seems to be the interplay between informal social control, shifts in both cognition and identity, as well as the role of subjective factors in the effort to disengage from crime. For instance, in their Age-graded informal social control theory, Sampson and Laub (2003, 2005) advocate the importance of structural factors in disengaging from a life of crime.

These authors conceive that human agency, the conscious decision to engage in or desist from crime as well as the role of structural factors such as placement in good jobs or

finding good marriage partners, including attachment to one's children are all indispensable in igniting the criminal desistance process. Craig et al. (2014) also arrived at a similar conclusion in proposing that human and social capital in the form of a conventional spouse, legitimate employment and conventional associates significantly promote the desistance process.

Similarly, other models of criminal desistance such as the Theory of cognitive transformation (Giordano, 2014) emphasise the interplay between cognitive processes and the importance of human agency in the deliberate decision to stop offending. Despite Giordano and her colleagues failing to find conclusive evidence for structural support in their study, nevertheless they did admit that these are necessary and important in the effort to change (Giordano, 2014). However, in conceptualising their own framework as well as departing from Sampson and Laub's (1993) Age-graded theory, Giordano (2014) identified four distinct stages inherent in the desistance process. The first of these stages is a basic openness to change where an offender feels that offending is no longer compatible with who they are; the second stage involves an openness to a specific hook (a hook refers to a catalyst for change such as marriage or employment); the third stage entails adopting a new identity in which an offender envisages a future self in replacement of the old deviant self; and the last of these stages concerns changes in the way in which the deviant lifestyle or deviant behaviour is viewed by the offender.

All these stages will be juxtaposed in relation to how study participants fared. As I expected, the narratives generated from this study seemed to support the notion of "multiple pathways to desistance" as issues of employment, union formation and parenthood are contextually dissimilar in South Africa as in the United States where the Informal social control theory was developed. In other contexts, social ties such as parenthood, union formation, school achievement and secure employment have been inconsistently linked with crime cessation (Barry, 2006). Thus, against this backdrop, it is reasonable to assume that different offenders exposed to different hooks will react differently towards, and perhaps display different attitudes to the various catalysts for change.

Conscientised this way, I became particularly interested in: (1) whether the social bonds (dynamics and mechanisms) underlying criminal desistance as proposed by Sampson and Laub (1993) were also applicable in the South African context; and (2) whether their theory actually applies in a multicultural setting characterised by a collectivist culture while

taking into cognisance the policies enshrined in the White Paper on Corrections (2005). After having already identified the various catalysts thought to be responsible for the transformation of each study participant, I now dedicate the next section to discussing six hooks for change as proposed by Giordano (2014): employment as breakthrough; education as coping mechanism; marriage as a turning point; parenthood; and lastly, families as institutions of reform and participants' religiosity as a catalyst for change.

Employment as breakthrough

There seems to be a common belief among the general public that employment displaces some imminent risks and the reasons mostly cited include reduced amounts of time spent with delinquent peers as well as time spent away from communities with high crime rates (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014). Overall, there is the tendency to regard occupation as indispensable in addressing issues of crime and recidivism. Also conceived of as an intervention among the research community, the question that requires answering is, can employment act as a deterrent to criminal recidivism? Despite this line of inquiry being approached differently by different researchers, by and large, investigations into issues of offender unemployment show that occupation plays a crucial role in assisting ex-offenders avoid criminal behaviour and reincarceration (Lageson & Uggen, 2013).

One example in the key areas frequently explored in the criminal careers of offenders considers whether finding and keeping a good quality job contributes to the process of criminal desistance. According to the Age-graded informal social control theory, a good quality job imposes certain limits to routine activities all the while promoting conventional behaviour (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). This theory also states that a steady job keeps one preoccupied with work commitments and away from delinquent peers and activities (Warr, 1998). However, sustaining this process requires tenacity and dedication, for example having to wake up in the morning to go to work so as to maintain ones cash flow (Farrall, 2002 cited in Savolainen, 2009). Putting it slightly differently was Akhona who stated that...*my company got registered while I was still in prison. I started working full-time October 2013 to January 2015. It's only this year [2015] that I started getting formal salary monthly. That's what happens when you get married to the dream and when passion just drives you irrespective of whether you are making money but you know that I'm building on the right foundation. I'm bound to be successful be it ten years or twenty years, but this is gonna happen, like it or not. There is nothing that gets to me like personal*

fulfilment...money comes after. To some degree then, it seems reasonable to assume that one's employment status has a significant impact on one's self-concept as well as how they are perceived by others (Farrall, 2002).

Another salient premise advanced by the Age-graded informal social control theory asserts that there is more to employment as a means to money-making than simply surviving economic hardship. The state of being employed fulfils an important role in the accumulation of social capital providing, in the process, a sense of meaning and positive identity. In other instances, "men who manage to find jobs are more likely to attract prosocial partners than men who remain unemployed" (Savolainen, 2009, p. 300). Perceived this way, employment becomes one of the key mechanisms contributing towards the process of criminal desistance.

However, in much the same way as with the other catalysts for change, employment does not in itself cause desistance but it is deemed to be a contributing factor towards criminal desistance. A more recent study by Savolainen (2009) reconfirms this notion including much of what has already been documented in many international writings (both by policy-makers as well as research findings) that procuring employment serves as a strong impetus in breaking away from a criminal career. But this is paradoxical in itself because assuming that strong bonds to the labour market significantly reduce the propensity to reoffend (Sampson & Laub, 1993), then the opposite seems equally true as well. Without a legitimate source of income and having a poor self-concept could result in money procured through illegal means. In his study, Savolainen (2009) found that the transition from joblessness to work proved to be the strongest theoretical predictor of criminal desistance.

And to the extent that study participants were able to earn an income played a major role with employment acting as a substitute to committing economic crime (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). This finding is also consistent with the results of this study. I quote, for instance, an extract from Gothatso's transcript which reads as follows...*good life is being able to do things...meaning, I am now employed I get paid, isn't? I am able to do the things I want. Although I will be able to do those things at my own pace but I am able to do them anyway. Number two, I have private jobs that I do with the work that I do. There's cash flow now, you see? I no longer get money through criminal activities...I now get money by working.* Similar to the marriage effect, employment appears to be age-graded with Uggen (2000) reporting that behavioural changes occur as a consequence of being employed from a particular age. Generally, those who are 27 years and older tend to show a gradual increase in

crime cessation as a result of being employed than those who are younger. Savolainen (2009) also found that men who manage to find and maintain employment are more likely to attract pro-social partners than men who remain unemployed.

This finding is strikingly consistent with the results of the present study in that all four participants were employed at the time of the interviews, well into their thirties and seemed to have also attracted prosocial partners. Thus, consistent with the tenets of this theory, a conclusion reached by Savolainen (2009) suggests that upon encountering a habitual offender with a job could be indicative of someone who is trying their hardest to disengage from a life of crime. This finding is critical in South Africa given that criminological research demonstrates that low-quality jobs are unsuccessful in reducing criminal behaviour (Crutchfield & Pitchford, 1997 as cited in Savolainen, 2009). In light of these findings, it is critical to question whether the provision of high quality correctional education might not be a feasible alternative to this current state of affairs.

Education as coping mechanism

...okay sharp, if I say I am not going back to crime, what will I do outside? I'm not educated...I ended up in standard eight...what will I do upon my return? It seems fitting enough to begin the discussion of this theme by juxtaposing two extracts; one from Michael and the other from the DCS's National Commissioner Mr Z. I. Modise who, during an Ex-Offenders Work Session at Kgosi Mampuru II Management Area, Tshwane, said: "Through education and skills development programmes that [ex-offenders] acquired while incarcerated, many are able to come out as changed individuals ready to reverse their history of thuggery, and malevolence, into inspirational success stories" (Modise, 2016, p. 3). However, according to international literature, this is in complete contrast with the U.S., where, for instance, with a few exceptions almost all correctional education programmes have been barred from all maximum security prisons (Frank, Omstead & Pigg, 2012).

In this niche area, research is crystal clear in as far as it indicates that correctional education, with its transformative powers can help change "the prison experience into one wherein critical thinking skills are developed, confidence is built, and social validation is increased (Frank et al., 2012). Besides, in retrospect, a prison system that does not educate and rehabilitate its offenders is likely to breed unreformed and uneducated offenders susceptible to the "revolving door effect".

From personal experience, I can confirm that prolonged periods of incarceration, devoid of constant and regular mental stimulation contribute to cognitive deterioration where, for instance, the spelling and recall of simple and familiar words become even harder with time. Thus, to counter the corrosion of cognitive faculties within the correctional domain, one needs to continuously practice reading and writing. Within this domain as well, other studies have documented several positive benefits. For example, Guse and Hudson (2014) and Leigey and Ryder (2015) have found that correctional education provides meaning, hope and purpose for long-term sentenced offenders who felt that their lives were deteriorating.

These findings are a mirror reflection of the lived experience of Hlamalani who initially felt that imprisonment was a waste time before dedicating himself to correctional education and prison programmes. In relation to the above findings, he said...[because of correctional education]...*we were able to deal with issues that resulted in answering questions as to why are we here and build from there and do what's right. And by doing that through your adversities, you become proud of yourself.* In this respect then, Guse and Hudson (2014) assert that through the development of self-awareness and constructing a new meaning in life, offenders may develop a different philosophy of life.

True to the results of the current study, it is possible that 'this philosophy of life' might have also contributed to participants' desisting from crime. Of particular significance here is the recognition that all four study participants were, at some point during their incarceration engaged in correctional education which demonstrated a love for learning as seen through the advancement of their own education whilst positively contributing to the education of other offenders (Guse & Hudson, 2014).

To illustrate with an example, I quote Hlamalani who commented that...*my release from prison was facilitated by my conduct...I was a tutor and I was involved in every programme that was on offer.* Similarly, at the time of the interview with Michael, he was noted as saying he constructively served his sentence by actively participating in his own education and in programmes designed to help other offenders educate and rehabilitate themselves. However, in complete contrast, continued participation in correctional education seemed to gradually lack meaning and significance for Akhona who eventually dropped out of university. His account was recorded as follows...*I lost interest in studying because I didn't know what I was studying for, at first I studied because I know I wanted to get employed, but after I decided that I'm not that kind of a person, that interest vanished.* It was

fairly easy to rule out poor school performance as a reason behind Akhona dropping out of school because he subjectively experienced himself as exceptionally intelligent. He said...*I believe I am very intelligent. I am one of those [students] who got distinctions until the second level, but I just dropped out to build an emperor.* Unless studying towards industry-focused courses related to his line of business, Akhona maintained that...*I don't see myself going back to school.* In order to be meaningful, one could argue that correctional education must be relevant and appropriate.

Perhaps career guidance and counselling services could have prevented Akhona from dropping out. In support of this proposition, Frank et al. (2012, p. 31) write “simply memorising facts, becoming familiar with intellectual concepts and learning to write term papers does not rehabilitate a person...[instead]...the correcting comes when prisoners begin examining themselves and their lives through the lens of higher education. When this happens the prisoner’s journey through post-secondary education evolves from being simply an educational experience into a transformative learning process”. Thus far, the diversity illustrated in the two participants’ accounts can be seen as evidence of the multiple pathways of achieving criminal desistance in the sense that Gothatso preferred correctional education as a viable catalyst for change while Akhona epitomised entrepreneurship.

This tells us first, that exposure to correctional education does not necessarily act as a catalyst for all offenders contemplating change; and second that many ex-offenders prefer employment as a simple and viable catalyst for change. The two catalysts then (correctional education and employment) can be conceptualised as representing different dimensions of transformative impetus. In this regard, I agree and appreciate the unpredictability of the desistance process because, while opportunities such as taking advantage of correctional education with the intent to build a career seems to have been “downplayed” by Giordano’s (2014) participants and in particular, by other research studies; ironically, I find that correctional education as a catalyst for change has played a major reformatory role for both myself and the ex-offenders who participated in this study.

