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Comparing Desistance Processes: A Cross-National Analysis of English and French Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares processes of desistance from crime in England and France, in order to explore how individuals stop offending in distinct national, social, cultural, economic, and criminal justice settings. Processes of desistance in various settings have received increasing attention in the criminological literature. While empirical studies have been conducted in different countries, there is limited knowledge on desistance in a comparative lens and about how people stop offending in France. Data were obtained from 40 interviews with English and French men who had previous offending histories, were being supervised on probation, and had expressed a desire to stop offending. Cross-national comparison of narratives allows us to better discern the relationships between structural factors and individual behavioural change. This also allows us to examine the extent to which existing theories – mostly based upon data from the USA and the UK – are applicable in an under-researched setting with different characteristics.

The analyses show certain similarities across the two groups, which are articulated in ways that explain underlying differences in the narratives, according to national contexts. These include different existential considerations, ways in which offending is recounted, types of support systems engaged with, and strategies of maintaining desistance. For instance, English desisters tended to focus on avoiding temptations of reoffending by keeping to themselves, whereas French desisters typically adopted conventional, sociable lifestyles. Varying pains and gains from probation were identified, which reflect different criminal justice philosophies. The findings highlight subjective dimensions of desistance, including a focus on emotions, what it feels like to stop offending, perceptions of the self and of one's social world. This research contributes to better understanding the role of structural characteristics of national settings onto individual processes of behavioural change. The findings provide a more comprehensive picture of the role of national context in individual trajectories of desistance.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The present research explores and compares the ways in which English and French people stop offending, at a time in their lives when they were serving a sentence in the community. The current literature on desistance has demonstrated the role of social, structural factors as well as individual level internal patterns when they (want to) stop offending. Explanations of desistance have evolved with empirical contributions to the knowledge base on how and why people desist. This means that a lot is known about how and why desistance occurs, including personal motivations, support systems people engage with and how institutional rehabilitation strategies influence these changes. Nevertheless, little comparative research has been conducted on this topic; such research could shine a light on how different structural factors can shape individual pathways out of crime. Moreover, a lot of what is known about desistance has been researched in Anglophone settings. Only recently has the international scholarship on desistance from crime evolved, and there is very little knowledge about desistance in the French context. This research addresses these two gaps in the literature, by contributing to the knowledge on how people stop offending in France and comparing this with desistance in a context that has been thoroughly investigated. Through 20 in-depth interviews with English desisters and 20 with French desisters, this study explores and contrasts experiences of desistance in two distinct national, social, economic, cultural, political, and criminal justice contexts. This research investigated the different ways in which people told their stories of desistance, by interpreting the results with consideration of the national context in which their lives have unfolded. This study is based on addressing the following three research questions:

- How do people make sense of their experiences of offending and desisting? How is this different in England and in France? (addressed in Chapters 7, 8 and 11)
- What are the differences and similarities between English and French desisters in terms of relational and institutional experiences and perspectives? (addressed in Chapters 9, 10 and 11)
- How do these differences and similarities inform on the influences of national, societal contexts on individual pathways of desistance? (addressed in Chapters 7 to 11)

Before delving into the main thesis, I want to briefly discuss the scope of the study, what it does and does not seek to achieve. To reiterate, the aims of this thesis are to compare how and why people stop offending in England and France; to uncover differences and similarities in experiences and perspectives reported; and to draw conclusions on how context shapes individual trajectories. This thesis does not intend to determine whether desisting in one country is more or less favourable, nor did it seek to establish whether rehabilitative efforts are more efficient in one country as opposed to the other. While it is important to understand ‘what works’ to prevent reoffending, in terms of rehabilitative interventions, it is essential to discern how and why people stop offending in the first place, to then shape professional practice effectively according to what helps (Weaver, 2016; McNeill, 2006; Farrall, 2002). The following quote sums this idea up:

“We might be better off if we allowed offenders to guide us...listened to what they think might best fit their individual struggles out of crime, rather than continue to insist that our solutions are their salvation” (Porporino, 2010: 80, cited in Weaver, 2016: 33)

This exploratory research therefore sought to compare how people desist in two different national contexts and to draw conclusions on the influences of context upon changes in individuals' offending behaviour.

1.1. Definition and Justification

Traditionally, criminology as a discipline explored the question of the onset of criminal behaviour, attempting to explain why people start offending (Laub and Sampson, 2001). Research into life-course criminology found a trend of declining offending behaviours, associated with age. From the 1970s onwards, studies on desistance gained traction on research, and then, from the early 2000s, policy agendas. Studies have explored factors associated with decline in frequency of offending and explained desistance as a process. Earlier studies on desistance uncovered factors external to the individual that are associated with desistance from crime, for instance in the impact of employment and relationships (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Moffitt, 1993; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). More recently, qualitative research has mapped out patterns in the internal dynamics of change (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007; Maruna, 2001).

The verb 'to desist' means to stop doing something, to refrain or abstain from continuing to engage in an action or type of behaviours. Various definitions of desistance from crime were suggested by scholars. Meisenhelder (1977: 319), for instance, defined desistance as the "successful disengagement from a previously developed and subjectively recognised, pattern of criminal behaviour". A common challenge in research on desistance from crime is, however, the lack of a universally adopted definition of the concept. This has implications for epistemological considerations and operationalisation for empirical purposes.

The definition of desistance chosen for a piece of research is, indeed, telling of the epistemological leaning of scholars. In other words, how desistance is defined informs us of certain assumptions and stances regarding human behaviours and the social world. This in turn has implications on how desistance is

operationalised and researched, and which criteria are chosen to recruit participants (Maruna, 2001). An example of the epistemological implications of defining and outlining desistance from crime is the consideration of whether there is a 'point' at which an offender becomes a former offender, or if this is best seen as a gradual shift from a state of offending to non-offending. In earlier scholarly discussions on desistance, there was debate as to whether desistance entailed a 'termination event' (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983), or a "continuing process of lulls in the offending in persistent criminals" (Clarke and Cornish, 1985: 173).

The former perspective considers desistance as the "termination of a criminal career" (Piquero et al, 2003: 380) which is measurable after a certain amount of crime-free time. Studies which take the definition of desistance as a termination event tend to focus on the crime-free state of potential participants. The concept is operationalised through a time frame within which people will not have reoffended. These time frames are arbitrary and vary greatly from one study to another. For instance, Warr (1998) considered people to have desisted after a year without self-reported reoffending. In contrast, Farrington and Hawkins (1991) chose this time frame to be the specific decade after 21 years old. Shover and Thompson (1992) considered desistance if no arrests were made in the 36 months after release from prison. Kazemian (2007) has compiled a list of studies according to their operationalisation of desistance, which illustrates the variety of definitions adopted, and therefore the inconsistency within the literature.

There are several limitations to the consideration of desistance as a termination event and the subsequent measurement of desistance for empirical purposes. This perspective fails to account for the dynamic aspect of behavioural change, how individuals get to the crime-free state in the first place or manage to sustain it. Termination perspectives also neglect the various factors and influences that shape what is called 'pathways out of crime'. As such, scholars have increasingly considered desistance as a process rather than an event, and as a gradual decline

in the frequency (Kazemian, 2007; Bushway et al, 2001; Laub et al, 1998), and for some, severity (Fagan, 1989) of offences committed. In terms of operationalisation, this means that the time frame since the last offence is no longer used as the sole criterion for recruiting participants, if one is recruiting former offenders. Rather, more recent studies on desistance have used self-reported data, self-identification, and self-definitions of desistance as well as official recorded (re)convictions to select the subject for research (see Farrall et al, 2014).

What is more, the sporadic nature of offending behaviour inevitably shapes how people stop offending, meaning that desistance occurs over time but not necessarily in a linear manner. As McNeill (2009: 27) puts it, desistance “is not an event, it is a process; a process of ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ of progress and setback, of hope and despair”. The widespread consideration of desistance as a process is apparent in the vocabulary adopted by scholars, who often write of ‘processes of desistance’, ‘pathways of desistance’, ‘pathways out of crime/offending’, ‘change’ or ‘process of change’ when discussing the topic. This stylistic recurrence emphasises the gradual aspect of behavioural change, contrasting with the abruptness of the notion of a ‘termination event’. Part of this thesis seeks to explore the plurality of desistance pathways, so I often refer to ‘*processes* of desistance’ in plural to stress that there is not one uniform way in which people stop offending but different journeys out of crime as well as different factors shaping these journeys. Each person has their own specific experience of desistance, but patterns in these reveal common ways, factors and influences that impact upon individual change.

Desistance is therefore better summed up as the *process* by which people stop offending, and is commonly acknowledged as such, rather than as an event (Farrall et al, 2014; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Desistance refers to a process of change which is “tumultuous, dynamic and uncertain” (Healy, 2010: 5). For

researchers and people who want to desist alike, frustrations arise when change involves reoffending, relapses, or breaks and ‘lulls’ in offending behaviours (Maruna et al, 2004). What this means is that despite ‘desistance from crime’ meaning the abstinence from offending, the process often also entails reoffending as well as ambivalence towards offending (Burnett, 2004). This also means that what is interesting to explore are the processes *building* to change, as well as the ways in which desistance is maintained by individuals (Maruna, 2001).

Scholars have justified the value and implications of desistance studies to the management of offenders in practice. Understanding the dynamics of desistance from crime is essential if we are to shape interventions aimed at helping people who are involved in offending (Laub and Sampson, 2003). Farrall and Bowling have suggested the ‘added value’ of empirical work on desistance is that:

“By helping to elucidate some of its facets, a theory of desistance would enable criminal justice policies aimed at reducing offending (e.g., the work of the probation service) to be fine-tuned and for the elements of these interventions which “work” best, to be more thoroughly understood” (1999: 254).

Here, they argue for evidence-based implementations of policies and interventions aiming to reduce the propensity of people to reoffend. Researchers have, accordingly, advocated desistance-based rehabilitative interventions (McNeill, 2006). While rehabilitation is concerned with changes resulting from interventions, a desistance approach allows us to comprehend change as experienced by the individual.

Desistance from crime involves an interplay between individual agency and wider structural, social, political, economic, and cultural factors, which are beyond the control of the individual (Farrall et al, 2010; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Most notably, employment, romantic relationships, familial links were found to play a

role in desistance processes (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Research into the internal dynamics of desistance has uncovered recurrent themes in expressions of self-identity (Maruna, 2001) and patterns in cognitive shifts occurring with behavioural change (Giordano et al, 2002). These have allowed us to unpack how the aforementioned factors that are out of control of the individual interact with their thought processes, sense of self, and emotions in ultimately shaping the ways in which people desist. Relational dynamics have been highlighted as crucial to processes of change, because of the fundamentally social nature of desistance (Weaver, 2016). This not only includes social networks and peers, but also more generally interactions with people, institutions, and organisations. Past offending is a factor influencing the ways in which people stop offending (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011), as well as the intensity and frequency of involvement with the criminal justice system (McAra and McVie, 2007). The role of criminal justice interventions and probation supervision upon behavioural change have also been explored (Villeneuve et al, 2021; Farrall et al, 2014; King, 2013; McCulloch, 2005; Rex, 1999; Leibrich, 1993). Different personal characteristics are also associated with different pathways out of crime, in terms of the social/relational/structural and internal aspects of desistance: this includes for example gender (Worrall and Gelsthorpe, 2009) and ethnicity (Calverley, 2013). The study of desistance has garnered significant knowledge on processes of change, increasingly highlighting the variety in pathways out of crime.

The knowledge on the interplay between structure and individual agency is specific to the settings in which the research was conducted (Farrall, 2019). A lot of the knowledge on processes of change stems from research conducted in North America, the UK, and more broadly English-speaking countries with a tradition of empirical research, evaluation of public policies and evidence-based practice. France, in contrast, is a country that lacks this tradition of criminological research, meaning that little is known on how people stop offending there (although see

Benazeth, 2021; Kazemian, 2020; Gaïa, 2019). Comparing countries that are similar and close with regard to both western characteristics and physical, geographical location allows us to understand the intricacies of the influence of structural factors on individual lives. The value of this research is two-fold: it adds to the pool of knowledge on desistance in France, and contrasts what is known in one setting (England) with another where little is known. Cross-national comparisons into desistance from crime allow us to demonstrate how and why structural factors and processes operate to facilitate or hinder change (Farrall, 2019). Initial research comparing different experiences of desistance confirms the influence of certain factors, like age, employment, relationships, motivations (Segev, 2020; Calverley, 2013). The interesting common finding in these studies is the differing extent to which these factors influence processes of desistance, which is telling of the role of context upon individual lives.

1.2. Layout of the Thesis

Chapter 2 overviews relevant desistance studies and argues for the value of cross-national research. Its aim is to present what is known about desistance from crime, to explain and to justify the present research. It makes the case for cross-national comparative work by demonstrating a gap in the literature and overviewing existing comparative studies. Indeed, despite the recent increase in research exploring desistance processes in different national settings, including Ireland (Healy, 2010), Scotland (McCulloch, 2005), Sweden, (Österman, 2018), Chile (Villagra, 2016), France (Benazeth, 2021), Belgium (Claes and Shapland, 2016), Spain (Cid and Martì, 2016), Norway (Todd-Kvam, 2020), Japan (Barry, 2017), Israel (Segev, 2020), Canada (Bracken et al, 2009) and others, there is little knowledge on how structural factors shape individual change in a comparative lens.

Building upon the knowledge base on desistance discussed in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework of this study. Critically analysing the key

explanations for desistance, this chapter gradually makes the case for the relevance of an integrated model generally, but also specifically for comparative research. Indeed, Farrall and colleagues' (2011) model is particularly helpful when exploring the roles of social structures in different national contexts. The chapter concludes with reflections on the ontological stance of the study.

Chapter 4 provides a comparison of English and French societies, in anticipation of the analyses presented in the main thesis. It presents the two countries' social, economic, cultural, political, and criminal justice contexts, through selected information, relevant to the typical populations researched. In order to gain deeper understanding of the social context of each country, the chapter analyses data from the European Social Survey, comparing notions of universalism, conformity, tradition, and social relationships in each country. The chapter concludes by comparing public opinions on crime, justice, and rehabilitation matters, which contribute to establishing the societal context in which desistance takes place.

Following this, Chapter 5 focuses on comparisons of relevant criminal justice topics. This chapter shows that England and France share common issues, including those of overcrowded prisons and punitive turns. The use of non-custodial sentences is compared, along with strategies for preventing reoffending. The probation services in each country are described and contrasted in terms of their emergence and characteristics. Particular attention is paid to the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme implemented by the UK government in 2015 and what it means to probation delivery.

Chapter 6 presents the methodology of research used in this chapter. After overviewing the research questions and aims, the epistemology and research design are exposed. Reflections about the operationalisation of desistance are explained, before detailing the recruitment and sampling processes. Like for most qualitative research, there are certain ethical considerations that are important to reveal. The interviewing process is also explained, along with linguistic

considerations. The chapter ends with an exploration of the sample and the method of analysing data.

Chapter 7 further develops insights on characteristics of participants by comparing narratives of offending. I delve into how the participants recalled and explained the start of their offending and their various barriers to desistance. Chapter 8 further provides an analysis of the emotional considerations that have emerged from the narratives. I explore and compare the reasons provided for desisting and the reasoning behind desires for change. Chapter 9 explores the support systems that participants engaged with, providing insight into the types of concerns desisters typically faced. Initial information is provided on desisters' social networks and the sources of support they benefit from. Chapter 10 zooms in on participants' experiences of probation as well as the understandings and meanings they attribute to being subject to mandatory supervision. This chapter continues on the support that desisters engaged with, with particular focus on the type of help provided by their probation officers. Pains of serving punishment in the community are also compared. Chapter 11 compares the geographic spaces occupied by English and French desisters as well as the work and occupations they typically engaged with. This chapter is presented last, as it provides an illustration of what desistance 'looks' like in each country, which is best read with the knowledge of the findings emerging from the previous analytic chapters. The thesis ends with a discussion chapter where I sum up the findings, interpret them and consider their implications.

Chapter 2 – Desistance Research: A Case for Comparative Studies

In this chapter, the present study is located within the existing scholarship, and I explain the gap in the literature which it addresses. Key findings regarding social factors associated with desistance are explored. Research shining a light on dynamics of identity and cognition in behavioural change is then presented. I overview the knowledge on the role of probation in desistance processes. Afterwards, I discuss the essential aspect of considering personal characteristics and social environment in researching desistance. The focus is then shifted to existing comparative research on desistance. Existing cross-national and cross-cultural comparative research are presented. The chapter concludes by justifying and defending cross-national comparisons of desistance, underlining the gap in the literature in discerning how structural and social context shapes individual pathways out of crime. The argument put forward here is that comparative research is valuable to better understand the specificities of desistance processes according to groups of people with different characteristics, experiences, backgrounds, and circumstances.

2.1. Social Factors Associated with Desistance

Academic research on desistance stems from developmental studies and life-course criminology which took an interest in changes and persistence in individuals' offending behaviour over time. Longitudinal studies allowed us to analyse changes within individual lives and associate certain factors with desistance from crime. In the book *Crime in the Making*, Sampson and Laub (1993) offered a developmental approach to studying offending behaviour. The longitudinal aspect of their study allowed them to gain insight into the relationship between certain life events and changes in offending behaviour. From this study,

Sampson and Laub (1993) formulated a Theory of Informal Social Control (see Chapter 3) which explains changes in offending behaviour through changes in the strength of individuals' bonds with society. The authors demonstrated how certain 'turning points' can act upon criminogenic environments. 'Turning points' refer to changes in people's lives that spark behavioural change (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Sampson and Laub identified exogenous factors associated with 'turning points' in people's lives that shape desistance processes, which particularly come about in the transition to adulthood.

These include securing stable employment, getting married and other significant life events which provide positive social bonds. These newly acquired social bonds act as catalyst to processes of desistance, as individuals get invested in these pro-social roles. In other words, changes in adult behaviour are influenced by the changing strength of adult social bonds. Laub and Sampson (2003) have shown that turning points can bring about change by providing routine, structure, social support, and allowing for identity transformation towards the adoption of pro-social roles. These changes can occur gradually, or more rapidly, by having a 'knifing off' effect on offending. 'Knifing off' refers to individuals significantly and abruptly distancing themselves from elements, people or spaces that led to offending (Maruna and Roy, 2007).

2.1.1. Employment

Securing employment is often cited as a significant turning point in offenders' lives, strengthening their bonds with society and supporting efforts of desistance (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Employment can therefore be seen as a form of informal social control, since valued social bonds are created and maintained, encouraging behaviours that would sustain these bonds and thus deter offending (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Employment typically provides a pro-social identity, which people can use to facilitate their desistance (Giordano et al, 2002). Sampson and Laub (1993) found that stable employment in early adulthood reduced the

likelihood of subsequent offending in the mid-twenties to early thirties. That being said, the causal relationship between employment and desistance from crime can be questioned. Efforts for desistance may predate the start of employment, which could be a normative result of ageing into adulthood. Employment could encourage existing processes of desistance rather than spark them (Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2014).

Persistent offenders are unlikely to adopt pro-social identities or roles that are generally associated with adult status (Moffitt, 1993), meaning that employment is most likely to affect desistance if processes of change have already started. In other words, motivation to stop offending is also important for strengthened social bonds to lead to desistance. Similarly, van der Geest and colleagues (2011) found in their study of young offenders having been released from juvenile facilities in the Netherlands, that offending was reduced more or less strongly during periods of employment according to the quality of employment (quality here being related to the manner in which employment was gained).

Life events and turning points have varying impacts on people and affect offenders in different manners according to their circumstances. Employment (and other life events) can be shaped by – but not necessarily caused by desistance. Skardhamar and Savolainen's (2014) research suggested that securing employment comes as a consequence of desistance, after people stopped offending. Uggen (2000) found that employment acts as a turning point for men older than 26 years but not for those who are younger. A decline in offending behaviour thus tends to occur after a certain age, following involvement in conventional adult social roles, providing conformity and routine away from delinquency. Giordano and colleagues' (2002) study has found no link between employment and offending rates in either men or women. This challenges the extent to which conformity and social norms are linked with desistance from crime.

The importance of employment (and other informal social institutions) is therefore not limited to *when* people stop offending but includes the nature and quality of employment and how it interacts with people's self-perceptions, emotions, and relational concerns (Weaver, 2016). This suggests that people's relationships with employment will vary according to factors pertaining to social context and individual circumstances. In other words, the impact of social factors on offending behaviour is dependent upon individuals' circumstances, backgrounds, and social realities. The sole strength of the social bond with employment is therefore insufficient in understanding its role upon change, and the context surrounding employment, offending and desistance is to be considered.

2.1.2. Marriage

Much like employment, marriage is considered as a significant potential turning point in desistance. The role of marriage in desistance has been thoroughly researched (Craig and Foster, 2013; van Schellen et al, 2011; Bersani et al, 2009; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Farrington and West, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1993), with findings broadly suggesting a positive relationship.

In their analysis of the Gluecks' data, Laub and colleagues (1998) found that a 'good marriage' had a cumulative positive relationship with a decline in offending behaviour. This means that the nature of the spousal relationship over time influences desistance rather than the marriage itself. Similarly, Farrington and West (1995) found that offending behaviour tended to decline more following marriage compared to remaining single. They challenged a causal relationship between marriage and desistance, acknowledging that behavioural changes could be facilitated by factors accompanying marriage rather than the marriage event itself. For instance, marriage may lead to a decline in association with offending peers, it may restructure routine activities, and spouses may provide a source of informal social control (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Warr, 2002). Theobald and

Farrington's (2009) research produced similar findings. They suggest that for younger offenders, marriage might have a 'knifing off' effect on unconventional and offending behaviour whereas older offenders might have more difficulties to modify their social environment and habits linked to offending. The men in their sample who married late were more likely to have committed less serious offences, but for a longer period of time, thus being less open to change and 'knifing off' being more drastic and difficult to achieve.

The significance of marriage varies across societies, meaning that getting married will have different consequences on offending behaviour accordingly. This is evidenced by certain studies – that, unlike aforementioned ones, were not based in Anglophone countries – finding no link between marriage and desistance. For instance, Lyngstad and Skardhamar's (2013) longitudinal study based in Norway found no evidence of marriage having an effect on offending behaviour. Another study based in the Netherlands, provided nuance to aforementioned findings, by analysing the role of offending history on transitions to marriage (van Schellen et al, 2012). The seriousness of offending history was found to be linked with the likelihood of marriage, in that more offences committed led to fewer chances of having a spouse. People with significant offending history were also more likely to marry someone involved in offending. Considering these results, the universality of the link between marriage and desistance across social contexts is to be challenged.

These findings also indicate that characteristics associated with the likelihood of marriage are linked with the likelihood of desistance, and that the relationship between marriage and behavioural change is not as straightforward as it could seem. The societal norms surrounding marriage may also have bearing on its impact on changes in offending behaviours, which could explain these varying results. Changed collective understandings of marriage may also lead to different impacts upon desistance. Savolainen's (2009) research supports this, proposing

an application of the Theory of Informal Social Control in a different national context. His study, based in Finland, found that compared to marriage, cohabitation had greater associations with decline in offending behaviour. Marriage having different significance to different groups of people means it will affect processes of desistance in different manners.

Another example is found in the research conducted by Bersani and colleagues (2009) into the relationship between marriage and offending in Dutch men and women. They found that marriage reduced offending across gender but had a stronger effect on men than on women. This may be explained by Sampson and colleagues' (2006) suggestion that because of men's greater involvement in offending compared to women, they are more likely to marry 'up' than women (Bersani et al, 2009). This further supports the idea that understanding the societal context of turning points is necessary beyond simply acknowledging the potential for change of the life event.

2.1.3. Parenthood

A number of studies have suggested that the experience of becoming a parent is also associated with desistance (see for example, Sampson and Laub, 1993; Leibrich, 1993). Interestingly, having a child is more or less influential in processes of desistance according to different studies: Giordano and colleagues (2002) found that motherhood, for instance, was not inevitably linked to desistance, even though having children was often identified in their data. Savolainen (2009) found that having a child reduced the likelihood of reoffending, and that there was a cumulative effect of cohabitation and parenthood on desistance. In comparison, Kreager and colleagues (2010) identified motherhood more so than marriage, as the primary turning point for change towards desistance in disadvantaged communities.

A reason for such different findings may lie in the vastly different demographics of the samples used in studies linking parenthood and marriage to desistance from

crime. The significance and common assumptions on marriage and parenthood to one's life differ both over time and according to societal specificities. This means that the importance of getting married and becoming parents will differ according to context. Societal developments have led to other life events – such as cohabitation – becoming more significant and replacing marriage, for instance, as a normative expectation. What is more, the wide availability of contraceptives led to parenthood becoming increasingly controlled and planned for. This type of societal changes may indicate that in different settings, parenthood, relationships and, broadly speaking, standard life objectives have varying impact on people's motivations and opportunities to stop offending.

2.1.4. Education

Less considered in the desistance literature, education is an interesting factor to explore. Educational attainment is typically conceptualised in criminological research in terms of crime prevention (Machin et al, 2011). Although dropping out of school has not been found to be a cause of offending, it is symptomatic of gradual disengagement from school (Sweeten et al, 2009). Rather, long, difficult histories with school, poor performances and antisocial behaviours were found to account for offending in people who dropped out. The social benefits of education have been found to prevent the onset of offending behaviour, so efforts are typically made for children to stay in school and complete their education (Taheri and Welsh, 2016). This is illustrated by Machin and colleagues' (2011) research that compared crime rates of cohorts that were, and were not, affected by a policy that increased the school leaving age. They found a significant difference in rates of property crimes, which was lower in the cohort that had additional time in school. The extra time in education had a clear impact upon the decrease in offending, demonstrating the social benefits of educational attainment. What is more, dropping out of school is the result of complex processes involving

disengagement, which could be alleviated by certain social benefits of remaining in education.

In terms of impacts on desistance from crime, very little is known on the role of education. Abeling-Judge (2019) conducted a study based in the USA, exploring the impact of educational attainment upon desistance, by analysing data from a longitudinal survey from the 1990s. He found that offenders who re-enrolled into education were less likely to reoffend than those who did not. The results suggest that following re-enrolment, commitment to education led to longer-term opportunities for change. This study indicates value in return to education for people who had dropped out of school, and also highlights the role of human agency in desistance with the decision to return to formal education, which hints at desires for stability and conformity. The return to education is part of a process of change, meaning that it is a step towards desistance rather than an element that would spark the desire to stop offending. Abeling-Judge (2019: 547) concluded:

“Going back to formal education pursuits is reflective of a broader behavioural transition. This may not initiate the desistance process for stopped-out offenders [offenders who dropped out], but is a contributing influence to intensify the reduction in frequency and severity of offending”.

There is therefore room for more research into education, desistance and the role of re-enrolling in processes of change. Abeling-Judge’s (2019) research shines a light on the importance of education in desistance transitions, but little is known on the motivations and circumstances that would encourage offenders to direct efforts into education.

Sampson and Laub’s contribution to the knowledge on desistance processes is therefore crucial for the consideration of social factors and turning points in individual change. Nevertheless, there needs to be thorough consideration of the

context in which turning points occur to grasp processes of change rigorously and accurately. Carlsson (2012: 5) eloquently summed this up:

“In understanding the meaning of something - the employment, military service, marriage, the residential change, etc. - we must to a greater extent study and understand it in the context of the surrounding processes of which it must necessarily be part, and see how it is through these that the turning point emerges and how change is made possible”

2.1.5. Social Contexts

Findings about the social factors mentioned above suggest that broader social contextual elements have important roles in shaping processes of desistance. Bottoms and colleagues' (2004; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011) research considered social circumstances, context, and individual transformations within desistance. Their Sheffield Desistance Study is a longitudinal research exploring trajectories of change. Their aim was to get a fuller understanding of processes of desistance in young adulthood. This study emphasised the importance of including social context in considering changes in offending behaviour (Bottoms et al, 2004). The key predictors of desistance they identified from their study are offending history and aspects of current circumstances (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011).

The researchers highlighted certain factors of change pertaining to individuals' personal circumstances and how these interact with notions of self-perceptions and identity. For instance, they found that empathy and perceptions of possible achievements were related to views about future offending. In a similar vein to Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) concept of 'future selves' (see Chapter 3), this study found that perceptions of *current* personal circumstances were linked to *future* prospects envisaged in terms of desistance or persistence. Bottoms and Shapland (2011) underlined the idea that desistance entails negotiations for changes to occur, which interact with people's social context and perspectives of

their future. Compared to the previously discussed explanations of Sampson and Laub focusing on social bonds, Bottoms and Shapland also accounted for ‘background predictors’ in understanding behavioural change. Individuals’ personal historical context was highlighted *as well as* social context and perceptions of future opportunities in processes of desistance.

Bottoms and Shapland (2011) also found a series of commonly perceived obstacles to desistance. These obstacles link back to the social issues associated with desistance, and include employment, issues related to money, and ‘drug problems’. They found that emotional ‘pulls’ towards desistance hindered change. They also highlighted the role of the situational and contextual nature of offending, which may lead to reoffending despite intentions to desist. Social pressures, excitement or the need for money can contribute to reoffending even when there are desires for changes in lifestyle. Influences of offending peers can also constitute a push factor towards reoffending, hindering efforts to desist. Beyond offending peers, general social attitudes of non-offending people in civil society can have a stigmatising effect on people with convictions, hindering their involvement in the professional sphere (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; Farrall et al, 2011; Farrall, 2005). Laws, policies, and social attitudes can also consist in obstacles to desistance (Savolainen, 2009), especially when it comes to securing employment (Kurtovic and Rovira, 2016).

Other studies emphasising the role of social context in offending and desistance are those that explore residential moves. In particular, long-distance moves have been associated with reduced reoffending and arrests (Vogel et al, 2017; Kirk, 2012; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Osborn, 1980). What is more, residential moves are central in transitions from adolescence to adulthood, notably with new jobs or relationships (Geist and McManus, 2008). Widdowson and Siennick (2021) analysed the effects of residential moves during this transition to adulthood. They found that residential moves reduced the likelihood of reoffending, particularly

within-county moves (the study was based in the USA). They concluded that long-distance moves could consist in turning points in offending behaviour. The decrease in offending behaviour that accompanied residential moves tended to occur immediately and was found to be lasting. This echoes the ‘knifing off’ type of desistance found in certain pathways of change (Maruna and Roy, 2007). The authors’ analysis indicates that these findings are independent of marriage or employment, which are typically the main influences associated with desistance. This suggests that residential moves could be considered as a causal factor of desistance processes.

2.2. Identity and Cognition

Investigations into the subjective layers of desistance from crime have provided fresh insight on processes of change. The Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) explored changes in offending behaviour through narratives of both persistent offenders and desisters (Maruna, 2001). Taking a step beyond considerations of turning points and causal explanations, this study explored perceptions of change – how people conceive desistance. Unlike other studies mentioned, this research did not aim to explain *why* or *how* people stop offending, but what it meant for people to stop, or have stopped offending. This exploratory research investigated perceptions and understandings of people’s personal and social worlds. Desistance and offending were analysed with insight *from* the individual and significant weight was given to exploring the role of identity and human agency.

Differences were found, in ‘scripts’ or patterns of self-reflexion and how people tell their stories, according to their self-asserted status as desister or persistent offender. These correspond to different ways in which people make sense of their stories to account for their current situations regarding offending and change. People who continued to be involved in offending were found to have internalised a ‘condemnation script’ expressing feelings of being stuck, stranded, and doomed, lacking a capacity for internal conversation. They tended to point at external

factors, out of their control to explain their continued offending, and demonstrated distinctive ‘sense-making’ processes compared to desisters. Obstacles to change were considered as overwhelming and insurmountable, explaining their inability to desist.

In contrast, people who have desisted were found to have formed a coherent life story through a ‘redemption script’. Through a redemption script, desisters made sense of their past offending to explain their current situations, resolving any dissonance from a continuity in offending. Former offenders demonstrated a ‘language of agency’, self-reflexion through contemplation of their actions and behaviours. Desisters perceived change in their offending behaviour as a result of them overcoming structural obstacles and disadvantaged situations. Past offences were seen as necessary in order to shape the present pro-social identity they take on. Desisters took control and responsibility regarding their future and recognised self-determination when it came to their behaviour (Maruna, 2001).

Giordano and colleagues (2002) also researched internal mechanisms of desistance in their Ohio Life-Course Study. The authors found in the narratives they gathered, patterns of ‘cognitive shifts’ in explanations of behavioural change. Drawing from this, they formulated a Theory of Cognitive Transformation (see Chapter 3). Acknowledging the role of social factors of desistance, they highlighted internal dynamics interacting with external influences. The role of motivation, or ‘openness to change’ was underlined in processes of desistance. The ways in which people reacted to opportunities was also found to be essential in comprehending processes of change. Beyond this, the availability of and exposure to opportunities for change were found to trump motivation to desist.

This study also found some differences, but mostly similarities between men and women’s trajectories of change. Giordano and colleagues found that while there was an overlap in the language used by men and women the two groups had different psychosocial processes involved in their offending trajectories: women

were more likely to look for ‘hooks for change’, elements that would support their desistance, whereas men seemed more susceptible to succumb to the control of structural factors, thus requiring favourable circumstances to desist. The explanation for this is also suggested from a social perspective, that women are more likely to be stigmatised for their deviancy, creating strain and a factor encouraging a break with deviancy, towards the adoption of traditional roles of social conformity such as ‘mother’ or ‘wife’ (Giordano et al, 2002).

The findings discussed here suggest an interplay between structural factors and agency, and how desistance can entail changes in self-perception and perceptions of people’s social world. These studies highlight the importance of including how change is experienced and what it means to people in the context of their lives, acknowledging that crime, punishment, and rehabilitation are only *part* of their realities. Studies into identity and cognition are therefore noteworthy because of their considerations of the subjective aspects of desistance and insight provided into the several facets of internal mechanisms of change. There is more discussion on explanations of internal mechanisms of desistance in the next chapter. The following part of this chapter explores key studies into the role of probation in facilitating desistance.

2.3. The Role of Probation

Rex’s (1999) study into desistance in probation was one of the first to have given insight into experiences of supervision and how these fit into processes of change. The perceived commitment of the probation officer, a sense of care, concern and dedication for the probationers’ welfare were found to be crucial in compliance to supervision. For some, being supervised on probation was enough of a deterrent from reoffending. For others, Rex suggested that in order to facilitate desistance, the probation officer could encourage their probationer to be actively pro-social and to provide direct support regarding social issues. The relationship between probationer and probation officer is thus important in the delivery of

probation and potential behavioural change. The importance of the relational aspect of probation supervision is a common finding among studies of probation and desistance (McNeill and Robinson, 2012; McNeill, 2006; McCulloch, 2005; Burnett, 2004; Leibrich, 1993) Probationers perceived probation as rehabilitative (see also McCulloch, 2005), valuing guidance and advice to address and resolve their social problems (Farrall, 2002; Rex, 1999).

An essential study informing us on the role of probation in desistance, is Farrall and colleagues' (2014; 2006; 2002) Tracking Project. The researchers started this longitudinal study in 1996, with the aim to uncover what helped people to stop offending, in the context of probation supervision. The study analysed both the roles of social structures and human agency in processes of desistance. With time and new sweeps of interviews, the scope of the study went beyond the role of probation supervision to include matters of victimisation, spatial dynamics, citizenship, and imprisonment. The key finding of this project, however, lies in the role of probation supervision regarding individual trajectories out of crime. In the earlier sweeps, only a few participants reported that supervision had helped them in desisting (Farrall, 2002). With time, an increasing number of participants credited probation supervision as a positive influence in their desistance journeys (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Farrall et al, 2014). What this means is that probation supervision provides individuals with tools to support change, which are not necessarily immediately useful, but selectively used when the circumstances for desistance allow for it.

This project is particularly important in the scope of this chapter because the model for desistance shaped by its findings grounds the theoretical framework adopted in the current study. It is particularly useful for contextualising desistance, not only through structure, agency, emotions, and relationships, but also time and space, which provides a more tangible perspective to the obstacles and minutiae that people face during processes of desistance. The picture of

desistance drawn by theory is comprehensive and covers relevant spheres impacting processes of change. More discussion on Farrall and colleagues' (2011) integrated model of desistance is to be found in the following chapter.

Another key study into the relationship between probation practice and processes of desistance is King's (2014) research. His findings demonstrated that probation has the potential to facilitate desistance by working on enhancing individual agency, instilling relevant skills, and constructing strategies for change. That being said, assistance from probation officers in providing problem solving and practical support was found to be limited. A strength of this research is its consideration for the political and policy contexts in which probation is delivered and desistance occurs. The political and policy contexts are found to shape the delivery of probation, which in turn impacts on desistance pathways in a specific manner. In continuation, different institutional contexts could potentially lead to a variety of desistance processes. This thesis addresses this questioning by exploring desistance in different national, institutional, criminal justice contexts. The following part of this chapter will continue to demonstrate the variety of ways in which people stop offending, according to context.

2.4. Other Developments in Desistance Research

2.4.1. Personal Characteristics

As well as the key studies mentioned previously, more recent desistance research has sharpened our understandings of different ways in which people stop offending. These have explored specificities of change according to the type of offence, for instance, desistance from drug use (van Roeyen et al, 2016), drug trafficking (Campbell and Hansen, 2012), white-collar offending (Hunter, 2015), from sex offending (Thompson et al, 2017; Laws and Ward, 2011) or gang membership (Pyrooz and Decker, 2011). Desistance pathways have been explored in different national settings including France (Benazeth, 2021), Chile (Villagra, 2019), Ireland (Healy, 2019), Sweden (Österman, 2018), Scotland (McCulloch,

2005), Japan (Barry, 2017), Israel (Segev, 2020), Belgium (Claes and Shapland, 2016) and others. Differences according to personal attributes also uncovered the variety of pathways out of crime: women's experiences (Gålnander, 2019; Rodermond et al, 2016; McIvor et al, 2009; Giordano et al, 2002), desistance of young people (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). Consequently, more is known on how processes of desistance are experienced according to specific personal and social characteristics.

Developments in desistance research have highlighted how different personal and social characteristics influence the ways in which individuals stop offending. To illustrate this, religion is a good example as it blends the personal, intimate realm with social, communitarian aspects. The role of religion in processes of desistance is a relatively underexplored subject. Religion was found to have the potential to support positive change through pro-social roles, networks, and activities (Jang and Johnson, 2017; Calverley, 2013). The social context of religion can potentially contribute to structuring pathways of change. For instance, Muslim former prisoners are found to face distinct issues in resettlement compared to non-Muslim former prisoners (Marranci, 2009). Religion also has the potential to provide a 'cognitive blueprint' with which to act out behavioural change (Giordano et al, 2007).

In the French context, Mohammed (2019) analysed the relationship between religion and desistance within a wider project exploring criminal careers. The specificity of the potential of religion as a driver of change is explained by its relatively effortless and accessible aspects. A route out of crime through religion entails morals which are non-negotiable, unquestionable, and absolute. This is contrasted with familial or societal morals which are challenged and subject to change. Another specificity of religion as the main driver of change is its unconditional aspect. The influence of religion, unlike that of employment or relationship, for instance, is not dependent on the availability of relevant

resources. In sum, desistance via religion provides opportunities for change that is “accessible, immediate and honourable” (2019: 60).

Mohammed highlighted the variety in spiritual pathways out of crime. Some pathways were entirely shaped by religion, while for others, faith was one motivation, among others. He found that the use of faith towards efforts for desistance was more likely if religiosity predated change. This means that people who were religious before desisting had greater ease in mobilising their faith towards change. He also found that those who were not religious prior to desisting, and converted, gave greater importance to spirituality. The author identified a pattern whereby people expressed that their offending behaviour was in contradiction with their faith, and that they were seeking appeasement and redemption (Mohammed, 2009). This echoes the findings of Maruna (2001) identifying ‘redemption scripts’ in narratives of desisters.

Acknowledging that influences of religion upon processes of change occur within wider structural circumstances, Mohammed distinguishes pathways of desistance led by romantic relationship, those facilitated by employment and other trajectories. Change led by religion, in contrast, does not have pre-requirements like skills for employment or a social network for relationships. While this may be useful to understand the particular influences of religion, the consideration of desistance as being clearly led by one motivator, such as a romantic partner, employment or religion, is to be challenged. Individuals whose trajectories out of crime are impacted by their faith are also subject to their social networks, relationships, and employment problematics, which will have varying degrees of influence upon change. As Mohammed’s study demonstrates, desistance for some is solely motivated by faith, however, the variety of trajectories out of crime does not mean each is defined by a single characteristic. Nevertheless, this research shines a light on specific ways in which a personal characteristic can, in part, shape desistance.

2.4.2. Social Networks and Situational Context

A consistent finding in the literature is that desistance is a fundamentally *social* process. Changes in social network and distance from criminogenic settings are associated with desistance (Best et al, 2018; Farrall, 2002). What is more, continuous association with delinquent peers was found to have a negative impact on desistance processes (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; Warr, 1998). Notions of peer pressure and being influenceable are recurrent in narratives of desisters (Segev, 2020; Giordano et al, 2003). While desistance entails internal changes and cognitive transformations, it occurs within a given social context, and is subject to social factors, as was argued throughout this chapter.

Weaver and McNeill's (2015) study of interrelated narratives of a friendship group of ex-offenders in their 40s has presented processes of desistance through individual, relational, and structural components. This study explored life stories of six individuals from the same friendship group, who had offended together in their youth and early adulthood. Their results emphasise the importance of relationality in explaining deviant trajectories through interactions. This research has linked processes of desistance with friendships, but also intimate relationships, employment, relocation, parenthood, and religion (Weaver and McNeill, 2015; see also Weaver, 2016).

The findings of this study suggest the significance of social relations within this group to understand individual change in offending behaviour: for some, desistance was not a goal in itself, but a tool for maintaining these friendships, or reciprocal social relations, as they evolve over time. Desistance was, for some, achieved "as a means to realizing and maintaining the men's individual and relational concerns" (2015:104). Some members of the friendship group have relocated, both in order to escape violence and to live in an environment with more opportunities for them to achieve their goals of employment. These findings echo the notion that desistance is likely to occur when pro-social relations are

strengthened (Sampson and Laub, 1993). In order to retain and protect social relations and feelings of shared reciprocity within the friendship group, the men stopped offending and took on roles and identities outside of crime.

The role of situational context was also developed in the Tracking Project. Farrall and colleagues (2014) found that the extent of desistance or persistence was linked with the places participants were spending time in, and people they were spending time with: “where they were informed our interviewees about ‘who’ they were” (2014: 281). People who wish to stop offending may actively avoid certain spaces or people to maintain their desistance. This is particularly true for individuals desisting from substance abuse. Indeed, those who have desisted from drug use tend to take steps in ‘giving back’ and helping others who are going through similar journeys, as a ‘wounded healer’ would (Maruna, 2001). In contrast, people with non-drug related offending tend to explain their desistance as influenced by the ‘right’ partner, job or becoming parents (Farrall et al, 2014). This group recalled less intentional self-change “undertaken for their reformatory potential” (2014: 280) but rather desistance driven by social and personal influences.

Through this research, Farrall and colleagues also demonstrated the role of social-structural influences in shaping offending trajectories. For instance, the collectively accepted norms on parenting and fatherhood may change over time, influencing processes of change. Moreover, the findings suggest that the *availability* of pro-social identities, roles away from offending, have an impact on processes of change. King (2014) also found that people’s priorities changed according to perceptions of the availability of pro-social roles, which influences the potential impact of projections of future selves (see Chapter 3). Findings from the Tracking Project suggest that these factors and influences interact with each other: past and present circumstances, agency, social context and structures, policy, all contribute to shaping pathways out of crime. In other words, change in

offending behaviour entails constant interactions between these factors and influences.

This chapter has so far demonstrated, through a review of relevant empirical research, the importance of structural factors, social and personal characteristics as well as identity and cognition, in processes of desistance. Research has increasingly explored how pathways of desistance differ according to personal characteristics including, for instance age, gender, type of offence typically committed, religion, and according to social context, including relationships, social norms, or situational context. This thesis is inscribed in this growing interest for exploring specificities of how processes of desistance are experienced and different structural factors impacting change. The rest of this chapter argues for cross-national comparative research on desistance.

2.5. Comparative Research

While there have been an increasing number of empirical studies exploring processes of desistance from crime in various contexts, only a few of these studies have been comparative. Research on desistance has emerged from considering offending behaviour in the life course, having evolved to qualitative methods of inquiry and to a focus on agentic patterns of change. These various studies provided thorough understanding of how and why people stop offending, considering agency and structure in interaction. However,

“there has been far less enquiry into the potential impact of social-structural differences – in different countries or different decades – on opportunities for and processes of desistance” (Farrall et al, 2010: 547).

Considering processes of desistance in different settings allows us to discern *how* broad social contexts may impact social conditions and pathways for individual change. Comparison of desistance processes in different countries therefore has value in providing insight into the potential impact of social structure on

trajectories out of crime and the interplay between structure and agency in processes of change. Knowing from the literature how and why people stop offending, cross-national comparative research produces knowledge on how context shapes distinct pathways of desistance.

2.5.1. The Relevance of Context in Analysing Desistance

The importance of the historical context has been mentioned by Giordano and colleagues (2002) in comparing their findings with those of Sampson and Laub, whose sample was taken from the Gluecks' research from the 1930s. This data reflects a context previous to World War II when gender differences in roles and traditions were more differentiated than they are today. Giordano and colleagues conducted their research in the 1980s and 1990s. They specified:

“the respondents in our sample matured into adulthood during a time when both women and men were less constrained by tradition and faced less favourable economic prospects” (2002: 1054).

Therefore, in looking at the societal context in which the research took place, we can understand why women seem to demonstrate more agency in desisting towards traditional roles, and why men transition out of criminality according to societal pressures they may face, in this particular context. What is more, individual agency is dependent on, and conditioned by, the social context framing processes of change, so it is essential to consider relevant parameters of the environment in which people stop offending.

Examining historical data can shine a light on the shifting nature of certain societal norms which would impact changes in offending behaviour. In a study exploring criminal trajectories of people in the town of Crewe, in England from 1880 to 1940, Farrall and colleagues (2009) demonstrated the importance of the cultural and historical context in studying social phenomena. Some of their findings were in line with contemporary analyses of desistance from crime, regarding the

influence of employment in levels of offending behaviour: for most case studies, leaving employment was a factor in an increase of criminal behaviour.

Nevertheless, a surprising finding was the increase in offending behaviour with the beginning of employment. This was explained by analysing the types of offence committed: a culture of alcohol associated with this professional setting meant that employment in this particular time and place was a factor in sparking a specific type of offense. On the one hand, employment is an agent of informal social control, in that it prevents certain offenses, as it can be deduced by the increase of deviancy on leaving a job. On the other hand, because of a specific culture and societal context, which means a set of cultural norms and standards, deviancy can emerge as a result of employment. This study has effectively shown the importance of context – historical, cultural, and social – in determining the dynamics of criminal trajectories.

However, it should be noted that while offending behaviour here has been studied with consideration to societal norms and whether a certain behaviour is accepted or not, it can be argued that certain types of delinquent behaviour, while illegal, remain in the realm of acceptable conduct. This is why specifying the historical, cultural, and social context is important: to understand how desistance from offending behaviour can be examined, considered, and studied, as a social process, truly impacted by dynamics of a given environment, on various levels. Comparative work on desistance between different settings is therefore helpful in grasping the societal dynamics interfering with changes in individual behaviour.

2.5.2. Cross-cultural and Cross-national Comparisons

There are only a few empirical studies on desistance from crime with a cross-cultural or cross-national perspective. Studies comparing experiences according to cultural background within one setting provide valuable information on how informal support systems can improve to facilitate desistance. To start with, Finestone (1967) compared post-release experiences of Polish and Italian first-

generation immigrants in the USA. His research demonstrates the various cultural layers to consider when examining individual pathways. His work considered what it means to be an Italian or Polish immigrant in that context, and how this affects individual trajectories of criminality. Setting the context surrounding the participant is important because of the specific social and political context of the USA at that time; the dynamics of being an immigrant in this context and more specifically of being an Italian or Polish immigrant.

Finestone found that Italian post-release offenders were more likely than Polish ones to be accepted back into their family, including with their extended family, thanks to shared values of familial solidarity. In contrast, when Polish former prisoners were accepted back into their family, this was more likely to be with relationships they would have maintained when incarcerated, with the example of a parent, or a married sibling who would welcome them in their own family. Moreover, Polish men were more likely to be subjected to shame and stigma from their families, compared to the Italian ones, whose return from prison would be celebrated, and their criminality viewed as a part of growing up. Italian prisoners, upon their release had more opportunities to find employment, accommodation, and opportunities in general, including illicit ones, due to their network. Polish prisoners being released from prison did not have access to such networks and rehabilitation was more associated with the notion of redemption.

Finestone's study emphasised reintegration into society, specifically within the family and the community, through notions of forgiveness, support, and human capital. While they were able to study the stories of post-prison release, reintegration into communities and avoiding reoffending, little attention is given to individual will for change. Participants' lives in this study were shaped by their cultural backgrounds and their trajectories of offending were shaped by cultural expectations, meaning that there is little consideration for self-reflexivity and human agency in Finestone's analysis.

This is precisely what Calverley's (2013) study addressed. His study explored desistance processes of ethnic minorities in England. Similarly to Finestone's work, it provides a comparison of how different cultures in the same location can engender different environments, identities, and opportunities for people to desist towards. Calverley's sample included people from Indian, Bangladeshi, and Black and mixed ethnic backgrounds, who were inscribed in a path of desistance. His findings highlighted the variety of pathways of desistance, each group having a different set of norms, values and strategies driving change. Desistance was found to be dependent on and shaped by cultural ties establishing social context and opportunities for change.

Calverley found that Indian families gave significant importance to their image and reputation, leading to the creation of 'counter-factual' narratives to explain time away during incarceration. These families, most often middle-class, provided social and economic opportunities to desisters who demonstrated agency and determination as a result of the awareness of these options. Similarly, the role of the family was central to desistance in Bangladeshi people, who, while they were more likely to be of more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, were able to instil hope through sparking awareness of the availability of opportunities outside of crime. Religion was important in desistance for Bangladeshi people as it provided an identity, a belief system, and a set of values to transition to, which were shared with their family. In contrast, family played a less important role in the journeys of people of Black and mixed ethnicity as they were more likely to invest in themselves and imply strategies of self-improvement.

Calverley focused particularly on the influence, impact, and involvement of each community to suggest that a thorough understanding of people's social context can contribute to the use of tailored practice, for offender management programmes, probation and any work geared towards assisting desistance. The comparative aspect brought to light the structural component of desistance

according to ethnicity. Calverley (2013: 189) specified that future research on desistance “require[s] consideration of why some communities may be better at fostering desistance than others”, and encouraged further comparative research on the topic, considering the location where desistance takes place.

Studies that compare experiences of desistance in different settings allow us to understand how the interplay between structures and personal, social circumstances impact desistance processes, and to uncover how different societies manage offenders, and make sense of desistance and rehabilitation. Claes and Shapland’s (2016) comparative research into the use of restorative justice in prisons in England and Belgium demonstrates how institutional settings can shape individual experiences. Another example is Barry and colleagues’ (2017) comparative study of desistance of young offenders in Scotland and Japan. They found similar views in the two countries, despite vastly different cultures and institutions, suggesting that some experiences might have certain degree of universality. These results demonstrate the value of cross-national research in shining a light on the role of social structures, institutions, and context in processes of desistance.

Österman (2018) compared women’s experiences of desistance from crime in England and Sweden. Two dominant pathways out of crime were identified. A reactionary pathway, mostly identified in the English sample, corresponds to cases where offending behaviour began with chaotic childhoods and often repeated involvement with social services. An active pathway was mostly identified in the Swedish sample, where offending started because of attraction to risk taking, typically through drug use and with no particular issues during childhood. ‘Pathway luggage’ is conceptualised as the set of challenging and problematic factors and experiences linked with engagement in offending. The nature and volume of pathway luggage has an impact on the female desistance process, for instance, in health issues, level, or lack of education, previous

experiences and interactions with official institutions such as social services or the police. Mapping pathways into crime by providing context into the conditions of the onset of their offending allows us to better understand the behaviour participants desisted from.

Österman also found a stark contrast in access to individual support: lacking in England and occurring outside of the prison walls in Sweden, in an attempt to ease the transition out of the criminal justice system. Moreover, women in the English sample have shared negative experiences of staff-inmate relations, while the Sweden data shows positive links with the staff which builds in the prisoners an internal motivation to desist, to avoid embarrassment from staff and reduce social distance between them.

Finally, Segev's (2020) research into desistance processes in England and Israel is the most notable for the similarities with the present study in aims and design. Segev's research is another example of how valuable cross-national perspectives can be, and greatly inspired the design of this research project. The aim of her study was to explore and compare desistance narratives of former offenders to get insight into how different cultural, social, economic, and criminal justice factors interact with agency. Her findings confirm the importance of contextual factors in understanding processes of change. Differences identified in her study are underpinned by broad similarities confirming theories to a certain extent. For instance, Segev found that desistance processes in England and Israel entail heightened agency and self-determination over a crime-free future; fears of what one's life may become with persistent offending and shifts in priorities. Both English and Israeli desisters conceived further involvement with the criminal justice system as worsening their personal and social circumstances.

A notable difference found in Segev's samples is the way in which desisters perceived the source of their offending. The Israeli men explained their past offending through a psychological lens, as caused by 'unhealthy development'

and a lack of adequate cognitive and emotional abilities. In contrast, the English desisters understood their trajectories as resulting from social disadvantage, recalling offending as mistakes or childhood errors. Narratives of desistance therefore are shaped accordingly to understandings of offending: Israeli desistance implies a focus on internal change, while English desistance requires addressing criminogenic needs and adopting conforming behaviours of ‘sensible’ adults.

Differences in how criminal justice systems operate lead to different experiences with sentencing, probation, and rehabilitative support. For instance, the Israeli system considers offenders through a psychological lens, which means that rehabilitation is considered as therapy. This also leads to individuals perceiving their own offending as a psychological issue, which structures desistance pathways distinctively from the English experience. Another example of institutional specificities leading to distinctive experiences out of crime is the relatively long length of penal procedures in Israel in comparison to England.

Segev’s work also underlined the importance of social context in understanding desistance. Different characteristics of social contexts led to varying social avenues for behavioural change. Notably, Israeli desisters were found to experience less stigmatisation in comparison to English desisters. In terms of desistance processes, this is essential because of the implications upon opportunities for social change and the adoption of pro-social identities, away from offending. The author found that English desisters experienced more exclusion, particularly because of their criminal record. In sum, the main argument of Segev’s research is that social contextual factors are crucial to understanding how pathways out of crime are structured. The current thesis is inscribed in the same framework, as it seeks to explore how different national, social, cultural, economic, and criminal justice contexts shape desistance.

2.5.3. The Value of Cross-national Comparative Research

Through a discussion of existing empirical research, this chapter has demonstrated what is known on desistance from crime and made the case for comparative work. Social factors such as employment, marriage or parenthood have been found to influence pathways out of crime, to a certain extent, depending on context. Personal characteristics also have different effects on change. This chapter has shown that while a lot is known on processes of desistance, little is known on how the influence of these factors varies in different contexts. In other words, the range of studies on desistance have highlighted the different ways in which people stop offending, but there is little knowledge on how these differences come to be.

Cross-national comparative research is useful for the exploration of variations of offending and forms of social control (Karstedt, 2001). Thus, there is value in looking at how the same social phenomenon occurs in different settings and has different or similar influences. Tonry (2015: 506) sums up the value of cross-national research in three main ideas that apply to this research:

- Allowing policymakers to get insight from across borders
- Exploring the scope for importing foreign ideas
- Finding out how different policies and practices lead to particular patterns in crime and punishment.

Cross-national research in criminal justice issues has been mostly concerned with quantitative comparisons (for example, Farrington and Wikström, 1994). Nevertheless, qualitative comparative methods are valuable in enriching existing understandings of the interplay between social and individual factors in different structural settings. This is evidenced by existing studies that have compared experiences of desistance across countries (Segev, 2020; Österman, 2018; Barry, 2017), and highlighted the impact of different societal and criminal justice philosophies on individual lives. The scarcity of such research, however, reflects the challenges of cross-national comparative research.

Chapter 3 - A Theoretical Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research

This chapter seeks to engage with theories of desistance, with the aim of ultimately formulating the theoretical framework of this current study. Here, I critically explain selected theories in order to build from their strengths and limitations, the theoretical stance adopted in this study. This theory-based chapter explains the assumptions taken in this study on the social worlds in which desistance occurs. By establishing a theoretical angle, it provides the researcher's perspectives on offending behaviours and change.

In this chapter, I argue for a theoretical approach which integrates various facets of existing theories, accounting for dynamic socio-structural factors and internal mechanisms. This approach also allows us to consider the impact of characteristics of a society in a given time and the variety of pathways out of crime, which, in a cross-national comparative study, is essential. The chapter concludes by arguing that an integrated approach to studying desistance is most appropriate to analyse how different groups of people stop offending, as it accounts for a comprehensive range of influences that evolve alongside individual change and internal mechanisms.

3.1. Maturation Reform

Studies of desistance emerge from patterns observed in the life course of offenders, in that criminal behaviours seemed to peak in late adolescence and decline in their 20s (Moffitt, 1993; Shover and Thompson, 1992). The link between age and offending behaviour has been drawn from longitudinal studies, notably one which analysed the trajectories of a thousand offending and non-offending men (Glueck and Glueck, 1950). The Gluecks' study demonstrated that most offenders stop offending at some point and that there are more people who

offend in their late adolescence than during any other stage of life (Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Farrington, 1995). This result was explained by the idea that most people who do engage in offending behaviour eventually desist from it. The age-crime distribution is “one of the few facts agreed on in criminology” (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983: 552; Farrington, 1986).

From these results was developed a Maturational Reform Theory, which suggests that ageing is a significant factor in the decline of offending behaviour, that such behaviour ‘naturally’ declines with age and that people mature out of offending (Glueck and Glueck, 1950). This ‘ontogenic’ paradigm explains offending behaviour as temporary – a phase which individuals seemingly ‘grow out of’ (Maruna, 1997). Aspects of ageing such as growing feelings of tiredness, slowing down and weakened body have been associated with processes of desistance (Sparkes and Day, 2016). The Gluecks have emphasised the psychosocial and physiological maturational change and explained changes in behaviour as resulting from a ‘burn out’ from crime (Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Sparkes and Day, 2016). How people physically feel after going through cycles of offending and punishment, and lost time in prison, can amount to significant influences in terms of desistance progress (Sparkes and Day, 2016).

Taking a maturational reform approach, Moffitt (1993) proposed an explanation of the relationship between age and crime by formulating a dual taxonomy of offending. The population of offenders were distinguished between those who eventually stop offending, called the ‘adolescent-limited offenders’, and persistent offenders, also called ‘life-course’ offenders. ‘Adolescent limited’ and ‘life-course’ offenders can be respectively placed at the peak of the curve and towards the declining end of the curve. Moffitt specified the variations in types of crimes committed for both categories: younger offenders engaged in anti-social behaviours, crimes symbolising ‘adult privilege’, petty offences and ‘status’

crimes. 'Adolescent limited' offenders are rewarded by symbolic independence and a feeling of maturity from their offending behaviour. They desist from offending thanks to suitable resources and social skills. Persistent offenders tend to commit a greater variety of offences which include violence and fraud. Their desistance is said to be obstructed by inadequate social skills, amplified from childhood dysfunctions (Moffitt, 1993).

Moffitt's distinction simplifies the offending population into two groups, which under-estimates the heterogeneity of offending trajectories over time and fails to account for factors of desistance other than predispositions or propensity to offend through socialisation. 'Adolescent limited' offenders eventually desist from crime while entering adulthood as the rewarding aspect of offending decreases and they are able to attain feelings of maturity through more conventional means. Offending behaviour is perceived as a threat to new conventional lifestyles that make use of their social skills and resources. To the contrary, desistance is not envisaged for persistent offenders. Categorising offenders into two groups is inadequate, just as entire populations cannot be reasonably and accurately distinguished into one of two behavioural patterns. Individuals and their behaviours are not considered as dynamic since there is no overlap between 'adolescent-limited' and 'life-course' offenders. In other words, pathways of offending and change are considered as fixed according to which category people fit in. The limitations of Moffitt's findings reflect issues of a maturational approach, which considers offending and behavioural change as disconnected and independent from both socio-structural factors and human agency.

On its own, a maturational approach is therefore insufficient to grasp the complexity of processes of desistance. The concept of maturation is subjective, ambiguous, and ultimately inadequate to explain behavioural change. There is no consideration for the impact of criminogenic elements, and behavioural change is assumed to be passive, as people 'grow' out of offending. This approach fails to

consider both human agency and external, socio-structural factors influencing individual behavioural change. Moreover, a maturational approach considers the likelihood of offending as being fixed and fails to account for variations in types of crime, involvement with the criminal justice system and, broadly speaking, people's social environments.

3.2. Informal Social Control

Despite its limitations, the maturational perspective is still useful to consider desistance, thanks to the observation of the link between offending and age. The causal relationship between age and desistance has been challenged, giving way to considerations for other explanations. Sampson and Laub (1993) challenged the maturational approach and provided a social control perspective to understanding offending behaviour. Whilst a maturational approach focuses on factors of change being internal to the individual – namely physical condition and maturity – and universal, they took a dynamic approach and considered environmental influences on behavioural change. This means that the propensity to offend is not fixed during a life course and is subject to a variety of influences. Social control perspectives account for external factors impacting on changes in circumstances and thus on likelihood to reoffend. Changes rather than persistence in offending behaviour are hereby addressed. A social control approach underlines the role of social bonds and human relations in criminal trajectories, providing a relational approach to behavioural change.

Sampson and Laub (1993) analysed the Gluecks' data from the 1940s. Their findings suggest that childhood experiences impact adult offending, challenging the maturational reform approach. From a social control perspective, the likelihood of reoffending is lower when institutional bonds damaged in childhood are strengthened, regardless of cognitive tools acquired during youth. They also found that spaces of informal social control mediate childhood offending behaviour; that anti-social behaviour in childhood is likely to continue into

adulthood; and that changes in ties with institutions of informal social control have an impact on changes to offending behaviour. The last point is of most interest for this study.

Drawing from their results, Sampson and Laub developed the Theory of Informal Social Control (1993). This theory explains processes of desistance by focusing on the role of informal social ties, labelled 'social bonds'. This theory demonstrates the role of developmental factors associated with desistance, which correspond to pro-social roles acquired in adulthood. They found that people who desist from offending are more likely to have strong social bonds than those who persist. Marriage or employment for instance, are informal social control mechanisms, with the potential to form and strengthen social bonds and subsequently reduce offending (Horney et al, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1993). The strengthening of social bonds has the potential to "increase social capital and investment in social relations and institutions" (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 21). The development of positive social bonds subsequently can act as turning points. Sampson and Laub pointed out the criminogenic aspect of the criminal justice reliance on imprisonment, which inherently has negative consequences to positive social bonds.

Sampson and Laub (1993) suggested that external forces in the form of social bonds mentioned have a cumulative, preventative, and controlling effect on people's propensity to commit crime. This means that the accumulation of positive social bonds over time makes offending in adulthood unlikely. In terms of desistance, this means that change occurs when these social bonds are strengthened over time, providing people with interests outside of offending and gradual investment in conventionality. Arguably, this assumes that individuals are passively subject to social bonds and changes in the intensity of these. Desistance could be construed through this perspective, as drifting into a normative, conventional lifestyle. Nevertheless, individuals may also be considered as active

in their involvement with social institutions, particularly when motivated to change. This challenges the idea that turning points spark change, suggesting that strong social bonds come about as a result of accumulated investment in them. Indeed, Carlsson (2016) has found that desistance is more likely to be informed by changes in human agency rather than external turning points. Still, understanding desistance through the notion of social bonds and turning points helps us to consider behavioural change as influenced by relationality and identity.

The strength of social bonds comes from increased involvement in, and adoption of, pro-social roles that are not related to offending: professional, parental, or educational roles, for example (Loeber and Le Blanc, 1990). Social bonds therefore constitute informal social control, meaning that strong relationships, and pro-social roles act in restricting offending behaviour. People's social bonds evolve with events occurring in their lives, which can subsequently lead to a decline in offending or anti-social behaviour. While this perspective explains change in offending behaviours according to new developments in people's lives, it fails to account for individual agency and how people make sense of these changes in their lives. Nevertheless, Laub and Sampson published in 2003 *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*, which is a follow-up research conducted with 52 men from the original sample. With this new data, their theory of informal social control was expanded to include the role of human agency, situational circumstances, and historical context in explaining desistance and persistence in offending behaviour.

Attention must therefore be given to individuals' interpretations of their social bonds and the importance they attach to them, beyond simply understanding desistance as strengthened social bonds (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Moreover, an informal social control approach does not account for existing parameters potentially influencing change, which are not subject to institutional links. The

nature of institutions is also not accounted for in considering their impact on change. For instance, the role of familial, educational, religious, or criminal justice institutions varies according to specificities of families, education, religion (Calverley, 2013) and penal systems (Österman, 2018; Segev, 2020).

3.3. Beyond Structural Explanations

So far, we saw the value of maturational perspectives that sparked research on desistance, in understanding the role of ageing in processes of change. Certain limitations of this approach were addressed by a subsequent social control approach, which accounts for external factors and life events impacting trajectories. These approaches do, however, have limitations in terms of the scope for explanations provided. As mentioned, both maturational and social control approaches fail to account for human agency and specificities of individual pathways out of crime. Moreover, too little attention is paid to the changing nature of societies, which shape individual lives and frame the context for behavioural change. If informal social control restricts reoffending through strong social bonds, there is a lack of consideration to the context in which these bonds evolve and changes in offending occur.

Aspects of maturational reform such as the impact of childhood experiences and the physical element of offending are relevant to processes of desistance. Aspects of social control perspective are also relevant, namely the influence of institutions and broadly speaking of social context, the focus on relationality and the indication that desistance consists of gradual, dynamic processes. Ultimately, both approaches are valuable in grasping – albeit despite their limitations – the complexity of desistance processes.

The empirical work which theories are based upon are homogenous samples, in terms of location, often taken from the same two countries (UK and USA) and excluding women from the analysis. While homogenous samples support internal validity and provides robust findings, these findings are exclusive to the type of

people sampled. This homogenous characteristic of samples erases the diversity in relationships with social institutions, the variety of social bonds and, ultimately, differences in pathways out of crime. In other words, the conclusions and theories drawn from these studies do not reflect desistance from crime but explain change for a specific type of person. This downside also highlights the importance of analysing the roles of social institutions and social bonds in better understanding processes of change, as these will have differing impact according to characteristics of different people and their contexts.

What is more, research that these theories derive from were quantitative studies. “Desistance from crime is best studied by investigating the complex patterns of deviant behaviour and self- and social controls simultaneously” (Morizot and Le Blanc, 2007: 66). Perhaps the biggest limitation of the approaches mentioned here is the inability, by design, of these approaches to account for these ‘complex patterns’. Subsequent qualitative studies have highlighted the processual and gradual aspects of desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2002; Laub and Sampson, 2003), which in turn has allowed to conceptualise changes in behaviour through new lenses and theories which include subjective considerations.

Indeed, changes in methodological designs led to new perspectives on desistance from crime, notably with the emergence of narrative analysis. These allowed researchers to identify patterns in how people experience change and accounted for how external factors mentioned above interact with how people think about themselves, what they want, what they fear and how they feel. Moreover, different steps, or stages were identified in people’s journeys out of crime. For instance, Maruna and Farrall (2004) distinguished between initial behavioural change and longer-term modifications in terms of identity, respectively called ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ stages of desistance. The former corresponds to potentially temporary ‘lulls’ in offending whereas the latter describes more established, sustained change, whereby the identity of ‘offender’ has been shed as well as offending

behaviour. While this distinction can be questioned for its compartmentalisation of behavioural and identity change, it is useful for its conceptualisation of desistance beyond structural factors, and as involving internal dynamics (behaviour and identity) in short term tentative change and long term established desistance. McNeill (2016) has added to this distinction the concept of tertiary desistance, which relates to the social aspect of personal identity, the notion of belonging to a community and social integration. This will be briefly discussed later in this chapter.