In this respect, and consistent with National Commissioner Modise’s assertion above, participating in correctional education and/or vocational skills-training does seem to assist ex-offenders in the acquisition of new skills, including acquiring high school and tertiary qualifications (Leigey & Ryder, 2015). The advantages are varied and some include the development of personal growth, responsibility and a sense of self-worth (Frank et al., 2012).

Used effectively, correctional education should be able to enhance the lives of many offenders and drive them to greater heights where they can have a true comprehension of the meaning of humanity (Frank et al., 2012).

The discussion so far seems to confirm that factors influencing criminal desistance such as finding employment and engaging in correctional education are consistent with what Sampson and Laub (1993) proposed almost a decade and a half ago in claiming that approaches to criminal desistance are all underscored by common elements in which each creates new circumstances that knife off the past from the present as well as provide opportunities for identity change. The other two remaining elements which bring about change and structure to offenders' routine activities including the supervision and monitoring of opportunities for social support and growth constitute part of the theme: marriage as a turning point, which is discussed next.

Marriage as a turning point

Marriage has long been identified in criminological research as but one of the many facets contributing towards the process of criminal desistance. However, the relationship between marriage and desistance is not straight-forward and consequently not without controversy. Much deliberation coalesces around the issue of whether marriage is a precursor to criminal desistance or the consequence thereof (Craig et al., 2014). For instance, a fundamental premise of the Age-graded informal social control theory asserts that increasing informal social control such as getting married provides an influential catalyst for change as ex-offenders find themselves in relationships which regulate and foster pro-social behaviour (Sampson & Laub, 1993). In essence, advocates of this theory assert that in the life course of offenders, there comes an opportunity for change when such offenders are released and eventually marry conventional and law-abiding spouses.

The marriage effect then triggers the desistance process and much like a ripple effect, a host of other pro-social ties follow such as access to the labour market, finding and keeping conventional friends, including community participation which all act together to reduce offenders' propensity to criminal inclinations.

All of the above are seen to constitute what is called the complete "respectability package" with marriage and a stable job being singled out as the two most influential social controls that steer offenders away from further offending (Sampson & Laub, 1993;

Savolainen, 2009). Others place emphasis on the value of the marriage, contending that marital commitment as well as the quality of the marriage and not just the state of being married is critical to the desistance process (Laub et al., 1998; Warr 1998). In accordance with this perspective then, marriage is conceptualised as a “turning point” in the life course of offenders.

A turning point can be construed as any life-changing moment or event which modifies the criminal career of offenders such that it alters their criminal trajectory and induces in them a sense of refraining from participating in further criminal activities. For some, turning points such as getting married, especially if the individual wants to make the marriage work, culminate in permanent behaviour change (Hunter, 2015) and brings forth opportunities for self and collective growth, the disbandment of old delinquent friends and the replacement of these with new roles and activities as well as opportunities for identity change. A number of authors also seem to be in agreement with the protective role played by marriage in helping foster the desistance process (Craig et al., 2014; Horney et al., 1995).

From the results of this study, I can confirm that to a certain degree, there is some level of consistency between Hlamalani’s subjective experiences of his relationship and what has been previously theorised by Samson and Laub (1993) in asserting that a strong attachment to a conventional spouse greatly increases access to conventional people and activities, all the while raising the social stakes associated with misbehaviour.

In support of these findings, Hlamalani said...*I do have friends, a lot, different characters...some are married, but not all, others are planning on getting married which poses a challenge for them as I’m also getting married in December.* He further contested that...*you spend very little time with friends especially if you are a leader in your workplace.* Here, he was directly referring to himself. Similarly, upon discussing religion he made the following statement...*I do go to church because I meet different but positive people [and also] I learn positive things.* Nonetheless, even though we may partially attribute such change to changes in Hlamalani’s increased informal social control, results generated from this study require cautious interpretation since it is only Hlamalani alone out of the other study participants who appeared to strongly attribute the marriage effect to his desistance process.

To a lesser extent, the other two participants (Michael and Gothatso) did not feel that being in a relationship significantly contributed to their desistance process. For example,

Michael responded...*I haven't realised their impact because I feel I have long had a backbone, the decision that I am not going back there is a decision that I took long before she was in my life...it does not even cross my mind to commit crime.* Akhona, on the other hand, believed that had it not been for a healthy relationship with a loving and supporting girlfriend, some of his previous relationships would have in fact triggered him to reoffend.

Arriving at a similar finding is Savolainen (2009, p. 286) who articulated that "It is possible to end up in a marriage that enables, rather than inhibits, a criminal lifestyle." Instantaneously, I followed up on this belief and Akhona explained that being short-tempered, he would not have tolerated infidelity. Yet when the conversation turned to refer to his current girlfriend, even his body language gave off typical signs of a 4/5-month-old relationship. I then probed further and asked Akhona about the prospects of a wedding through which he responded that he does plan on getting married...*I always knew that one day I'll get married because I have always looked up to my father as someone who inspires me.* In this regard, it has to be noted that Akhona originates from a tightly-knitted family with both parents and siblings. Therefore, it is conceivable that he would want to emulate his father as his role model, but equally important is a study conducted by Hirschi and Gottfredson (1995) who point out that the marriage effect is simply a natural developmental phase in the lives of ex-offenders.

According to these authors, getting married is a developmental stage just like any other; and as expected, ex-offenders who have naturally outgrown their criminal behaviour and decided to conform to a conventional lifestyle will get married. From this assertion, I find convergence in my participants' responses and the results reported in earlier research findings. For instance, among other outcomes, I have noted that this particular area of research is clouded by studies reporting conflicting and inconsistent results as to whether cohabitation (living with a girlfriend/boyfriend) and/or common-law marriages increase or decrease further criminal involvement (Horney et al., 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Savolainen, 2009).

For the record, I must state that all study participants reported to be unmarried although cohabiting at the time when this study was conducted. From these results then, it seems clear that cohabitation as a mechanism underlying the desistance process could have had or might have had a positive influence in the propensity to curb further criminal engagements among study participants. These results are hardly surprising as they mirror

contemporary research findings suggesting that cohabitation as well as having children are both associated with desistance (Barry, 2006; Savolainen, 2009). It seems clear then, for participants in this study, that their relationships only served to enhance the desistance process by creating some sort of a barrier which reduced the amount of time spent with delinquent friends; and, as proposed by Warr (1998), this necessarily limits the opportunities for committing crime.

Substantiating these findings is Gothatso who reported that...*it* [being in a relationship] *does contribute in the sense of restricting you from spending too much time with friends...because you are in a relationship, you can't travel around for three days and claim you were with friends...ja, it contributes that way, but the commission of crime is because of you. It's you that tell yourself that I want to live this way.* Insofar as he was concerned, Gothatso believed that being in a relationship does not change a person, rather...*change starts with you.* Judging from the little significance he placed on the marriage effect primarily because for him he did not believe his partner contributed to his change process, I asked Gothatso what were his thoughts on marriage...*it's something that needs to happen eventually when you claim to have grown up and you have changed.* Ironically though, while he reported to have thought about marriage a long time ago, he did not think about marriage while in prison, he only started thinking about marriage after his release and...*when life started brightening up.*

From the discussion so far, one can conclude that even though there is some level discrepancy in as far as the participants' accounts were concerned, yet overall, there was some consistency between the participants' accounts and findings in the literature that it is not the marital relationship itself that represents opportunities for change, but "marriage acts to disrupt or dissolve friendships that existed prior to marriage, including relations with other offenders or accomplices" (Warr, 1998, p.188).

Parenthood

To this end, elucidations of criminal desistance have traditionally focused on the role of adult social bonds including intra-individual factors such as cognitive transformations and shifts in identity as pertinent in the attainment of a non-criminal lifestyle. To a larger extent, these explanations have either excluded considerations of a relationship between parenthood and criminal desistance, or they have found no support for parenthood as a life course

transition necessary in the attainment of criminal desistance (Savolainen, 2009). Perceiving this gap, Savolainen (2009) then conducted a study among a sample of Finnish recidivists examining, among other things, the role of parenthood in the process of criminal desistance.

In his research, he found a 15% reduction in the number of new convictions suggesting that parenthood does contribute to the process of criminal desistance. Against this backdrop, contemporary research conducted on a sample of incarcerated mothers and fathers from multiple prisons across America confirmed that having, and maintaining contact with children remained one of the most important sources of social support for incarcerated parents (Benning & Lahm, 2016). This was also found to help against the negative experiences associated with abandonment (Purvis, 2013). Yet male offenders, in their majority, reported maintaining very little contact with their children while incarcerated (Perry & Bright, 2012; Purvis, 2013). This finding is consistent with the results of this study and similar to Giordano's (2014) tentative conclusion that male desisters are generally less likely than female desisters to centre primarily on parenthood as a key changing event.

Consider, for instance, Hlamalani's response to the following the question: while in prison, did your family come visit you? If yes, how often?...*yes, my brothers and my entire family visited me very often...[almost] every month.* In this response, it is interesting to note that even though Hlamalani indicated having had a good relationship with his children (an 18-year-old stepson and two daughters who are 16 and 14), he did not explicitly refer to his children as having visited him while in prison but instead categorised them under...*my entire family.*

This however, was not an indication that his children were unimportant. In fact, Hlamalani and his daughters appeared to share a very close relationship; although as he explained, coming from a traditional background where certain customs were still practised and certain acts prohibited, it was and still is unpopular or unheard of for fathers to discuss issues relating to 'that time of the month' with their daughters but nevertheless he did so with his own daughters.

Another equally interesting revelation consistent with the discussion above was that Hlamalani, just like many other ex-offenders including myself, separated from the mother of his two daughters. He recalled that...*it was difficult...I was angry, but had dealt with these emotions while still inside.* But coming from a supportive family, Hlamalani explained that

...my family were able to take care of my children while I was still in prison. My family subscribes to a culture that does not abandon children but takes care of them...upon my arrest; my kids went onto stay with their grandmother. This outcome also mirrored that of Gothatso who reported having a good quality relationship with his 15-year-old son whom he affectionately referred to as Isotsha lam' (my soldier). Gothatso's son was also looked after by his grandmother while he was in prison...*but my brother used to visit my son and buy him clothes, but most of the time he was left in the care of my grandmother.* Gothatso's son currently lives with his grandmother and mother.

By extension then, and true to the results of this study, although participants did not explicitly tie parenthood as a key transition event to their desistance, however, in almost all instances they were inclined to make some reference to parenthood including Michael who succinctly said...*after achieving these goals...then I can try to plan to have a child, get engaged...and get married.* Similarly, even in their own research, Laub and Sampson (2003) found evidence suggesting that parenthood played a significant role in the desistance process; so did Giordano (2014, p. 53) who found that "children do figure heavily in respondents' change stories". Accordingly then, these results could imply that the birth of a baby, even improved or renewed relations with one's children can be associated with lower levels of reoffending (Barry, 2006).

The explanation, thereof, is that the transition to becoming a parent and the responsibility that accompanies it significantly alters the offender's life in terms of priority shifts that moderate situational incentives to commit crime (Savolainen, 2009). Viewed this way, parenthood can translate into a full-time job that necessitates a reorientation of the self (Giordano, 2014) "especially if combined with the presence of a stable relationship between the two parents" (Savolainen, 2009, p. 289). In view of this, parents who are ex-offenders, I would imagine, are almost always compelled to alter their routine activities. To some extent, this will necessarily comprise reworking and readjusting their lives in order to accommodate the ensuing changes that accompany parenthood. But what happens when one or both parents are in prison?

Given that there are hundreds and thousands of people behind bars of which a proportion of that figure constitutes mothers and fathers makes one wonder about the impact of imprisonment on the offenders and their families; but most importantly, their children, "a group that has not been convicted but is sentenced nonetheless" (Perry & Bright, 2012, p.

199). Research indicates that the incarceration of parents, for the majority of their children occurs while they are still too young to comprehend the notion of imprisonment, “confused about their feelings and unsure how to grieve the loss of a parent who is alive, yet emotionally and physically absent (Purvis, 2013, p. 12).

Other studies report that the incarceration of fathers is more than likely to lead to a decline in parental capacities through the disruption and shifting of family dynamics that result in the abandonment of fatherhood identities while replacing these with the internalised offender identity (Arditti, 2014; Perry & Bright, 2012; see also Meek, 2011 for contradictory findings). In addition, incarcerated fathers are also subjected to the social and legal loss of their parental rights (Arditti, 2014).

In a variety of societies, historically and even today, women are considered more to be experts and frontrunners in childrearing practices than men and in the event of a missing father, mothers often have the sole rights to their children. As such, most incarcerated fathers rely on caregivers such as their wives, extended family members or foster parents to maintain contact with their children including opportunities to practice fatherhood while incarcerated. This is made possible via visitation, telephone calls or through letter-writing. Yet depending on the nature of the parental relationship, the facilitation of such contacts may not be feasible at all if the relationship with the mother (for instance, estranged wife or ex-girlfriend) is strained.

According to Roy and Doyson (2005, as cited in Benning & Lahm, 2016; see also Perry & Bright, 2012), the exclusion of a father figure leads to a phenomenon called ‘maternal gatekeeping’ where male offenders are literally at the mercy of those taking care of their children. From personal experience, I am convinced that severing the parent-child relationship may have untoward effects given that on completion of their sentences, these fathers would probably still want to re-establish their relationships with their children; in which case, if the social and emotional ties with the children have not been fully restored it becomes even more complicated (Perry & Bright, 2012). In keeping with the idea of families as comprising marriage, parenthood and children, in the next theme I discuss families as broader institutions of reform.

Families as institutions of reform

The view that families of offenders have the capacity to act as primary catalysts of change finds harmony with the idiom “charity begins at home”. Because crime is pervasive and affects all of us directly and/or indirectly so, corrections has become a societal responsibility with families earmarked as the primary agents of change (White Paper on Corrections, 2005). In line with this premise, Benning and Lahm (2016) have also recently suggested that stronger familial bonds have the potential to trigger positive behaviours during and after offenders’ sentences and this in turn facilitates the process of criminal desistance.

In this study, stronger familial bonds can be construed as having received social support in the form of constant visitations. As will be shown, these visits became key in the sustenance of healthy family relationships between study participants and their families. Mnguni and Mohapi (2015, p. 53) also concur that the rehabilitation of offenders includes, *inter alia*, the “facilitation of contact between offenders and their families”.

This was demonstrated to be particularly true in this study. According to Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) when an offender is incarcerated, technically, the whole family and to some extent the broader community gets incarcerated as well. Such close interconnectedness, perceived from the understanding of an individual whose descent is African, could give rise to subtle, yet vital implications since it resonates with the traditional ethos of “*Umntu akalahlwa asaphila*” loosely translated as “A person is never discarded while still alive”.

Furthermore, in accordance with the ethos of Ubuntu which upholds collective responsibility (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2008), I sought to find out whether families and communities did in fact act as providers of social capital. As alluded to earlier, participants were asked questions relating to receiving family support; for instance, whether or not their families came to visit them during their incarceration and if yes how frequently; as well as how easy or difficult was it for them to reunite with their families following their release from prison?

Incidentally, coming from a predominantly African culture in which all four study participants subscribe to, it was not surprising that the emphasis to help foster the desistance process was also attributed to the support participants received from significant others such as family members, friends, partners, including the broader community. Once more, diversity manifested in the participants’ lived experiences with an exception of a few similarities. For

instance, Akhona responded...*I have never really disconnected to my family...emotionally, spiritually we have always been together...there was always this sense of unity...it was only physical separation... [that] I cannot reach them anytime I want to... [and] they cannot come and see me anytime they wanted to.* As Mabuza and Roelofse (2013) found, and Benning and Lahm (2016) later corroborated, the extent to which offenders receive social support is essential in the way in which it impacts their behaviours during and after their incarceration.

For that reason, another set of questions directed at the family level focused on the impact of incarceration by exploring how imprisonment impacted the participants' families as a direct result of their incarceration as well as how imprisonment impacted the participants in return. Understanding the perceptions of how family members were affected by the participants' imprisonment from their own point of view was deemed important and necessary as well (Browning, Miller & Spruance, 2001 as cited in Benning & Lahm, 2016).

New insight emerged during the interview with Akhona as I was made to understand the full impact that incarceration has had on his loved ones. For instance, soon after he was found guilty and convicted to a fifteen-year jail term, Akhona's mother resigned from her work because...*she felt it was too much and needed to rest...she even relocated to the rural areas to have a peace of mind.* During those times, Akhona recalled that...*it was hard for the family to cope.* As a consequence, family relations suffer and day-to-day logistics get disrupted including the overall socioeconomics of the household as a result of the imprisonment of a family member (Schonteich, 2015).

Gothatso also concurred with this view when I asked how his family felt about his incarceration. He said...*they were devastated knowing very well that I'm in prison and obviously not doing well.* He also recalled that prior to and soon after his release days, his family endured a great deal of anxiety wondering whether he will relapse back to his old criminal ways. But after a short pause, his body language suggested that all that apprehension from his family was unwarranted. I say this because he framed his response as if his family already had anticipations of him recidivating into criminal behaviour. He commented...*only to find that when I got out they were able to see that this person had changed his life around and living a different life...he's no longer the person we used to know...they were used to seeing a firearm behind the wall unit, but now all they see are books, papers and pens.* He said that these were now his weapons and felt that it was a great achievement that he had gone back to school during his incarceration.

Another participant who echoed similar sentiments was Hlamalani who was recorded as saying...*my incarceration had a huge but negative impact on my family...sometimes they would point out that had it not been for my incarceration I would have achieved a lot of things by now...but I also make them aware that going to prison has also afforded me the opportunity to be the person I am today.*

Consider, again, the following account from Michael who described his reintegration as follows...*because we had constant communication with my family whilst in prison, obviously during visits, [and] over the phone so it was not that difficult to gel in because we had constant communication.* Sharing a similar experience was Hlamalani who also said...*reintegrating with my family was something enjoyable [because] we were united [and] they were with me all the time during my incarceration.* His whole family, especially his brothers visited him quite often for the entire duration of the time he spent in prison; on average, Hlamalani said his family visited him almost every month. Similarly, Michael also reported to have received constant and regular visitation while in prison.

For Michael, family support was expressed rather profoundly. Because he was released as part of the President's remission strategy to reduce overpopulation inside prisons, the day he was released, the release process received considerable media attention and as a result his mother was interviewed on a popular radio station about how she felt regarding her son's release. She commented...*there is no trash can for naughty kids [and as Michael reflected on this]...that said to me I have committed my mistakes but I'm still her child and she still believes in me.* Not only do such sentiments communicate reassurance and unwavering support - but they also communicate forgiveness and unconditional acceptance. In an almost identical fashion, asked as to how often he received visitation, Akhona said...*my family came to visit me upon my request.* This would be for instance when he needed toiletries or perhaps when something urgent came up.

Judging from the extracts above, it would seem as if receiving family support in the form of regular and constant visitation proved to be beneficial for the participants' reintegration. However, in the case of Gothatso, the experience was a slightly different one. He recalled receiving very little visitation from his family...*at least once a year.* In this regard, recent research by Benning and Lahm (2016) suggests that sometimes some family members may experience prison as traumatic and because people's threshold for pain varies,

not every family member will be able to come through. Gothatso also claimed that life had been extremely tough during his incarceration and prior to his employment after release.

To capture the essence and the gravity of his suffering, Gothatso exemplified that during the first few days following his release, he had to smoke one cigarette sparingly by putting it out at least three times to last him the whole day. To complicate matters, he had no place to sleep either. Backyard rooms were available at his home provided he paid rent money which he did not have because he was unemployed. So, to improvise, Gothatso shared a bed with his younger brother who also lived with his girlfriend and small baby in his young brother's shack. Although Gothatso felt pressured by this arrangement he remained resolute that...*in the end it will be okay*. Because he had no one supporting him financially, he borrowed money from his younger brother and opened up a stall selling sweets, cigarettes, and Rizlas (rolling papers).

Approximately three weeks later he had accumulated around R500 profit which he used to apply for an internship. After being accepted into the internship and undergoing the necessary induction process, he was surprised to learn he was also to receive a stipend of R 5 000 per month. As far as he was concerned...*this was a breakthrough*. He also reported to have been the oldest in that internship...*all of them were young kids*. And just out of nowhere, I was emotionally moved when he said...*I didn't have clothes and I didn't care...for as long as I was clean*. Inquisitively, I asked what he did with his monthly stipend to which he replied...*I was able to rent a room, bought a bed...[and] I bought a TV set the following month...and life started changing for the better...when that internship ended, I already had a learner's licence*.

Over and above, the results generated from this theme seem to suggest that if offenders feel connected to their families, chances are they will increasingly become aware of the negative behaviours that hurt their families and possibly stop offending (Browning et al., 2001 as cited in Benning & Lahm, 2016). Consistent with the extracts cited above, it seems apparent that the strength of social bonds in the form of quality and frequency of visits between study participants and their loved ones were strong enough to have resulted in a deterrent effect.

The love, support and assurance demonstrated by participants' family members could have also resulted in a protective shield for the participants to refrain from committing further

criminal acts. In this regard, Michael said...*um, you know, maybe with the loving family, the supporting family obviously that I didn't want to let down again and myself.* From this extract, it is clear that Michael was prepared and rather determined to stop his offending behaviour if such offending meant jeopardising his relationship with his family.

Religiosity and/or spirituality as a catalyst for change

The terms religiosity and spirituality may at first seem to refer to similar concepts because they both involve some level of self-transcendence and a need to relate to a greater being; nevertheless, they remain two separate entities. Guse and Hudson (2014), for example, define spirituality as a strength that encompasses religiousness, faith and purpose. However, within this purview, I do make an exception in this study for the sake of clarity and convenience to apply the two concepts interchangeably. Theoretically, I am aware that they are differentiated on the basis that spirituality is an all-encompassing term for a search for the sacred while religion refers to a search within specific churches (James & Samuels, 1999 as cited in Compton & Hoffman, 2013). To the extent that the psychological well-being of offenders is regarded as essential to their optimal development and re-adjustment during incarceration, so do their subjective and spiritual well-being.

According to Compton and Hoffman (2013) increased religiosity, conceived of as a commitment to, and regular attendance of religious activities or practices which bring about positive emotional states such as joy, hope, optimism, and compassion is significantly related to subjective well-being. In fact, there are a myriad of reasons as to why religion is related to subjective well-being and some of these include social support, promotion of a healthy lifestyle, generativity and altruism, personality integration, and lastly, the belief that religion provides a unique coping strategy (Compton & Hoffman, 2013).

Corroborating this claim is Hlamalani who commented...*ja, I do go to church because I meet different but positive people and I learn positive things.* Explicating his point a bit further, Hlamalani stated that his fiancé's role as a Christian also contributed to him leaving behind a life of crime. By explicitly stating that his fiancé is Christian, in principle suggested that her orientation towards crime is one that discouraged criminal behaviour and true to the theory of Sampson and Laub (1993), this was confirmation that the orientation of an ex-offender's partner plays a significant role as to the determinant of whether desistance occurs or not.

Consistent with the results and findings above, another line of enquiry, particularly in controlled studies, has also shown that offenders who participated in religious programmes (Bible studies, faith-based drug treatment and faith-based prisoner re-entry programmes) were less likely to recidivate, committed minimal disciplinary infringements, and were more likely to engage in correctional education compared to those who did not (Johnson, 2014).

In support of this claim, I quote Akhona who testified as follows...*I got sentenced on the second of February and I think by March I had accepted Jesus as my Lord and saviour and that was the turning point of my life...before I even started and doing other things I received Christ and I went into courses and completed my matric and enrolled with UNISA...I did different things but that was all held together by the person that I was transformed to be, and that's basically discovering my identity and my purpose for living.* Because of this newly adopted identity, Compton and Hoffman (2013) find that there is an overwhelming transformation in one's sense of meaning and purpose in life which assists with the reintegration and reconsolidation of an individual into a coherent meaningful whole.