The following part of this chapter continues to discuss concepts and theories of desistance, specifically those that were formulated after and in response to those focusing on structural explanations for change.

3.4. Feared Selves and Future Selves

Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) Identity Theory of Desistance reconciles theoretical tensions which arose from previously mentioned approaches. They consider individuals as agentic beings as well as subject to social influences. While the approaches previously mentioned have accounted for *processes* of change, addressing the question 'how do people stop offending?', the Identity Theory of Desistance provides an additional dimension to our understandings of the subject. Indeed, it provides an explanation for *motivations* for change, addressing the question 'what sparks the will to stop offending in the first place?'. Their explanation of change highlights the role of identity and self-perception in shaping behavioural change, while accounting for external, social influences. Perceptions of past actions, current 'working selves' and projections of 'future selves' are identified as crucial to processes of desistance. According to them, individuals hold a 'working identity' related to their present, offending selves. Commitment to an offending identity explains the continuous and consistent behaviour in line with this identity. Offending is part of a current, or working identity, and will remain so as long as it is perceived as more beneficial than not,

“thought to be successful or, more specifically, as long as, on average, it nets more benefits than costs” (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009: 1105).

In addition to a present sense of self, individuals hold a sense of self oriented to the future. This future oriented self can either be constructed positively as the person they wish to become – or in a negative manner, invoking fears of who they may become. These positive and negative perceptions of the self, projected in the future constitute what the authors call the ‘possible self’:

“as a conception of the self in a future state, the possible self is not mere fantasy but is connected to current selves and past experiences and is directed at individually specific hopes or goals and fears or uncertainties” (2009: 1113).

This echoes Shover’s (1983) findings that most desisters took ‘stock of their lives’ as they became ‘acutely’ aware of time with age and realised certain negative consequences of offending and reconviction. Moreover, desistance tends to occur following a gradual realisation of dissatisfaction, in the aftermath of failures or negative experiences which are linked with, or even interpreted as caused by the individual’s criminal activities: “the weakening of a criminal identity comes about gradually and as a result of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with crime” (Bushway and Paternoster, 2013: 224). In other words, the ‘working self’ becomes increasingly dissatisfying as current failures become linked with anticipated ones. The desire to desist emerges regardless of external hooks for change (unlike the cognitive transformation perspective discussed below) and comes about as the accumulation of failures and negativity associated with offending.

This dissatisfaction is likely to result in a ‘possible self’ which involves conventional activities. Once these particular failures get linked with each other and become part of a pattern, processes of desistance may be launched through

what is called the ‘crystallisation of discontent’ (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009:1123-1124; Baumeister, 1994). This phenomenon refers to associative links being formed “between the subjective perception of costs, disadvantages, problems, unpleasant outcomes, and other undesirable features of some involvement” leading to individuals recognising a pattern of persistent problems, instead of a series of unrelated problems (Baumeister, 1994: 287).

The way in which Paternoster and Bushway mapped out desistance is helpful for considering how identity connects with social environment, circumstances, and opportunities. They considered past experiences as shaping motivation to change and suggest a certain passivity of offenders in the accumulation of bad experiences and feelings of discontent, until a realisation of a need for change. This motivation often comes about as a fear of what one may become in the future, if current criminal behaviour is sustained. Paternoster and Bushway develop on this fear-led motivation as embodied by the ‘feared self’ – or the worst-case scenario for individuals’ future. They outline desistance as the result of a change in what they call the ‘working identity’ (or ‘working self’) of an offender, which is the current identity as defined by their criminality.

In continuation, the ‘positive self’ relates to the person that the offender wishes to become in the future, which emerges as an increasing motivation to lead a conventional life and, similarly to the feared self, comes about after a gradual discontent of criminality. Therefore, the possible self is a source of motivation for changes in criminal behaviour. The interplay between these different considerations of the self ultimately impacts the offender’s ambition to desist. In other words, the comparison between the past and current working selves with the possible feared self gives directions and guidelines to narrow the gap between these selves (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009).

A process of self-change thus comes about alongside a ‘break with the past’ (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). This may result from a triggering event, or a

gradual feeling of dissatisfaction. Even in situations where a particular event seemingly triggers this general feeling of disappointment, this spark leads to the reconsideration of criminal behaviour because of a focus on ‘general discontent’ rather than the occurrence alone (Baumeister, 1994).

The feared self approach considers desistance as resulting from discontent and negative self-perception: desistance is “a decision by an offender that she has ‘had enough’ of crime and being a criminal and desires a change in what she does and who she is” (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009: 1108). The notion that desistance is a decision is a contested one, as it implies a rational choice approach. There are indeed similarities with rational choice perspectives, which suggest desistance entails decisions to stop offending, which are motivated by a more favourable future, following the accumulation of unfavourable experiences (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). That being said, the approach taken by Paternoster and Bushway does not entirely fit with a rational choice perspective, as it gives weight to social circumstances in explaining behaviours. This means that individuals are not considered as purely rational, calculating beings, as they are also subject to external influences. This is particularly apparent when considering the inclusion of elements pertaining to emotions. A focus on identity and self-perception also allows us to understand behavioural change as a potentially irrational process involving fears, desires, and self-reflection.

To put this in perspective, Sampson and Laub’s (1993) approach of informal social control is at the polar opposite of a rational choice perspective, as behaviours are deemed to be fully dependent on links with social institutions. They suggested that desistance occurs from strengthened social bonds, with the assumption that change from within can occur without variations in social circumstances. They also suggested that identity shifts are not necessary in processes of change, that human agency has little or no relevance and that a ‘non-trivial’ part of desistance can come about by default (Laub and Sampson, 2003;

Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). In contrast, a feared self perspective posits that change can occur without necessary variations in social circumstances (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Behavioural change occurs alongside challenged notions of changed self-perceptions and shifts in identity. Motivations for change may occur as a result of modified social circumstances and new opportunities outside of offending, but these will eventually lead to behavioural change if individuals have come to a realisation of negativity associated with crime. Aspects of rational choice are relevant to a certain extent when it comes to desistance, because of change for a more favourable future, but not when it comes to persistent offending.

3.5. Cognitive Transformations and Identity Theories

As previously mentioned, a criticism of the approach of social control is that it pays too little attention to human agency (Schinkel, 2019). A shift from quantitative to qualitative methods of investigation allowed researchers to uncover a whole different facet of processes of desistance and highlighted how human agency interacts with socio-structural factors. Carlsson (2012; 2016) demonstrated the crucial role of human agency in identifying motivations in narratives of desistance, suggesting processual change rather than one life event impacting behaviours. Notable perspectives accounting for the roles of identity and agency in behavioural change are Maruna's (2001) narrative model of desistance, which identifies different scripts in desistance and persistence; and Vaughan's (2007) mapping of the internal conversation of desistance. The former explained change by putting forward what it 'feels' like to stop offending and the consequences of desistance onto how people perceive themselves. As McNeill (2006: 49) puts it, Maruna highlighted "the role of reflexivity in both revealing and producing shifts in the dynamic relationships between agency and structure". The latter identified stages of desistance from an internal perspective towards the dedication to a non-offending identity (Vaughan, 2007).

At the heart of Vaughan's internal conversation of desistance are notions of self-reflexion, self-perception, and understandings of how individuals are perceived by others. Very similar to the feared self approach mentioned previously, this perspective highlights the role of emotions in internal deliberations accompanying desistance. Vaughan supports that in order to comprehend desistance, we must grasp individuals' 'ultimate concerns' that shape their motivations and behaviours. Individuals are considered as emotional and social beings; therefore, desistance is perceived as an emotional process occurring in the context of social relations. The cognitive transformation approach developed by Giordano and colleagues (2002) also provides insight into internal dynamics of desistance, with the added dimension of demonstrating how external factors interact with individual cognition.

Drawing from Sampson and Laub's theory, Giordano and colleagues mapped out stages of cognitive transformations involved in desistance processes. They have identified 'hooks for change', which are opportunities to desist for people already motivated to change (unlike turning points, which spark desistance). This means that unlike Sampson and Laub, Giordano and colleagues consider behavioural change as occurring previous to turning points, or hooks for change. Their Theory of Cognitive Transformations takes a symbolic interactionist approach to change, emphasising the role of relationality, emotions, and opportunities for change. Recognising that change in offending behaviour occurs within the social context and not solely within individual, Giordano and colleagues mapped out internal mechanisms of change, while accounting for social factors. For them, a thorough theoretical understanding of desistance requires a "reciprocal relationship between actor and environment" and "a central place for agency in the change process" (2002: 999). Approaches of informal social control are useful in discerning catalysts for change, while the theory of Cognitive Transformation

provides insight into cognitive shifts before, during and after “new life course experiences” (2002: 1033).

The first cognitive transformation is openness to change, which is a precursor to behavioural change (Giordano et al, 2002). Giordano and colleagues suggest that it is unlikely that desistance processes will begin without “a heightened awareness of what it is that they are undertaking and absent a strong desire to begin such a conversion effort” (2002: 1032). The second transformation is the exposure to hooks for change. Hooks for change correspond to external opportunities for change, for instance, through social institutions, as were mentioned in the context of the aforementioned social control approach. This step is particularly useful in understanding desistance processes as an interplay between individual and social environment, focusing on the “reciprocal relationship between actor and environment” (2002: 1001). It is indeed a reciprocal relationship as the impact of opportunities to act on openness for change will depend on individuals’ social environments and how they react to them. This puts in perspective previous theories and findings, framing them in their social context: Sampson and Laub’s results were drawn from the Gluecks’ data, which highlighted the positive role of employment, for instance, in processes of behavioural change. However, the historical and social context in which data were gathered was one in which included opportunities for low-skilled work through the manufacturing industry (Paternoster et al, 2015). The economic and social landscape having changed and being different across societies and nations, the Glueck’s data and Sampson and Laub’s conclusions are to be challenged.

The third phase of cognitive transformation lies in the ability to imagine a ‘replacement self’ to replace the offending one: “the presence of the environmental stimulus is integral to the development of the replacement self” (Giordano et al, 2002: 1002). This stage can be linked to Sampson and Laub’s work, in that the availability of pro-social roles may encourage individuals to

envision themselves fulfilling it. This stage can also be linked to the Identity Theory of Paternoster and Bushway mentioned above, in terms of projecting future selves that keep an offending lifestyle and that desist from crime. Individuals may imagine themselves as having stronger bonds to social institutions. The last stage of cognitive transformation consists in a change in the way people conceive offending behaviour itself: “the desistance process can be seen as relatively complete when the actor no longer sees these same behaviors as positive, viable, or even personally relevant” (2002: 1002).

The patterns identified by the cognitive transformations perspective are useful in considering desistance from crime as both internal and external change. What is more, the notion of hooks for change may provide explanation for initial change through social control and can also be considered a blueprint for continued change, or maintained desistance (Maruna, 2001). Hooks for change may become catalysts for desistance processes. Giordano and colleagues have taken a step beyond the informal social control approach, by analysing how individuals react to environmental factors and circumstances in processes of change.

Another perspective highlighting environmental circumstances is found in the notion of ‘tertiary’ desistance, developed by McNeill (2016) in continuation of Maruna and Farrall’s (2004) distinction between ‘primary’ (behavioural) and ‘secondary’ (identity) desistance. Tertiary desistance is a concept that highlights the role of communities and social context for behavioural and identity change that desistance consists of. The third stage of desistance corresponds to changes after shifts in behaviour and identity. These involve social rehabilitation, feelings of belonging to a community and adhering to common morals. It also involves judicial rehabilitation, whereby change is acknowledged by the state and the criminal justice system. These changes cement desistance through the notion of belonging to a collective on a meso level (belonging to and being accepted in a

community and adhering to its codes) and macro level (one's administrative and symbolic status, shedding the label of 'offender').

This concept is useful for its consideration of social context as interacting with desistance in terms of behavioural and identity change on the long-term. It encourages us to consider what sort of life people desist into, and the specificities of life as a former offender, beyond the lack of offending.

3.6. An Interactive Model of Early Stages of Desistance

Bottoms and Shapland (2011) also theorised stages of desistance, in particular early ones, giving 'proper weight' to both structural factors as well as agency, but also considering the role of social capital in changes in offending (Bottoms et al, 2004). Drawing from findings of their Sheffield Desistance Study, they underlined the role of relapses, the importance of identity and the influence of social networks in desistance trajectories. Bottoms and Shapland have, from the results of their study (see Chapter 2), developed an interactive model of desistance, suggesting an interplay between 'individual dispositions' which is the "results of his personal, social and criminal history" and their potential for change in terms of social capital which is linked to Giordano and colleague's concept of 'hooks for change' (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). In other words, they consider individual habits, offending history and opportunities as 'held' together by the individual "who must attempt to negotiate a new way of living, breaking with the habits of the past with the support of whoever is willing and able to act as a 'significant other' (including, interestingly, parents), all within a shifting surrounding social context" (2011: 70)

Aspects of cognitive transformation and informal social control have been incorporated into this integrated model of desistance. Continuing from Sampson and Laub's theoretical framework, Bottoms and Shapland's gives weight to social factors and personal circumstances in processes of change. A key concept in their theory involves 'programmed potential' which corresponds to the specific

circumstances of the person; social structures, which impact opportunities for change; culture and collective beliefs and values that constitute social norms; situational contexts that may impact desistance processes; and human agency, which relates to individual self-perception (Bottoms et al, 2004). Persistent offending, or hindrances to desistance, are thus both circumstantial and internal to the person.

Similar to turning points and hooks for change, the authors have identified ‘triggers’ that spark a wish to change current offending habits, which leads to offenders thinking about themselves and their circumstances in a different manner, subsequently producing a motivation for change. Once offenders begin to think differently about themselves and their surroundings, steps towards desistance will be taken. From then on, desistance will either be maintained, or in cases of re-offending, individuals will experience relapses. Maintenance is encouraged by pro-social roles, crime-free identities which reinforce desistance processes. Relapses are explained through structural circumstances. Bottoms and Shapland make a point to differentiate the situation of a relapse and that of early desistance. This explains why desistance is also considered as a decline in offending behaviour rather than a sudden stop: desistance implies relapses and gradual decline in behaviour that is increasingly unwanted. This interactive model of desistance proposes an understanding of how people stop offending by integrating internal change, structural factors, and social capital.

The strengths of the interactive model by Bottoms and Shapland also lie in the inclusion of relapses in considering trajectories of desistance. Unlike previous theories mentioned, there is an acknowledgement that when people stop offending, there may be lulls and relapses rather than a smooth decline of delinquent behaviour (Clarke and Cornish, 1985). This interactive model accounts for a truly gradual understanding of desistance processes while considering the ‘zig-zag’ aspect of change: “relapse occurs, however, it does not necessarily push

the would-be desister right back to his starting-point” (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011: 69). In terms of a comparative approach, however, this interactive model and the theories mentioned above fail to account for factors specific to time and space in which desistance takes place. Characteristics specific to the particular setting in which people stop offending are to be accounted for in efforts to grasp processes of change.

3.7. An Integrated Model for Comparative Work

Beyond the argument of maturational reform focusing solely on the influence of time, structural factors and life events have been linked with decline in offending behaviour (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Notions of identity, motivation and emotions have been associated with processes of desistance (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Burnett, 1992; Hunter and Farrall, 2018), as well as relational, social factors (Farrall, 2004; Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Considerations for human agency have been incorporated in understanding desistance, through internal mechanisms and transformations (Giordano et al, 2002; Vaughan, 2007). The theories mentioned here emphasise certain factors over others and are more or less valid for certain people in certain circumstances. That is to say, a single theory is insufficient in accounting for all desistance, and it is the integration of selected theories that makes for a thorough theoretical framework (Farrall et al, 2014).

Farrall and colleagues (2011) developed an integrated model, which considers various aspects of theories mentioned above, *integrating* relevant elements from them in order to widely capture processes of desistance in “westernised, post-industrialized nations” (reproduced here as Figure 1). This model brings together a variety of influences and factors interacting with each other and associated with desistance processes. Structural factors are accounted for on different levels. Personal circumstances such as offending history, ethnicity and gender, and situational context are said to influence the availability of non-offending

identities. Emotional components of change are considered in desistance processes. Like the interactive model, elements of structure, relationality and internal change are accounted for in understanding change.

The integrated model accounts for what is called “shocks to the system” (2011: 227) that happen with little warning and can modify the social, economic, or cultural context where desistance occurs. These include, for example, changes in legislation (although they can be expected) or the emergence of epidemics of certain drugs. This approach addresses the changing nature of societies that previously mentioned theories typically failed to consider. Events and societal shifts contribute to the contexts in which people desist, thereby influencing processes of change. Using the previous example of the evolutions of parenthood, the democratisation of contraception is a significant societal shift which contributed to the changed landscape of marriage, parenthood, and the familial institution. In terms of desistance, this has an influence on both individual childhoods, relationships with parents and families but also on the pro-social role of parent.

Moreover, Farrall and colleagues (2020) have conducted research into the impact of government policies on criminal careers. Their findings suggest that economic policies influence crime rates and the persistence of offending. In turn, desistance processes are also impacted by economic policies in shaping availability of opportunities and the societal landscape in which change occurs. This demonstrates that societies are dynamic, and desistance is influenced by changes beyond simply fixed social structures. Understanding desistance through this integrated model means considering societal characteristics as constantly changing, as opposed to rigid visions of institutions, like ‘marriage’, ‘education’ or ‘employment’. Rather, societal norms and values about relationships, opportunities for education and employment and the state of the labour market at a given time are more relevant in terms of considering the context in which

desistance takes place. These examples demonstrate the importance of considering socio-economic context in exploring processes of change. For this reason, the socio-economic contexts of England and France are overviewed in Chapter 4 setting the context.

This integrated model accounts for the role of institutions in establishing ‘normative behaviours’, including morality and acceptable behaviours within and beyond offending (Farrall et al, 2011). Macro-level changes in society therefore not only affect *when* but also *how* desistance takes place: people’s ability to and manner of desisting. Farrall and colleagues (2010) focused on the relationship between societal transformations in England from the 1980s to the 2000s and offender management: changes in the economy, more specifically the labour market, the diminution of mining work and the increase in banking or finance work necessitating graduate level skills lead to a growing scarceness of accessible employment. Economic situations, employment market, social values, collective norms associated with life events discussed above – are all influences interacting with each other and shaping the context where desistance processes take place. What is more, some of these influences will have varying impacts on different groups of people. For instance, we know that desistance processes of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Black and dual heritage offenders in England are different from each other, given their different social and cultural backgrounds, norms, available opportunities, and resources (Calverley, 2013).

Moreover, there has been, at the end of the 20th century, an increasing tendency by employers to check criminal records, which hinders job prospects and rehabilitation into society (Farrall et al, 2010). Changes in criminal justice practices, influenced by a political climate focused on ‘tough on crime’ measures, included an increase in punitiveness for specific types of crimes and repeat offenders. This led to significant increase in the prison population since more and longer custodial sentences were pronounced (Farrall et al, 2010). Different ways

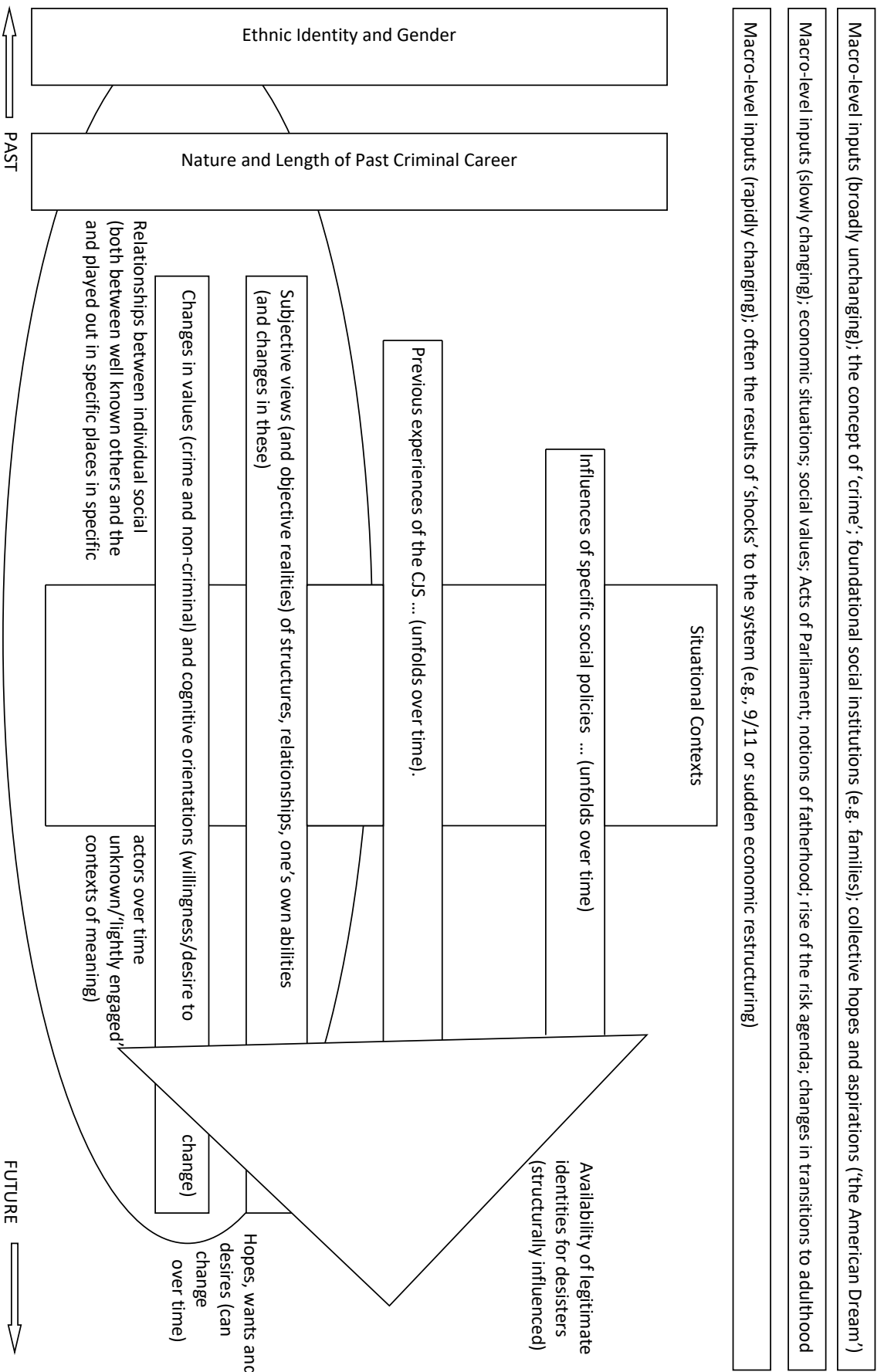
in which the criminal justice system manages and treats the offending population thus has an impact on the ways in which people desist from crime (Segev, 2020; Österman, 2018). The manner in which the state and institutions of the state deal with offenders and the methods used (sentencing, sentence modifications, available support, and welfare) determines in many ways – practical, tangible but also internal, emotional, and motivational – the specifics of processes of desistance. Structural level factors thus ‘trickle down’ and influence individual trajectories in different manners, according to their specific characteristics (Farrall et al, 2010).

In terms of individual-level influences on desistance trajectories, personal context is suggested as potentially shaping the opportunities and availability of opportunities for people to desist. Personal context is rooted in people’s pasts and includes circumstances specific to each person, such as gender, ethnicity, offending history, relationship past (Farrall et al, 2011). These specificities are acknowledged in terms of individual pathways out of crime: “over time, and within reasonable limits, different ‘styles’ of desistance trajectories can be observed” (Farrall et al, 2014: 279). This aspect of an integrated approach contributes to demonstrating the value of comparative research, in the complexity and variety of people’s lives and circumstances in which desistance occurs. In other words, a detailed consideration of the context in which people stop offending, allows for a variety of influences and factors including consideration of social, structural circumstances, social norms, labelling practices and criminal justice philosophies. In comparing individual trajectories between countries, a thorough consideration of the contexts in question is necessary to grasp personal circumstances and frame the narratives within a broad background. The state of social policies, the political climate, cultural norms, and economic context – basically, the societal situation – have an influence on what is considered deviant

or acceptable, on structures of formal and informal social control and support, and therefore on processes of desistance.

The integrated model is useful for comparative studies because it accounts for context, structure but also the individual agent. The relational aspect of desistance is also accounted for, in terms of the influence of social interactions and relationships that people have over time. Within this category is included changes in individuals' subjective perceptions of themselves, their social world and of institutions. Emotional aspects of desistance and identity and cognitive transformations are relevant on this level, with changes in routine (Farrall et al, 2011).

Figure 1: Structural and Individual Level Processes and Criminal Careers (Source: Farrall et al, 2011)



3.8. Summary and Reflections on Ontology

In sum, developments in desistance research and new findings on processes of change have led to theories of desistance evolving and sharpening our understandings of how people stop offending. An integrated approach as formulated by Farrall and colleagues (2011) provides the most adequate theoretical basis for a cross-national comparative study of desistance processes, because it offers a comprehensive account of environmental factors and internal changes. This framework will best help us to compare how macro level and other external influences lead to individual experiences of change. Nevertheless, other theories of desistance have contributed to knowledge on how and why people stop offending, which is a valuable basis to build further research upon, to better understand various factors and facets of change.

Discussing theoretical frameworks of desistance is not solely important to locate this study within discussions on the matter, but also in terms of establishing its ontological stance. The theories mentioned in this chapter stem from studies that have systematically demonstrated the subjective nature of desistance, first in the limitations of quantitative research, and then in the very findings of subsequent qualitative and mixed methods research. We have seen that individuals are not purely rational beings, nor are they fully free-willed. Processes of change are found to be intimate but social, impacted by institutions and structures – which are seemingly unchangeable factors – but also personal. Understanding change entails understanding people, given the complexity of human lives, recognising the dynamic nature of the subjects in question. People who offend, or have offended, are not bound by these behaviours, and live daily aspects of their lives that are other than offending and penal punishment. Studying desistance is therefore not limited to analysing the lack of offending behaviour but as much as possible, encompasses everything that surrounds change, people's environments and how they experience change.

Developments in desistance research have demonstrated the variety of pathways out of crime, and a comparative approach therefore opens the door to better understanding change, by controlling for environments. For these reasons and considering the breadth of evidence mentioned, this study is grounded in the ontological approach of interpretivism, based on the idea that reality is to be interpreted in order to be understood. Desistance is not a process that can be observable (at least not without seriously breaching ethical guidelines, like a Truman Show situation), and even if it were, change would have to be interpreted subjectively as opposed to measured objectively through quantifiable variables.

Chapter 4 – Setting the Context: Comparing Societies

The previous chapter established the theoretical angle of this study and explained the relevant assumptions on the social world that are taken for this research. The subject of the research is change in offending behaviour, which is viewed within the framework of Farrall and colleagues' (2011) integrated model of desistance. This framework considers behavioural change as part of and influenced by a wide variety of factors that constitute the context in which behavioural change occurs. This present chapter sets the scene in which English and French people stop offending, allowing us to better interpret the accounts of change that are subsequently analysed and compared.

Comparative research allows us to gain deeper understanding of social phenomena according to context (Hantrais, 2007). What is more, social factors play an important role in shaping pathways out of crime (Farrall et al, 2014), so establishing the contexts in which change occurs is crucial. This chapter is about social, economic, cultural, political, and criminal justice contexts. Here, I identify and outline key elements of the societies in question, which are significant to processes of desistance and thus to this cross-national research. The economic contexts of the countries are presented, with particular interest in issues of poverty, employment, and social mobility. Then, I discuss employment for people with conviction in England and France, specifically with regard to criminal record checks. In terms of social policy, I explore social security and the role of the State in providing welfare and housing assistance to its citizens. Attitudes and values of English and French societies are analysed thanks to data from the European Social Survey (ESS). The public opinion of English and French people on crime

is then compared. These topics were chosen because they are most relevant in understanding the context of individual behavioural change for my participants.

Using data from the latest round of the ESS conducted in 2019, I provide background on attitudes and social values in England and France. I also use data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to outline the economic context in which people desist. OECD data is presented for the UK as a whole as information for separate nations of the UK is not available. This poses a challenge as to the comparability of data. Nevertheless, ESS, OECD and other sources of data mentioned in this thesis are deemed to provide valuable insight into the social worlds in which English and French people desist.

The cross-national comparison provided in this chapter allows us to explore what circumstances desisters live in. Indeed, this chapter aims to compare English and French societies in order to assess some of the external circumstances – those that are out of control of the person – surrounding people who wish to desist. People with convictions generally tend to face difficulties in terms of poverty, precarity, securing a job and generally are at the bottom of the ‘employment ladder’ (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). Considering the typical profile of the population of people with convictions is low-skilled (Canton et al, 2011), it is pertinent to pay attention to the socio-economic situation of the country in which they desist, and the specificities of the labour market and social climates at the moment where efforts for desistance are being made.

4.1. Poverty and Social Mobility

In this section, OECD data regarding poverty and social mobility are presented to locate England and France’s situations relative to each other. It should be noted that data provided is relevant to the time around which fieldwork was conducted, between 2018 and 2020, which were the years directly preceding the COVID-19 crisis. Economically, a lot has already changed since the crisis hit, however, the

data collected for this study through the interviews reflect the socio-economic conditions of desistance before 2020.

With regard to OECD indicators of income (which are ‘household financial wealth’ and household net adjusted disposable income’ – the amount of money available to a household after taxes), the average family is in a better position in the UK than in France.¹ That being said, income *inequality* has increased in the UK and stagnated in France.² This is linked to the different ways in which the two countries have dealt with post-industrialisation, globalisation, and the financial crisis (Catherine et al, 2015). While the UK has high levels of inequality and low, stable levels of unemployment, France has high unemployment and lower levels of inequality. The French State has increased minimum wages to avoid them stagnating and increased taxes for the highest earnings to contain both their increase and wage inequalities (Catherine et al, 2015). In other words, the gap between the richest and the poorest in France remains relatively unchanged whilst it is larger and continues to grow in the UK. This has implications on people’s ability and opportunities to come out of poverty, which is a concern for an important proportion of people with convictions (Hay and Forrest, 2009; Jarjoura et al, 2002). Unemployment in France mainly concerns the least qualified people (Catherine et al, 2015). What is more, there is in France an issue of long-term unemployment, which concerns 38.8% of the unemployed population, compared to 25.1% in the UK³ (OECD, 2020).

Levels of inequality in the UK hint at a link between individual economic status and that of their parents. The OECD calculated that for a child born in a family at the bottom of the income distribution in the UK, it would take five generations

¹ OECD Better Life Index: Income <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/income/>

² In France, income inequality has been broadly stabilised since the 1990s (OECD, 2012) and remains below the OECD average, with a Gini coefficient of 0.292 in 2018 (a measure between 0 and 1, the smaller signifying more equality). In comparison, income inequality in the UK remains above the OECD average, with a Gini coefficient of 0.357 in 2018. See [OECD Inequality](#) and [OECD Income Distribution Database \(IDD\)](#); Gini, poverty, income, methods and concepts

for them to reach the average national income (OECD, 2018). Even though France has lower levels of income inequality, upwards social mobility is more strained than in the UK, as it would take six generations for a child born into poverty to reach the national average income (OECD, 2018a). This difference means that in the UK, people at the lower end of the income distribution are likely to come out of poverty quicker than in France.

This finding is also illustrated by the difference in earnings mobility which is marginally lower in France than in the UK: “What your parents earned when you were a child has more effect on your own earnings in France than in more mobile countries, such as Denmark and Australia, but less than in Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States” (OECD, 2008: 2). There are more people at risk of poverty in the UK than in France. Eurostats defines people at risk of poverty as “persons with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income”.³ In 2018, the rate of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 17.4% in France and 23.1% in the UK.

Furthermore, the difficult upward mobility is particularly pronounced with regard to the education of parents in both countries. The gap in educational attainment between children of parents who do and do not have a higher education degree is considerable, especially in the UK. The percentage of children whose parents have a degree in higher education and go on to complete one themselves is roughly similar, with 71% in the UK and 68% in France. Similarly, the UK and France have respectively 21% and 17% of children completing a higher education degree, whose parents do not have one themselves (OECD, 2018; 2018a). In both countries, children are more likely to get a degree if their parents have one and educational achievement is largely influenced by family background and

³ Eurostats, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/t2020_50

socioeconomic factors. This means in terms of social mobility that growth in earnings is less likely to occur for low-skilled workers, especially in the UK. According to OECD's France Economic Snapshot data, educational outcomes are largely influenced by socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, even more so than in the 'advanced' countries of the organisation (OECD, 2019b). This suggests a persistent lack of social mobility and capacity to escape from poverty.

The OECD measures education performance through indicators of 'years in education', 'student skills' and 'educational attainment'.⁴ The free and relatively easy access to education in France may suggest a better performance of the country in terms of education. In reality, the UK performs better in terms of education than France, with more years in education on average and a higher proportion of people aged 25 to 64 having at least the equivalent of a high school degree.⁵ What is more, earnings mobility is slightly lower in France than in the UK (OECD, 2018; 2018a). This may be explained by a certain instability of low-skilled employment in France and the prevalence of short-term contracts hindering upwards income mobility (OECD, 2018a). In the UK, while the majority of low-income workers have "relatively decent chances of moving up" (OECD, 2018:2), upwards mobility is low for low-skilled workers. Low levels of intergenerational mobility can therefore be understood in terms of likelihood of earnings mobility through education and likelihood of education through parental education. Considering these findings, the OECD has suggested the UK invests in upskilling its workforce "to improve job quality and satisfaction" (OECD, 2018: 2). Since 2010 in the UK, people have been upskilling and there has been a shift from low to medium and high skilled workers (ONS, 2019).⁵

Despite providing free higher education, educational attainment in France is largely dependent on human and social capital passed down by parents as well as

⁴ OECD Better Life Index: Education <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/education/>

⁵ There has been a skills shortage across the whole skills spectrum and notably in construction, hospitality, and healthcare. See: [Financial Times The five UK sectors that have been grappling with labour shortages](#)

the neighbourhoods people grow up in (OECD, 2018a). This means that there are considerable socio-economic gaps in education attainment which have consequences for rates of (un)employment, nature of employment, potential for upwards mobility and any potential personal capital to make use of in efforts for desistance from crime. The OECD suggested that better support be provided for children in disadvantaged backgrounds in France in order to foster social mobility (OECD, 2018a). In summary, social mobility is slightly better in the UK than in France. Even for skilled and educated workers, income mobility largely depends on parents' backgrounds in France, whereas in the UK, income mobility is comparably high for skilled individuals. Opportunities for upskilling are better in France, but the outcome of gaining skills is more favourable in the UK, certainly in terms of securing employment in the context of desistance.

Both inequality and poverty have declined in France in the two decades prior to the Great Recession (OECD, 2008). The OECD outlines poverty as the share of people living with less than 50% of the national median income; the amounts being 10,406€ and £8,166 per year in France and the UK respectively (OECD, 2012: 158). The OECD income distribution database shows that the share of the French population living in poverty remained broadly stable at around seven percent until the Great Recession in 2008, increasing to nearly eight percent in 2010, following the financial crisis (OECD, 2012: 158). The share of people living in poverty in the UK decreased from 14% in 1990 to 10% in 2010 (OECD, 2012: 339). These percentages demonstrate that there are proportionally more people living in poverty in the UK than in France, and indeed the poverty rates in 2016 were respectively 0.101 and 0.853 for people of working age (18 to 65 years old). Escaping poverty therefore is easier in France, but the reward of doing so in terms of skills is lower. There are considerably more people over 66 years old in poverty in the UK than in France, with poverty rates of 0.142 and 0.034 respectively for this age group. Child poverty rates are closer to each other and more of a problem

than poverty in the working population, with 0.115 in France and 0.118 in the UK.⁶

In summary, France ranks below average compared to OECD countries in matters concerning subjective well-being, employment, skills and earning and above average for income, wealth, and housing. While there is greater income inequality in the UK, the country ranks above average for matters of subjective well-being, employment, skills, earnings, and income.⁷

4.2. Employment and Criminal Record Checks

Having discussed poverty and social mobility in England and France, I now turn to a comparison of employment issues for people with convictions. Securing employment is often seen as a first step and main barrier to rehabilitation (Hlavka et al, 2015). People with convictions are disproportionately discriminated against in the labour market, so it is important to understand and identify key aspects of employment in each country.

In 2019, the employment rate for 20-64-year-olds was broadly similar in the UK and France (respectively 79.3% and 71.6% - Eurostats, 2020). The unemployment rate was 8.1% in France⁸ and 4% in the UK in 2019, right before the COVID-19 crisis. An important barrier to employment in the offending population is a lack of professional, but also interpersonal and marketable skills that are necessary in the labour market (Thomas and Heberton, 2013). As an illustration, HM Inspectorate of Probation statistics inform that while 15% of the general population of England and Wales have no qualification, the figure is 47% for the current prison population. What is more, 68% of people imprisoned were unemployed in the four weeks before their custody, with the figure being as high as 81% for imprisoned women. Figures telling of the gap between the general

⁶ OECD Poverty Rate: <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>

⁷ OECD Better Life Index: the UK <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/united-kingdom/>

⁸ INSEE statistiques et études <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4309346>

population and people in prison regarding the labour market are the percentages of people never having had a job, which are respectively 4% and 13% (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019: 28).

The negative consequences of a criminal record can be considered as part of the ‘invisible punishment’ of incarceration, that is to say the set of aftereffects of convictions that puts people in worse off situations than they were in before their punishment (Travis, 2002). In other words, even though incarceration is the punishment for their offence, during and after the punishment there is a set of negative consequences accompanying the punishment, which worsens the person’s situation and creates barriers to social reintegration. Criminal history is often the cause of people with convictions being denied employment (Pager, 2003). Imprisonment often entails the loss of employment, of housing and a physical separation from families, all of which have consequences for the person’s return into society. A criminal record is a pertinent example for the notion of ‘collateral damage’ to punishment, for the stigma and subsequent disadvantage on the labour market it creates, to the detriment of efforts for rehabilitation (Henley, 2018; 2014).

In England and Wales, criminal records are updated and maintained by the police in the Police National Computer (PNC) system. The PNC holds criminal records and other information relating to “arrests, cautions, DNA” and other data (Padfield, 2011: 37). These records are accessed by the probation services for pre-sentence reports, but also by the prison service and the private companies managing them. Information provided by the PNC may be useful to the “security categorization and allocation of prisoners” (Padfield, 2011: 40) which highlights the relevance of criminal records with regard to risk management and how the State perceives the person.

In terms of checks for employment, the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) founded by the Police Act of 1997, was one of the most prominent developments in

criminal records checking procedures (Thomas and Heberton, 2013). The CRB, run by a private company, provided criminal record checks from information given by the police, but does not hold these records. The CRB was merged with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) in 2012, forming the Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS). Today, employers may ask candidates for a DBS check.⁹ A commodification of criminal records has led to the expansion of employment screening as an industry. Employers may check applicants' criminal records in vetting processes prior to appointing individuals to a job, particularly in sectors requiring a certain level of security clearance. In some cases, people can choose not to disclose their offences and in others, it is unlawful not to. After a certain amount of time without re-conviction, the disclosure of criminal record is not required (Padfield, 2011; Thomas and Heberton, 2013).

There are negative consequences to a criminal record being disclosed: a job (offer) or a tenancy could be refused, insurance, and generally speaking opportunities could be denied, leading to social exclusion and further identification as deviant. Arguably, the crucial reason for understanding criminal disclosures as part of the desistance process is in the search for employment. In the UK in the 1970s, an increased importance was given to criminal background checks, particularly with the introduction of a police-held criminal register from concern about 'habitual criminals', and later on from 1986 when it was announced that people who work with children were to be vetted (Thomas and Heberton, 2013). Criminal record checks are therefore being used as a manner to verify whether the prospective employee's past suggests a potential risk.

Indeed, much of the drive in the UK for developing checks on criminal records with employers stems from a particular societal concern for children's wellbeing and an increasing governmental adoption of risk management approach and

⁹ 'The Disclosure and Barring Services is created': <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-disclosure-and-barring-service-is-created>

‘worst case scenario’ planning (Thomas and Hebenton, 2013). As Padfield (2011:41) notes, “the right of the offender to rehabilitation, always a limited right, is now [after priority being given to rehabilitation] often ignored in favour of a much wider public protection agenda”. In line with political efforts for public protection, rules regarding the disclosure of criminal convictions have been strengthened towards increased need for disclosure. Convictions being spent, however, does not mean that the criminal record is erased altogether, simply that the *disclosure* of the conviction is not mandatory (Thomas and Hebenton, 2013).

Unlike in England and Wales where the disclosure of criminal records is completed by a private company, access to such records in France is managed by the State and limited in availability (Herzog-Evans, 2011). Criminal records are held by the *Casier Judiciaire National*, which is the National Judicial Record (NJR). In this NJR are compiled sentences, convictions, and sentence management measures.¹⁰ This information is provided by courts, administrations, and public prosecutors (Herzog-Evans, 2011). The person concerned can have access to their own NJR, public services may have partial access and employers can in some cases request a copy of the record.

The record is divided into three parts, each of them containing varying details of involvement with the criminal justice system and each accessible to different entities. Access to the record can be granted to one, two or all three sections.

The three sections of the NJR are as follows:

- Section 1 has all information on all sentences, measures, and judicial decisions. Some of the information will be erased after certain deadlines or in cases of “legal rehabilitation”. This section is only accessible by judicial

¹⁰ FAQ Direction des affaires criminelles et des grâces, Casier Judiciaire National <https://faq.casier-judiciaire.justice.gouv.fr/selfservice/>

authorities and penal courts as well as the person concerned/whose record this is.

- Section 2 has all court decisions, apart from contraventions (fines), juvenile offences and suspended sentences for which the suspension deadline has been passed. This section is accessible by prospective employers in the public sectors and by the person whose record this is. Section 2 was specifically created for employment checks in the public sector.
- Section 3 contains information on any imprisonment of two or more years, meaning for crimes and other serious offences. This section only contains details of sentencing, such as length of the sentence, but no information on the offence itself. Only the person whose record this is has access to this section, and prospective employers in the private sector may request access for this part.

There is a noteworthy cultural dimension of criminal record disclosure policies as privacy is particularly important to French society – which could explain the restriction to accessing criminal records. The French Civil Code states that each person has the right to the respect of their private lives.¹¹ The French employment legislation specifies that the information requested in the recruitment process has to be necessary, and in direct link with the job opportunity.

Every citizen has a record, whether they have been sentenced or not. If they have never been sentenced, the record will be empty. A ‘clean’ record thus corresponds to an empty record. A section of the record can only be requested for safety reasons, for certain jobs. In theory, only convictions that are linked to the type of employment applied for can be considered in the recruitment process.¹² In practice, there is employment discrimination for people with convictions.

¹¹ Article 9 of the Civil Code.

¹² Le Casier Judiciaire National : Un Accès Difficile à Certains Métiers <http://www.cidj.com/le-casier-judiciaire/le-casier-judiciaire-national-un-acces-difficile-a-certains-metiers>

Employers may ask prospective employees for proof of an empty record, which may be an obstacle for people with conviction in their search for employment.

There is a national judicial sex offender database in France, which contains personal information and details on the crimes of people who have been convicted or indicted for a violent crime, including sexual offences (Dorléans, 2009). Judicial authorities and the police have access to this register, as well as state administrators, mayors and other regional leaders and people responsible for recruitment in sectors involving contact with minors. The UK has a similar Violent and Sex Offender Register, which is accessible to the police, the prison and probation service personnel but also private companies that manage prisons.

4.3. Social Security and Welfare

Economic and social differences observed above add to differences in institutional cultures in the two countries. The recipients of social protection and welfare have many similarities with problematics of people with convictions: issues of homelessness/housing, unemployment, financial instability, unstable families and relationships, sickness, and general social exclusion (ONS, 2018: 4). In other words, when it comes to desistance from crime and institutional contexts, looking at the situation of welfare and state support seems evident: people who offend and go through the criminal justice system tend to use and rely on social protection whether this is in terms of job search, medical issues, legal rights, benefits, actual social care like child services or social workers. This is why it can be assumed that a considerable proportion of people with convictions and people who wish to desist from offending will be recipients of social protection systems. Partnerships between probation services and other state services of social care are, in both countries and in theory, central in managing the social rehabilitation efforts of people who are supervised on probation. As the French department for the Penitentiary Administration puts it: “access to due social services, benefits and plans for continued support after release is decisive for the success of the public

penitentiary service's mission of preparing for rehabilitation of people under the responsibility of the justice system" (DAP, 2018: 6).

To start with, linguistic differences of social protection reflect subtly different cultural stances on the matter. Social protection refers to the range of benefits granted to households by the State or by public bodies, with the intention of relieving burdens stemming from specific needs which are "sickness/health, disability, old age, survivors, family/children, unemployment, housing, social exclusion" (Eurostats, 2012: 10). The British notion of 'welfare' conveys well-being, in the context of economic and social conditions, whereas in France the social support system is communicated in terms of 'protection', 'solidarity' and 'help'. What is referred to as the 'welfare state' in the UK has no direct and precise equivalent. A close notion of *Etat Providence* conveys the idea of a State which takes on economic and social principles and practices ensuring a range of social standards for its citizens. Rather, the French equivalent of the British welfare state translates in terms of solidarity and redistribution (Spicker, 1998). *La sécurité sociale* (social security) is therefore the system of resources in charge of supporting people when they need support for issues and needs such as food, housing, hygiene, health and financial. Established after the Second World War like the British welfare state and indeed inspired partly by the Beveridge report, the French social security provides social protection and support by means of redistribution of wealth.

As the Free French (la France Libre) were in London when the Beveridge report was issued, this influenced the shaping of the social security: "Beveridge represented the kind of world that the Allies were fighting for, and perhaps unsurprisingly the authors of the French system wanted to show that what they were doing was related to that kind of ideal" (Spicker, 1998: 67). However, French social policy has stepped away from the report as there is no basis on citizenship or institutional welfare but it is centred instead around the meaningful

notions of solidarity, social responsibility, and support. Solidarity in the context of social policy can be perceived as the continuation and the practical application of the fraternity element of the revolution and found in the country's motto. Solidarity also draws from catholic values of duty to the community and mutual aid.

The French *Régime Général* equates to national insurance, but is not universal, meaning that it does not cover all the population; different categories of benefits are calculated according to different needs such as old age, unemployment, low income, dependency (Spicker, 1998). This means that not everyone is entitled to receive support, rather that everyone would be if they found themselves in one of these categories. The debate in France rests on the scope for solidarity, universalism, and the availability of support for all and on the condition of reciprocation. This idea of condition of reciprocation means that the provision of support depends on the person fulfilling certain conditions to satisfy the State in that the person indeed requires the help and actively works towards improving their own situation. For example, the French RMI (*Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* – income maintenance benefit), equivalent to the British income support, is granted on condition of the demonstration of efforts for insertion, providing proof of a job search, for example. Welfare in France is “based on a concept of collective social responsibility expressed through existing social networks” (Spicker, 1998: 73). The objective is guaranteed social protection.

Three principal elements of the British welfare state are: minimum standards and minimum wage; protection in case of insecurity; and the provision of services at the best level possible (Spicker, 1998: 61). This institutional model of welfare is set on the basis of right, meaning that people have the right to welfare support, on the assumption that need is an inevitable aspect, or risk of life. The notion of a right is not to be confused with universalism: as Spicker makes clear, the right to welfare “does not mean that everyone should receive welfare, but that everyone

should be able to receive it when they need it” (Spiecker, 1998: 63). What is more, the notion of equality is important in the British welfare system, with a focus on equal treatment, opportunity, and equality of result, in practice meaning progressive redistribution of resources where poor and rich get social protection, although this is more valuable, and worth more to the poor. The debate resides on the role of the State in access to welfare in the UK rather than the scope of the services provided. In a liberal, individualised Britain, ideas of the old Poor Law can be linked to the welfare system wherein its usage is seen as a form of dependency on the State.

In substance, the British and French systems are similar to a certain extent: universality of the system (everyone is entitled to it), untransferable rights, organised by the State, based on the redistribution of wealth through taxes. However, having evolved in different cultural contexts, the two are today notably different. In 2018, France had the highest ratio of social protection expenditure to GDP in the EU, having spent on it 31.2% of its GDP, while the UK has spent 20.6% of its GDP (OECD, 2019a: 105). The French social protection system is based around the notion of solidarity between people and groups of people of varying wealth, the State being in charge of redistribution (Spicker, 1998: 61). In contrast,

“Equality has not been a driving principle in social welfare in France in the same way as it has in the UK. Rights in the French model are particular rather than general; they arise, not from the general condition of all citizens, but rather from the specific experience and relationship of each person in a context” (Spicker, 1998: 73).

4.4. Living in England and France: Social Housing

This section explores the differences between France and the UK in terms of housing, more specifically social housing. Similar amounts of people in both

countries live in an urban area.¹³ In 2018, the rate of people living in households and spending over 40% of their income on housing was 4.7% in France and 15.1% in the UK. Housing costs are high in both countries compared to the EU average, by 13.7% for France and 57.7% for the UK.¹⁴ Around 16% of people in France live in social housing (INSEE, 2018) and the proportion is similar in the UK (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2020), with 17%. In sum, the housing landscape is broadly similar in both countries, with the exception of costs, which are higher in the UK.

Social housing in France was built between the 1950s and 70s for reconstruction and economic recovery. Housing was hastily built in the suburbs of big cities to accommodate low-skilled immigrants recruited in the face of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation (Wong and Goldblum, 2016; Stébé, 2009). Today, living in social housing presents many disadvantages, which have accumulated over time. A lot of French social housing has become derelict and neglected, which poses public health issues (Baronet, 2012). Social housing issues have been exacerbated by recurring recessions, rising unemployment, and the impoverishment of the lower classes. Leaving social housing has been identified as a significant challenge in efforts for upwards social mobility, as the high cost of rent elsewhere may prevent people moving closer to city centres and jobs (Laferrère, 2013).

Discrimination in the job market on the basis of postcode is not unheard of, because of the stigma and stereotypes attached (Duguet et al, 2009). This is also the case in the UK, where postcode discrimination is one of the explanations for areas with high levels of unemployment (Nunn et al, 2010). Wong and Goldblum (2016) attribute the rising unemployment in areas of social housing to the end of France's competitiveness as a supplier of low-skilled labour, with rising labour

¹³ In 2020, 83% of the UK and 82% of France resided in an urban area. Worldometer <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/>

¹⁴ Eurostats, check out how expensive your country is <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/WDN-20190624-1?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Feurostat%2F>

costs and the increasing attractiveness of labour from less developed countries. This brought about new patterns of inequality, poverty and unemployment which were reproduced with generations and have been tackled with new housing and welfare schemes. Similarly, increases in unemployment in the UK are also attributed to shifts in the labour market.

In the UK, social housing has evolved from a universal, public, wide-ranging housing model to one that exclusively houses people who do not have access to the private market (Malpass and Victory, 2010). This shift occurred from concerns over public spending and the promotion of homeownership through government incentives like the implementation of the Right to Buy Scheme in 1980 (Pearce and Vine, 2014). This scheme gave tenants of social housing the option to buy their property at a discount. Eventually, better-off tenants were able to become homeowners, leaving the social housing sector increasingly occupied by lower income groups (Forrest and Murie, 1983).

In the UK, in an effort to avoid social segregation, registration for social housing waiting lists is available to anyone, regardless of income. In France, access to social housing is reserved for low to moderate income households. Social housing is referred to as *habitation à loyer modéré*, which translates to ‘housing at moderate rent’. Nevertheless, in both countries social housing is directed at the most vulnerable groups in society, on the basis of need (Braga and Palvarini, 2013). The size of the social housing sector is large in the UK (over 20% of the total housing market) and medium in France (between 11-19% - Braga and Palvarini, 2013: 13).

As of 2015, the proportion of residents in social housing who are a minority or immigrants is twice the share of the French population as a whole. This proportion is only 16% in England (Scanlon et al, 2015). In both France and England, there is an overrepresentation of single parents and single households (INSEE, 2018). In England, there are older and single households, whereas in France, people are

somewhat younger than in the broader population (Scanlon et al, 2015). In 2018, 19.7% of the French population was at risk of poverty with relation to urbanisation. Generally, people who live in social housing have worse living conditions in both countries (INSEE, 2018; Braga and Palvarini, 2013).

4.5. Comparing Societies: Attitudes and Values of English and French People

In this section, I analyse data from the 9th round of the European Social Survey (ESS) conducted in 2018, to provide further comparative elements in establishing the context of desistance in England and France. This section follows Segev's (2020) analysis of the 6th round of the ESS. In her comparison of desistance processes in England and Israel, Segev used ESS data to give more context as to the values broadly held by each country. Selected questions from Schwartz's model of universal human values were analysed in each country to locate them within Europe and provide relevant elements of comparison.

The aim of this section is to compare certain shared attitudes and values between English and French societies. The values that prevail in a certain country are informative of differences between nations and widespread attitudes towards particular values. Davidov and colleagues (2009: 5) have stated: "basic values have predictive and explanatory potential both at the individual and societal levels". Therefore, the results from the analysis of the ESS data on the chosen basic values help us to further establish the national, societal context in which participants of this present study desist. It also helps us to explain the results of the analysis of the participants' narratives by resituating them within their broader national context.

First, the notion of universalism is compared. This was chosen because it refers to "the welfare of those in the larger society" (Schwartz, 2012: 7), and therefore concerns the extent of individualism or solidarity within a society. Then, attitudes concerning conformity are compared. This corresponds to the importance of

compliance, submitting to the expectations of others, and appearing to be like others (Bilsky et al, 2010). The value of tradition is then compared, which refers to the importance of submitting to customs and other sources of expectations which are established with generations, such as religion. Within this section, the religiosity of England and France are compared. Afterwards, values pertaining to social relationships are compared, including the notions of benevolence, sociability, and self-direction. Benevolence refers to concern for the welfare of “people with whom one is in frequent personal contact” (Bilsky et al, 2010: 22). Benevolence is to be considered in contrast with notions of universalism, the former referring to concern for those who are unfamiliar and different, the latter referring to concern for ‘our own’, people who are familiar and similar. The importance of self-direction is also compared, which informs us on the attitudes towards life goals, ambitions, and independence. This section allows us to understand certain characteristics of England and France in a comparative lens and draw a picture of social norms and attitudes of each society in relation to the other.

The ESS data were recoded into three groups including England (N = 1,862), France (N= 2,010) and the rest of Europe (N = 43,214). One-way ANOVA tests were used to analyse answers from Schwartz’s social value questions. ANOVA tests show whether there are statistically significant differences in the mean of answers within each group (Field, 2009). The questions from the ESS were treated as dependent variables and the countries were independent variables. Cross-tabulations were also used to explore relationships between categorical variables from the ESS dataset.

4.5.1. Universalism

Questions pertaining to the value of universalism provide insight into the tolerance of differences within England and France. Understanding, appreciation and the protection of the welfare of all living beings is also included in the notion

of universalism (Schwartz, 2012). The questions in the ESS that address Schwartz's notion of universalism ask respondents to what extent certain statements corresponded to their own values. The answers are on a scale ranging from one (very much like me) to six (not like me at all) and the statements pertain to the following:

- Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities
- Important to understand different people
- Important to care for nature and the environment

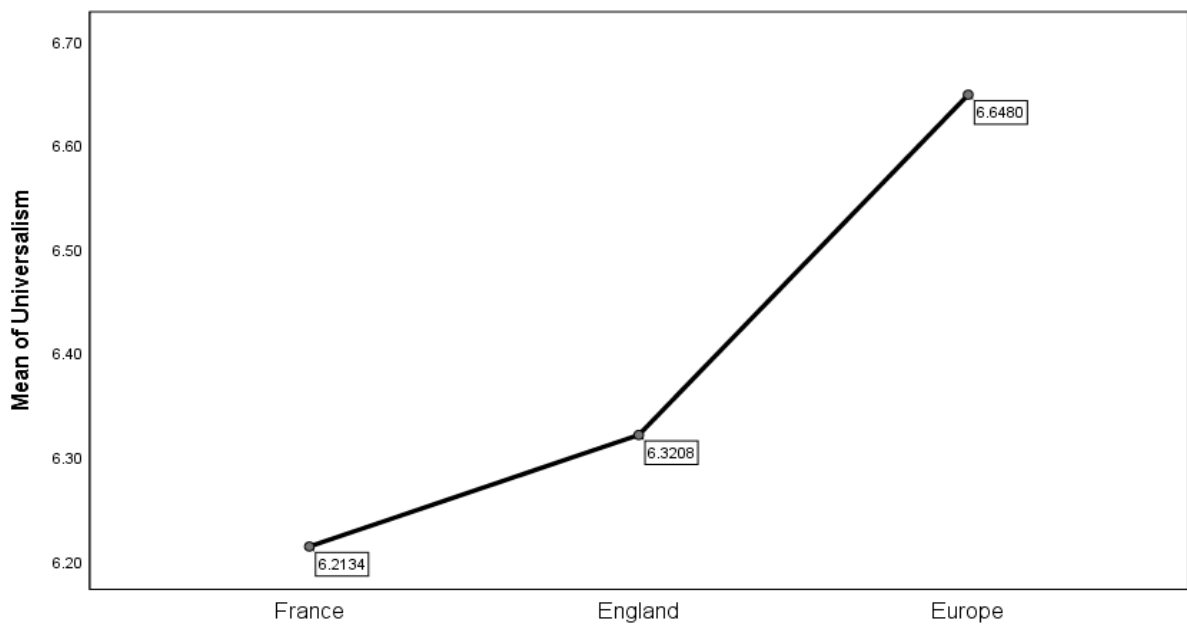


Chart 1: Universalism

The ANOVA test shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the way English and French respondents answered. Both tended to reply that the statements mentioned were like them. This means that there is no significant difference in values of universalism, as shown in Chart 1. However, both countries distinguish themselves from the rest of Europe, with differences in means of -0.43458 with France and -0.32723 for England ($p < .000$ and $F = 47.087$). Higher scores found in the rest of Europe mean higher numbers of answers agreeing with statements, thus, greater levels of universalism, in comparison to England and France.

4.5.2. Conformity

Questions pertaining to the value of conformity provide insight into the restraint of actions and impulses as well as self-restraint, obedience, self-discipline, and politeness (Schwartz, 2012). The statements in the ESS relating to conformity are the following:

- Important to do what is told and follow rules
- Important to behave properly

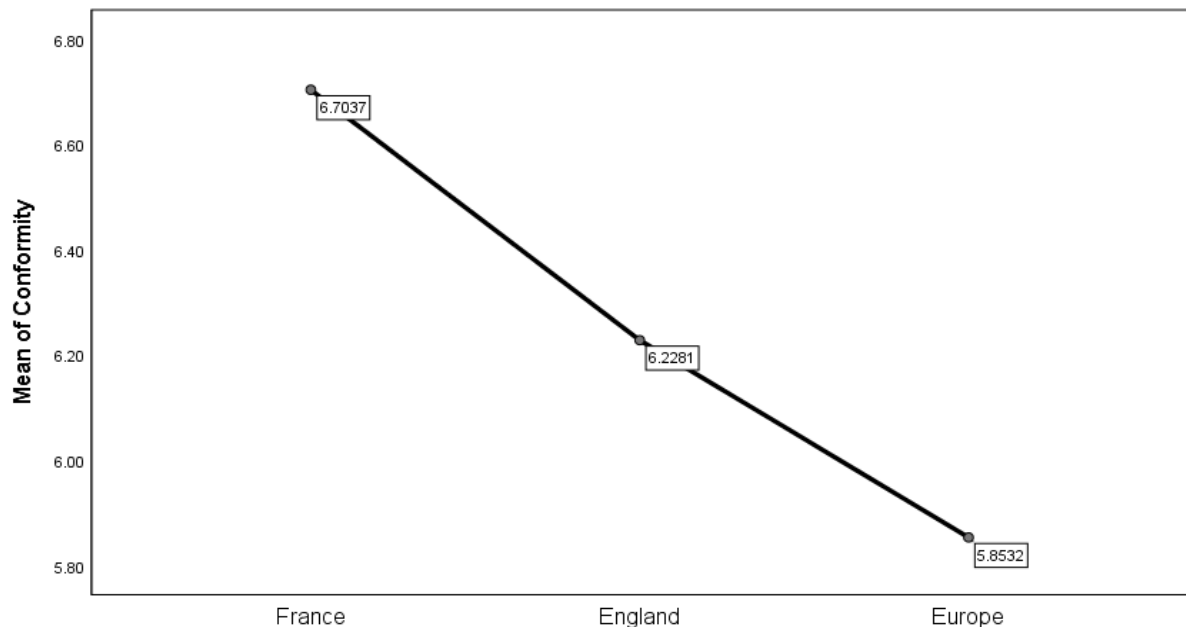


Chart 2: Conformity

The ANOVA test shows that there is a statistically significant difference in French and English values of conformity, both mostly replying that the statements were somewhat like them. The difference of means is $-.47563$ ($F = 151.221$, $p < .000$). The same is true for England and Europe, with a difference of means of $.37486$ and between France and Europe with a difference of $.85049$. French respondents agreed significantly more with the statements than those in England and Europe. France has therefore significantly higher levels of conformity than both England and the rest of Europe.

4.5.3. Tradition

The ANOVA test shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of French and English values for tradition, and there are higher levels of tradition in France. Tradition was measured in the ESS by the question asking respondents whether they identify with the idea of following traditions and customs. The difference in means between England and France is .220 ($F = 173.998$ $p < .000$).

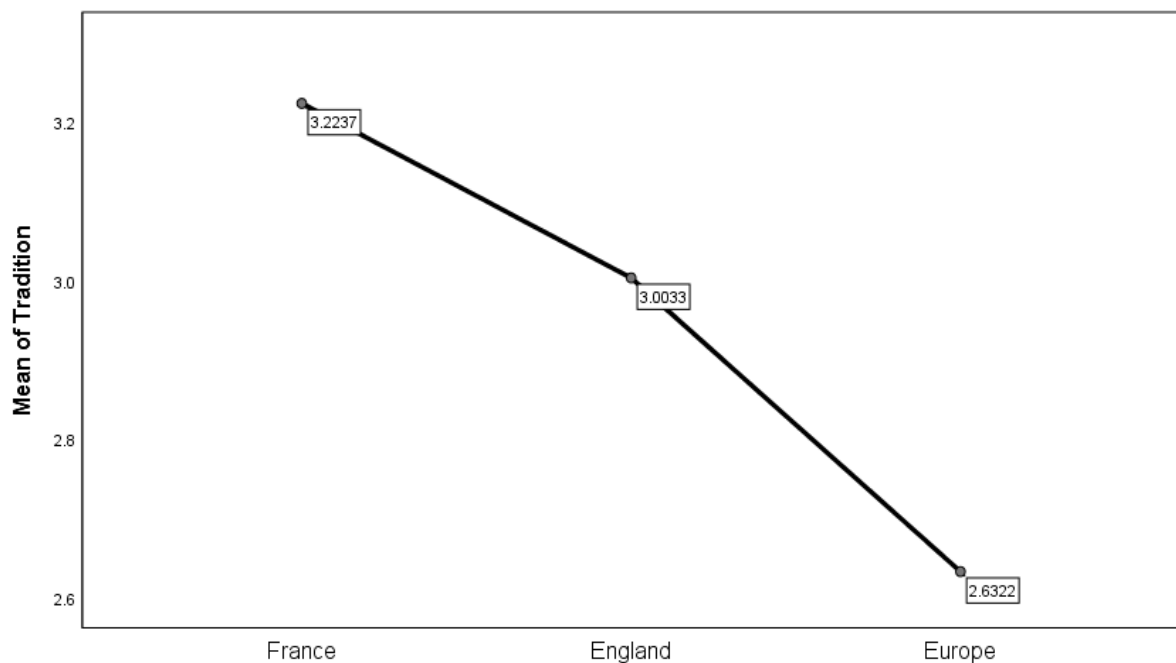


Chart 3: Tradition

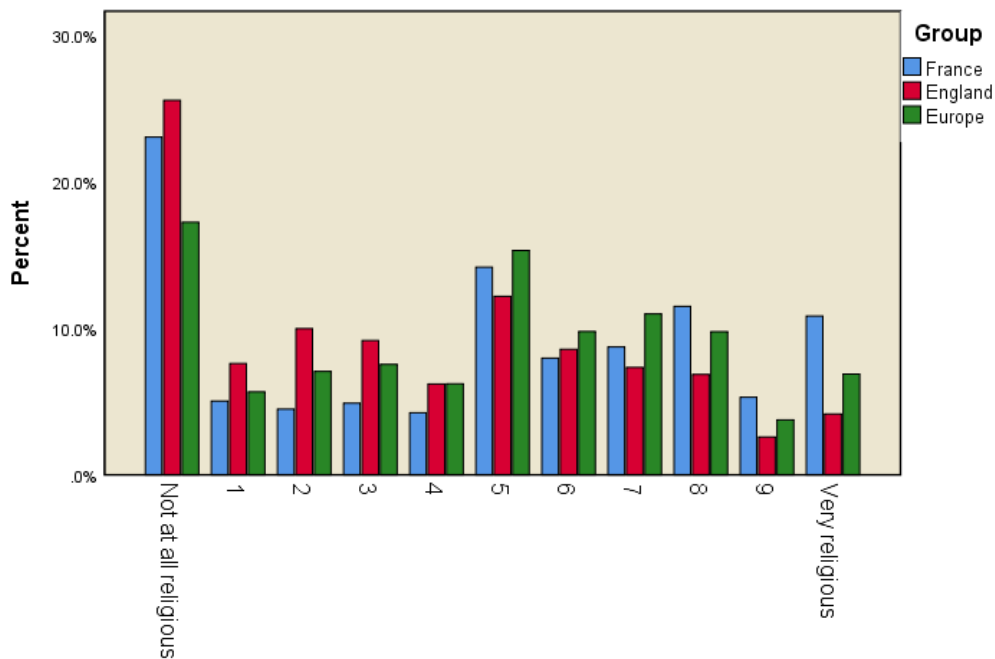
A higher level of conformity and tradition in France may explain the collective ideal of immigration and multiculturalism. For immigrants in France, the general expectation is that of assimilation to French culture and society, broadly speaking (Solomos and Schuster, 2001). A cultural, national tradition of unity through citizenship is present in French society. Citizenship entails fundamental unity, cohesion and a collective identity transcending other personal attributes. French citizens are French first, before religious, ethnic, cultural or any other identification (Favell, 1998).

Despite similar colonial pasts, France and England have different relationships with multiculturalism and variety in ethnicities. The French national motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality, brotherhood/solidarity) illustrates the idea that all citizens are equal, regardless of personal differences. Ethnicity, culture, and religion are thus not monitored like they are in England, because they are considered as private, personal attributes, independent from that of being French (Starkey, 2000; Favell, 1998).

England (and the UK) takes on a different framework in considering differences by highlighting differences and putting them first before any national identity. While France emphasises the importance of integration into society for an ideal of a common, shared national identity, British society addresses race relations, acknowledging differences, maintaining distinctions between groups of people. While in England, schools teach religious education, pupils in France receive civic education, teaching young people about values of the republic and the organisation of State institutions (Starkey, 2000). In contrast, in England and the UK, cultural differences are put forward and consciously highlighted through the political mobilisation of ethnic and religious minorities (Solomos and Schuster, 2001). The notion of citizenship in the UK is less focused on equality and unity and more concerned with celebrating differences and emphasising tolerance (Starkey, 2000).

Religion

When asked how religious they are, 13.5% of English respondents and 27.6% of French respondents replied between 8 and 10. Both England and France are less religious than the rest of Europe. There is a statistically significant difference in the religiosity of English and French respondents ($F = 90.292, p < .000$).