Other studies associate religious commitment with positive behavioural change (Guse & Hudson, 2014; Johnson, 2014). During his interview, for example, Akhona was quoted as saying...*I don't do drugs. I don't smoke...I don't take anything that is intoxicating.* Such lifestyle change as exemplified by Akhona is similar to, and consistent with reports by Johnson (2014) that religiosity serves as an avenue to evade crime commission and drug use.

Viewed this way, people's religiosity and/or spirituality may act as one of the mechanisms that contribute to the desistance process by covertly regulating peoples' behaviour so that it becomes compatible with society's expectations of conventional and normative behaviour. Furthermore, religious involvement is also thought to provide networks of support that help socialise adolescents into adopting values that encourage empathy for others (Johnson, 2014).

Through religion then, those who have taken a detour from conventional society by committing criminal acts are able to circumnavigate their way back to conventional society. Furthermore, this lifestyle change, which is set in motion by one's religious conversion and manifested in one's procurement of new acquaintances may provide concrete advice and reinforcement for sustaining the new way of life (Giordano, 2014). As explained above, religiosity and/or spirituality is important in as far as it offers meaning and purpose where

there appears to be none; and it provides explanations for why certain events construed as misfortune occur; for instance, responses to questions such as “why is this happening to me?” can be fairly easy to answer during incarceration. Yet those who proclaim to be religious also claim to find solace and hope through religion.

Several interesting suggestions have thus been put forward and some of them are: God does His things in mysterious ways and has probably subjected them to difficult times so that they can triumph; or God has put them in prison to prevent them from their imminent death, or to simply find renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life. Another interesting revelation reflecting the outside world was the acknowledgement and practice of the different religions available within the different South African prisons. These include Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Rastafarianism to mention just a few.

However, notwithstanding this variation which was aimed at communicating respect and sensitivity towards study participants’ preferences; I quote Akhona who shared his views as follows...*I am a Christian...[and] Christianity is a lifestyle according to my standpoint...religion is completely different from who I am...I don't do anything according to religion...I live my life according to God's word.* Having been conscientised this way, I began asking each participant about their religious beliefs hoping for an underlying connection with their desistance. So I proceeded to ask questions and in the event that participants affirmed I probed further by exploring how their religious conviction/spirituality contributed to their decision to stop offending.

The rationale behind asking these questions was aimed at providing participants with an opportunity to delve deeper to search within themselves for more concealed reasons, meanings, motivations and desires that might have contributed to their desistance. As per usual, diversity manifested considerably within the participants’ responses reflecting, once again, the apparent contradiction in the literature - that of a direct link between offenders’ participation in religious programmes and lower rates of offending (Johnson, 2014). In this regard, I must state that until recently, there has been minimal agreement in this area of research pertaining to religion and/or spirituality as a catalyst for change including the role it plays in promoting criminal desistance. This, despite the widely accepted notion that spiritual and/or religious participation greatly reduces criminal inclinations and tendencies (Johnson, 2014). Thus far, it appears that the decision to stop offending is an inherently individual

decision and this could also signify that one needs to constantly dig deep to find their true change.

Digging deep

It is not uncommon in this day and age to come across claims by ex-offenders who have made their own effort to desist from crime. Specifically, within the context of this research, I experienced the ex-offenders who participated in this study as having dug deep within themselves and “in line with the strengths perspective that states that every human being has strengths” (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015, p. 54). I identified three strengths as having been essential in the participants’ change process: discovering their true potential (what really is it that they were capable of doing with their lives post-incarceration?); maintaining their determination to change (which resources were effective to their change process and which were not?); including discourses of positive change which also seem to have assisted in maintaining their decision to desist from crime and facilitate their reintegration into their communities. In essence then, this superordinate theme demonstrates that despite the pain exerted by imprisonment, study participants were also “equal to the task” in the way in which they simultaneously developed strategies that helped them cope with the challenges imposed by imprisonment.

At this stage, I would like to draw parallels between the above statement and the saying “what does not kill you only makes you stronger”. Adding to this train of thought, Dufour et al. (2015) further report that to trigger the desistance process requires that offenders adopt a whole new life perspective. This “whole new life perspective”, I am willing to argue, comprises re-routing one’s life by re-writing a whole new life chapter in one’s autobiography.

Once the integration of the past, present and the future have been assimilated, that is, when the newly-adopted personal and social identities have been integrated, will the participants be able to personify one or more social identities such as student, father, husband, pastor, employee, business partner and/or entrepreneur and be in a position to abandon their criminal identities (Dufour et al., 2015). What is promising from this study is the likelihood that at some point in their lifetime offenders will one day give up their criminal identities. In fact, Dufour et al. (2015, p. 493) find that shredding the criminal identity hinges “on the success they [offenders] obtain in the non-criminal world, the opportunities present,

[and] or the social roles they personify.” Thus, becoming a father, partner or employee might have contributed to the participants’ disengagement from crime.

And once more, the results generated from this study strongly suggest that only during their incarceration did study participants become increasingly aware that crime does not pay; that is, it is in fact less profitable and more risky. The unrelenting dissatisfaction that comes with being in prison was further aggravated by the mounting recognition that continued offending had become incompatible with their renewed efforts to accomplish conventional goals (Barry, 2006).

As highlighted earlier, among these goals, entrepreneurship was the most cited followed by efforts to find employment. According to Ngabonziza and Singh (2012), the fact that participants were able to consider other innovative and creative ideas in which they themselves can create jobs and not rely on looking for employment as the only way of making a living also contributes to lower levels of recidivism.

The ex-offenders who participated in this study reported wanting to live “normal” and better lives than the ones they previously subjected themselves to. This, in a way, gave me an indication that offending was already something of the past for the study participants and that it made no sense for them to return to a life of crime again. This desire to want to live a normal life signified participants’ readiness and preparedness to turn their lives around in the hope of achieving stability and conventionality in their lives (Barry, 2006).

It is important that I also emphasise that the state of readiness for change as illustrated by Giordano (2014, p. 49) is an important first step towards achieving criminal desistance because this cognitive transformation illustrates the “basic element of openness to change”. For instance, Hlamalani reasoned that...*when you commit crime you have a need that you want to fulfil, but there are other ways in which you can fulfil that need. By thinking well and doing well....so think for a moment that if you can change, how can life turn out?* To think for a moment suggests evaluating a situation before an action could be taken. It is this thinking that influenced his decision making. Added to these individualistic mental processes are increased recognition and the desire to give up one’s criminal inclinations. However, as observed by Giordano (2014, p. 50) “long-lasting changes will frequently need to be built upon processes that are more tangible than desire and good intentions.” In the following

subordinate theme, I discuss how study participants discovered their potential to turn their lives around.

Discovering one's true potential

World icon and ex-Robben Island inmate Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela once said: “The greatest glory in living lies not only in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” (Purposefairy, 2016). I find that the truthfulness of this premise resonates with the conviction that the river of life pulls us in so many different directions that often times some of us land in prison. At this point during one's life, where a sentence of fifteen years feels more like eternity and “the basic necessities of everyday life seem like luxuries” (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012, p. 92), a deep introspection is likely to occur. At best, this introspection can culminate into an opportunity to discover one's true potential.

In the context of this study, discovering one's true potential refers to the act of digging deep within oneself and questioning ‘what really is it that I am capable of achieving?’ Because of my own experience as an ex-offender, I was aware of some of the dilemmas ex-offenders face “such as where offenders will live and who will support them” (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014, p. 1432). The importance of considering these aspects, as I subsequently found, is related to the types of goals desisting offenders make. According to Dickson and Polaschek (2014) desisting offenders seem to make two types of goals which help facilitate their desistance process. They are approach goals and avoidance goals.

In a similar fashion, how participants in the current study spoke about their desistance appeared to exhibit both types of goals; approach goals which seem to have the ability to gravitate people toward a more positive or desirable outcome such as becoming an entrepreneur as in the case of Akhona or even securing employment like Gothatso; as well as avoidance goals which seem to have propelled participants to stay away from criminal behaviour as evidenced by staying away from former delinquent friends. In turn, as argued by Meek (2011) these prosocial identities, for example, ‘I am a youth pastor’, or ‘I am a husband and a father’ have the potential to instil a ‘normal’ purpose and meaning in those attempting to desist from crime.

For instance, at the time of his interview, Gothatso believes that...*correctional services and communities should work together to assist returning offenders. He said...I think it is the role of the community as well as the correctional services to reform offenders and*

assist them to discover their true potential. *They are the ones who can try to make our fellow offenders not to relapse back into the life of crime, because, like...it needs to be something compulsory, do you understand me? Some things should be compulsory...so that for as long as you are a parolee, as long as you are still under the care of the correctional services, you will do this but in a way that will benefit you, do you understand me? Some programmes need to be compulsory for them (their own good).*

Ironically, when “places of correction” are seen to deviate from what they have been primarily mandated to do, this necessarily calls into question issues of change and transformation and the ends they are supposed to effectively meet. In recent years, this debate has gained momentum. For example, backed-up by contemporary research findings, criminologists have begun questioning the viewpoint that incarceration has a crime-avoiding effect (Listwan et al., 2011).

For instance, departing from the notion that prisons are universities of crime where antisocial learning mostly prevails, Guse and Hudson (2014) conducted a study among three adult male South African ex-offenders who had successfully reintegrated into society. The researchers employed a strengths-based model to explore and identify the prevalence of psychological strengths and posttraumatic growth during and post-incarceration. Psychological strength was conceptualised as both adaptive behaviour and positive psychological functioning that allows individuals to perform well and cope in life while the latter was conceptualised as growth that results from difficult life circumstances that have the potential to alter the behaviour of an offender. Their research established that while imprisonment can be experienced as a traumatic encounter, some psychological strengths do seem to facilitate the successful reintegration of ex-offenders as well as their desistance from crime (Guse & Hudson, 2014).

Specifically, their study identified the following strengths: strength of wisdom and knowledge (where participants were found to have attended to their own educational development); strength of courage (the finding that participants remained resolute despite prison adversities); strength of humanity (the finding that participants contributed positively in the development of other fellow offenders) and lastly; the strength of transcendence (the finding that participants derived meaning and purpose for their lives through their religiosity and/or spirituality). This theme is important insofar as it highlights the positive changes that ensue following a traumatic experience such as imprisonment. The authors also highlight

opportunities for identity change and that “this may include a changed perception of self, awareness of new possibilities, and appreciation of life” (Guse & Hudson, 2014, p. 1451). In addition to the points mentioned above, participants in this study also demonstrated the willingness and the importance of determination in changing who they were.

Willpower to change

In accordance with how participants in the current study experienced their transition from prison to community, as a researcher there were hardly any doubts at the time of the interview about how delighted and excited the participants seemed to be concerning their release from prison. Yet no matter how thrilled and pleased one can be, such experiences can be relatively short-lived if one is not willing to “change and distance themselves from bad influences ranging from negative people, to drugs and join positive people with messages of hope” (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012, p. 97). As discussed in the literature review chapter, there a variety of structural and individual difficulties facing ex-offenders upon their release from prison. Some of these difficulties according to Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) include social stigma, a lack of housing as well as the fear associated with a return to a life of hostility and economic uncertainty. Polaschek and Dickson (2014) also agree.

In a recent study, they reported that even when ex-offenders are motivated to cease their offending behaviour, yet due to the myriad of problems facing ex-offenders upon their re-entry, sometimes desisting from crime becomes an impossible task (Polaschek & Dickson, 2014). In as far as reality permits, recently-released offenders can be described as somewhat vulnerable and fragile in the way in which they feel apprehensive about the future; which, from time to time I would imagine exerts a “crippling effect”.