Graph 1: Religiosity

In summary, traditional values are more important in French society. Significantly more French respondents indicated valuing traditions, customs, and religion.

4.5.4. Social Relationships

The following section will focus on differences in values pertaining to social relationships in England and France. To start with, Schwartz's value of benevolence is understood as "preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact" (2012: 7) and provides insight into altruism, compassion, and openness to help others. The statements addressed to respondents are the following:

- Important to help people and care for others' well-being
- Important to be loyal to friends and devoted to people close to them

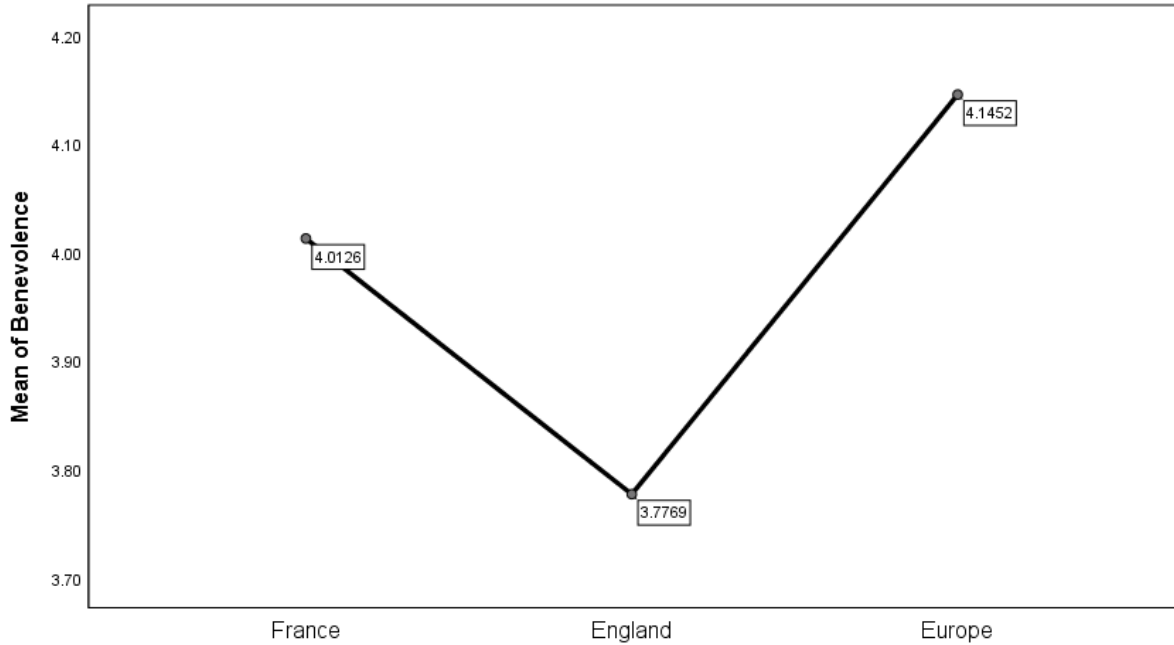
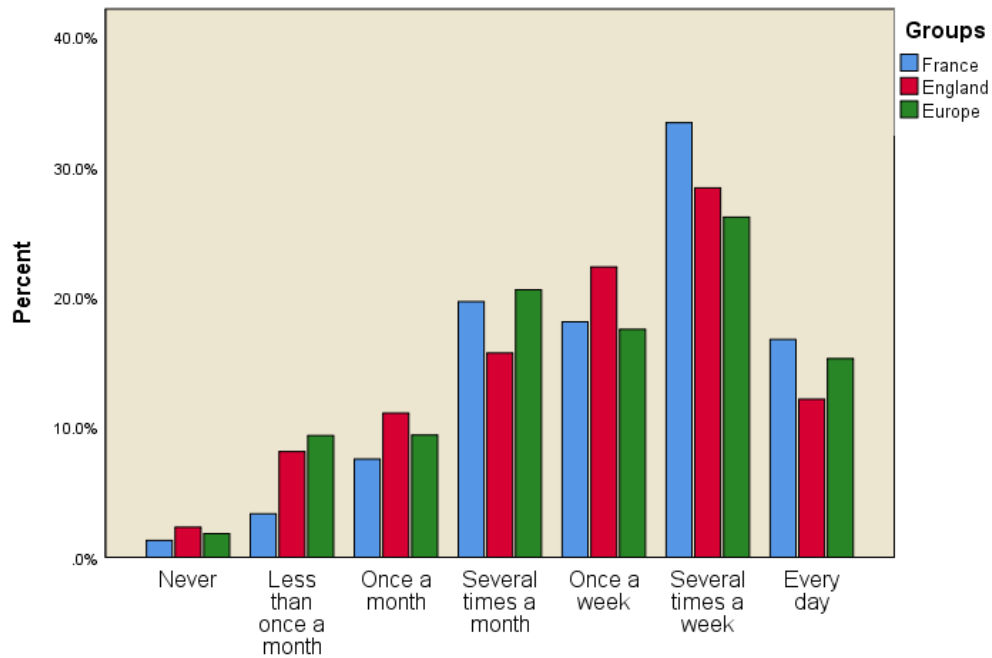


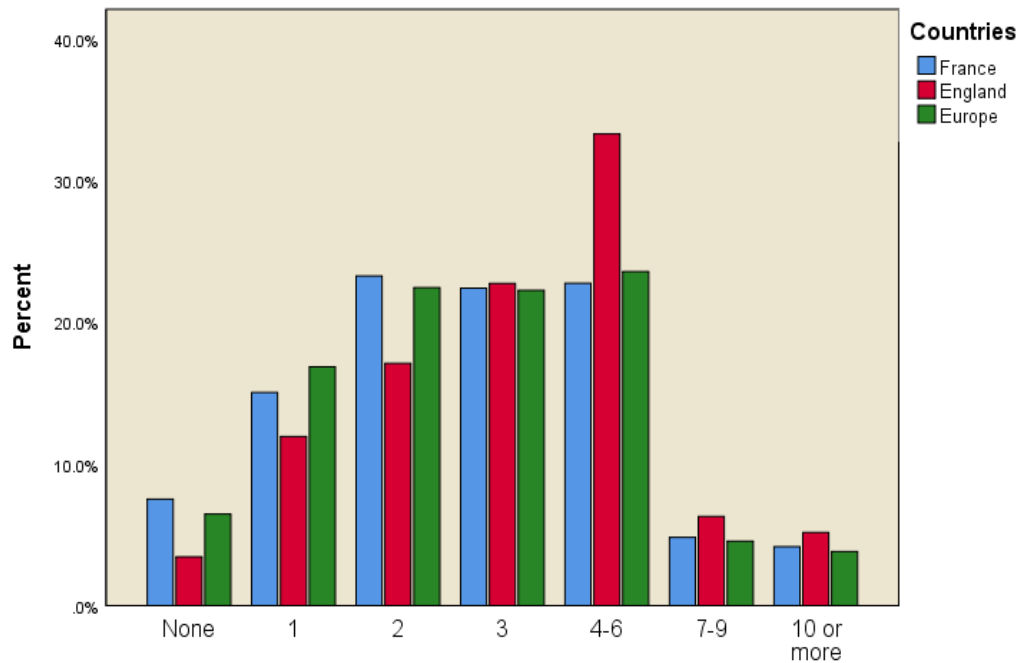
Chart 4: Benevolence

The ANOVA test shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of English and French answers ($F = 56.182, p < .000$), with a difference in means of .23576. This means that England has significantly lower levels of benevolence compared to France. This suggests that social relationships might be more important in France than in England.



Graph 2: Social meetings

Another indicator of the sociability of English and French people is the answers to the question ‘How often do you socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues?’. As graph 2 shows, of the French respondents, 50.1% reported having social meetings several times a week or more, compared to 40.5% for the English respondents and 41.7% for European respondents. This difference was statistically significant ($F = 51.212$ $p < .000$), which suggests that French people are more sociable than their English and European counterparts.



Graph 3: Close personal relationships

Respondents were asked about the number of people they felt they could discuss intimate and personal matters with. English respondents had significantly more people they felt they could have such discussions with ($F = 76.666, p < .000$), with a difference in means of $-.411$.

Segev (2020) found similar results in comparing England and Israel, in that English respondents reported having more people they could discuss personal matters with and suggested that there might be a difference in the interpretation of the question. English and French respondents may consider intimate and personal matters differently, which might explain the difference in answers.

4.5.5. Self-direction

Schwartz's value of self-direction gives insight into attitudes towards the pursuit of life goals, independent thoughts, and actions. The statements relating to self-direction in the ESS are:

- Thinking of new ideas and being creative is important
- Important to make own decisions, to be free and independent

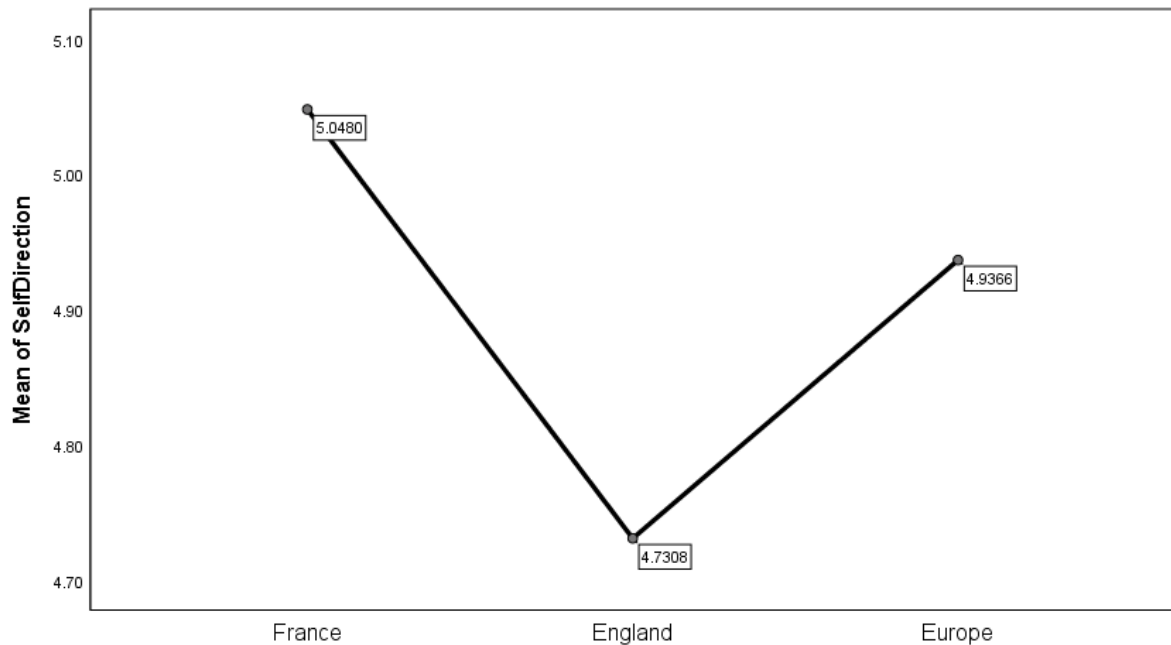


Chart 5: Self-Direction

There is a statistically significant difference in answers between England and France, with a difference in means of .31720 ($F=13.916, p<.000$). Creativity and independence as included in the notion of self-direction is therefore more important in France than in England.

4.5.6. Summarising the ESS Analysis

The analysis of the ESS data in this section has uncovered certain interesting differences in the attitudes and values held in English and French societies. This analysis is valuable to the thesis as it informs us on certain characteristics of the contexts in which desistance takes place, in a comparative lens. In terms of universalism, no significant differences were found between England and France. This means that notions of equal treatment and opportunities, the understandings of different people are equally important in both countries.

With regard to conformity, the analysis found that there is a significant difference between England and France. The results show that France has greater levels of conformity than England, giving more importance to following rules and behaving properly. Conformity entails self-restraint, the restraint of actions and

impulses, which is interesting with regard to offending and desistance. It is essential to clarify here that the results do not suggest that conformity is not important in England, rather that there is a significant difference in how important it is in comparison to France. In other words, conformity is less important in England than it is in France.

Self-direction was measured through statements on the importance of creativity and independence. The analysis found that indicators of self-direction were more important in France than in England. Similarly, and unsurprisingly given the closeness with the notion of conformity, the analysis found that there is a significantly higher importance given to tradition in France. In continuation, the analysis found that French society is more religious than the English one.

The analysis on attitudes towards social relationships, which includes the notion of benevolence, also found significant differences between England and France. Indeed, England has lower levels of benevolence, meaning that less importance is given to helping others and loyalty to friends. This suggests that French society is more geared towards sociability. This being said, larger social circles were found in English data. This finding can be challenged by the potential of different interpretations of the notion of personal matters by English and French respondents.

4.6. Public Opinion on Crime

We know from literature and empirical research that social stigma, societal norms and community support play significant roles in offending trajectories (Farrall et al, 2011; Harvey, 2001). We also know that desistance implies changes and improvements in social integration and conformity, which is why this section specifically examines public opinions on crime, justice, and the rehabilitation of offenders. As the English and British contexts have already been thoroughly explored in criminology and within desistance studies (Segev, 2020; Österman, 2018), I will provide more information on the French context in this section.

The cross-national comparative aspect presents an added obstacle to observing crime rates as there are inevitable differences in types of measuring, defining, or reporting crime, but also differences in societal contexts, transformations, and evolutions (Mucchielli, 2007). There are intricacies to comparing attitudes and statistics between jurisdictions because of different ways in which data are gathered, compiled, and presented. For instance, because of its belonging in the UK, researching information on England can be difficult as the presentation of data is not consistent: sometimes statistics are published for the UK without the breakdown within countries and sometimes the numbers will be added to those of Wales. Because of this, particular attention needs to be given to information and whether data concerns England, Britain, England and Wales or the UK. Similarly, French data sometimes excludes overseas territories.

There seems to have been a gradual growth in interest over the years in matters of justice and punishment in both France and England, evolving alongside a profound change in the overall role assigned to incarceration. Rehabilitation has been a mission for the French Ministry of Justice since the end of the Second World War (Delarue, 2017). In the 1990s while Labour's 'tough on crime' stance was emerging, so did the French risk management rationale (Delarue, 2017). Imprisonment was no longer given to sanction and rehabilitate but to isolate individuals deemed 'dangerous' from the rest of society. The French Penal Law of 1994 introduced this notion of individuals as presenting a danger, thereby establishing in the justice system a logic of risk management, arguably to the detriment of rehabilitation. The idea of imparting change onto an offender was relegated in favour of a public protection rationale. Penal and public policies since then swayed between conceptions of prisons as function of sanction and crime prevention on one hand, and as a way of isolating dangerous people on the other. This logic is also found in the English probation rationale, whereby supervision

is mobilised both for public protection and risk management on the one hand, and rehabilitation and preventing reoffending on the other (Robinson, 1999).

Just like in other major western countries, overall crime rates in France rose until the end of the 20th century and have decreased since 2001 (Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire, 2005). In France, the number of incarcerated people rose as new prison places and new prisons were being built. As of the 1st of October 2019, there were 70,818 prisoners for 61,090 places, meaning that the carceral density was 115.9% (DAP, 2019). Public officials order the construction of new prisons and new places for prisons, which encourages judges to imprison people. The French prison population has increased by 54% since the 1960s while the overall population of the country has only risen by 7% (Delarue, 2017). New crimes such as harassment, cyber-harassment and the redefining of sexual offences and terrorist-related offences have, in the past couple of decades, been especially relevant in media and the public discourse (Delarue, 2017). What is more, judges seem to be all the more inclined to sentence people to prison for offences that are mediatised (Ouss and Philippe, 2016).

Successive governments in France have used a ‘double discourse’, or bifurcation, to discuss matters of punishment and justice, blending together a humanist, empathetic condemnation of conditions of imprisonment while taking on a firm and attacking approach to lawbreakers in tackling crime rates (Delarue, 2017). This means that even though conditions of incarcerations are criticised, more and more prison sentences are being given, rapidly increasing the amount of people imprisoned, leading to an escalation of occupancy rates. Delarue (2017) explains this contradiction from the speeches of politicians: “it is indeed about marking a repressive orientation against petty crime, which has sensibly risen since the 60s” (2017: 36).

Similarly, crime increased in England and Wales from after the Second World War until the mid-1990s (Newburn, 2007: 425). As crime grew, so did the general

public's fear of crime and the demand for punitive public policies (Jennings et al, 2017). Nearing the end of the 20th century, political consensus for penal-welfarism gave way to a stricter government stance for tackling issues of criminality during the 1970s (Newburn, 2007; Reiner, 2000). Particularly at the end of the 20th century, politics on both left and right of the spectrum in England has taken a considerable punitive turn, succumbing, or giving in to populist pressures. This, coupled with an increasingly hardened public attitude to issues of crime and justice, has led to an expansion of penal punitiveness (Tonry, 2004). Changes in the punitiveness of the English justice system implied increase in severity of punishment, both community and custodial, and subsequently led to prison population escalating by two-thirds after just a decade (Newburn, 2007: 426). Rising incarceration rates were not linked to crime rates: "recent substantial decline in crime have coincided with sustained and swift rises in the prison population" (Newburn, 2007: 452). To this day, a drastic increase of incarceration rate continues despite crime rates decreasing. What is more, public support for punitive, tough on crime measures has decreased alongside falling crime rates (Jennings et al, 2017). Fewer than one in ten people responded that imprisoning more people would be an effective way to deal with crime (PRT, 2019). The general public in the UK tends to "neither [be] in favour of locking people up for the sake of it, not do they support policies which do not take into account the wider factors that influence offending" (Crest Advisory, 2018: 14).

The French public's punitiveness is also not as evident as the penal punitiveness would suggest (Mayhew and van Kesteren, 2002: 8). Since the establishment of the socio-judicial supervision (supervision on probation) in 1998 the public critique of the penal system has been calling attention to a lack of means and resources awarded to offender management rather than punitiveness itself (Descarpes, 2008). In the past decade, issues of incarceration have been present in public debate especially with regard to overcrowding (Delarue, 2017). A 2008

survey suggests that 39% of respondents judge that the material conditions of incarceration in France are ‘very bad’; 36% having judged them as ‘bad’ (Descarpes, 2008). This may be in part explained by representations of prisons in the media, which are often in the context of criticism of the living conditions in detention.

With regard to sentencing, more than 90% of respondents expressed being in favour of developing alternative measures to imprisonment (Descarpes, 2008: 2). For instance, early release (in French *libération conditionnelle*, translating to release under terms/conditions) has been credited for its various beneficial effects and for encouraging the released person to adopt a positive attitude, away from reoffending (Descarpes, 2008). These findings suggest that imprisonment is indeed not the main form of sentence in collective minds of the French public, who do not hold a retributive approach to punishment (in other words they do not want to harm the person for their offence).

Descarpes puts forward the observation that “the process of construction and diffusion of knowledge is thus not entirely political or populist, but rather intellectual and conflictual” (2008: 3). In other words, instead of expected populist, penal punitiveness which can be found in the UK and the USA, the French public’s debates on prisons, and punishments tend to be pragmatic, concerned with prisoners’ human rights and effective measures to prevent reoffending. Interestingly, a 2018 study in France has found that 93% of respondents believe that avoidance of religious radicalisation in prison and the avoidance of having dangerous individuals free in communities are seen as priorities for prisons in France (Lévy et al, 2018). This result suggests that incarceration is a valid and legitimate tool in the eyes of the French public in *some* circumstances. The rationale put forward here is public protection and risk avoidance, which can be argued to stem from a specific post-terrorism context when there was widespread discussion on prisons as generally amplifying

criminal behaviour and radicalisation. The French public therefore understand incarceration as not only criminogenic but the specific context of the country means prisons are seen as spaces of religious radicalisation. The French public's knowledge on matters of incarceration is thus reactive to reported living conditions, and less dependent on stereotypes conveyed by politicians. There has also been important activism calling for the abolition rather than reform of prisons (Charbit and Ricordeau, 2015).

This chapter explored and compared characteristics of English and French societies in order to establish knowledge on the societal context in which the present research takes place. The UK is a more favourable setting than France in terms of subjective well-being, employment, skills and earning. There are higher levels of inequality in the UK but lower levels of unemployment than in France. That being said, the risk of poverty is lower in France. The countries have similar difficulties with regard to social mobility, with a slightly better situation in the UK. This chapter has also overviewed criminal record check systems in the UK and France and compared welfare systems and social housing. The ESS data have provided more context to the attitudes and values of the two countries with relation to each other. It was found that France gives more weight to values pertaining to conformity, self-direction, and tradition, so is a more conservative but also individualist country than England. It was found that French people were more sociable, but that English people had a larger social circle. Lastly, there was a discussion on similar punitive turns in British and French criminal justice systems and changing public opinions on punitiveness. The following chapter will continue the comparative exercise by focusing on the two criminal justice systems, further providing context to relevant aspects of living and desisting in England and France.

Chapter 5 – Introducing and Comparing Criminal Justice Systems

In this chapter, I compare the criminal justice contexts in England and France in order to understand the institutional contexts of offending, punishment, and desistance. As the English criminal justice system has already been thoroughly examined by previous comparative studies of desistance (see Segev, 2020; Österman, 2018), I mostly provide information on the French criminal justice system. Here, I argue that while both countries experienced a punitive turn and increasingly adopted a risk management rationale, the English probation services tend to be geared, in theory, towards evidence-based practices, whereas the French criminal justice delivery is not based on evidence from empirical research and derives its delivery from the intellectual roots of social work.

I start by outlining the two criminal justice systems, their use of prisons, levels of punitiveness, rates of incarceration and reoffending. Then, I focus on how probation is organised and delivered in the two countries, including the work of probation officers. I argue that both countries adopt a risk management rationale implemented from punitive, ‘tough on crime’ policies that are distinct from previous ideals of rehabilitation in England and social work in France. This chapter, along with Chapter 4, contributes to outlining the contexts in which English and French desisters journey away from crime. As this chapter aims to provide a picture of the criminal justice settings that the participants in this study have experienced, the information and statistics provided here will mostly provide an overview of the situations around the time when the interviews were conducted (between 2018 and 2019).

5.1. Introducing the Two Justice Systems

The English and Welsh Ministry of Justice, created in 2007, deals with criminal law, sentencing, reducing reoffending, prisons, and probation as well as Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC).¹⁵ More detail on probation services will be provided later in this chapter. The delivery of penal punishment in both custodial and non-custodial contexts is provided by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The priorities of the Ministry of Justice are to run “a prison and probation service that reforms offenders”, “a modern courts and justice system” aiming for “a global Britain that promotes the rule of law”.¹⁶ Sentencing is carried out by Her Majesty’s Courts Service, and the execution of sentences by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Services as well as the CRCs.

The Ministry of Justice in France has two main responsibilities: the preparation of judicial texts and the administration of justice through courts, prisons, and probation services, meaning the application of the law in practice (Ministère de la Justice, 2013). It also ensures the management and operation of the many branches of the justice system, including civil and criminal affairs, the courts, the Penitentiary Administration and youth protection and justice affairs. The Ministry of Justice handles and deals accordingly, in other words with people who are under judicial authority. The Ministry also defines and enforces public policies to do with law, crime, and deviance, such as victim support or access to common law institutions (Ministère de la Justice, 2013). The Ministry of Justice’s legislative department is divided into two branches of management: civil and penal (Ministère de la Justice, 2017). The former elaborates and generates laws pertaining to civil and commercial domains, participating in the discussions on

¹⁵ The structure of probation in England and Wales is changing with a renationalisation following failures of the Transforming Rehabilitation program. See: <https://www.russellwebster.com/probation-is-renationalised/>

¹⁶ Ministry of Justice website – About Us section: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about>

public and constitutional law. The latter elaborates projects pertaining to penal law and penal process, defining, and applying penal policies.

The Penitentiary Administration is the branch of the French Ministry of Justice which handles matters of incarceration, punishment, and rehabilitation. Once sentences have been imposed, the Penitentiary Administration organises and delivers the sentence – whether this is in a closed environment (prison) or in open environments, which have alternative forms of sentencing, in the community (Ministère de la Justice, 2007). The Penitentiary Administration in France is a branch of the Ministry of Justice which deals with sentencing in practice. The entirety of the penitentiary system in France is a public service. This means that the State is entirely and solely responsible for the whole of the penal process as well as its financing. Its two main responsibilities are as follows (Ministère de la Justice, 2007):

- Organising and implementing sentences pronounced by judges. This is applicable to all types of sentences, not only ones for incarceration. In carrying these out, the Penitentiary Administration is responsible for guaranteeing public safety through ensuring the monitoring of people placed under their authority.
- Encouraging when possible the individualisation of sentencing in order to support reinsertion into society. In other words, the Penitentiary Administration can suggest modifications to the measures to judges according to the profile of the individual and the progress they will have made.

The penitentiary in France is composed of several prisons of different characteristics, of the probation services and of a special department in charge of training staff (Vie Publique, 2014; Ministère de la Justice, 2007). Within the Penitentiary Administration, the staff includes prison guards and staff, probation

workers, judges, lawyers, medical staff, volunteers from charity organisations funded by the State. As of the 1st of January 2017, the Penitentiary Administration is composed of 103 probation services, 5,095 probation officers and 186 penitentiary buildings (Ministère de la Justice, 2017a).

In England and Wales, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is accountable for sentences in and out of custody, as well as rehabilitation. HM Prison Service manages public sector prisons, on the one hand, and private prisons contracts, on the other. At the time of data collection for this study, the National Probation Service was similarly handling public probation and contracts with private CRCs. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services are responsible for running prison and probation services; for rehabilitation services for people leaving prison; and for "making sure support is available for people to stop reoffending".¹⁷ In 2017, the National Offender Management Service was replaced by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to assist prison and probation services in managing offenders (Ministry of Justice, 2017a).

5.2. The Problem of Overcrowded Prisons

As this thesis is concerned with journeys out of crime, it is important to consider the circumstances of involvement in the criminal justice system, and specifically those surrounding penal punishment. People with convictions will typically have either been imprisoned or faced a potential prison sentence. The impact of a prison sentence on desistance processes is complex, whether criminogenic or deterrent (Maruna and Toch, 2005). It is therefore worth noting the state of prisons in each context, which informs us on both institutional circumstances and individual experience.

¹⁷ HM Probation and Prison Service website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about>

In 2018, England and Wales ranked 3rd in overall prison overcrowding in Europe, after Russia and Turkey, followed by Poland (4th) and France ranked in 5th.¹⁸ If we include Scotland with England and Wales, together they have the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe (PRT, 2019). There are difficulties in comparing official statistics of the penal populations in England and France, due to variations in how the numbers are collected and presented. While the French Penitentiary Administration deals with the delivery of probation, people supervised in the community are not necessarily counted in their official statistics. In France, the Penitentiary Administration talks of *écrou* to designate people who are under their responsibility and subject to a sentence that restrains their liberties and not necessarily supervised on probation. As such, someone can be placed ‘under’ *écrou* while not necessarily being imprisoned, but also not considered as ‘free’, for example, in cases of electronic monitoring or *placement extérieur* whereby people spend nights in prison and days outside.¹⁹ At times, statistics are given for people under *écrou*, while in some documents, the number of people incarcerated is provided. As of the 1st of December 2018, 71,061 people were imprisoned in France, out of the 82,634 dealt with by the Penitentiary Administration (excluding probation – Ministère de la Justice, 2018: 5). As of May 2018, the total prison population in England and Wales was 83,430 (Sturge, 2018: 3).

In both England and France, the prison population is increasing (Ministère de la Justice, 2018; Sturge, 2018). While the overall number of incarcerated people in Europe is decreasing, in France it is still increasing across decades.²⁰ In 2017, 97

¹⁸ World Prison Brief <https://www.prisonstudies.org/>

¹⁹ Dictionnaire de criminologie en ligne, démographie Carcérale. <http://criminologie.com/categorie/articles-mots-cl%C3%A9s/ex%C3%A9cution-des-peines>

²⁰ From 35,876 people in 1983 to 54,269 in 1997, 64,787 in 2012 (Ministère de la Justice, 2014a: 15) and 69,714 in 2017 (Ministère de la Justice, 2017b: 4)

*maisons d'arrêt*²¹ were overpopulated by at least 120% (Direction de l'Administration Pénitentiaire, 2017b). The number of people incarcerated who are awaiting trial tends to evolve in time with the number of people being given prison sentences and represented about 25% of the total incarcerated population in 2014 (de Bruyn and Kensey, 2014) and 28.7% in 2018.¹⁹ In contrast, people on remand in England and Wales accounted for 13.8% in 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2014) and 11% as of 2018 (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

The growth of the number of incarcerated people in France is a major preoccupation for the Penitentiary Administration and thus for the Ministry of Justice, because of the gap between the number of detainees and the number of available spaces in prisons (de Bruyn and Kensey, 2014). Statistics published by the Council of Europe illustrate 'acute overcrowding' and show that there were 113.4 inmates for 100 spaces in the country in 2015 (Aebi et al, 2016: 34). Undignified circumstances in prison are evidenced by the number of people incarcerated who slept on mattresses on the floor, which was 1,547 as of the 1st of December 2018 (Ministère de la Justice, 2018: 4). Among the 27 countries for which data was available, in 2015, the Netherlands had the lowest occupancy levels, with 76.9 inmates per 100 places, followed by Poland and Spain with 81.1 and 82.3, respectively. In contrast, France is second to last out of the 27 with 113.4 and the UK is 10th in the ranking with 97.3, which is just above the EU average of 94.1 (Aebi et al, 2016: 48). Prison overcrowding is therefore particularly severe in France, compared to the UK.

It has been reported that in France, 132 inmates died in prison in 2014, of which 77 were suicides (Aebi et al, 2016: 115) and the *Observatoire International des Prisons* (International Observatory of Prisons - OIP) mentions on its website that

²¹ The French prison system is divided into *maison d'arrêt* (for people awaiting trial and those sentenced to up to two years), *centre de détention* (for people whose are sentenced to more than two years) and *maison centrale* (high security prison for people with very long sentences)

there were 121 cases of suicide in the country in 2015.²² In England and Wales, in the year leading up to March 2019, there were 317 deaths in prison, of which 87 were reported as cases of suicide in prisons (Ministry of Justice, 2019a: 1). Moreover, the numbers might be much higher than these in reality, as deaths by suicide might not get reported as such. The European Court of Human Rights has condemned several prisons in France for their poor conditions. These conditions concern hygiene, nutrition, contact with the outside world, access to healthcare and education (Crétenot and Liaras, 2013). Suicides in prison and the overcrowded inmate population are problems that are accompanied by the issue of general conditions of detention. These reports paint, in part, a picture of what it is like to carry out a prison sentence.

As a solution to these problems, the current French President, Emmanuel Macron, has announced the construction of 10,000 further prison places. However, it is generally accepted that increasing the number of available places is not a long-term solution as the prison population tends to increase at the same rate as the places available (Raffaelli, 2017). The overcrowding of French prisons can be explained in part by looking at the punitiveness of the judiciary and harsh sentencing, privileging prison over alternative measures. The situation in England and Wales is also bleak, for similar reasons. Two thirds of prisons house people in inadequate conditions (Savage and Townsend, 2018). The safety in English and Welsh prisons has been worsening and both prisoners and staff's safety is deteriorating (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2017).

5.3. Who is in Prison in England and France?

As mentioned above, a challenge in cross-national comparative research is the availability of reliable and comparable data. Due to differences in how data on the criminal justice system are gathered and compiled, it is difficult to draw a

²² Journal Spécial des Sociétés. Suicide en Milieu Carcéral : un Taux Sept Fois plus Elevé en Détenion.
https://www.jss.fr/Suicide_en_milieu_carceral_un_taux_sept_fois_plus_eleve_en_detention_-1378.awp

reasonable comparison on the typical population going through criminal justice processes. That being said, national prison data is generally available and can in part inform us on the clientele of respective criminal justice systems.

In 2017, five per cent of the English and Welsh prison population and 3.7% of the French prison population were female (Sturge, 2018: 6; DAP, 2018; Ministère de la Justice, 2017b). As of March 2018, around a quarter of English and Welsh prisoners were sentenced for violence against the person and 15% each for drug related, sexual offences and theft (Sturge, 2018: 8). In 2018 in France, 17.4% of penal offences were for physical violence, 20.4% for property-related offences, and 20.2% were ‘other’ offences, which included drug-related ones (Ministère de la Justice, 2019: 17). The different ways of recording and classifying offences make it hard to adequately compare data, as the categories in these statistics illustrate. The age distributions of prisoners in England and France are roughly similar.²³

Around 46% of the prison population were serving a prison sentence of over four years in England and Wales (Sturge, 2018: 7), around a quarter were serving one to four years and roughly 8% were serving a sentence of less than a year (2018: 8). In 2018, there were over twice as many people sentenced to more ten years or more in England and Wales, compared to 2006 (PRT, 2019: 3). Around half of all sentences in France in 2018 have led to a prison sentence, of which 46.6% led to imprisonment, for an average of 8,8 months (Ministère de la Justice, 2019: 18). Imprisonment is thus common in both countries, and France seems to privilege non-custodial sentences. Long prison sentences are more frequent in England and Wales compared to France, where people spend less time incarcerated.

²³ Of all people dealt with by the Penitentiary Administration in France as of the 1st of January 2018, 23% were 18-25 years old, 19.2% were 25-30 years old, 28.9% were 30-40 years old, 15,9% were 40-50 years old and 11.8 % were over 50 (DAP, 2018: 5). As of March 2018, in England and Wales, 17% of the prison population were 18-24 years old, 18% were 25-29 years old, 30% were 30-39 years old, 18% were 40-49 and 16% were over 50 years old (Sturge, 2018: 9).

The average length of penal procedures in France was 42.2 months for crimes and 11.7 for offences. In cases of appeal, the average delay of procedures from the first sentencing to the appeal decision is 20.3 months for crimes and 15.7 for offences (Ministère de la Justice, 2019: 18). In England and Wales in 2011, penal procedure from the offence until sentencing took around five months (Ministry of Justice, 2012), which is at least twice as fast as for offences in France. The English justice system is swifter than France's, which has been condemned multiple times by the European Court of Human Rights for failing to deliver justice in a reasonable time (Spencer, 2016).

5.4. Punitiveness and Alternatives to Imprisonment

Research in the English and Welsh context has shown the potential of alternative sentences, or non-custodial sentences, on reducing crime rates (Abramovaite et al, 2018), demonstrating the downsides of a punitive justice system. Penal punitiveness, repressive responses to crime and offending, has been thoroughly explored in the English and Welsh context, in terms of its significance for criminal justice philosophy (Nelken, 2011; Garland, 2001); the state and role of public opinion (Roberts and Hough, 2011; Bottoms, 1995); consequences of punitive strategies on criminal justice policy and long-term effects of such policy changes (Farrall et al, 2016). The creation and use of alternative sentences to imprisonment is considered as one of several indices of punitiveness, among which, for example, juvenile justice (Hamilton, 2014). Again, much is known on punishments in the community in the English context (Garland, 2001), in terms of its place in the penal subjective experiences (Hayes, 2018) but also in terms of legitimacy in contrast to imprisonment (McNeill and Robinson, 2012) as well as efficiency and compliance in community punishments (Robinson and McNeill, 2008), all of which puts the idea of punitiveness in perspective. With empirical research, the societal and criminal justice perspectives on offending and desistance are understood, and the consequences of punitive mentalities onto desistance

processes are known (Maruna and King, 2009). In contrast, little is known empirically on the state and consequences of punitiveness in the French justice system, apart from in the context of youth justice (see Sallée, 2017). Despite renowned French philosophical work challenging the role of punishment in prison (Foucault, 1975), evaluations of alternative sentences in the French context are rare, and data are limited to what official Ministry of Justice data provides. For this reason, this section of the chapter will focus on discussing penal punitiveness through efforts for alternative sentences in the French context, to provide the necessary background information to the current research.

Penal reforms and criminal justice strategies in France are largely based on the assumption that social integration will lower risks of reoffending. Prison sentences that are not suspended are by law required to be given as last resort (Kensey, 2013). Non-custodial sentences and probation delivery are shaped to tailor individual needs for (re)socialisation (Desportes and Le Gunehec, 2003). The principle of individualisation of sentences is important to French penal law (Saleilles, 1898) as it, in theory, guarantees addressing the aims of sentences (Dubourg, 2016). This means that circumstances of the offences and the offender are in theory considered in sentencing and implementation of sentences, with the end goal of preventing reoffending, facilitating reintegration into society and, more broadly, public protection. Sentence implementation judges therefore scrutinise people's efforts for social integration in making decisions regarding the amendment of sentences and judicial measures.

Penal punishment in France can be distinguished between the sentencing process and the post-sentencing decisions that are made after the conviction will have been imposed. A measure called the *aménagement de peine* allows people who have been sent to prison to apply for a modification of their sentence to suit their specific case and allow them to work on their rehabilitation. *Aménagement de peine* literally means 'amendment of sentence' and constitutes an opportunity for

people to make a case for their measures to be modified by the sentence implementation judge. This measure was implemented as an attempt to tailor sentences to the individual and their social needs (Ministère de la Justice, 2013a). The emergence of this measure was linked to the increased weight given to sentence implementation processes and the judge responsible for them (Agoguet, 2013). This contrasts with the English and Welsh penal system, in which amendments of judicial measures are rare. There is, however, a parole system in England and Wales, in which people already serving a prison sentence can be eligible for parole (Padfield, 2006). The Parole Board oversees releases in cases of life sentence, extended determinate sentences and sentences of “offenders of particular concern” as well as the re-release of people who have been imprisoned for breach of their licence conditions.²⁴

An *aménagement de peine* allows people to request a conditional release from prison, or for their sentence to be suspended if they demonstrate their case warrants it. This appears as a flexible policy, compared to the more rigid English system, where sentences are not subject to modification, unless in exceptional circumstances (Agoguet, 2013). The conditions for sentence amendment being considered are any of the following:

- If they have manifested sufficient efforts for reinsertion
- If they are actively engaging with their family environment
- If they need to receive medical treatment
- If they make efforts to repair the damage made to victims
- If they are implicated in a serious project for employment, education, or training.

These measures mean that people sentenced to prison can serve some or all of their sentence outside of prison, to maintain aspects of their social integration and

²⁴ The Parole Board, About Us: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/parole-board/about>

avoid potential marginalisation from imprisonment. The availability of the option for sentence modification seems to be adopted by various criminal justice systems across Europe: Agoguet (2013) has found in Germany, Italy and Spain, the emergence of sentence modification measures for short prison sentences, in order to avoid the known criminogenic impacts of short-term imprisonment.

If the modification of the sentence is approved, it is accompanied by specific conditions the person has to respect. These conditions, named *obligations*, are requirements, for instance, getting medical assistance, repairing damage caused to a victim or to society. They can be follow-ups with a probation officer, or restriction on travel beyond a set area (Ministère de la Justice, 2013a). With the *aménagement de peine*, the incarcerated person can also request to be released in exchange for being closely monitored. This can be done with a *semi-liberté* regime (semi freedom), where the person needs to respect a timetable set by the judge and is incarcerated certain days at certain hours only. A modification to the prison sentence for a *placement à l'extérieur* (placed outside) means that the person is free to spend the daytime outside but is housed overnight in prison. The monitoring can also be done with electronic surveillance. As of the 1st of January 2018, 20.4% of the people who were dealt with by the Penitentiary Administration benefitted from a modification of their sentence (Ministère de la Justice, 2018: 7).

As of the 1st of January 2018, 13.5% of people under the responsibility of the justice system were given sentences other than imprisonment (Ministère de la Justice, 2018). In contrast, as of the 1st of January 2010, 7.7% of the total number of people dealt with by the Penitentiary Administration were sentenced to sentences alternative to prison (Ministère de la Justice, 2011: 3). This increase in the proportion of people convicted to what is called 'alternative sentences' demonstrates an effort to keep individuals socialised towards prospects of rehabilitation. The Ministry of Justice's research has shown that individuals being released from prison without an *aménagement de peine*, (without an amendment

of their sentence) were significantly more likely to reoffend than those who get released with such negotiated terms (Ministère de la Justice, 2014a: 6).

Chantraine (2000) argued that abolishing of the death penalty in France led to an increase in severity of the treatment of criminal convicts all along the penal process, essentially resulting in the elongation of prison sentences. The subsequent implementation of sanctions alternative to prison and of the *aménagement de peine* have also a role in the lengthening of sentences, specifically with regard to recidivism. If a person who has already benefitted from a sentence modification reoffends, this will be perceived as a breach of trust, leading to harsher sentences upon reconviction. The same reasoning applies to recidivism in cases of suspended sentences, if a person offends while they are already purging a conviction (Chantraine, 2000). This logic is used by some politicians to encourage prison sentences and deter from punishments in the community, which are often considered ‘laxist’, meaning too lenient.

Another example of alternative measures to imprisonment is electronic monitoring, which is a measure that can be given to alleviate a prison sentence, so that the inmate can purge part or all of their custodial sentence outside. It can also be pronounced when an inmate asks to be released under specific conditions set by the judge, as mentioned above. Furthermore, electronic monitoring can be used as an alternative to preventative detention for people awaiting trial. In 2017, 10,519 people in France were sentenced to electronic surveillance with ankle monitoring, and a further 10,187 were able to negotiate their prison sentence to be released with an ankle monitor (Ministère de la Justice, 2017b). As with most administrative procedures within the justice system, the *Aménagement de Peine* is a difficult and lengthy one, as inmates need to prove that they are trustworthy to be released and, through a series of interviews with probation officers and judges, need to demonstrate regret for their actions and the ability to recognise what they did as wrong, so as to make them guarantee that this type of behaviour

would not happen again. This is akin to what Maruna calls a rehabilitative ceremony, in that the State acknowledges, by agreeing to amend a sentence, that people can change and move on from offending (Maruna, 2011a).

In 2014, the penal system was reformed through the *loi Taubira* (law passed by the minister at the time, Christiane Taubira) which aimed to individualise sentences, prevent recidivism and to avoid “dry exits” out of prison, which refer to cases where individuals are released without personalised support or follow-up (Ministère de la Justice, 2014a: 5). A new sentence was created alongside this law, that was specifically introduced to avoid sentencing people to prison. Indeed, in France 64% of people released from prison are reconvicted within 5 years (Gouvernement.fr, 2017). This sentence is the *contrainte pénale* – in English, the ‘penal constraint’ – which, imposed a set of obligations (or constraints) and bans according to the individual situation and circumstances, for up to 5 years. This measure was accompanied with the undoing of more punitive policies that were previously instated (Forseti and Paul, 2014) and allowed for reinforced and strict monitoring of the individual while preserving their freedom. As such, this measure was applied to individuals who are not considered as a threat to society – delinquents but not criminals. Should the individual breach the law while on this measure, or not respect the constraints or bans, the judge may order their incarceration. The *contrainte pénale* was also instated to speed up the penal process, as the measure starts as soon as sentencing is pronounced, as opposed to prison sentences which can be executed months after the judge takes a decision.

Public opinion and the socio-cultural climate are crucial factors in judicial decisions (see Chapter 4) and therefore penal strategy. Despite these efforts to reduce overcrowding of the penitentiary, France’s prison population has increased and looks likely to continue to increase. These trends are indicative of the level of punitiveness and the resort to incarceration by the justice system; the evolution of the length of these prison sentences also demonstrates an increasingly punitive

judiciary. An increasing average amount of time spent incarcerated is suggested to be the main reason for over-population of prisons (de Bruyn and Kensey, 2014). Prison sentences, which are ‘de-socialising’ (isolating the offender from the society, their social network and restricting the expansion of this network), contribute to the punitive aspect of measures, rather than the notion of repairing harm to the community.

A call for punitiveness, through a collective, social reaction, can be considered as efforts for repairing the social fabric of society breached by the offence. In France, a punitive framing was constructed in particular with public and politician discourse around insecurity (Bonelli, 2007). Media attention and electoral campaigns often encourage public concern and desire for more repressive and punitive sentencing, penal reforms, and policies. Through populist policymaking, attitudes held by the majority of people may often shape the level of punitiveness of the judiciary. This is what French sociologist Tocqueville calls the ‘tyranny of the majority’, in public opinion’s potential to influence legislation in a democracy such as France. Nevertheless, as Chapter 1 argued, the French public tends to be in favour of alternatives to imprisonment and less punitive than its English counterparts. Ultimately, a lack of empirical research means it is difficult to draw a comprehensive picture of the impact of a punitive justice system onto individual behavioural change.

5.5. The Use of non-Custodial Measures

Community sentences typically result in lower reoffending rates than imprisonment (Yukhnenko et al, 2019). In France as of 2018, 67% of individuals dealt with by the CJS were carrying out a sentence in the community, and 33% were imprisoned. This includes people awaiting trial, which is the case for 25% of the imprisoned population (INSEE, 2019: 86). In England and Wales, the proportion of offenders sentenced to non-custodial punishment is much lower, with eight percent of sentences being served in the community in 2019 (Ministry

of Justice, 2020: 6). The use of community sentences in England and Wales has more than halved during the past decade (PRT, 2019: 2), despite Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders reportedly leading to lower reoffending rates (Ministry of Justice, 2015).

In the past couple of decades in Europe, there has been a growth in the sentencing options for non-custodial measures (Aebi and Hashimoto, 2018), and in 2017, probation supervision had a higher population rate than incarceration in most countries of the Council of Europe (Aebi et al, 2019). Non-custodial sentences have been increasingly given out in efforts to divert individuals having committed low-severity offences from incarceration, considering the recidivism rate for short prison sentences compared to community sentences (Ministry of Justice, 2013a). In an effort to reduce custody rates, the UK has established Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders, implemented in 2005, with which provide alternatives to short prison sentences. These orders are implemented with requirements to be carried out in the community, including probation supervision, unpaid work, addressing health issues, completing accredited programs, and curfews and limitations to certain locations (Mair et al, 2007: 11).

In France, the (now defunct) ‘penal constraint’ – or *contrainte pénale* – created in 2014 was a new type of measure which established probation supervision as a sentence on its own, resulting from efforts to legitimise and give value to punishments in the community (de Larminat, 2014). Probation supervision is accompanied by ‘obligations’ which are measures to be carried out in the community, much like the requirements for Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders. These are tailored to the individuals’ situations in order to increase the likelihood of social integration and prevent reoffending. Moreover, there has been an increasing use of early prison release strategies in Europe, in efforts to reduce the amount of time and people spent incarcerated (Anderson and

Telle, 2019). This means that community measures also act as a transition from custodial to non-custodial supervision and punishment.

Community sentences are often perceived in the French public discourse as alternatives to incarceration (OIP, 2020) rather than legitimate sentences on their own. In France, probation supervision is not always accompanying sentences in the community and can be a sentence on its own. In England and Wales, probation supervision is carried out either after a prison sentence of 12 months or more, as part of a Community Order or a suspended sentence. In other words, probation supervision is always a measure carried out in the community but not all community sentences entail probation supervision (for example, suspended sentences, TAG, or unpaid work). Community sentences reportedly lead to lower reoffending rates than imprisonment: in France, 61% of offenders in prison will reoffend and be reincarcerated within five years of their release, whereas this percentage drops to 34% in sentences for unpaid work and down to 19% for suspended sentences (Ministère de la Justice, 2014). In England and Wales, 63% of people having served a prison sentence of 12 months or less reoffend within a year, whereas 54% of people sentenced to a suspended sentence do (PRT, 2019: 14). In general, France has lower reoffending rates than England and Wales, with respectively 26% and 48% of people having carried out a custodial sentence reoffending after a year from their release (Yukhenenko et al, 2019). Outside of public perceptions, empirical research based on punishments in the community is rare, meaning that little is known on the efficiency of non-custodial measures in the French context.

In Anglophone academic literature, probation supervision has been found to influence processes of desistance on various levels (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Compared to other types of penal measures, probation has been reported as generating most positive views (Barry, 2013). A number of studies on probation and desistance have underlined the role of probation officers in facilitating

changes in offending behaviour (Farrall et al, 2014; King, 2013; Barry, 2007; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Rex, 1999). Considering that desistance entails tackling personal problems, probation supervision can be a space for gaining interpersonal skills and agency allowing to better address these issues. Desistance in practice can therefore result from direct guidance from officers but also from the quality of the relationship enabling probationers to be more receptive to support and change (King, 2013; McCulloch, 2005). Valued characteristics in probation officers are therefore those that foster positive relationship, and include being friendly, supportive, believing in the probationer, understanding their needs, listening, and demonstrating empathy without judgement (McCulloch, 2005; Burnett, 2004). These characteristics make for trusting relationships, encouraging self-reflexion

Farrall (2002: 220) introduced the term ‘desistance-focused’, as opposed to the previously employed term ‘offending-related’, emphasising the need for future-centred probation supervisions. Scholars have thus called for policy involving active probation and interventions that encourage agency and self-determination, meaning that supervision is to be carried out by officers working ‘with’ offenders rather than ‘on’ them (Kazemian and Travis, 2015; McNeill, 2006; McCulloch, 2005; McNeill, 2003). Probation supervision is more efficient in terms of desistance when the work carried out focuses on strengths and resources rather than risks in order to encourage motivation and lessen the impact of stigmatisation of an offending past (Maruna and LeBel, 2009). What is more, probation supervision has the potential to develop social capital, for people to grasp opportunities unrelated to offending. Probation supervision can also support change in encouraging the performance of pro-social identities, thus shifting the focus away from an identity of ‘offender’ (Farrall, 2004). The scope for influencing change, however, is limited, considering wider social processes at play (McCulloch, 2005). In sum, community sentencing and probation work in

particular have the potential to support desistance processes and this is largely due to a focus on change and the relationship between probation officer and service user (Healy, 2012).

5.6. Reoffending and Preventing Reoffending

The role of employment has been demonstrated as significant in the prevention of recidivism in the French context: for example, 65% of people being incarcerated in 2000 were unemployed, with only 28% of them receiving unemployment benefits (Administration Pénitentiaire, 2002: 82). Moreover, inmates who are declared to be employed in detention are much less likely to reoffend than those without employment, especially for offences with high risk of recidivism, such as theft (Baader and Shea, 2007: 6). These results show that there is certainly a link between employment and desistance and between unemployment and recidivism and suggest that precarious situations due to unemployment may have a role in people's offending trajectories. It must be noted that people who secure employment after a prison sentence are most likely to have been released upon negotiation of their sentence, conditionally released, having been 'placed' outside of prison, or on a semi-detainment regime, all of which are granted if the person is deemed to be low risk of recidivism in the first place (Kensey and Tournier, 2005).

Further studies on employment, crime and punishment would be helpful to fully grasp the dynamics in play in the context of reoffending in France and to develop from the existing statistical research towards a more in-depth understanding of the subject. Unfortunately, there is a significant lack of empirical studies in the French criminal justice context, which prevents the implementation of evidence-based practices (Dindo, 2012). Empirical research on reoffending based in France is rare, and those that exist are mainly statistical studies drawn from official numbers and compiled by the Ministry of Justice and Penitentiary Administration researchers themselves (Josnin, 2014; Kensey et al, 2010; Kensey and Tournier,

2005 Kensey et al, 2004). In 2004, 20% of 500,000 people in France convicted for non-criminal offences (offences and transgressions) were sentenced to prison; 41% were reconvicted within the 5 following years and 45% were reconvicted within the following 8 years (Josnin, 2014). Research employing qualitative or mixed methods, conducted by researchers outside of the French Ministry of Justice would provide a more thorough account of the state of the criminal justice system, and would be useful for improving offender management and strategies for rehabilitation.

A study by the Penitentiary Administration carried out a statistical analysis of 7,000 profiles of people having been released from prison in 2002, during a 5-year period (Kensey and Benaouda, 2011). The analysis of the data focused on the probabilities of reoffending according to several variables such as age, gender, type of offence and type of sentence. The authors acknowledged the definition of ‘legal recidivism’ used by official state reports – reoffending involving the same type of offence initially committed – and chose to broaden its limits to include *any* type of reoffending, for the relevance to understanding factors behind recidivism. They were able to draw various conclusions from their statistical analysis: for instance, 76% of people who had originally been convicted for assault reoffended within the 5-year period; 74% of people who were originally convicted for theft reoffended. These were the highest percentages according to type of offence and are proportions which suggest that imprisonment might not have a deterrent or rehabilitative effect on this population. To the contrary, the lowest percentage of recidivism according to type of offence was 19% for convictions of rape on a minor (2011: 2). In parallel with the age-crime relationship, prisoners were statistically less likely to reoffend the older they were.

Aside from similar statistical studies, there is indeed a lack of research exploring the various aspects of reoffending and recidivism in France. This could lead to inefficiency in the penal response and support (Dindo, 2012). While before 2012,

newer techniques like motivational interviews were scarcely used in French probation, probation officers in recent years have increasingly been offered training in such methods and programmes, as a result of a profession wide conference on new public policy on recidivism, that took place in Paris.²⁵ This conference (*conference de consensus*) provided the ground work for the abrogation of the minimal sentence policy and the establishment of the *contrainte pénale* ('penal constraint' – Ministère de la Justice, 2008) mentioned above, which is an open custody measure. This measure was added to the already existing *sursis mise à l'épreuve* which applied to sentences of up to five years in prison to be amended for probation supervision along with other judicial requirements. Since then, the French legal framework has focused less on individual prevention of reoffending and more on long-term lifestyle change from a delinquent lifestyle (Dubourg, 2016). However, in 2020, the *contrainte pénale* was deemed a failure and has been merged with the *sursis mise à l'épreuve*, forming the *sursis probatoire* which is a general suspended sentence entailing probation supervision (Buffet and Detraigne, 2020).

5.7. The French Probation Services

After the second world war, there was a profound change in the penitentiary services in France, leading to social work being introduced to the field of incarceration (Vanderskuten et al, 2018). A social service for prisons was founded in 1945, followed a year later by the committee of assistance for released prisoners. The French probation service was established in 1949, which is recent compared to the English and Welsh probation (Herzog-Evans, 2016). It was initially divided into a department for probation and assistance of people released from prison and a department for the education and social assistance aiming at reinsertion and rehabilitation. The roots of French probation service are thus in

²⁵ Conférence de Consensus de Prévention de la Récidive : http://www.justice.gouv.fr/art_pix/3_1_note_information_installation_conference_consensus.pdf

social work (Lhuilier, 2007). Probation was carried out in the form of suspended sentence (now *sursis mise à l'épreuve*). The same year, the position of *Juge d'Application des Peines* (judge of the application of sentences – JAP, the judge in charge of the sentence after sentencing) was created.

Open custody measures are organised by the *Juges d'Application des Peines*, who closely work with probation officers. Since 1981, probation officers are involved in drafting pre-sentence reports through “social investigations” into offenders’ lives, environments, in order to advise the judges in sentencing. The affiliation of the probation services with the Penitentiary Administration took place in 1986 (they were beforehand included in the tribunals). In 1991, the Penitentiary Administration was affiliated to the Ministry of Justice. In 1993 the role of the *Conseiller Pénitentiaire d'Insertion et de Probation* (CPIP - ‘penitentiary advisor of insertion and probation’ – probation officer) was established, their goal being to assist with social integration (de Larminat, 2012: 78 – 84).²⁶ This all led to the creation in 1999 of the probation services as we know them today: the SPIP²⁷ (*Service Pénitentiaire d'Insertion et de Probation* – Penitentiary services for probation and insertion) which is part of the Penitentiary Administration and is now responsible for the probation of convicted people in and out of prison, and for matters of reinsertion and rehabilitation (Pelissier and Perrier, 2008).

The core goals of the SPIP are “to ensure the continuity of action and the harmonisation of methods of working, to better respond to the needs of populations, in combining the means and activities of agents of probation”; “to clarify the appointment of administrative and judiciary responsibilities in the organisation and the functioning of the services”; and “to create regarding external

²⁶ Décret n° 93-1114 du 21 septembre 1993 relatif au statut particulier du personnel d'insertion et de probation de l'administration pénitentiaire.

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000727484&categorieLien=id>

²⁷ Décret n°99-276 du 13 avril 1999 modifiant le code de procédure pénale (troisième partie, Décrets) et portant création des services pénitentiaires d'insertion et de probation

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000211204>

partner organisations a unique contact at the departmental level so as to better enunciate the mission of rehabilitation devoted to this administration with public policies” (Ministère de la Justice, 2008: 1). Since then, the roles of various agents of probation have been clarified, the methods of intervention of probation agents were made clearer and the situation of the probation service within the Penitentiary Administration became entrenched. The goals of the SPIP developed to focus more on the prevention of reoffending.

Only recently has probation work in France been scrutinised and evaluated (Dubourg, 2016), compared to the regular, and frequent evaluations of English and Welsh probation services by organisations like the National Audit Office, for instance. To reiterate, probation officers in France are responsible for the monitoring and supervising of measures pronounced by the sentencing judge as well as advising the sentence implementation judge on tailoring these measures (Pelissier and Perrier, 2008). They work alongside external partners including charity organisations and public services, as well as prison services staff for custodial measures. The main technique used by probation officers in France translates to “non structured professional judgement” (Dubourg, 2016). This corresponds to probation officers drawing from psychoanalysis and determining the level of supervision and content of safety measures for the offenders they are in charge of, by using a grid of criteria to collate relevant information (Matignon, 2015). This method of evaluation has been criticised as being irrelevant to understanding risks of reoffending and as relying too much on individual officers’ bias (Herzog-Evans, 2012a). Another criticism is that the non-structured aspect of evaluations could lead to imprecise outcomes, potentially overstating risks of reoffending (Dubourg and Gautron, 2014). Actuarial methods, which are more formal and less susceptible to bias, have been suggested, for their use of predictive factors in dealing with evaluating offenders (Herzog-Evans, 2012a). Nevertheless, practitioners and academics in France remain sceptical of actuarial

methods, because of reticence for subjective human behaviours to be processed objectively.

In summary, the work of French probation workers is at the crossroads of social work, judicial advising, psychology, and administrative, bureaucratic actions. Their work is in a permanent transformation, from their roots in social work to the uncertainty of their future responsibilities (Herzog-Evans, 2012), and evidence-based practice is yet to be included. What is more, the importation of foreign programmes of rehabilitation is hardly welcomed by French practitioners. This is linked with the absence of a culture of evaluation and assessment in France as well as a small and recent academic field of criminology.

5.8. Population and Goals of Probation Work in France

In 2018, there were 103 probation offices in France and 160,623 people supervised in non-custodial settings (Ministère de la Justice, 2019: 30). The average length of probation supervision was 18 months. These settings included suspended sentences, unpaid work, and conditional release from prison. The average age of the probationer in 2016 was 35.9 years old (Ministère de la Justice, 2017b: 77). Of the total population supervised on probation, 6.6% were women and 6.1% were foreign nationals. After the transfer of the Penitentiary Administration to the Ministry of Justice, several innovative measures were put in place, which shaped the probation services of today. For example, electronic monitoring/ankle bracelets were implemented in 2000 (Pelissier and Perrier, 2008).

The main goals of the SPIP are to:

- Help with judiciary decisions and tailoring measures, assistance in criminal court decisions
- Preventing recidivism
- Assisting with reinsertion into society

- Carrying out follow-ups and ensuring the respect of measures pronounced by judges – controlling that the measures are respected.

Since 2008, the main goal of probation work in France has been to prevent recidivism. Probation officers' objectives are to assist in decisions of sentencing, to ensure that the measures pronounced in the sentence are applied, enforced, and respected. Probation officers' work is thus set between notions of education and security (Vanderstukken et al, 2018). From pre-sentencing to the end of the sentence, the probation services work with the convicted person to make sure the measure is understood and as effective as possible. Rehabilitation is supported by a variety of partner organisations, external to the SPIP, offering socio-legal assistance, for instance with housing, employment/training/education, and legal aid. Since 2009, probation officers have contributed to penal decision making.²⁸ Therefore, once instructed by the judges, probation officers of the SPIP will verify the person's social, personal circumstances and suggest measures and modifications of sentences which would best suit them.

Probation work in France has been based on social work and has evolved to incorporate the control/respect of measures pronounced for prevention of recidivism and, has shifted towards a risk-assessment approach (Vanderskuten et al, 2018). More recently, a set of novel evidence-based approaches were introduced, largely inspired by studies and practices of English-speaking countries. *Parcours*, for instance, is a Canadian programme, based not only on the prevention of recidivism, but also taking a cognitive-behavioural approach and drawing on motivational interviews to encourage change in the person (Lafortune, 2015). Considering that French probation officers are, as of the past few years and on a voluntary basis, being trained for motivational interviews and cognitive-behavioural as well as Risk-Needs-Receptivity (RNR) approaches for their work

²⁸ Brochure, Le Service Pénitentiaire d'Insertion et de Probation (SPIP) Mission : Prévenir la Récidive. Ministère de la Justice

and that they have been taking on the goal of preventing recidivism, the conditions for the implementation of a programme such as *Parcours* are optimal.

From its roots in social work to the apparently conflicting nature of control and assistance, the identity of probation officer as a profession has been strained in France (Herzog-Evans, 2012). The implementation of new models and the growing partnerships of organisations working with the offending population have looked to lessen this strain and contributed to a mutation in the probation services (Vanderskuten et al, 2018). Little by little, the institution of probation work has started to welcome criminology into its management and understanding of the offending population.

5.9. Transforming Rehabilitation

The English (and Welsh) probation service is one of the longest established in Europe (Vanstone, 2004) and was completely state run until 2015 (Robinson, 2016; Carr, 2018). *Transforming Rehabilitation* (TR) was an initiative for renewing the probation system, implemented by the government in 2015, in an effort to modernise the services and reduce both reoffending and the cost of offender management. It was a reform programme which transformed the landscape of open custody and the organisation of community sentences, through the privatisation and outsourcing of low-medium risk offenders. Offenders deemed high-risk were supervised by the National Probation Service (NPS) and low-medium risk offenders supervised by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC). A ‘competition’ was opened in 2013 for private companies to place their bids and manage a CRC. Existing probation staff were divided and allocated to work with either NPS or a CRC. In February 2015, the new CRC companies started delivering probation supervision. Thirty-five Probation Trusts were effectively replaced by the NPS and 21 CRCs. TR is thus a two-tiered service

categorised according to perceived risk of offenders.²⁹ Court work is carried out by the National Probation Service and they decide on the allocation of cases, to themselves or to a CRC, according to the person's evaluated level of risk.

TR has thus taken an approach of allocating probations based around the notion of risk. Risk is being perceived as fixed and classifiable into two categories: low-medium and high. The entire organisation of the probation system (NPS and CRCs) revolves around this distinction of risk in offenders. TR therefore draws connections and confuses between levels of risk, levels of potential harm, or potential reoffending and nature of need or level of supervision (McNeill, 2018). What is meant by risk is actually potential of harm, meaning that low-medium risk offenders are actually those that do not pose significant threat of harm to society and whose offences are deemed low severity. In the same way, high risk offenders are those with long sentences, whose offences are severe and who are deemed to be potentially harmful. Levels of harm are considered as potential of reoffending even though offenders having committed low severity offences are more likely to reoffend than those who have committed high severity crimes: according to the Ministry of Justice itself, just over 50% of adult offenders who have been convicted for theft have committed a proven reoffence and this is the case for just over 40% for public order offences, 30% for robbery, just over 15% of proven reoffence for sexual offences, 25% for violence against the person and criminal damage and arson (Ministry of Justice, 2018: 2010). These percentages are from data taken in 2016, and a proven reoffence is "any offence committed in a one-year follow-up period that leads to a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one-year follow-up or within a further six months waiting period to allow the offence to be proven in court".

²⁹ Ministry of Justice Policy Paper, 2010 to 2015 government policy: reoffending and rehabilitation . <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-reoffending-and-rehabilitation/2010-to-2015-government-policy-reoffending-and-rehabilitation#appendix-4-transforming-rehabilitation>

Criminal Justice policy in England and Wales has increasingly focused on notions of risk and offender management, while maintaining aims of reducing reoffending, which has altered the relationship between probation officers and probationers, shifting from “advise, assist, befriend” to a more managerial style of supervision (Hope and Sparks, 2000; King, 2011: 9). Changes in criminal justice policy towards risk-based probation delivery, notably through the TR programme, were implemented and justified with a public protection and offender management and surveillance rationale (Ministry of Justice, 2013: 3; King, 2013: 4). A risk-based system of offender allocation and supervision is inherently flawed (Carr, 2018) as it considers people’s potential as fixed, does not allow for a desistance approach and tailored, consistent and coordinated interventions (McNeill, 2018). TR was for many criminal justice experts poorly designed, inadequately funded and flawed in communication and co-ordination with the NPS (McNeill, 2013; Carr, 2018).

In the context of CRCs, probation supervision is strained by financial motivation, which could be in conflict with the initial goal of preventing reoffending. Significant staff reductions led to caseloads increase per probation officer in CRCs (Carr, 2018). The working conditions of probation officers have worsened to the extent of impacting their mental health (Walker et al, 2019). In 2016, reports from the National Audit Office and the Probation Inspectors found and identified “significant problems” in the service delivery of CRCs. Since then, various other reports have concluded the ineffectiveness of CRCs. In 2017, a report by HM Inspectorate of Probation showed that offenders seem to be better supervised with the NPS and that most CRCs are struggling.³⁰ This is due largely to financial pressures and caseloads of CRCs compared to the number of staff they employ, as well as technical difficulties (Carr, 2018). The changes brought about by TR

³⁰ Russell Webster, the end of TR: <http://www.russellwebster.com/endtr/>

have therefore completely shifted the probation profession from its public-service, humanitarian foundations (Walker et al, 2019; Deering and Feilzer, 2017).

Unsurprisingly to those who were sceptical to start with, the Ministry of Justice announced in July 2018 that TR was not effective in delivering supervision and that the probation services would be re-designed.³¹ The CRC contracts that were supposed to end in 2022 came to an end without renewal. Voluntary sector organisations will be stepping in to deliver supervision with unpaid work. Recognising that the TR reform has not attained expectations in delivering quality probation supervision, the Ministry of Justice has opened a ‘consultation’ where citizens can contribute on the issue. The government through this consultation has also communicated that while CRCs are evidently facing significant challenges and falling short of expectations, they intend on improving and further investing in them to keep on exploring “with the market” how to effectively put in place a “commercial framework for probation services”.³² A more “integrated and collaborative probation system” is endeavoured to be created through the improvement of offender assessment, minimum standards of offender supervision, improved unpaid work available for probationers and the implementation of interventions tailored to probationers’ sentence and rehabilitation needs.³³

5.10. Population and Goals of Probation Work in England

At the end of June 2017, there were 262,347 people on probation in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2017), which is the second time in a decade that the number was higher than 250,000 (2017: 6). A person can be on probation as part of a Suspended Sentence, a Community Order, or if they are released from prison on parole or on licence. For each case, there will be specific probation rules

³¹ Russell Webster, designing the future of probation: <http://www.russellwebster.com/trconsult1/>

³² Ministry of Justice: Strengthening probation, building confidence: <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/hm-prisons-and-probation/strengthening-probation-building-confidence/>

³³ Russell Webster, more details on the future of probation <http://www.russellwebster.com/probconsultation/>

tailored to the individual being supervised. The British government provides this information to those on probation supervision on its website:³⁴ “Your offender manager will ask you to read and agree to a ‘sentence plan’. This will tell you the rules you have to stick to during your probation and what your responsibilities are.”

Interestingly, the term “offender manager” is used instead of “probation officer” which is more common in academic works. The website specifies that if the rules of probation are broken by the offender, they run the risk of being sent back to prison. The lack of options for sentence modification, like it is the case in France, indicates a more managerial perspective of probation supervision in England. The French sentence modification system, in comparison to the English sentencing process, suggests more institutional concern for rehabilitation, beyond offender management. The availability of judicial procedures to modify a sentence also gives legitimacy to the offender. On legitimacy, Tyler (2003: 297) stated: “Procedural justice shapes people's feelings of responsibility and obligation to obey rules and accept decisions because it enhances the legitimacy of rules and authorities.”