Participants in this study demonstrated that maintaining the willpower to change is two-fold. It requires attitudinal change and resiliency. This change in attitude, which is essential in reforming offenders lies at the heart of identifying interventions which target specific individual needs (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). For example, Hlamalani said it was through delinquent friends and the pressure to want to conform that ignited his criminal career. But in this regard, he stated...*when I came back from prison, in a way, I was a changed person...I no longer associated myself with people that were still involved in crime...I live a different life now...I don't serve them, but we serve each other.* This

suggested a shift from the company of friends with a “delinquent agenda” to friendships with a noncriminal attitude as reflected from the account above.

As far as resiliency is concerned, it is without doubt, having endured the pains of imprisonment that a sense of resiliency surfaced and seemed to overlap within the participants’ accounts. Akhona commented as follows...*It’s only this year that I started getting a formal monthly salary. That’s what happens when you get married to the vision and when passion just drives you irregardless of whether you are making money but you know that you are building on the right foundation. I’m bound to be successful be it ten years or twenty years, but this is gonna happen, like it or not...there’s nothing that comes to me like personal fulfilment, money comes after.* In his pursuit to live and conform to society’s expectations, Akhona displayed a shift in preferences which required determination and resiliency on his part. His displays of fortitude suggested that committing crime is no longer an option for him. Armed with this information, one of the interview questions then sought to identify each participant’s strength and in this regard I found a strong link between Akhona’s religious conviction and disengagement from crime.

As previously discussed and directly linked with the theme on religiosity, Johnson (2014) found evidence of a connection between religiosity and resiliency. He found that religion, even in impoverished communities does seem to help individuals from the negative consequences of living to become resilient and avoid delinquent paths in spite of factors and attributes that would otherwise seem to predict a deviant behavioural trajectory. In this context, one could say resiliency and psychological agility play an important role in as far as they provide a buffer against prison stress (Haney, 2006).

In his interview, Hlamalani said the following...*but also with my resilience, I told myself that no one will do anything for me, I have to be responsible for everything...in so far as how people look at me that I have no control over, I have to stay positive and live my life.* In this regard, Eggert (1997) explained that this mind-set teaches individuals skills that serve to increase their resiliency to ‘life’s challenges’. This strategy aims to develop attributes such as self-esteem, empathic understanding, a sense of personal control, a sense of meaning and having a purpose in life, tenacity, perseverance and optimism, as well as problem-solving abilities. Since Eggert’s (1997) approach specialises on reinforcing the protective factors and processes within the family, school, and communities; offenders in correctional centres too could as well qualify as individuals requiring resiliency in their lives.

From the premise above, we can see that it is a myth that prisons harm literally each and every one who enters its premises (Haney, 2006). Resiliency in the context of the strengths based perspective consistently shows that “despite the difficulties that people experience, they have an ability to rise and make a fresh start” (Saleebey, 1997 as cited in Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015, p 9). For offenders in a correctional facility, it means that, despite whatever crime they committed, they have the ability to change their behaviour and make a fresh start (Mnguni & Mohapi, 2015). As Akhona suggested...*it doesn't matter whether the environment allows you or not, resilience...you have what it takes. Convert the environment to what you want it to be.* Converting the environment, I would imagine, involves acting on it, which finds significance with the theme discussed next.

Actions versus discourses of positive change

...*Actions speak louder than words...you have to show me, not tell me.* This particular extract was taken from Michael's transcript on describing what it meant for him to desist from crime. In essence, what he implied by this response was “talk the talk if you are able to walk the walk”. Using himself as an example, he explained...*with my experience...before I decided to change...I must have been arrested I think twice or thrice but every time I would claim to have changed but I'll go back to my old ways again...so, you have to show me rather than tell me you have changed, then I'll believe.* From the extract above, Giordano (2014) would argue that a simple feature that signifies one's relative position in the continuum of criminal desistance is the generally flawless use of the past tense in the stories articulated.

Gothatso validated this notion in the following account...*to become an offender has really disturbed me in life...but for me as an individual, it has taught me a lot of things because it has taught me patience and to start afresh in life. With the mind-set I had when I went into prison, I was not right. All that I was able to prove after prison.*

Similarly, Michael expressed his change as follows...*so this person that I have become and the person that I was when I offended and committed criminal acts was not the same person, or is not the same person that was brought up at home.* Apparently then, the use of the past tense during the interviews suggested that crime was something of the past for the participants in this study. However, the same cannot be said for the majority of offenders who relapse into criminal behaviour, it could be that the prison identity has already inculcated habits of thinking and acting that are dysfunctional to their later adjustment (Haney, 2001).

Acting in accordance with a prison identity, I argue, leads to the incarceration of the mind because offenders become their experiences and relive these prison experiences upon returning to the outside world thus causing a permanent sense of damage and even more defiance to conform. Chances of an external locus of control are thus highly likely. An external locus of control is the belief that life's circumstances occur as a result of bad luck or a string of misfortunes which are outside one's control (Compton & Hoffman, 2013).

This reality was confirmed by one of the study participants, Michael. To put it into context, Michael explained that prior to the acceptance of his conviction he felt that...*initially it started as...um, you know, I felt that it's bad luck or a curse, or something of that nature forgetting that I have wronged people...I have committed a crime, you know? And subsequently...after I was sentenced I realised when I accepted that I'm convicted that there's nothing I can do...I just now need to live my life toward my sentence and beyond.* From this excerpt, I picked up that it was not only about accepting personal responsibility for his actions but simultaneously about the positive discourses that translated into positive actions.

In a similar fashion, Hlamalani said...*for me, something that I tell people is that prison is not a place that can kill a person. It's a place that wastes a person's time but that develops a person if that person is prepared to be developed.* Akhona summarised his experiences of incarceration as a...*turning point in his life.* He used expressions such as...*life journey...[and]...a place of new beginnings* to describe the most salient memories of what imprisonment felt like for him.

Notably, similar sentiments were articulated in a study by Leigey and Ryder (2015) where the participants strongly felt that their lives were being eroded by imprisonment and maintained instead that had they been released their lives would have greater meaning and purpose. Sometimes, for a select few, such as the participants interviewed in this study, the ability to psychologically adapt to certain prison contexts (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012) and a strong internal locus of control could have played a role in their subsequent adjustment in the prison and the community. According to positive psychology, self-directed efforts such as taking responsibility to turn one's life around are associated with a strong internal locus of control (Compton & Hoffman, 2013).

Indeed, to some degree, one could argue, based on the close examination of the extracts above that discourses of positive change, together with an internal locus of control as well as accepting personal responsibility are likely to result into positive actions that bring forth opportunities of social change such as criminal desistance. However, as suggested by this theme, for desistance to occur, one is required to constantly and relentlessly work on their efforts to change instead of desiring such change.

All in the past

Implicit in the sub-themes of this theme is the paradox that out of loss there is gain. Maruna (2001) conducted a study more than a decade and a half ago where he focused primarily on ex-offenders' emotional aspects of disengaging from crime including the short-term processes implicated in the criminal desistance process. Among other findings, his study indicated that being able to reframe the past in the context of a present and future, coupled with the ability to disassociate oneself from one's deviant past constitutes a significant part of the desistance process. Meek (2011) also agreed, arguing that the previously valued offender identity is not cast in stone but can be superseded by a more positive, and equally desirable identity such as becoming a parent.

As suggested by these studies then, it is important for desisting offenders to be able to replace their deviant identities in favour of new non-criminal identities. This, according to Maruna (2001), creates a self-narrative necessary in the integration of one's delinquent past with one's imagined future. Thus, in extending Maruna's (2001) concept in the current study could imply that depending on the type of narrative scripts that offenders write, it is possible that during their incarceration participants in the present study decided to write a script of redemption where they committed to do well.

As a tentative explanation, I propose that engaging in "internal conversations" with oneself when writing these scripts could have resulted in participants scribbling their own scripts of redemption insofar as the writing process also assisted me in planning and preparing for life after imprisonment.

For the participants in this study, the imagined future that seemed most prominent was the determination to stop offending which also appeared to have been facilitated by protective factors such as entrepreneurship, parenthood, spirituality and employment to mention a few.

Because the past is always somehow connected to the present and the future, these self-narratives, which also comprise the past, present and future make it possible for offenders to explain their prior actions and how life experience had shaped their goals and beliefs (Guse & Hudson, 2014; Meek, 2011). This is typically done by rationalising, for example, that “it had to take this situation” in order for one to realise where they are headed, implicitly inferring that they had to go through the experience of imprisonment in order to live a purposeful-driven life free of crime. Similarly, Giordano (2014, p. 46), reports that when offenders begin to view their deviant lifestyle as being incompatible with who they are and what they stand for, this usually denotes the fourth type of cognitive transformation signifying that “the desistance process can [now] be seen as relatively complete”. Such identity shifts where ex-offenders distance themselves from their old offending selves in favour of the new non-offending selves portray a life all in the past.

However, this past is not rejected but assimilated and made sense of. This involves looking critically at the past and it is only when the past is seen from another perspective that displays of fortitude and strength can be realised. To confirm this notion, one of the narratives in Michael’s transcript reads as follows...*I am no longer offending; it’s all in the past.* And in as far as his old offending self is concerned, one could infer that Michael now distanced himself from his previous delinquent self. In this regard, he said...*in a way, um...looking now, the person I am, the Michael I have become comparing to the Michael I was, the naughty Michael, the offending Michael, you know, the misbehaving Michael, the smoking Michael...and the now Michael...the better Michael, a positive Michael.* Here, it was once again useful to consider whether for Michael, developing an altered self-identity which proved incompatible with an offending identity might not have facilitated his from crime desistance (Guse & Hudson, 2015).

So, in retrospect, while trying to make sense of this extract, I interpreted Michael’s account as explicitly stating that he is no longer the same person as he was when he went into prison. He further went on to say...*I regarded myself as an ex-offender while I was still inside prison.* His argument being that...*I offended some ten years ago why call me an offender now?* This argument, once again highlighted the multiple identities we simultaneously hold as human beings. Interestingly enough, it is also note-worthy that Michael experienced his prison identity as somehow incongruent with his lived experience during his incarceration.

Disguised blessing

It is not uncommon to stumble across claims among ex-offenders asserting that imprisonment, rather than being experienced as some sort of punishment was rather experienced as a blessing in disguise. In the words of Haney (2006, p. 162) “Adapting to the realities of prison life may change a prisoner’s habits of thinking and acting in ways that will persist long after his or her incarceration has ended.” Therefore, institutions of reform, based on the above assertion can construct inasmuch as they can destruct those incarcerated in them.

To illustrate with an example, one of the extracts in Michael’s transcripts reads as follows...*later on during my sentence, I realised that my incarceration was actually a blessing in disguise because it offered me the opportunity to change. It gave me time to think and introspect. So, it was an investment in a way...so right now these are the returns of the investment even though I’m not saying I’m proud of being in prison, but I don’t regret in a way because those years I’ve spent them constructively.* In probing for more detail, Michael explained that by constructive he meant taking an initiative to involve himself in his own self-development. This entailed, among other things, participating in correctional education and prison programmes such as Life Skills programmes and subsequently, this resulted in him impacting and contributing positively towards the collective development of other fellow offenders.

It is without a doubt that Michael’s story is one of success, and like many of his kind, he explained that...*I had to start on minimum zero from underwear to sock.* As a sentenced offender, Michael started organising events in 2008 during his incarceration and this is where he met his previous employer. He said...*I’ve been in this industry since 2008...[and]...I met [my previous employer] through prison programmes.*

In this regard, Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) report that it is in the best interest of our communities to provide ex-offenders with opportunities for successful reintegration because failure often results in them relapsing right back into crime. Michael explained that the later years of his incarceration were preoccupied with organising graduation ceremonies and other prison-related events. Upon his release and subsequent establishment of his business, Michael said that it made him feel good and proud of what he had become (an entrepreneur). I then asked, are you happy with this person you have become?...*Yes, very much so (giggling), very*

much so. I'm so passionate about the industry I'm in...it's in here (pointing to his left side of the chest), *close to my heart.*

Likewise, when I asked Gothatso whether he felt satisfied with the kind of work he was doing (being an IT specialist), he said he did. Partially intersecting with the theme on marriage as a turning point, this theme re-affirms what has been constantly argued throughout this dissertation that planning to desist from crime began while participants were still in prison.