Changes in the political climate of the 20th century led to changes in the UK in the concept of rehabilitation in practice and probation work. Until the 1970s, rehabilitation of offenders was associated with a treatment model, conceiving criminal behaviour akin to medical illness. Probation work and rehabilitation was thus considered as a ‘cure’ for bad behaviour (Robinson and Crow, 2009). Since the mid-1970s, the disease analogy was critiqued and the delivery of probation supervision underwent significant changes: the notion of ‘treatment’ was replaced by that of ‘help’ (Bottoms and McWilliams, 1979); attention was given to practical problems of the offenders’ social lives and ‘social rehabilitation’ – which is “a process by which the offender takes his or her place in society” – was starting

³⁴ Guide to Probation: <https://www.gov.uk/guide-to-probation>

to get traction (Robinson and Crow, 2009: 124); and welfare was considered as integral to change away from offending (Farrall et al, 2010). These changes in the institutional consideration of offending and offender management illustrates the idea that criminal justice “philosophy” and assumptions of crime have an influence on the context in which change takes place and thus impact on specific aspects of processes of desistance: the most visible example of this would be found in levels of punitiveness and the manner with which the justice system deals with setbacks and reoffending in the context of desistance trajectories (Burnett, 2004).

Since the shift away from the treatment model, closer attention has been given to the effectiveness of probation work and efforts to rehabilitation. Since the 1970s, and after the publication of a relatively pessimistic study concluding that “nothing works” in offender rehabilitation, there has been discussion on “what works” to prevent crime and recidivism. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy approaches were used in attempts to modify offending behaviour as well as to work on the development of skills and competencies (Farrall et al, 2010). A rise in risk-based approaches in the criminal justice system stems from increasing pressure to assess the potential danger of people being supervised, with a perspective of harm avoidance (Herzog-Evans, 2012; Robinson, 2002). Categorising the offending population according to perceived risk can lead to negative consequences like a fatalistic outlook of the person and labelling, stigmatising from the outside (Halsey et al, 2017). Also, an emphasis on risk in the delivery of probation can clash with the role of probation officers as providers of support, care and rehabilitative efforts (Farrall et al, 2014; McNeill, 2009). The manner in which the State and institutions of the State deal with offenders and the methods used in probation work determines in many ways – practical, tangible but also internal, emotional, and motivational – the specifics of processes of desistance. Structural

level factors thus ‘trickle down’ and influence individual trajectories in different manners, according to their specific characteristics (Farrall et al, 2010).

5.11. Discussion

This chapter presented and compared the criminal justice situations in England and France, to set the scene in which desistance in each country occurs. Similarities with regard to broad economic and political aspects mean that certain issues are common: penal punitiveness, prison overcrowding, cost-focused public institutions. Both countries have increasingly taken a risk management rationale and punitive turns in dealing with people with convictions, to the detriment of prison conditions and rehabilitative approaches. Nevertheless, more subtle distinctions arise because of historical and philosophical differences, namely in the goals and organisations of probation services and use of non-custodial punishment. In France, people convicted of custodial sentences can apply for an amendment of their sentence, by demonstrating social integration. Alternatively, in England, sentences are not modified once they are pronounced, and they are completed in a more passive manner, as offenders are not required to actively demonstrate change to get a more favourable outcome.

In both countries, probation officers’ professional identities have been subject to existential crisis. The French probation services are relatively recent, they stem from social work and so there are tensions within the probation profession regarding their role and the methods they should employ. In England, the partial privatisation of probation services has led to significant organisational shifts. Privatisations and the payment by result model of *Transforming Rehabilitation* have jostled the profession and working conditions have worsened. These differences justify expectations of variances in the ways people desist in each country: specifically, in terms of the role of probation, understandings of being punished in the community and the scope of support available within the criminal justice setting.

Chapter 6 – Methodology

In order to compare processes of desistance in England and France, I gathered data from desisters in each country. To do this, qualitative data were collected in each country for a cross-national, comparative analysis. This chapter explores the methodological framework employed in this study, by discussing and justifying decisions made during the entire research process.

To start with, research objectives and questions are presented, after which epistemological considerations and research design are overviewed. I then delve into the decisions made regarding the operationalisation of the concept of desistance in this research. The chapter also describes the sampling criteria used and the process of recruiting participants. There is, in addition, a consideration of ethical issues including informed consent for participation, preserving anonymity, anticipating potential harm, and managing data. The chapter draws attention to my influence as researcher on the research process, particularly in data collection and analysis. The interviewing process is explained, including how they were organised to optimise the study. Finally, there is a brief account of the final sample and an overview of the analysis process to provide context to the analysis chapters. Throughout this methodology chapter, obstacles, limitations, solutions, and strengths are reflected upon in order to provide a thorough outline of the research and decision-making processes.

6.1. Research Questions and Objectives

As Chapters 2 and 3 showed, there has been little empirical, comparative research undertaken on how desistance processes operate in different settings. While the desistance literature is scarce in France, the UK (along with the USA) is where the majority of key research has been conducted. Historical and cultural proximity alongside different criminal justice systems and organisations of societies make a

comparison of individual experiences between England and France particularly fruitful. England and France are broadly similar western countries. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences in State philosophies and organisation (see Chapters 4 and 5), such as legal systems and the organisation of probation services.

The key aim of this research project is to compare pathways out of crime, to develop a better understanding of the influence of social structures and context onto individual change. Theoretical considerations drawing from extensive research into desistance (Farrall, 2019; Bottoms et al, 2004) have informed the basis of this research in terms of recognising the influence of structure and agency in processes of change. As a result, this thesis seeks to provide deeper insight into the role of social structures in which desistance takes place. Weaver (2019) has argued that desistance literature would be enhanced by the production of analysis of structural influences on crime and desistance, which the comparative approach aims to address. The overarching objectives of this thesis are twofold: to provide a comparative approach, thereby deepening our understandings of how structure and agency operate in dynamics of change, and to contribute to the scarce empirical knowledge on desistance in the French context.

To recap, the main objectives of this study can be summarised through the following research questions:

- How do people make sense of their experiences of offending and desisting?
How is this different in England and in France?
- What are the differences and similarities between English and French desisters in terms of relational and institutional experiences and perspectives?
- How do these differences and similarities inform on the influences of national, societal contexts on individual pathways of desistance?

The aim of this research is not to generalise findings and draw up a universal theory from similarities between contexts, nor does it seek to emphasise uniqueness of individual experiences, highlighting specificities and role of context. Desistance is a social reality in English and French societies and this research looks to deepen our understandings of the role of social structures on individual behavioural change. Perspectives on behavioural change are shaped with reference to factors and patterns from existing literature (employment, relationships, cognitive elements), which are intrinsic to societies. Chapter 4 overviewed the similarities and differences of these structural, societal factors and patterns in each country, to provide relevant background information as to the context where change occurs. This research therefore takes on a societal approach to international comparative research because it allows to establish “a relationship between the macro and micro levels, involving a more analytical and deductive approach” than universalist or culturalist approaches would allow (Hantrais, 2007: 7; Maurice, 1989). In terms of exploring and comparing desistance, a societal approach accounts for context and individual, cognitive, emotional aspects of change, which is in line with the theoretical framework adopted.

6.2. Epistemology and Research Design

This research sought to compare subjective experiences and roles of social contexts in behavioural change. To do this, a qualitative approach is best suited, as it is relevant to studies interested in “the authenticity of human experience” (Silverman, 2010: 6) and allows for an insight into the subject’s social world (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, Mangen, 2007). A quantitative method of research would not adequately address the research aims and questions and would not be adequate in exploring the subjective aspect of behavioural change. Qualitative research methods allow us to explore social life as a set of processes, locating experiences and individuals within context. Qualitative data collection allows for dynamic data co-production with the subjects in question. Rich, informative data

can be obtained from drawing the subjects' experiences and perspectives based on a first-hand account.

Approaches to the subject of study shapes the epistemology of the research, which in turn informs the most appropriate research methods to address aims and research questions (Bryman, 1984). Desistance is considered as the process and maintenance of change. The notion of change from individual perspectives is central to the research. Considering the research questions mentioned above and the overarching aim of this thesis, it is logical to gather data directly from people experiencing processes of desistance. The subjective aspect of the exploration of experiences therefore entails qualitative data collected in narrative format: "narratives are constituted of subjectively meaningful life-course events, which are internalised and reconstructed to provide coherence and understanding to the life as a whole" (King, 2013: 151). The research design is similar to those of Calverley (2013), Österman (2018) and Segev (2020) who also conducted comparative research into experiences of change. In-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews is the method of research that provides the most appropriate manner in comparing experiences of change.

This method allows us to capture narratives of people who were actively managing changes associated with desistance, rather than retrospectively remembering the various challenges and dynamics of desistance (Calverley, 2009). Participants will likely be negotiating change in lifestyle, attitudes and behaviours linked to offending during the months or years they are being supervised. As Chapter 8 shows, the emotional dimension of desistance needs to be considered when exploring processes of change. Speaking to relevant participants about their experiences out of crime allows for a focus on the emotional nature of crime, that is critical to desistance (Giordano et al, 2002; Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007). Beyond explorations of

desistance from crime, a consideration for the emotional dimensions is beneficial for advances in criminology (Katz, 1988).

To capture narratives of experiences, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with men who expressed a will to stop offending and who were being supervised on probation in both countries. Women were excluded from the sample to avoid an added layer of analysis with gender considerations, and for practical reasons as very few women were identified as potential participants. The interviews were structured enough to bring up important themes as informed by the literature review, but also flexible enough for the participants to focus on particular areas that they deem important in their stories: “the semi-structured interview offers more opportunity for dialogue and exchange between the interviewer and interviewee” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 79). The semi-structured aspect of the interview allowed me to gather rich, detailed information from the interaction, probing when necessary and relevant (Gilbert, 2008). The following sections will provide further details of the research process and highlight the benefits and scope of a narrative approach through semi-structured interviews.

Contextualisation is central to comparative research, and Chapter 4 of this thesis has overviewed the two national contexts this study puts side by side. Comparative research serves, among others, the purpose of gaining deeper understanding of social phenomena (Hantrais, 2007). Findings of existing desistance research are conditioned by and limited to spatial and temporal factors. This research has attempted to overcome this by considering the social reality of individuals as context dependant. Contextualisation in comparative research is crucial, because individual desisters are influenced by their societal surroundings: “the context itself serves as an important explanatory variable and an enabling tool”, meaning that differences in social structures may explain specificities in journeys out of crime (Hantrais, 2007: 4). This research allows to delve into the intricacies of the influence of context on individual pathways out of crime. The

comparative aspect is therefore a strength in desistance research for the potential to better grasp the role of context in individual change.

6.3. Operationalisation and Challenges

Operationalising desistance is a crucial step in the research process because understandings of the concept has influence on research design and ultimately on the findings. The ways in which the concept is implemented in empirical research is telling of perspectives of desistance. The operationalisation of desistance is a critical obstacle to overcome, as it refers to the absence of an event, which is difficult to observe. Defining desistance is challenging for empirical research (Maruna, 2001; Maruna et al, 2004) and in practice, for the delivery of probation work and rehabilitative efforts (Fox and Marsh, 2016). This is also because of the lack of a universally accepted definition of the concept of desistance, beyond the notion of the end of offending behaviour, from the observation that “most offenders, after all, eventually stop offending” (Laub and Sampson, 2001: 5; King, 2013).

For instance, what counts as successful desistance? Kazemian (2007) has compiled a number of empirical studies of desistance according to the length of non-offending taken into consideration for participant recruitment. Some studies chose a cut off age after which participants will have no convictions, which tends to be adulthood age up to early 30s (Farrington and Hawkins, 1991; Farrington and Wilkström, 1994; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Other studies rely on the absence of arrest for a certain period of time (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Shover and Thompson, 1992). Others yet rely on self-reports for the absence of offending behaviour (Maruna, 2001; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). These different conceptual and methodological choices demonstrate the variety of approaches and manners of operationalisation that can be taken when analysing desistance (King, 2013: 148).

The uncertainty behind the rationale of the time frame for desistance is illustrated by Farrington's quote: "even a five-year or ten-year crime free period is no guarantee that offending has terminated" (1986: 201). Indeed, any amount of time chosen as cut off point to frame desistance will be selected arbitrarily and ultimately cannot ever be a guarantee or pledge of 'true' or successful desistance. Risk assessment tools have been developed to evaluate people's likelihood to reoffend through components of "criminal careers" such as rate and patterns of offending (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1994). The accuracy of such tools, however, has not been demonstrated and they are unreliable in terms of assessing desistance (Maruna et al, 2004; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1994).

Desistance can hardly be measured in a quantitative manner and is arguably inevitably subject to interpretation. Behavioural change implies past behaviour, and desistance is the *process* of change. In practice in fieldwork, there is a dichotomy to desistance (similar to that of recidivism: new convictions or no new convictions) that may not reflect the reality of the social phenomena: staff assess their service users as 'still offending' or 'desisting'/on a right path. Researchers have used this 'stopped' and 'not stopped' dichotomous approach to design their method of exploring desistance (Maruna, 2001).

Nevertheless, focusing on whether or not individuals have truly stopped offending and assigning an arbitrary time frame to desistance is not relevant to the aims of this research. Instead, processes of change are to be understood as gradual, as desistance entailing a decrease in offending behaviour over time (Farrall, 2004: 63). Any individual, regardless of previous offending behaviour, may at some point commit an offence: rather than overly focusing on whether or not participants will reoffend or have reoffended through a risk management rationale, what is interesting is to analyse elements of desistance as a process (Bushway et al, 2001). Moreover, people may have 'breaks' in between offences that may or may not correspond to desistance (Maruna et al, 2004; Maruna, 2001).

This research considers changes in offending behaviour through notions of motivations and self-perceptions, therefore allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of how and why people desist. What is interesting in this research is how desistance is experienced and narrated, rather than the certainty of the absence of reoffending (Maruna, 2001). Therefore, in terms of operationalisation, desistance was considered in terms of motivation and will to change. Participants were recruited through their probation officers, according to their own expressions of a will to desist.

Another challenge in this research stems from the extent to which the two sites in which participants were recruited from were comparable, and whether experiences of the participants can be considered representative of desistance pathways in each country. The economic, social, and political circumstances of Paris and Sheffield are distinct, so the question of comparability is one that arises early on in the decision-making process of the research design. Paris being a capital city unlike Sheffield, means dynamics of the location in which participants live are vastly different. Nevertheless, both sites are legitimate in that experiences of Parisian desisters are part of the French picture of desistance, while not the entirety of it. Similarly, people desisting in Sheffield form part of the English picture of desistance. They both provide valid representations the national contexts of desistance from crime, which is an argument that can be made while acknowledging that Sheffield and Paris do not represent all of England and France to start with. This question of comparability is taken into account in the analysis of narratives, whereby a distinction is made between differences between the cities and differences between the countries, so that the research does provide a comparison between desistance in England and desistance in France. For instance, when examining the spaces where participants go to, I took into consideration that the differences in the availability of public transports was a specificity of the particular cities, and not the countries overall. What is more, people who were

recruited were more tied to either France or England than to Sheffield or Paris, as most people, at some point in their lives, move across cities (but most do not necessarily move across countries). While the differences between Sheffield and Paris could be considered as a limitation to the study, the assumption taken here is that Sheffield is no less legitimate as an English site of research than London, and Paris is no more legitimate as a representation of Paris than a smaller town.

6.4. Recruitment and Sampling

Gaining access for data collection is a key issue in qualitative criminology (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Access to probation services in France was negotiated prior to the start of the PhD, during the application process, while I was undertaking an internship there. Senior staff had given verbal approval for my research to be conducted in their offices, and once I started the PhD, I sought official access to be granted from the Ministry of Justice. In England, ties with the Sheffield Community Rehabilitation Company were already set from my supervisor's previous work. Access was granted to me by gatekeepers on the condition that participants' confidentiality is ensured. Once ethical approval was granted and access negotiated, I presented my data collection plan and strategy to probation staff, who ultimately joined me in recruiting participants. Probation officers were asked to recruit participants according to specific criteria, thereby producing a purposive sample (Silverman, 2010). Individuals were asked to participate in this study if they corresponded to the following criteria:

- Male
- Adult
- Supervised on probation
- Had at least two previous convictions – excluding only motor offences
- Expressing a desire to stop offending.

These criteria were inspired by research methods of existing qualitative studies on desistance from crime, notably those adopted by Calverley (2013) and Segev (2020) in their comparative studies of desistance.

Only considering men as participants is in part a practical, pragmatic decision, as there are considerably fewer female offenders. Indeed, during fieldwork I did not see any women probationers in the waiting area of the Sheffield CRC and only saw two in the French probation offices. Excluding women from the sample was therefore justified because there would not be enough participants to draw valid conclusions. This is also because having both men and women in the sample would add a layer of analysis pertaining to gender, which would have been difficult to carry out in the scope of the thesis in addition to the cross-national analysis. Similarly, participants are all adult (over 18 years old) because desistance implies a significant offending past, which can only be the case if people are already of a certain age.

The number of previous convictions required to be considered in this study was decided to ensure participants had a history of offending. Initially, participants needed to have at least three previous convictions, similar to Calverley's (2013) participant selection criteria. However, this restrained the pool of potential participants too much. Therefore, for practical matters and time constraints, this was lowered to a minimum of two convictions, excluding motor offences. Nevertheless, probation officers were informed to consider probationers convicted for solely motor offences or who had only one conviction if they knew of previous sustained offending history.

Moreover, the last criterion was picked up on by probation officers as they doubted the sincerity of probationers' expressed desire to change. Ultimately, it is impossible to truly know whether people are genuinely wanting to change or saying they do for ulterior motives. This thesis is concerned just as much with change, as with desires to desist. This means that people who were persistent

offenders but expressed desires to stop offending were considered. One participant in the English sample had disclosed not having stopped offending but wanting to. Another person, interviewed in England, denied any offending behaviour despite having two convictions on their record. His interview was excluded from the final sample for this reason. These examples illustrate how the sampling criteria outlined above were used as a guideline, and as long as participants had previous offending history and were expressing a will to change, they were considered.

I decided to exclude motor offences including drunk driving, driving while disqualified or without a valid licence to avoid an over-selection of people with motor offences, but also for its limiting insight into important aspects of desistance. As Calverley (2009: 80) notes, “research into the attitudes of those convicted of motoring offences often show us that they see themselves very much as part of mainstream society, particularly those convicted of speeding offences who often see themselves as law-abiding and needlessly prosecuted”.

Participants were all supervised on probation by the time the recruitment took place, to ensure that offending behaviour occurred relatively recently, allowing to capture participants who are in the process of negotiating a change in their lives (King, 2013; Calverley, 2013). Considering desistance as a decrease in offending activity will ensure considerable past offending with relatively recent offending and at least a start in contemplating change.

Being on probation allows for a timely understanding of how supervision is perceived by probationers as having an impact – or not – on their pathways out of crime, and the specific nature of this influence. The criterion requiring participants to be currently supervised on probation was therefore chosen not only for the practical purpose of collecting data but also for its particular relevance in operationalising desistance for this study. What is more, it is logical to recruit people currently supervised as one of the focuses of this exploration is experiences

of desistance within the institutional context of probation. In other words, considering the role of probation in supporting change in offenders, it makes sense for participants to be recruited from probation supervision.

6.5. Ethical Considerations

Any empirical research involving humans provokes ethical considerations. This section will provide a discussion of the ethical considerations of this study. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Sheffield's School of Law Ethics Committee prior to starting fieldwork. In anticipation of conducting interviews, various aspects of fieldwork were considered, including informed consent, potential harm to participants or to myself and data management.

The first ethical consideration encountered in the research process is the necessity for informed consent from participants. In recruiting participants, there was a risk that probationers would feel obliged to participate if they were encouraged to do so by their probation officers. For this reason, I made a point, when speaking to potential participants one-on-one, to let them know that their participation would be voluntary and would not have an impact on their supervision. At times, some potential participants were confused as to my role, thinking I was part of the probation service, so I ensured that it was clear I was not affiliated with the state, justice system or probation service. I also made a point with the probation officers who helped with the recruitment process, to convey to potential participants that their involvement in the study would not have an influence on their supervision or their convictions.

Consent forms and information sheets were given out to probation officers to hand out to potential participants. These were drafted in line with the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and written in a way that highlighted the voluntary nature of participation. The information sheet contained details in simple English of the purpose of the study, the content and design of interviews, an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality and description of data

management as well as contact details for myself and my supervisors. The consent form asked participants if they had an opportunity to address with the researchers any questions prior to the interview and followed the standard University consent form guidelines.

During the initial approach to potential participants, the ground rules of interviews and subsequent data management were established and communicated to gate keepers. An assurance of confidentiality was provided to both gate keepers and any interested, suitable participants. This included addressing limitations in confidentiality in the event of disclosure of certain information that may be shared during the interview, such as intentions by participants to harm themselves or others (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 84). Keeping an informal approach to recruitment and during the interviews allowed me to consider participants' state of mind. It allowed me to proceed with data collection in a sensitive, thoughtful manner. Anyone interested in participating was asked to review the information and consent forms, whether they had any questions, and to sign the consent sheet before proceeding with the interview. All participants agreed to sign the consent form.

Before proceeding with interviews, I would repeat some elements of the information sheet, such as the type of questions that would be asked and the topics that would be tackled, so that participants would not be taken by surprise, especially on personal questions. While there was no expectation of harm to be caused to participants during interviews, some topics to be discussed were of a sensitive nature, potentially involving difficult and upsetting memories. Prior to starting the recording, I also reiterated that participants could refuse to answer certain questions, avoid certain topics, or terminate the interviews at any time, withdrawing their participation without providing a reason. This was decided to avoid any potential harm or pressure for participants to speak about matters they would not be comfortable with, and to establish a relationship of equals, whereby

the participant is not 'due' answers to the researcher. Some participants did inform me during interviews that they did not want to speak about some topics, notably details about offending behaviour they had not been convicted for.

While participants did not present a risk of danger, there were considerations for my personal safety in the data collection process. The interviews were conducted during day-light, in the probation offices in England. In France, interviews were conducted in the probation offices or in coffee shops. Where possible, I asked participants to join me in the café opposite the probation offices, for a more relaxed and informal environment in which to conduct the interview. My supervisors were notified of the start and end of each interview as well as the location.

The interviews were audio recorded and saved onto a secure, password-protected file in my online storage account. The interviews were transcribed soon after they were conducted, so that the memory of the interviews would be fresh and I could make a note of non-verbal cues, atmosphere, any discussion that took place outside of the recordings and other details that time would erode. Transcribing the recordings shortly after the interviews also allowed for any mumbled words or strong accents to be deciphered whilst they were fresh in my mind. I transcribed the interviews, respecting participants' anonymity by taking out any names and identifying elements. Recordings were saved under the date of the interviews, and the names of participants were not written down or associated with their data. Identifying elements include names, specifics of stories that could be traced back to the participants and details like occupation and specific activities that were mentioned. Pseudonyms were allocated to each participant, reflecting their ethnicity.

6.6. The Researcher

Tonry (2015: 506) stated that research cannot be justified as an exercise of truth-seeking, aiming to achieve an "objective understanding of some facet of the

world”. Cross-national comparative research is no exception to researcher bias, and it is important to recognise the influence of researchers as human agents, on the production and interpretation of data. The ability of the researcher to take stock of their influence on the research process is critical in qualitative and specifically cross-national research (Mangen, 2007). As Nelken (2010: 26) argues, “unless we can somehow get a grasp on the ways our cultural assumptions shape our comparative projects we are unlikely to make progress in understanding another society”. The researcher’s cultural background is important to rigorously grasp the research process (Hantrais, 2007). For this reason, I thought it important to provide examples of how my own context has impacted this research.

Having significant experience of living in each country is a benefit for a cross-national research project, as it provides familiarity and knowledge of structures and norms. “Actually living in a place for a long period is the best – perhaps the only reliable – way to get a sense of what is salient” (Nelken, 2010: 96, cited in Österman, 2018: 66). I have spent my first 17 years in France and the remaining ten years in the UK, and am as a result, familiar with both French and British culture. Much like Segev (2020: 105), I am “an outsider, living as an insider; adopting the English ways of living, while not sharing their history, a right to vote, or an English accent”.

Flexibility is an asset in conducting cross-national research (Mangen, 2007), and my familiarity with British and French societies provides flexibility to the research, from negotiating access to fieldwork to data collection and analysis. Being fluent in English and French also provides flexibility in conducting background research, literature reviews, including a wide range of documents from both countries. Qualitative cross-national research is challenged by linguistic, cultural, and spatial barriers (Nelken, 2010; Mangen, 2007). My proficiency in English and French, along with the time I spent living in France and the UK, allows to overcome these challenges and carry out the tasks of

translation, respecting the original meaning of narrations including cultural and linguistic specificities of “figures of speech, metaphor, litotes, aphorisms, euphemisms hyperbole, innuendo, irony and so on – as well as dialect and non-verbal cues” (Mangen, 2007: 21).

During data collection, I was an outsider to the Community Rehabilitation Company in which fieldwork was conducted. I made sure to confirm this status as an outsider as much as I could, to avoid any potential identification of myself as part of the criminal justice process by the participants. To do this, I dressed in a more casual manner than the probation staff, who were in formal workwear. I also had the status of an outsider during interviews, having a foreign accent when speaking English and occasionally having to ask participants to explain slang terms. Participants were aware of my status as outsider, as I told them about myself before the interview started. This social distance from the English participants at times impacted their narratives as they occasionally made efforts to provide extra context to their stories. For instance, one participant, when describing the environment in which he grew up, asked me ‘do you know who Margaret Thatcher is?’. His hometown was a former mining area, and he was explaining the poverty, unemployment, drugs and offending where he came from. These types of gestures were welcome, as it provided more thorough context to their narrations.

In France, I was familiar with the probation officers and senior staff of the probation services, as I had completed a 5-month internship there prior to the PhD. Often, the interviews took place outside of the probation offices, in a café where participants were more comfortable, where it was a more relaxed atmosphere, more conducive to conversation and where it was clear I was not associated with the probation services. During the French interviews, a lot of participants had picked up on my language and accent, hinting that I came from a similar background to them, which led to an added degree of trust and assumptions of

understanding. This impacted their narrations, especially when asked about their upbringings, oftentimes participants would assume that I know what life is like in council estates, or how immigrant parents can be in certain scenarios. I have a Sri Lankan heritage, and participants in England and France also asked about my ethnicity.

In data interpretation, there were challenges of translating participants' words as adequately as possible. To overcome this, I have kept the quotes in the original language until the very end of the writing process, where I translated them, keeping the essence of the quote rather than providing a literal translation. I have also provided extra context to the French quotes, to lessen any translating bias on my part. Moreover, in footnotes, I have provided original quotes in French, for any English-French bilingual reader.

6.7. The Interviewing Process

There is often a standardised section of interviews which gathers demographic data (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 79). Here, this was not done in a standardised, structured manner, in order to retain the informal nature of the interviews and to ensure participants were as comfortable with the setting as possible. A structured set of demographic questions might have changed a relaxed atmosphere and made participants feel like they were part of a survey or 'just another statistic'. Questions like 'how old were you when you started offending?' might have elicited negative feelings that they could not reflect or develop upon. Instead, demographic data was gathered throughout the interview, preserving the informal nature of the discussion, and allowing participants to reflect on certain topics. Illustrating this with the question of age of first offences, beyond the number, participants were able to provide context (at school, with friends, after a divorce, etc) that gives more meaning to the start of offending than simply age.

This thesis adopts an exploratory methodology to start with, shifting the focus towards specific themes and patterns in later chapters (Hodkinson, 2008: 82). An

inductive approach implies the development of theory from data collected rather than pre-set categories of coding deduced by theory. In the case of this thesis, the literature review disclosed and covered existing research and theories regarding processes of desistance. Certain specific categories or themes are therefore expected to be found in the data, for instance, the mention of relationships, religion, social and financial issues.

This research draws from existing literature on narratives of desistance, therefore taking an iterative approach, as data collection has been shaped by existing studies (Bryman, 2012: 380). The interview schedule was drawn up with the knowledge provided by the literature on desistance and rehabilitation. The themes discussed during the interviews reflect the external factors and internal mechanisms of desistance previously examined. These themes look to reveal the process of change and are as follow:

- Self-perception: in asking the participant to present themselves, they can provide insight into how they see themselves and what aspects of their lives are most important in their eyes.
- Childhood and relationships with family: this topic will give insight into the background of the participant and the types of informal social control exerted in their formative years. If not already mentioned by the participant, issues of addiction, religion, precarity and early involvement in the criminal justice system will be asked about.
- Education, training, and work: addressing these allows for further investigation into forms of informal social control exerted through various aspects of social life as well as the types of labour and opportunities they project or have projected themselves in.
- Reflections on offending history: this will allow participants to recount how and why their offending behaviour started and persisted, as well as interactions with the police, the courts and experience serving sentences.

- Changes in offending behaviour: this point is the one that explicitly addresses desistance from crime, tying together previous themes. Motivators and barriers for change can be explored as well as support or obstacles from peers, from agents in the criminal justice system and other significant elements of their desistance.
- Plans for the future: this will show how the individual plans on sustaining their desistance and how they project themselves in a crime-free future.

The questioning was drawn up to be as open-ended as possible in order to gain spontaneous information. Moreover, both the interview schedule and the interviewing technique used aimed to encourage participants to share beliefs, values, and underlying attitudes (Fielding and Thomas, 2008: 249). The interviews took a pseudo-conversational form, allowing participants to lead the discussion and provide as much detail as they wished. For instance, some participants delved into their offending past from the start, without being prompted for it, and others spoke of other aspects of their lives until asked about their offending past. Interviews were designed and conducted so that participants would feel valued and listened to rather than simply a source of information for me to draw from.

The interview schedule was shaped to collect narratives in a comprehensive, almost chronological way. Interviews started with the question of ‘who are you?’ or ‘could you introduce yourself?’, moving on to ‘how did this all start?’, then on to experiences of offending, punishment, growing, relationships. Desistance is narrated with the social context having been provided and the freedom for participants to emphasise on what they deem is relevant and important to their journeys of change. Interviews mostly ended with the topic of plans for the future, addressing the critical question ‘what comes after desistance?’. Chapter 8 delves into the analysis of desisters’ plans for the future, providing insight into the

influence of socio-structural factors in longer term perspectives of behavioural change.

6.8. Linguistic Considerations

Comparing datasets that are in two different languages poses methodological and linguistic challenges: in order for the interviews to be comparable, the questions and essence of the interview need to be similar in both settings, while keeping in mind linguistic and cultural differences which may impact the way in which participants interpret questions and themes addressed. This means that both sets of interviews need to be as similar as possible, but different in some respects. For instance, the main topic of this study is desistance from crime. However, in French this concept is not only quasi absent from academic discussion, but also from public discourse and general vocabulary.

Although there are early career researchers who are pushing for the word to be added to the dictionary, the notion of ‘process of decline and end of criminal behaviour’ in the collective minds is unlikely to exist. Rather, when it comes to the trajectories in criminal behaviour, notions of rehabilitation and recidivism are clear in French. Often, the expression *reinsertion dans la société* is used, roughly translating to reintegration into society, which implies a person will have been initially ‘inserted’, included in a community, and detached from it through delinquency. This linguistic element regarding desistance is, to a certain extent, telling of French society’s approach to delinquent trajectories, and is close to the French criminal justice approach to addressing delinquency in probation services’ focus on social integration and considerations for merit-based judicial rehabilitation as opposed to automatic policies in England and Wales (Herzog-Evans, 2011; Maruna, 2011b, see also Chapter 5).

The word ‘desistance’, to start with, is not a word in the French language as such. Nevertheless, the verb *se désister* has the same meaning as the English ‘to desist’, which means to voluntarily renounce, give up, cede, or pull out from a procedure,

most often in the context of competition. It is generally difficult to translate verbs and expressions containing ‘-ing’, especially with regard to respecting the intended tense. In French grammar, there is no distinction within various tenses where in English we speak of “doing something” in the present and “doing something” in general. The element of *process* is harder to convey in French in as few words as in English. Coupling this with the lack of use of the word ‘desistance’, it is challenging to speak of desistance in French: ‘J’arrête’ is both ‘I am stopping’ and ‘I stop’, however ‘the process of stopping’ sounds wrong in French.

There is another challenging point as to the comparability of communication during interviews: the formal and informal ways of addressing people in the French language have no equivalent in English. ‘Vous’ or ‘tu’ are different words for ‘you’, which are forms of addressing the interlocutor according to familiarity, age, or social distance. Using ‘vous’ is common when speaking with people for the first time, while ‘tu’ is used in a more familiar context. Therefore, using ‘tu’ with strangers can be a mark of disrespect, overfamiliarity, and convey a lack of professionalism. I used ‘vous’ with all but one of the participants, who asked me to use ‘tu’ with him.

6.9. Sample and Analysis

An adaptive approach was taken for the data collection process, whereby both the interview schedule and the initial coding framework were shaped based on the literature on desistance. Data were then analysed inductively, meaning that these initial codes were re-shaped and rewritten through the analysis. The interviews in France were conducted between November 2018 and April 2019 and in England between July 2019 and January 2020. A total of 45 interviews were conducted as part of this research. In France, 23 interviews were conducted, and 22 in England. Of these 3 were excluded from the French participants, and 2 English participants were excluded, to leave a sample of 40 (20 English and 20 French). Regarding the

French interviews, two men were excluded from the final sample because they had only motor offences on their record and one was excluded because while he had several convictions (domestic violence, kidnapping and assaults) these were for a single event that the participant denies happened and maintains his innocence. Particularly, as he maintained his innocence, there is not much substance in the interview as to desistance processes and changes in offending behaviour. In the English sample, one interview was excluded because the participant claimed his innocence and did not consider himself as someone who offended, so did not express a desire to stop offending. Another interview was excluded because the participant had multiple convictions for a single event, which he described as a genuine one-off burst of violence, meaning that there is no process of change in his narrative.