Affirming this notion was Hlamalani who said...*I planned everything while I was inside prison, including marriage.* In the same way, sharing his blueprint for life post-incarceration; Michael's account was recorded as follows...*so I set aside five years of my time to achieve certain things, including, you know, getting married...getting a proper job, a car and a house...all of those things.*

In the context of this study then, it seems fitting that marriage, employment and acquiring property played a significant role in protecting participants from further offending. This is especially true for Hlamalani who met his fiancé during his incarceration and judging from the extract below, it would appear that he received tremendous amounts of support from his fiancé...*she was there for me, supporting and encouraging me all the time but also not putting pressure on me. These are some of the things that convinced me to change...she contributed immensely in my transformation.* From this extract, it is clear that Hlamalani identified his fiancé as the primary catalyst for his change. He also said that life's challenges were resolved with his fiancé whom he constantly referred to as his *pillar of strength.*

Against the backdrop of these results, in a three-country study by Schonteich (2015) analysing the socioeconomic impact of pre-trial detainees and their families in West Africa, the author concluded that due to long periods of incarceration and the physical and mental harm endured, imprisonment disrupted family relations in several ways. For example, the study found that families disintegrate and relationships break down through divorce when one partner is in prison (Schonteich, 2015; see also Arditti, 2014). Cross country research also indicates that the impact on the offenders and their families is much more severe in developing countries than developed countries (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012; Schonteich, 2015).

Taking all of this together partly suggests that through imprisonment, camouflaged as a blessing in disguise, offenders are able to reflect on where they are in life, evaluate their position, take the necessary measures to develop themselves and upon release, become reformed fathers, brothers, partners, employees, and entrepreneurs who can also financially assist and support their families.

But in turn, as highlighted in the subsequent and last theme of this chapter, receiving community support (whether explicitly from families or implicitly from business communities) can augment feelings of support and interdependence between the ex-offenders who participated in this study and the broader community. In this way, prison can be construed as having presented study participants with immense opportunities for self-reflection and introspection.

Looking back: incarceration as character-building

Insistently and quite vehemently so, Akhona maintained during his interview that...*prison is where your character gets built up, you are shaped up, you learn what patience is, you become more resilient.* For instance, the ex-offenders who participated in this study described themselves as having achieved multiple identities such as fathers, pastors, entrepreneurs, employees, motivational speakers and so on and so forth. According to Compton and Hoffman (2013) the study of character in positive psychology focuses on strengths that build character including those areas in which deficiency in knowledge, skills, or talent has a negative impact on us as well as others.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines character-building as improving the unusual or interesting qualities of a person (Hornby, 2010). In accordance with the above elucidations, this theme engages on character-building as displayed by study participants and is inspired by positive psychology's emphasis on individual strengths as a means to effect changes in our lives by concentrating on what we are already knowledgeable about and know how to do well (Compton & Hoffman, 2013).

In this regard, I argue that there is a need to explicitly recognise that among the imprisoned, there is an immense wealth of talent and potential abilities that should be put to good use and not go to waste. Of course, this onus does not lie with the Department of Correctional Services alone but equally with us as communities to ensure that all offenders are positively developed during their incarceration so that upon their release they are skilled

and reformed individuals who are capable of successful reintegration into communities as productive and law-abiding citizens (White Paper on Corrections, 2005). Similarly, in the words of Muthapuli (2015, p. 139) “Offenders are incarcerated not only to serve their sentences, but also to be given a second chance to have a positive influence in their communities through their participation in rehabilitation programmes. Whether educational, psychological or social work or health care, these programmes are provided by the DCS not only for the benefit of the offender, but for the benefit of the entire community.”

Yet somehow, the results derived from this study can at best be described as inconsistent with these findings. While for Michael, who for instance, secured employment twelve days following his release from prison believed that society helped him a great deal with his reintegration and cited his previous employer as having played a pivotal role with his re-adjustment. Hlamalani, on the other hand, considered his transition somewhat confusing. He said...*it's difficult to consider how society can assist ex-offenders upon their return because, nowadays, communities do not care. Communities discriminate...forgetting that a community comprises everyone who lives in South Africa.* Hlamalani reported that he did not receive so much physical support from his community, *but they (the community) looked at me as one of their own.* In two separate occasions during his interview, Akhona said, *I got out to a completely new environment because the people there did not know me...how will the family accept me? Are they not gonna fear me?* A little while later he said...*I have witnessed a lot of people who are released and as they good as they are, they relapsed. I hope I'm not gonna be a victim.*

In light of these excerpts, I gather that community support can be experienced and interpreted differently by different individuals and that secondly, one needs to be “in the moment” for desistance to occur regardless of the external support derived from others. To illustrate, I asked Michael to think of and identify challenges faced by ex-offenders, he immediately identified two. He said...*firstly the lack of backbone...and the lack of decision-making without being influenced by external forces. I think it lacks from the other guys...*

At a minimum then, one could argue that the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities requires a holistic approach involving a tripartite or memorandum of understanding between ex-offenders, their respective communities, and the DCS including a host of other relevant stakeholders. Of course, this is said with the understanding that the DCS is there to address the attitude and behaviour of offenders by means of treatment

programmes thus indirectly dealing with their inclination to reoffend. In line with these findings, this study has also brought to the fore results suggesting that the ex-offenders who participated in this study had within themselves the power and the capacity to change their plight into one of the greatest triumphs they can ever be proud of.

The implication of this is that no offender, no matter what his circumstances should be assumed incapable of change. For example, upon reminiscing on the years spent in prison, Michael reported having...*mixed emotions*. So did Akhona. In fact, Michael said he felt emotional every time he spoke about prison...*to the extent that sometimes my eyes become full of tears...ja, I feel emotional when I think about that time*. By the same token, upon looking back, Gothatso explained that the one thing he wanted the most in life was ‘the good life’.

In Hlamalani’s case, he attributed his own attitudinal change to the experience of imprisonment including the support he gained from prison officials and in particular, the types of treatment programmes he attended while in prison. Consistent with the claims already made by Giordano (2014), this study too endorses the notion that different individuals have different levels and sources of motivation. This motivation, whether derived intrinsically or otherwise, remains an essential building block determining what different participants bring to the change process. As already noted in a previous section that even though there may be varied pathways in which change may be effected, yet individuals themselves still need to be sufficiently motivated in realising their own change.

Our characters too, as individuals vary and only we can be the architects of our own lives. As part of the lessons learned, Hlamalani reported to have greatly improved his self-respect and self-worth as a result of having been to prison. To this effect, he said...*prison made me become the Hlamalani I am today...a huge difference compared to the one I was before*. It is therefore through the experience of imprisonment that participants were able to become the architects of their own making thus building character and achieving a strong sense of achievement in the process.

A strong sense of achievement

In part, the results of this study suggest that in order for desistance to occur, the desisting offender must change from viewing himself as a criminal to where he sees himself as a contributor of some sort; whether doing voluntary work like giving motivational

speeches to offenders in prisons like Akhona, or becoming a tutor and member of a School Governing Body as was the case with Hlamalani (Dufour et al., 2015). According to Maruna (2001), offenders feel a strong sense of achievement when helping other offenders because that help boomerangs right back. The preceding claim, in particular, finds consistency in Hlamalani and Michael's case who were both appointed as tutors and programme facilitators during their time in prison. To this effect, Hlamalani overtly stated his pride as follows...*to achieve desistance is very difficult...you have to go prison for ten years like me to achieve it. Then we salute you my brother...just like myself, I salute myself.*

The account above seems to suggest that Hlamalani derived a strong sense of achievement for having discontinued a life of crime and this particular finding is strikingly consistent with the finding by Maruna (2001) above. He stated...*for me, that I'm out of there (no longer committing crime) I am grateful...even my friends, those I used to commit crime with before I went into prison I would tell them that I am no longer there.* At a minimum then, it may be construed that a person who has a strong sense of achievement and has a lot invested is much more likely to develop a strong stake in conformity to the extent that they will not wish to jeopardise their futures by engaging in further criminal activity.

The strong sense of achievement referred to above was explicitly mentioned by Hlamalani; the other participants did express similar accounts but varied in terms of how their respective accomplishments were experienced. For instance, most evident were the participant's educational achievements, employability status as well as the establishment of their own businesses which, collectively, contributed to the breaking of the cycle of poverty.

Generally, all four study participants expressed an overt sense of responsibility towards themselves and their fellow offenders. The kind of responsibility referred to here was reflected by Michael who said...*it has been through education (that I developed myself) and also you know, um...impacting or contributing positively towards my fellow ex-inmates that also gave me that thing of seeing another person becoming something, you know? Knowing that it was me who planted some seed in that person to become that something.* Here, personal gratification speaks for itself. By virtue of encouraging others to remain optimistic, it could be argued that the participants themselves must have had an inherent supply of positivity in themselves.

Likewise, the study by Frank et al. (2012) conducted in Carlisle, Indiana used a phenomenological study to explore the experiences of correctional education among long-term sentenced offenders. The authors, two of whom earned their college degrees while incarcerated believed that serving others by contributing positively both within and outside the prison community was central to their own rehabilitation. Over and above, the responses provided by the participants in the current study convinced me that there was a willingness among recipients of correctional education to believe that...*all will be well in the future.*

The same outcome was also documented in Frank et al.'s (2012) study where hope, belief and trust in the human potential was thought to bring in changes by ushering new opportunities. I was instantly intrigued by this belief knowing from hindsight that correctional education is an investment with long-term benefits. So I continued probing for positive outcomes which might have resulted from their efforts of self-development. In this regard, Gothatso said...*it [correctional education] has had a very positive outcome for me because I got employed and I was able to procure a driver's license...I bought a car [and] I bought a house...so for me that was a great achievement.*

Similarly, Michael explained that it made him feel good and proud of what he had become. In what I regard as the most powerful narrative in his transcript, Gothatso reminisces how correctional education came to play an important role in his incarceration; he said...*without education, I don't believe I would still be here...maybe I would have gone back [to prison] again...cos an empty stomach take no order.* With this expression (*an empty stomach take[s] no order*), Gothatso asserts that poverty can be a very powerful motivator to reoffend; yet for him, correctional education played a somewhat formidable role as an intervention to break the cycle of poverty and crime.

A fundamental motive for leaving behind a life of crime then, as explained by Gothatso, concerns the idea of educating oneself and becoming employable. In this regard, he said...*I served my first sentence and I did not do anything [productive]. I again served my sentence for the second time and not do anything...no. This is one of the things that ended up motivating me to go back to school.* Another dimension of this achievement can be construed as having attained a...*normal life.* To illustrate with an example, I asked Gothatso what it meant to him that a person has stopped offending to which he simply replied...*that person is living a normal life.* According to him...*a life of crime is not normal as anything can happen*

during those criminal activities, you can die, you can be crippled and be wheelchair bound...ja...all of those things.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study were discussed in detail and related to literature. Five superordinate themes relating to participants' experiences were identified. To maintain the authenticity of the participants' accounts, I decided to use narratives which I extracted from the transcripts. I used these extracts by integrating them as results and incorporated the literature into a discussion by way of academic justification emanating from this study to form one coherent chapter. I also employed my interpretive resources by consulting academic resources. A number of interesting results came to the fore such as the positive impact played by imprisonment, the perception of time during incarceration, and the role of social bonds in the maintenance of criminal desistance. Chapter 5 will outline and discuss the conclusion, limitations, and recommendations of this study.

Chapter 5

Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

Introduction

Embarking on this study has highlighted a few important findings regarding the desistance of criminal offenders. In this chapter, I present the conclusion, limitations and recommendations of this study. And lastly, I reflect on the “journey travelled” during the course of this study.

Conclusion and executive summary

This study was able to accomplish its objectives of exploring the lived experiences as well as the reasons and the motivations behind criminal desistance including what it meant for the participants to disengage from crime. Interestingly, the participants’ motives to desist from crime seemed to have been derived from intra-individual factors. The responses that participants gave clearly suggested that change from criminal to non-criminal is an individual decision that begins during one’s incarceration. Waller (1974) also arrived at a similar conclusion, for example, that many ex-offenders regard rehabilitation as something that comes from within the individual.

This is important insofar as it forces offenders to consider their plans for parole, rather than simply planning to avoid risk (for example, to avoid re-arrest and reconviction). Offenders can also improve their quality of social reintegration by planning to establish their own businesses or seeking employment. Sometimes, employment opportunities, usually through a family member, friend, or neighbour or previous employer may become a linchpin of the offenders’ release plan (Dickson & Polaschek, 2014). Furthermore, the ability to maintain a crime-free identity appeared to be reinforced by attachments to social bonds such as employment, religiosity/spirituality, correctional education, and investments in prosocial relationships.

The state of being employed, having a supportive family and prosocial friends are among the key considerations promoting ex-offender’s reintegration into their communities - if successfully facilitated, these social bonds can significantly contribute towards the process of criminal desistance (Waller, 1974). In fact, the current study has demonstrated that ex-

offenders must feel accepted and supported by their communities (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012) and should feel a sense of belonging either to a life partner, a business of some sort, or employment “and [should] have access to its resources (social capital) to be able to desist from crime, regardless of their initial motivation...” (Dufour et al., 2015, p. 483).

The current study’s findings were also consistent with previous research indicating that correctional education provides incarcerated offenders with heightened self-esteem and the ability to think critically, and that these as well facilitate the process of desisting from crime (Frank et al., 2012). “Without possibilities to rectify their lives, no offender could desist”, hence the possibilities inspire some offenders to take on new social identities...[also]...family relatives play a pivotal role as they may help offenders recognise the “hooks for change” that are present in the environment” (Dufour et al., 2015, p. 495).

In essence, what is called upon during this major transformative change is a realignment of time, efforts and energies of all role players and stakeholders involved in the corrections fraternity and related fields to work towards the amelioration of those challenges associated with re-entry such as employment, family and communities which are often the root cause of most failures following release (Waller, 1974). For instance, in reacting to the widespread employment discrimination on the basis of having a criminal record, some by-laws in the U.S. oppose potential employers demanding job applicants disclosing their criminal records until the job interviews have been conducted and the position offered; thereby allowing all candidates an equal shot at being selected (Lageson & Uggen, 2013).

Surprisingly enough, none of the participants reported a concern over mental deterioration as I expected, rather, participants were confident in their abilities to function while in prison (Leigey & Reider, 2015). Ironically instead, several psychological strengths as well as indications of post-traumatic growth emerged in the participants’ accounts (Guse & Hudson, 2015). There were also changes in the self-perception of the participants as they viewed their incarceration as a major turning point in their lives. For instance, participants came across as more strongly emphasising interpersonal relationships post-incarceration than before and this was illustrated by an increased appreciation of relationships with families and significant others (Guse & Hudson, 2015). Moreover, they felt that they would not have accomplished nor changed for the better had they not been to prison (Guse & Hudson, 2015).

This complete “turn-about” (which I metaphorically refer to as the genesis of the offender) has highlighted fascinating revelations in how ex-offenders come to desist from crime. First and foremost, the ex-offenders who participated in this study narrated individual stories which suggested that they were being “haunted” by a “wondering self”, constantly searching for meaning in their lives. In pursuit of this meaning, identity transformation was shown to have occurred while participants were still in prison. It thus appeared as if participants experienced imprisonment as an opportunity for life transformation as mentioned earlier (Guse & Hudson, 2014).

In part, this also suggested that systems of institution like imprisonment have an equal ability not only to destructively but constructively shape behaviours and cognitions. In this regard, this study showed that these internal changes occurred long before the participants were released from prison. This was evidently clear from the ingenuities participants took in terms of initiating their own rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Another equally interesting revelation highlighted by this study was the challenge that painful prison experiences exacerbate criminality. Ironically, this study showed that as much as imprisonment involves a painful process of change, psychologically-resilient offenders are able to move through the process of incarceration pretty much unscathed. Several key factors were shown to be indispensable during the desistance process; chief among them being maturity and the inevitable transition into adult roles which brought about changes in the participant’s personal conceptions. These involved the development of empathy and accountability as well as taking into consideration the risks incurred in offending and the subsequent forfeiting of years and years in prison.

In addition to these, the importance of trigger events surfaced in this study. It transpired that critically significant moments such as the death of a loved one can serve an important symbolic and psychological function that can encourage desistance. Contrary to popular belief, the claim that a criminal record helps hinder the prospects of acquiring employment can at best be described as mixed. In the long-term, however, a link between good quality employment and correctional education was found. And in the short-term, as suggested by this study, to retain the interests of offenders in the education stream, correctional education must be relevant and provide meaning to the recipients of correctional education. Correctional education was also shown to be of vital importance for offenders’ reintegration process.

Mixed results were also recorded in as far as the association between marriage/cohabitation and criminal desistance was concerned. However, the overall support derived from these significant others strongly suggested that due to the quality and the commitment of their relationships as well as through constant regulation of daily and routine activities by wives and girlfriends, participants were able to avoid potentially crime inducing environments like staying out at night socialising.

Similarly, this study also illustrated how parenthood positively contributed towards the process of criminal desistance. Spending sufficient quality time so with one's children strengthens the relationship between father and child. Male offenders, nonetheless, were generally shown not to explicitly tie parenthood as a key transition event. Be that as it may, support from significant others was particularly experienced as crucial before and after the participants were incarcerated. It was therefore concluded that the one aspect implicated as having promoted participants' desistance in this regard was the strength of familial bonds involved. In stark contrast, it could be argued that lack of support due to weaker familial bonds has an untoward effect on returning offenders which has the propensity to trigger criminal relapse.

Ironically, this study showed that through the receipt of social support, chances of criminal desistance can be significantly augmented. In the same way, as suggested by the results of this study, receiving religious support or experiencing some sort of spiritual conversion, or exposure or even participating in religious programmes have been associated with lifestyle as well as behavioural changes such as quitting smoking and consuming alcohol.

Although the results remain divergent, yet this study showed that through religious transcendence, individuals are able to derive a sense of personal meaning and purpose in life. By the same token, the importance of cultural beliefs in terms of support and collective responsibility were also illustrated and shown how they were interwoven with the phenomenon of criminal desistance. The emotional aspect of this phenomenon was also brought to the fore and tapped into. It transpired that the positive changes that ensued following a traumatic experience presented opportunities for deep introspection that ultimately culminated into participants discovering their true potential and aptitudes.

However, in dealing with these traumatic encounters, this study showed that maintaining the willpower to change is two-fold; it required attitudinal change and resiliency. As such, psychological agility seemed to have played a huge role in the participants' decisions to turn their lives around, including the facilitation of their reintegration. Within this purview, this study also showed that positive discourses can translate into positive actions. In other words, thoughts, intentions and desires to want to desist have the potential to turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. But an equally important observation as well was that participants did not only wish to desist from crime but constantly worked on their efforts to do so.

According to this study then, offenders should be steadfast and unwavering in their decisions to stop offending. But substituting offending requires another activity of some sort such as educating oneself with the view to find employment.

Consequently then, one could argue that planning to desist from crime began while participants were still in prison. A close examination of the participants' future plans indicated that these plans were also related to their identified goals. Two goals were subsequently distinguished: approach goals which included plans like where and how to secure employment and avoidance goals such as averting delinquent friendships.

Therefore, this study has reaffirmed the notion that prisons are there for a purpose. Constructively, they are there to serve a rehabilitative role; but in this study, imprisonment was further portrayed as having offered study participants with remarkable opportunities for self-and collective growth. In essence, it could be argued that participants' imprisonment facilitated opportunities that built on their strengths while discouraging negative behaviours.

Building character was one such example. In this respect, the current study showed that character is built when offenders find their niche area in as far as their talents and aptitudes were concerned. This resulted in grave implications for how study participants felt subsequent to their achievements. Personal gratification, a sense of joy, relief, pride and achievement were among the obvious. This meant that through their accomplishments in the areas of education, entrepreneurship, as well as the overall change in their employability status, participants were also able to break the cycle of poverty.

Also, the strong sense of achievement displayed by study participants indicated that criminal desistance involved a process of deep self-introspection of the participants' past,

present and future aspirations. As such, this necessitated the distancing of the old offending self in favour of the new non-offending self.

In sum, the conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that successful desistance hinges on a variety of aspects which include intra-individual factors such as change in identity and cognition. Successful desistance also depends on one's relative attachments to conventional social bonds like a good marriage partner. Essentially, this means that criminal desistance requires a good solid foundation informed by a holistic approach (interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration) which can be accomplished through social support, good quality education that will lead to meaningful employment and properly structured and contextualised rehabilitation programmes.

Limitations of the study

This study formed part of the researcher's Masters' dissertation. For this reason, it is acknowledged that the small number of participants (four) may have posed serious limitations to the study. However, based on Creswell's (2012) assertion, even samples as small as one have been used in qualitative studies. Consequently, due to this limitation and several others, the study's generalisability is restricted only to the ex-offenders who participated in this study. Of course, it could be argued, based on the participant's attributes that the study's representativeness was more homogenous than heterogeneous (race, social class, geographical area of participants and their SES). Furthermore, the sample comprised male ex-offenders only and excluded offenders currently incarcerated.

It is also noteworthy that none of the family members participated in this study. Moreover, interviews were the only data gathering method used to solicit research data. And last but not least, my inevitable insider-outsider position.

Based on the limitations above, one could argue that since the study was grounded on data provided by ex-offenders, the richness of the data could have been severely compromised because understanding criminal desistance from the perspective of the participants only can in itself be considered unrepresentative relative to when the data is checked and/or supplemented by collateral information from significant others such as peers, families and including the broader community. Even how criminal desistance is experienced from the perspectives of female ex-offenders could have also supplemented the richness of the data if not providing a different perspective to male ex-offenders.

Therefore, taking all of this together, I presume the results could have turned out differently had the sample been heterogeneous such as including, for instance, white affluent participants from the upmarket suburbs of Menlyn Pretoria or Sandton Johannesburg.

It is therefore my conviction that had these shortcomings been dealt with and circumvented, the study could have provided a much more holistic understanding of desistance as a phenomenon.

What can also be regarded as an “unfair advantage” in this study is the dual nature of my position. I have a history of two previous criminal convictions. Perhaps the fact that I, as the researcher, have a criminal background could have also influenced the course of the study given that my schema is already primed with a particular ideology on issues, views and opinions regarding incarceration. This also includes my personal experiences and direct interaction with the Criminal Justice System as an offender.

However, I am grateful to have frequently received debriefing sessions with my peers, my supervisor as my mentor, as well as colleagues in the Department of Psychology at UNISA before, during and after conducting the study. Such collaborative sessions were used to bracket my preconceived ideas, potential biases, experiences and perceptions that I might have had coming into this study, including helping me draw attention to possible flaws in the proposed course of action.

Supporting this view is Shenton (2004) who contends that these get-together meetings provide a sounding-board for the researcher to assess his or her developing ideas and interpretations, and probing from others may help the investigator recognise his or her own biases and preferences. Constituting the third of the last two remaining limitations of the study was the language barrier. English was not the first language of the study participants and this was evidently clear during the interviews as participants sometimes struggled to fully articulate themselves in English. To compensate for this shortcoming, the interviews alternated between English and IsiZulu. Consequently, back-translating the responses from IsiZulu into English could also imply that meaning was lost in translation.

Another potentially significant limitation was that even though I conducted the study by myself and continued to relentlessly seek out a sounding-board especially for my analysis, the chances of objectivity might have also alluded me and as such, this could have had a limiting effect on the data obtained.

And lastly, the type of method chosen for this study (qualitative methodology) meant that desistance as a phenomenon could not be measured. Yet despite all these limitations, this study has assisted in identifying the reasons and the motivations implicated behind criminal desistance which might possibly assist policy makers particularly when reviewing the White Paper on Corrections.

Recommendations for future research

The results derived from this study have raised several key questions in as far as future research is concerned. Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that the representativeness of the study participants should be enhanced so as to reflect the South African context which will improve the generalisability of the findings with the view to be extended to other similar but different contexts.

This could imply conducting future research with participants of other races as well as males and females who come from different cultural backgrounds and geographical areas representing different socioeconomic levels and social class.

A longitudinal study is also recommended; preferably one that involves the families of offenders, their significant others, communities, former classmates, school teachers, previous employers and NGOs which could also assist with the tracking of the desistance process during and after participants' imprisonment.

Consequently, reaching a large number of participants could culminate in a more diversified and heterogeneous sample. Also, to enhance both the validity and the richness of the data, future research should consider incorporating offenders currently incarcerated in prisons so as to reach an acceptable level of understanding of the phenomenon of criminal desistance in the South African context, and not only when the ex-offenders have left the prison.

Lastly, this study has also highlighted the plight of ever growing numbers of children behind bars and recommends that future research focus more on the relationships between male offenders and their offsprings. With the exception of the "Fatherhood Project" just initiated recently in one of the prisons in Gauteng province, little is currently known about the social support received by offenders and ex-offenders alike, especially males, and how these relationships with their children affect behaviour both inside and outside of prison.

Also, advocates of a mixed method approach could focus on the measurement of the desistance process by incorporating a mixed method study; in this way each approach could supplement where the other lacks.

Reflections

The motivation behind the study: I am an ex-offender currently on parole for a nineteen-year jail term. It is this life experience of being incarcerated that has ostensibly led me to pursue my research dissertation on the corrections fraternity. Kanuha (2000) suggests that the construction and meaningfulness of my position as an ex-offender on parole is the primary motivating factor that separates me from an outsider researcher. It was therefore both for personal as well as academic reasons that I was drawn to study “my own kind” or an identity group with whom I share a past. In line with this motivation, the current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of criminal desistance from the participants’ perspectives. With this endeavour, I sought to understand the meanings participants attached to their experiences of criminal desistance.

However, as transpired throughout all the research stages of this study, insider/outsider boundaries can become more blurry than the terms simply imply (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). In my case, I was open about my insider status to the study participants as there was no need to be covert; after all, as a collective, we had much in common, and the fact that I and the study participants shared the following attributes qualified me an insider: I am black (race); Zulu (ethnicity); I come from more or less the same socioeconomic background as the study participants (SES); we share the same sexual orientation (heterosexuality); we also share the same cohort born around the 1970s; and lastly, we all tick ‘yes’ on the previous criminal record category.

But as stated previously, this disclosure was also an ethical requirement and somehow made sense to me to acknowledge my insider status with my participants (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

However, the one aspect that positioned me as an outsider was my educational training. Despite possessing special attributes such as being black and male and living in the same geographical vicinity (Gauteng) as the study participants, the dynamics of conducting research versus participating in research became evidently clear in this study (Richards & Emslie, 2000 as cited in Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). For instance, in terms of power dynamics

that exist between researchers and the researched (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015), one potential participant in the many informal discussions held with offenders believed that researchers generally conduct research for their own personal gain. This said to me, even when a researcher is a member of the same community and shares their identity, the researcher will always be considered an intruder (LaBaree, 2002; Perry et al., 2004).

Broadly speaking, this did not deter me or exert any overwhelming emotions in as far as the tension between the roles of the researcher and researched were concerned. Instead, this dual position placed me at the intersection of both. This presented both pros and cons and showed that both categories of insider and outsider are not clear cut. For instance, as an ex-offender, I believe I possess a special lens through which to understand and interpret criminal desistance; but also this advanced knowledge can serve as a barrier in understanding pre-constructed knowledge and assumptions about prisons in general.

Through this study then, a valuable lesson was learned; and that is, even though researchers and participants may share similar characteristics such as sexual orientation and so on and so forth, in order to become a researcher one must necessarily step outside of his/her comfort zone of insiderness for training and education to occur (Narayan, 1993 as cited in LaSala, 2003). Furthermore, contrary to literature which suggests that possessing special insider knowledge affords one easy access on where and how to recruit study participants, the process of finding participants for this study was somewhat challenging due to the hidden population of participants who fully met the inclusion criteria regardless of the attributes mentioned above.

Again, my role behind Inside-out Outside-in South African Corrections Interest Group could have also conscientised me in many different ways. Inside-out outside-in is a loose, inter-disciplinary grouping of people interested in issues relating to prisons in South Africa. The group's objective is aimed at mapping South African community engagement initiatives, networks, research studies and public services relating either directly or indirectly to corrections communities. In this case, it is important to take into consideration the many traversing identities that an individual can simultaneously hold, an employee, a student, a researcher, and an ambassador of some sort. These roles added more value under the guidance of my supervisor, mentor and colleague.

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on the study's conclusion, limitations, recommendations and the researchers' personal reflections. Furthermore, this chapter summarised the dynamics involved in criminal desistance, including a discussion about where, in the process of incarceration, do offenders struggle and/or thrive in terms of attaining criminal desistance. It was concluded that achieving criminal desistance requires a holistic approach which begins with the offender himself.

The importance of social bonds was emphasized as well as the recognition that achieving criminal desistance is difficult. The process was also shown to be fraught with challenges but this in turn identified the immense contribution played by all role players involved starting with the offender himself - his immediate family, community leaders, parents, educators, NGOs, SAPS, DCS, other government departments, and religious as well as political leaders.

Over and above, this study lent support to the notion that criminal desistance is not an ideal or abstract concept that cannot be achieved. Through a good solid foundation, we can all leave crime behind us and embark on new and humble beginnings.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview guide

Opening question

- Having officially signed off your entire parole means you are no longer a parolee, yet you are still classified as an ex-offender. What does the term ex-offender mean to you?

Interaction with the CJS

- For how long were you in prison?
- When you think back on the years you spent in prison, how would you summarise your experience of incarceration?
- In what way has your incarceration impacted on you?
- Looking at the time you spent in prison; do you feel you have achieved/lost something as a result of your incarceration?
- Describe the person you were when you went into prison.
- Describe the person you are now.
- Are you the same person as when you went into prison? If no, what has changed?

Main question

- I'm interested in your story as someone who has stopped offending and the reasons why you stopped offending. What does it mean to you if someone says they have stopped offending?
- What has influenced you, in particular, to stop offending?

Offender re-entry

- Please think back to your release process. How does it feel to be released from prison?
- What emotions did you feel on your first day out?
- What were your thoughts at the time you were first released?

- What are your thoughts and feelings now when reflecting on your release day(s)?
- How did you experience the various aspects of the release process? For example, do you feel that you were treated fairly, with respect for your dignity? Did the process show that you have transitioned from being an offender to someone who is now ready and able to reintegrate into the community?
- Describe how you were welcomed by your friends, family and neighbours? You could reflect on what they did, their reactions or what was said to you.
- Upon your release from prison, did you have any idea of the challenges you could face that would make it difficult for you to reintegrate into your family or community?
- To whom did you turn for help with your challenges?
- Did you receive any form of community or family support with your challenges?
- How do you think these challenges could drive you to reoffend/ or not to reoffend?
- We've just spoken about the challenges; what were some of the uplifting or supporting events, people or structures you had after your release?
- Do you believe that you have completed your transition from prison to community? If yes, how long has it (or will) it take you to make that transition?

Employment

- Are you currently employed? If yes, what kind of work do you do?
- If not, what do you do for a living?
- Is this the first formal employment you've held since your release?
- Thinking back to your first formal employment (if this is your first, ignore) please describe the process you followed in finding this job?
- When applying for this job, did you admit/disclose your criminal record? If no, why?
- How are you treated in the workplace? Either by your colleagues or employers?
- Do you find satisfaction doing the kind of job you do?
- What is the job or field you would ideally like to work in?
- Do you believe that having a criminal record prevents you from entering that field? Why?

Stigmatization

- What are your thoughts on ex-offenders applying for jobs with a criminal record?

- Was it difficult for you to get a job with a criminal record?
- Have there been instances of potential employers turning you down when you admitted to having a criminal record?

Age and desistance from crime

- How old were you when you were arrested?
- How old are you now?

Religiosity

- Do you participate in community organisations or support groups?
- Do you know of any social service organisation in your community dedicated to assisting ex-offenders with their re-integration? If yes, what are they and what do they do?
- Are you religious? If yes, how has your religious conviction/spiritual belief contributed to your decision to stop offending?

Marriage

- Are you in a relationship? (i.e. are you single/married/engaged or cohabiting?) If married, for how long have you been married?
- Have you been thinking about marriage before or after coming out of prison?
- Does the state of being married have any influence on your decision stop offending? If yes, how?

Families and communities as providers of social capital

- Following your release from prison, how easy or difficult was it to reunite with your family? Probe for more details.
- While in prison, did your family come visit you? If yes, how often?
- Now that you have been released from prison, how do you think your family was affected by your imprisonment?
- How did this impact you?

Peer influence

- Do you have friends? If yes, tell me more about your friends; what type of friends are they?
- How often or how much time do you spend with your friends?

Education

- What is/are your view/s on prison rehabilitation programmes?
- Are you involved in any post-release programmes provided by the DCS?
- Besides the DCS programs, are you involved in any educational programs? If yes, which program/s are those?

Transition to parenthood

- Do you have children? If yes, please describe your relationship with your children (e.g. how many children; are they boys or girls and how old they are, including who is taking care of them or who took care of them while you were in prison?).

Significance of critical moments

- What other reasons contributed to you deciding to leave behind a life of crime?

Concluding question

- What do you think society does to help ex-offenders maintain a crime-free life upon their release from prison? If there isn't any, what do you think society can do to help ex-offenders maintain a crime-free identity upon their release?

Appendix B

Information sheet

Mbongiseni Mdakane

1 Preller Street,

Muckleneuk,

Pretoria, 0002

28 May 2015

Dear Potential participant

I would like to take the opportunity of introducing myself. My name is Mbongiseni Mdakane. I am working on completing my research project in fulfilment of a Master's Degree in Research Consulting in the Department of Psychology at University of South Africa (Unisa). I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. The aim of this study is to gather stories from ex-offenders who have stopped offending, or who are currently in the process of disengaging from crime with the view to understand what has motivated/influenced them to do so, as well as how they come to maintain a crime free-identity.

I will ensure that the identity of all volunteering participants will remain anonymous. Your original names will not be used in this study. Apart from that, the information that will be shared will remain confidential. This means that the information will be used for research purposes only. However, the outcomes of the study will be available in the form of a research

report or dissertation. I will collect data by interviewing participants during an interview that will take approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. I would like to obtain your permission to tape record the interview. The recordings will be kept in a safe place for five years. After the period of five years the transcripts will be destroyed.

If you agree to take part in this study you will be requested to sign an informed consent form. The informed consent entails that you as the participant have read and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. However, it is not a binding contract that disallows withdrawal from the study. You can withdraw from the study if you want to. There are no anticipated discomforts that may result from partaking in the study, so risk to participants is minimal. However, in the event that discomfort is experienced as a result of the interviews, necessary arrangements have already been made with the Unisa Psychology Clinic for debriefing sessions. There are no tangible benefits or incentives that will be received by participants for taking part in the study, however, snacks and refreshment will be available post the interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, my supervisor or the Department of Psychology at Unisa which granted the permission for this study. My email address is emdakam@unisa.ac.za, and my supervisor, [Prof. Eduard Fourie's](#) email address is: fourieme@unisa.ac.za. You can also contact me at (012) 429-6833 or (012) 429-8088.

Thanking you in advance,

Mbongiseni Mdakane

Appendix C

Statement of consent

I have read the descriptions in Appendix B of this study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Name of the participant_____

Signature_____

Name of the researcher_____

Signature_____