In terms of ethnicity, there is a greater heterogeneity in the French sample than in the English one. In the French sample, the breakdown is as follows: five White French men, three men had heritage from Algeria, three from Mali, two from Senegal, two from Morocco, one each from Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Tunisia, French Guyana, and Congo. In the English sample, all but two participants were White British. The remaining men had Jamaican and Pakistani heritage respectively. All the participants in this study had unique stories and past experiences that framed their present selves and desistance journeys. They also had common characteristics that allowed to identify patterns in their stories.

The mean age of the English sample was 37 years old and for the French sample it was 38 years old. This reflects the mean age of people who are convicted to non-custodial sentences in each country, which is 36.2 in France (Ministère de la Justice, 2020). In England and Wales, most people supervised on probation are 25-35 and 36-49 years old (Ministry of Justice, 2020). The ages ranged from 22 to 67 for the English sample and 22 to 58 for the French sample.

	England	France
Mean age at time of interview	37	38
Range of ages	22 to 67	22 to 58

Table 6.1: Age at the time of the interviews

Data were analysed thematically after the interviews were transcribed. NVivo was used to organise, code, and reduce data. Patterns emerged from these codes, which were the basis of the thematic organisation of the analysis chapters (Roulston, 2010). The focus in the data analysis process, was put on the participants' perspectives and experiences of their desistance journeys. All the participants in this study had unique stories and past experiences that frame their present person and desistance journeys. They also had common characteristics that allow to identify patterns in their stories. Coding and interpretation of patterns was the basis of the analysis, but there was also a continuous and systematic return to the transcripts to refine the analysis and improve coding. Taking Silverman's (1993) advice to avoid the "seductive charms of an unreflective use of the qualitative method" (quote from Mangen, 2007: 20), efforts were made to provide multifactorial explanations to findings, avoiding rushed conclusions. This involved referring to previous literature on desistance to explore the extent to which theories apply to my data, but also other empirical work that could provide deeper understandings of desistance processes.

The themes of the analysis chapters were decided in order to cover important aspects of desistance and were deduced from existing literature. For instance, reflections on the past and past offending were analysed with the notion of redemption scripts (Maruna, 2001) in mind, to figure out the extent to which narratives of change differed. During the analysis process, I sought to explore differences and similarities between English and French samples, in the stories and the way participants told them. I coded data according to the themes of the chapters and went through the different categories of coded data a few more times

to shape each chapter according to recurrent patterns. As a result, data were analysed using an adaptive approach, a mix of inductive and deductive methods, much like Segev (2020) and Calverley (2013) did.

Through the analysis of narratives, I explore how desisters formulate and recall their experiences and past lives. As is the case in the rest of the analysis, I have carefully distinguished between linguistic differences and actual variations in narratives, the latter being presented in this chapter. Comparing English and French narratives allows us to understand differences in individual pathways out of crime according to societal setting. The structure of the analysis chapters follows different points of focus in the desistance journeys, starting with discussions which were typically towards the start of the interviews, which comprise of demographic data on participants, their past offending, and generally how they got to their present selves. After this, the chapters do not follow the interview schedules (not only because the conversation during interviews went into different directions depending on the participant), but steps away from the past, into the present. The second analysis chapter therefore shifts the focus to present perspectives on desistance, after having set the context in which it occurs. There, more personal and intimate themes are discussed, with the knowledge of the relevant context for narratives of change. ‘Zooming out’ from the personal to the relational, the following chapter explores the roles of those who were reported to have helped the participants to desist. Keeping the notion of ‘help’ in mind, the next chapter places probation at the centre of the analysis, shining a light on the role of probation officers in pathways of change. ‘Zooming out’ even more, and taking an almost aerial view of desistance, the last analysis chapter paints a picture of the spaces where participants typically went to, and who they spent their time with.

Chapter 7 – Understanding Desisters: Looking to the Past

Chapter 6 set out the methodology of this study and justified the use of qualitative methods for comparing desistance processes in England and France. This chapter sets out to compare how desisters in England and France narrated their past and framed their identities. Giddens (1991) argued that in a late modern age, identity is continually constructed rather than pre-existing. Coherence in self-perception is achieved through a consistent and meaningful ‘narrative of the self’. Considering that desistance entails a fundamental change in individuals’ identities (Maruna et al, 2004), it is important to explore how desisters expressed their sense of self. The aim of this chapter is to overview the sample and analyse desisters’ social realities and circumstances as they narrated.

First, I analyse and compare narratives of offending and explore how English and French desisters recalled their past offences, with a focus on changes in self-perception. The analysis of narratives of offending provides insight into how participants framed their past to make sense of their present. Then, I compare participants’ recollections of the start of their offending. This includes age of first offence, childhood background, social circumstances and other relevant contextual elements offered in the narratives. Other characteristics like romantic relationships and parenthood are not included here, as they are explored in Chapter 9 in the context of understanding change and would not be as pertinent in here. While romantic relationships are important to grasping the social realities of individuals, the analysis is better suited in the context of narratives of *desistance* rather than offending, as the number of participants who linked their offending behaviour to romantic relationships is little and limited to the men who were convicted for domestic violence (N=3 overall).

7.1. Narratives of Offending

7.1.1. Offence Range

The types of offences participants were convicted for at the time of interview varied between England and France, as shown in Table 7.1. Nearly half of the French participants were on probation for drug-related offences (N= 9), which included consumption and drug dealing. Comparing the samples with official statistics by proportions of types of offences committed is difficult, as official statistics are given according to categorisations that are not the same in England and France. An example to illustrate this is how English and French States compile drug-related offences. In England, the Ministry of Justice provides statistics for ‘drug offences’, which include all drug possession, consumption, transportation, supply. In France, drug-related offences are included under the umbrella term ‘breach of public health’, which includes drug offences as understood by the English nomenclature as well as other health related offences, for example, those in the medical sector (French Penal Code).³⁵ Nevertheless, some categories correspond in each country, and those will be considered here.

Table 7.1 shows the offences that participants were on probation for at the time of the interviews, their last convicted offence. The number of French participants having been last convicted of violent offences reflects the national statistics, as 35% of people serving a non-custodial sentence in France have been convicted for personal injury offences (Ministère de la Justice, 2020). For other categories, the proportions of the types of current offence (the one they were on probation for at the time of interview) do not reflect official crime statistics. In England and Wales, 10% of people supervised on probation were convicted for violence against the person (this is not including pre-sentence and post-sentence supervision - Ministry of Justice, 2020). Meanwhile, drug-related offences

³⁵ Les délits portant atteinte à la santé publique <https://www.cabinetaci.com/les-delits-portant-atteinte-a-la-sante-publique/>

account for 7% of community sentences in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020) and 12% of non-custodial sentences for offences against public health in France, which include drug-related offences (Ministère de la Justice, 2020). Motor offences constitute 24% of non-custodial sentences in France and 14% in England and Wales. These discrepancies might be due to different ways in which offences are recorded, but also to the recruitment criteria for this study, which includes participants expressing a desire to stop offending. The samples here therefore reflect desisters who are supervised on probation. The English sample has a wider variety of current offences, while the French sample has mostly last committed drug-related and violent offences.

	England	France
Fraud	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
Violence	5 (25%)	7 (35%)
Drug-related	3 (15%)	9 (45%)
Motor-related	6 (30%)	1 (5%)
Harassment	3 (15%)	0 (0%)
Property-related	1 (5%)	2 (10%)

Table 7.1: Type of offence last convicted for

The range of offences participants mentioned overall (as opposed to only current offence) is as follows (see Table 7.2): fraud, violence (assault, domestic violence, homicide, paedophilia, attempted terrorism, possession of weapons), drug-related offences (consumption, drug dealing), motor-related offences (driving while disqualified, driving while intoxicated), harassment (including breach of restraining order), property-related offences (theft, robbery, criminal damage). None of the French participants mentioned harassment or breaching restraining orders, while three of the English ones did. None of the English participants mentioned committing homicide, while two of the French ones did.

	Drug	Fraud	Harassment	Motor	Property	Violence
England	12	3	3	8	9	13
France	15	4	0	2	12	11

Table 7.2: Number of participants having reportedly (during the interviews) committed offences, by type of offence

Table 7.2 shows that 15 French participants reported having committed a drug related offence, which amounts to 75% of the French sample. In the English sample, 13 participants (65% of the English sample) have committed a violent offence. These numbers may underrepresent the offences committed by the participants as they might have omitted some of their past offences. Nevertheless, Table 7.2 presents participants' reported past offences, whether they were convicted for them or not.³⁶

Table 7.3 shows us that within drug-related offences, consumption is common across the samples. While issues of addiction are more important in the English sample (see below), drug dealing is a more common offence in the French sample.

	England (12)	France (15)
Drug dealing	6	11
Drug consumption	11	10

Table 7.3: Breakdown of drug-related offences mentioned overall

7.1.2. Reflecting on Offending

The ages of desisters in this study roughly reflected the ages of people supervised in the community in both England and France (see Chapter 5). The age at which people start offending has been associated with persistent offending along the life course (Moffitt, 1993). It is therefore interesting to analyse how participants have reflected and made sense of the onset of their offending behaviours. This section will delve into narratives of the past to explore how desisters reflected on themselves and recalled past offending in the context of change. Some participants were able to think back and provide a set age at which they committed

³⁶ For a given participant, there are often several types of offences mentioned, so Table 7.2 does not add up to the total number of participants

their first offence. Others were able to give an age range (for example, 15-16) and others yet gave a rough idea of when they started offending, like ‘around ten years ago’ or ‘in my 20s’. For this reason, I separated the sample into participants having started offending before 21 years old and after and including 21 years old.

	England	France
Started offending before 21	15 (75%)	16 (80%)
Started offending including and after 21	5 (25%)	4 (20%)

Table 7.4: Start of offending

There is a pattern in both the English (N=15) and French (N=13) samples of participants rationalising their past offending. These participants framed their actions in ways that painted them in a relatively positive light, despite ultimately discussing offending behaviour. The ways in which past offending was discussed varied: some participants kept the descriptions of offending brief and vague, while others did not wish to talk at length about their offending. Others still narrated their offending by clearly framing their actions within a context, providing a thorough picture of the circumstances in which they offended.

The English desisters framed their stories of offending by minimising their actions, comparing them to more severe offences they could have committed, but did not. There was a trend in English desisters narrating their offending by rationalising their actions as ‘not that bad’ and explaining that their past selves were not truly aware of the moral nature of their behaviours:

[At the time] you don't think you're really doing owt (Harry)

Offending was often described by English participants, by using vocabulary that played down, or minimised their behaviours, such as *messing around* (John), *daft little things* (Harry) or *just an argument* (Liam – describing a fight). What is more, carelessness and ‘not thinking’ related to the ways in which English desisters reported having changed, personality-wise. Processes of desistance have, for them, entailed associating more positive attributes to themselves with age. Traits

like carelessness, impulsivity and acting out were replaced with perceptions of themselves as calm people who think things through and consider consequences of their actions (see Chapter 8).

English desisters also tended to perceive their past behaviours as typical childhood actions to be expected from ‘young lads’. Of the 15 English desisters who started offending before 21 years old, eight of them described their past behaviours as childish. In some of these descriptions was conveyed the idea that children making mistakes was normal, *kids being kids* (John), and that their past offending corresponded to such mistakes. Danny explained his frame of mind when he used to get in fights, saying *everybody was fighting when you’re 14-15*. This idea of offending as a norm during teenage years contributed to minimising offending behaviour and ensuring continuity in desisters’ ‘good’ characters. This corresponds to Maruna’s (2001) descriptions of redemption scripts in desisters’ narratives, as childish mistakes can be considered as necessary prelude to their current, grown up selves who demonstrate agency, are more responsible and in control.

This tendency to minimise past actions was also found in the French narratives. However, this was framed in a different manner. Indeed, there is a pattern in French narrations where desisters made a point in explaining or disclosing their offences with relation to other offences, presenting boundaries they say they would not have crossed. This shows concern about how they appeared and came across, much like the English desisters minimised their offending. Those French desisters who consumed drugs made a point to let me know they had never *dealt* drugs. Even in a case where Remy, a French desister who took drugs, did also deal them, his boundaries were made explicit:

Rather than offend for money, I sold product to pay for my own dose, but under no circumstances did I make any benefit from that.

In particular, French former drug dealers accumulated elements in their narratives that contributed to the notion that they had perceived it as not ‘that bad’. The relative harmlessness of drug dealing was common in their narratives of offending. What is more, they tended to underline the idea that dealing for them was like a full-time job, not too dissimilar from a legitimate source of income; *It’s business* (Kylian). There was a recurrent focus on the ‘deal’ aspect of ‘drug deal’, wherein all actors of the deal were ‘winning’, that no one was getting hurt and that deals took place without violence. That being said, a change of perspective on the harms caused by drug dealing in the French data was often cited as contributing to desistance processes (see Chapter 8). These men’s narratives thus demonstrated internal negotiations to reconcile the illegal nature of the deal and the moral aspect of drugs with their self-perceptions as moral individuals. They typically recognised the illicit nature of drug dealing while reporting having considered it as a trade, buying and selling and supplying to the demand. Adama summed up nicely this internal negotiation:

Sure it was bad what we did but...for us we didn’t hurt anyone you see, for us we were in the mindset where I am there, he’s the one who asks me something you see, he’s the one who comes to ask something, I’m not asking anything, I’m minding my own and you’re the one who comes and asks and buys from me, I’m not doing you any harm, you see?

While French desisters showed that they had thought through their offences when they were offending, the English men recalled their past behaviours as having ‘drifted’ and lacked agency. Through their narratives, the English men demonstrated change in making it clear that they lacked ‘thought’ when they were offending. In explaining that they realised the ‘wrong’ and ‘bad’ nature of their actions, they demonstrated reflexivity and showed that they had grown and evolved into realising the true nature of their actions, giving a logic to their desistance. They had offended but were not *offenders*. English desisters

formulated a ‘true’ self by relativising what they did not wish to be associated with.

I knew what I was doing was against the law, but I didn't necessarily see it as being wrong (Lee)

Lee’s words illustrate the continuity in identity as he implied that had he understood his actions as being wrong, he would not have committed them. Similarly, Jacob’s negotiation of the construction of his identity with relation to his offending behaviour is also interesting, as his ‘train of thought’ type narration provides a glimpse into said negotiation:

I'm not a violent man, I'd like to think I'm not a violent man, I have never hit anybody- well, that's not true, I have. Only in retaliation to them-well actually no, I have punched somebody for-well, they punched somebody else first so...you know.

Narratives of French desisters also tended to suggest continuity in self-perception rather than change but framed in a different manner. Participants conveyed that they have always known the extent of their actions but narrated them within social or personal circumstances that provided added layers of context to their past behaviours (see below on understandings of the start of offending). For instance, Vincent, a French participant, was homeless for 16 years and his offending history was linked with homelessness, poverty, and addiction.

For me personally I am not a delinquent...because for one thing I don't offend. I had to do acts of delinquency.

Formulating explanations, providing justifications, and minimising offending behaviour served as a way to claim the status of a ‘normal’ person, rather than an offender, or a person with no morals or boundaries. In the French sample, participants relativised on their offending by framing their past actions as not having caused harm. Armed robberies were never planned for the weapons to be

actually used, and drug deals were not considered harmful. The drugs that were dealt were not actually dangerous ones. Stealing was out of necessity. Francis, who was only ever convicted for domestic violence, said *it's not like I killed anyone*. In both English and French narratives of offending, minimising the offences committed served to humanise participants, demonstrating that their 'true' self is 'good', 'not that bad' and thus worthy of being considered as a 'normal' non-offending person. Relativising and minimising past actions allows them to present themselves as 'good' people who happen to have done some bad things, thereby ensuring continuity in their self-identity (Maruna, 2001).

Another way in which continuity in identity was different in narratives across the samples is the presence among English desisters of narrative elements demonstrating that they have already changed. In the English sample, there was a common complaint of 'still' being part of the justice system despite having stopped committing the type of offences they previously did (N=5). Having stopped offending but kept driving while disqualified, Ethan expressed his frustrations at having to continue dealing with punishment:

I don't know if it's the universe trying to talk to me or what, but I done way worser things young, in my younger days, never been caught. and then the little things I do now, it's like... and it all happened in a short space of time as well. It's just weird, I don't know what happened.

Edward mentioned a big criminal record, and, having last been convicted 13 years ago, spoke of a 'stupid mistake' he made by driving while disqualified. Similarly, Brian, who had been 'clean' and not offending for three years, talked about the irony of his extensive offending past for which he did not get convicted, but getting caught and punished for drunk driving

RF: So you've never been to prison?

Brian: No... it's just the thing that people laugh about when I tell them like all the stuff I've done they're like how've you not been to jail?

These elements of self-reflection demonstrate how participants framed their present in relation to their past. They recognised a gap between their past offending and the convictions they got. Their recognition of this gap also signalled that they have moved on from offending, and that their past behaviours belong in the past. This also reflects a decline in the frequency and severity of offences that comes with certain pathways out of crime. This is also found in the narrative of the only French participant whose last conviction was for a motor offence:

All my last convictions now since ...yeah 2014 well since 2010 that I explained to you, it's on been only driving offences. (Abdul)

This analysis of how participants reflected on their past offending is interesting because it gave us insight into how their identities are constructed. Identities are negotiated through the desisters' understandings of their past, and there is a tendency in English and French narrations to minimise past behaviours. This serves the purpose of ensuring consistency in self-perception across the lifetime. The English participants, in particular, reflected on their past by pointing out the ways in which they had changed, for the better, while maintaining perceptions of their past selves as 'good' people. The French participants also tended to minimise their past offending by relativising their actions and comparing them to worse offences, making them look good in contrast. This continuity in self-perception was also found in the narratives of desisters explaining the roots of their offending. The next section will analyse the narratives of desisters making sense of their offending past and explaining the circumstances in which they started to offend.

7.2. Making Sense of Offending

A common characteristic across English and French samples is the social backgrounds of desisters. In each sample, all but three participants have grown up in disadvantaged socio-economic and familial backgrounds. The relationship between poverty and crime has been thoroughly explored in criminology (Hay et al, 2007; Hay and Forrest, 2009). In this section, I analyse the narratives of participants discussing their backgrounds and explore how, if at all, they related this to their offending.

Despite often coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, English participants scarcely attributed or associated their offending behaviours with their structural and social contexts. Seven English participants reported growing up in council houses, but even some that did not, have reported their offending as influenced by specific people. Indeed, half of the English sample understood their onset of offending often through the bad influence of ‘wrong crowd’ or ‘bad people’. Descriptions of these include people who are *just doing stupid things* (Edward), *already into doing stuff wrong* (Kieran), *people that weren’t really good influences* (John) and *your typical lad* (Liam). Others recalled the role of their friends in the start of their offending. For instance, Lee started taking drugs at university with his friends before supplying to them and eventually turning to dealing to others:

I started going out like raving, taking harder drugs (...) and I met some people who I used to get most things off and whenever we were going out, I'd start, I'd get enough for me and all my friends, so it kind of grew.

This finding relates to Barry’s (2006) findings that young people’s offending behaviours were shaped by desires for inclusion within their social worlds. This is pertinent to the English narratives here, as the men mostly recalled starting to offend as young people being influenced by delinquent peers. As they grew older and fully transitioned into adulthood, their desires for social inclusion were

trumped by other concerns and they ‘evolved’ to lose those personality traits like being influenceable, that they associated with the onset of their offending behaviours (see Chapter 8).

The role of ‘crowds’ and external factors in influencing behaviour is also found in French narratives, in a subtly different manner. While the English participants described their offending as a result of spending time with delinquent peers, the French participants understood theirs as linked to broader characteristics of the environment they lived in. In other words, English desisters recalled their offending as partly caused by their involvement with offending peers, within an otherwise neutral environment, whereas the French men situated themselves within a criminogenic environment to start with (N=11). The council houses and areas the French desisters described having grown up in were not merely socially disadvantaged areas but also spaces in which crime and drugs were common. The various descriptions of the surroundings the men lived in demonstrate understanding of the structural issues they have faced. For instance, Nabil suggested that if he had grown up in a different, nicer district of Paris, he would not have made the mistakes – referring to offending – he made in the tough area he lived in. Offending as a career was described not only as common in these tough areas, but as an attractive pathway. Adama summed this up:

Adama: There is opportunity in drug trafficking, there is money, so you jumped into it

RF: Did you have any opportunities when you were young?

Adama: Well not really. Today I see more opportunities. But younger, I didn't necessarily see opportunities, all the people we knew, they did more or less the same jobs you know, it was either you can play football, you succeed in sports, or you will try to sell drugs. That was our reality when we were young.

The onset of offending was therefore not framed as resulting from being influenced by *people* but by social norms and a lack of legitimate opportunities for adulthood. Much like Moffitt's (1993) description of adolescent-limited offenders, the French desisters have learned and replicated easily mimicable anti-social behaviours. This understanding of the onset of offending also links with the common narration of change as fuelled by images of the feared self (Patemoster and Bushway, 2009, see also Chapter 8). If the men started offending for not knowing who they were able to become, their desistance happened for fear of who they could become. This is mostly true of the French desisters who started offending in their teens, and not accurate for those who started later in their adulthood.

A criminogenic environment and the influence of bad people were patterns found mostly in narratives of participants who started offending before 21 years old. Some participants, particularly those who started offending well into their adulthood, explained the roots of their offending behaviour as sparked by events or relationships. A recurrent pattern in both sets of samples (regardless of the age of onset) is the understanding of the roots of offending as also stemming from a particular event that sparked subsequent offending. A cheating partner, the death of a parent, a break up, or a car accident are examples of such events that lead to poor mental health states, alcoholism, a fatalistic outlook on life and a pattern of offending.

Much like Segev's (2020) analysis of Israeli desisters, narratives of the start of offending for the French sample (particularly for those who started offending before 21) entailed a discussion about their childhood. The death of a parent leading to offending behaviour was found twice in the English sample and six times in the French one. For French desisters who had lost a parent, there was a recurrent notion that the men needed to provide for their mother and siblings, which pressured them into finding creative ways to earn money. Samy said:

At the time, I was 18, I lost my father in 95 (...) they needed me, to feed the family.

Ousmane's words also illustrate the impact of his father's loss on his behaviour. In discussing how he started dealing drugs, he stated that he was under pressure to fund his higher education:

My mother helped me [financially] and yeah, when there was my father, it was alright. But when I started the degree I had to do, there were a lot of expenses and it wasn't the same. My mother earns minimum wage so she couldn't help me much.

From there on, he described the ease with which he got into drug dealing, because of how common it was in the area he grew up in. These examples illustrate the trend in the French data in which the men explained their offending as resulting from unfortunate social and personal circumstances and a sense of a lack of opportunities.

Moreover, three participants each in the English and French samples reported leaving their homes or being kicked out by their parents. Conflictual relationships with parents were a common theme in both English and French narratives. Five English desisters reported leaving school early. Three English participants and two French ones reported being neglected or abused by their parents as children. Two English men and three French ones reported having been abandoned by their parents when they were young. These experiences were not necessarily directly narrated as having an impact on the men's offending behaviours; however, their early mention indicates the importance of these events or relationships in the lives of the desisters. In other words, strained relationships with parents were not perceived as necessarily resulting in offending or desisting but were deemed important enough to mention during the interviews.

To recap, English desisters mostly narrated the start of their offending as resulting from the influence of ‘bad’ people. Structural factors and criminogenic environments were included in the French desisters’ narratives in explaining how they started to offend. These findings also exemplify an aspect of the redemption script, in that desisters reported having been swayed by external forces that resulted in their subsequent offending (Maruna, 2001). There is also a link between these findings and the narratives of *change* of the participants, in that the English tended to isolate themselves to maintain desistance, while the French made efforts to integrate themselves in civil society, which are considered as non-criminogenic environments (see Chapters 8 and 11). Moffitt’s (1993) notion of the adolescent-limited offender seems to ring true for the English desisters, in that the onset of their offending behaviour tended to result from desires for social integration. This is not particularly true for French desisters, whose onset was understood more as the product of a criminogenic environment.

7.3. Current Problematics

In this section, I analyse the elements in desisters’ narratives that present certain problematics they dealt with, and whether – if at all – these were said to have had an impact on their offending. Common topics that emerged across the samples have provided insight into the lives of desisters and the context in which change occurs.

7.3.1. Employment

The relationship between employment and desistance has been explored in criminological literature (Bushway et al, 2011; Uggen and Wakefield, 2008). Employment is sometimes considered by scholars as caused by changes in offending behaviour, and sometimes as preceding desistance (Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2012). Either way, exploring participants’ main activities contributes to capturing desisters’ pathways out of crime and understanding their circumstances. In France, a lack of studies on desistance means there is no data

on the relationship between desistance and employment. Nevertheless, carceral studies are popular within French sociology, and have produced a number of quantitative studies on recidivism. Official State statistics show that unemployment has an impact on incarceration rates (Kensey and Toumier, 2005). The decline in employability following a prison sentence contributes to difficult re-integration into society (Baader and Shea, 2007). This indicates broad similarities in challenges of employment for people with convictions and desisters in England and France.

As Table 7.5 shows, at the time of the interviews, 11 French participants were either employed, self-employed or students, and seven men were unemployed, looking for a job. Two French participants were unemployed and not looking for a job. One of them was not looking because of demanding supervision from probation and a charity organisation as part of his judicial measures, and the other because he was recently released from prison and wanted to spend time with his family before starting to work. In contrast, eight English participants were employed, 12 were unemployed, of which only three were looking for employment.

	Active				Inactive			
	Total	Employed	Self-employed	Student	Total	Looking for employment	Not looking	Retired
England	8	8	0	0	12	3	7	2
France	11	5	4	2	9	7	2	0

Table 7.5: Activity of participants

As described in Chapter 4, English and French societies have similarities and differences, notably in terms of job market, social welfare, and poverty. France has higher levels of unemployment, but stronger welfare provisions by the State and there are more people at risk of poverty in the UK. That being said, more English participants were out of work than French ones. In terms of criminal record checks and employment, the French system allows *certain* employers to

check *certain* aspects of criminal records. A criminal record with a tiered system allows employers to only check for severe offences and crimes, which allows individuals to keep their low-level offences undisclosed. What is more, individuals can ask for convictions to be erased from their records after a certain time by demonstrating that they have ‘earned’ it. In the UK, employers have more freedom in checking the *entirety* of people’s criminal records. Furthermore, convictions can become spent after a given time frame, after which individuals are not required to disclose their convictions.

In the French sample, two participants that were at some point sentenced for severe crimes (Christian had a conviction for child sexual abuse and Olivier had one for homicide) have mentioned their criminal record as an obstacle for moving on, particularly in their professional lives. Christian’s job search was described as particularly difficult, as he mentioned his criminal record being a major, frequent obstacle in getting rehabilitated and re-integrated into society. He had spent nine years incarcerated for paedophilia after which he was reconvicted for fraud and violence. Due to the severity of his first offence, his conviction appears in the part of his criminal record that employers are allowed to request. He stated:

When you have a criminal record, especially like mine, it’s basically impossible because it is necessary that the people where you work never find out about your convictions. I have lost work like that.

Christian reported having difficulties both securing and maintaining employment because of his record, which is experienced for him as an inevitable problem that is impossible to solve. The motivation to desist, gain autonomy and routine through employment is blocked by the judicial, administrative consequences of his crime and subsequent conviction. He stated that even in places typically offering support to people with convictions, his presence was unwelcomed as soon as people found out about his offending past, which prevents him from moving on. This frustration is similar to that of certain English desisters’ who –

even though they have not committed severe offences as Christian did – have reported their criminal record as impeding their job search (discussed below).

In the rest of the French sample, desisters noted the opposite, stating that criminal records can be erased relatively easily, and that employers cannot have access to low-level offences anyway. Criminal record checks were not brought up in the rest of the French narratives unless I asked about them. These French participants did not have much to say about the role of criminal records in their journeys, apart from the idea that it was a non-issue for them. In terms of barriers to change, employment was only mentioned by Christian. Others reported addiction and mental health issues as preventing them from fully moving on, however, securing employment as a problem to overcome was largely absent from the French sample. That is not to say that securing employment was framed as an easy process, simply that criminal record checks were not presented as an obstacle to their job search.

In contrast, six of the English participants reported their criminal record as a barrier to employment. This is in line with previous findings that emphasised obstacles to employment for people with convictions (Farrall et al, 2014; Henley, 2014; Healy, 2014; Uggen et al, 2004). Criminal record checks were perceived as an additional obstacle for the English desisters, who already had difficulties locating the area or industry in which they wished to work. They also demonstrated lower levels of professional ambitions compared to French desisters (see Chapter 8). Morgan recalled particularly difficult experiences in trying to get employment:

There was a notice up for applications for it and she [jobseekers' worker] was saying that they're offering a training course which generally you have to pay for but...if I put myself forward for it, you were pretty much guaranteed a job for it, again because of certain erm...criminal...records, I

was struggling with [finding] work as well, I was struggling to find a job in any sort of field.

Morgan said that he struggled to find employment at all, which was a recurrent apprehension in narratives of the English desisters. Kieran's experience in an attempt to desist when he was in his 20s also illustrates this frustration. In efforts to start *being normal* and stop *being dodgy*, he had secured a job. A month into this job, he got pulled over by the police, after which his employer found out about his criminal record and fired him. Kieran not only lost his job, but was convicted for obtaining employment with peculiar advantage, meaning that he did not disclose his criminal record.

Another common anxiety in the English sample is illustrated in Kieran's experience, in that he was unable to *keep* his job. Not only did he lose his job, but he was then convicted and spent six months imprisoned, after which he continued offending. His experience demonstrates the impact on reoffending that barriers to change can have. This contrasts with the French narratives, where desisters who were employed also had low-skilled jobs, but employers did not have access to the part of their criminal record where convictions for low-medium level offences were recorded. This is telling of the societal view in England that people with convictions are 'risky', which in itself is a barrier to rehabilitation as people are then less likely to get support for housing and employment (Henley, 2014). What comes out of the English narratives is also the frustrations of uncertainties and instabilities of searching for and securing work. Liam, for instance, shared that he wanted to 'sort out' his mental health before starting to look for a job, and described his apprehensions of job search:

There's no point in me sat in a job for them to go and do the checks and come back and say oh can't do, we can't have you.

This frustration is common in narratives of English desisters who mentioned their criminal record as an obstacle. Beyond the legal, administrative step of disclosing convictions, English desisters seemed to be impacted by employers' views on their convictions. The systematic criminal record checks in recruiting people constituted a source of frustration to start with, and English desisters had to deal with being labelled as offenders, undeserving and 'not good enough' to be in employment (Henley, 2014).

They look at you, as soon as they know you've got a criminal record: "sorry mate you're at the back of the pile, there's 50 people before you who've got no record, yeah they might be twice as bad as you". I was an honest person, I told her honestly what I did and that, but they don't want to know. (Imran)

The prospect of being stigmatised for their criminal record is framed as a reason for English desisters not to bother with employment. For English desisters, struggles in job search constituted an important informal (or indirect) collateral consequence of their criminal record. Collateral consequences include, for instance, the loss of employment accompanying convictions or imprisonment. Indirect collateral consequences are those that do not stem from legal operation and include among others the stigma attached to convictions and a host of difficulties that arise from the penal process (Logan, 2013). Added difficulties in finding and securing employment that desisters have constitute the collateral consequences of their convictions.

These concerns were not present in any of the French narratives; on the contrary, there was a certain confidence when discussing the impact of criminal records. While the job search is not described as an easy process, the role of the criminal record is not as important as it is for English desisters. French participants tended to have a more precise idea than English desisters in terms of the meaning of work for them and what field they wished to work in. A number of the French men who were out of work were considering traineeships in specific areas and roles. For

instance, Nabil was looking to start a traineeship to become an ambulance driver. Matthieu wanted to become a receptionist in an arts centre, because of his previous experience, and him valuing being able to contribute, in the extent of his skills, to the functioning of a cultural establishment. Vincent looked to find a traineeship to become a building guard, and thus secure both employment and housing at the same time (in some housing buildings in France, the concierge has a studio within the building). This might be possible for French participants because of a more generous welfare state (see Chapter 4).

In contrast, the English men who were looking for a job did not demonstrate much more thought than the broad industry they were searching in. French desisters were able to provide more detail on the type of job they wanted and why. This common finding in the French narratives indicates that employment does not spark change but accompanies and supports people in their desistance processes. Changes in employment status and even simply the efforts for job search indicated and demonstrated desistance in action, as the men took, or looked to take on pro-social roles, identities, and responsibilities. This is apparent in the French sample, which has a high proportion of men having dealt drugs at some point in their lives and eventually secured legitimate means of earning money. Drug dealing was often considered as a full-time job, in that skills were put in practice and the men were ‘working’ towards earnings. The vocabulary used in descriptions of drug deals is reminiscent of a corporate environment: the men spoke of sales, product, clients, and accounting.

Adding to the administrative barrier of the criminal record check in securing employment in the English context, employers’ attitudes were experienced as hostile to people who looked to ‘go straight’. This further stigmatises and labels people as ‘offender’ in a way that is absent in most French experiences, barring those who were convicted for severe crimes. The only restriction mentioned was that people with convictions cannot work as civil servants. That being said, none

of the participants expressed a wish of working for the State, so this was not an issue for them. Francis' words reflect this:

They erase it [the criminal record] for you if you show that you are serious, for example now for two years at the probation, if I ask could you help me erase my criminal record, they will seize the judge to tell him that this guy, we supervised him and he's a serious person, so there.

This difference in the ways in which people with convictions are considered by employees is reflective of societal perceptions on offenders (see Chapter 4). The English general public is more punitive and less open to the re-settlement of people with convictions in communities than the French. The French public opinion is more favourable to rehabilitation and tends to be more sceptical on imprisonment than the English. These findings also reflect Segev's (2020) cross-national comparative research into desistance. She highlighted the more 'reserved' English culture and social climate regarding the disclosure of criminal records compared to the situation in Israel where policies were comparatively more favourable for people with convictions to get employment.

7.3.2. Addictions

The link between drugs and crime has been extensively reported within criminology, mostly with regard to the start of offending careers, underlining the effects of addictions on social bonds, re-offending, and lifestyles (Best et al, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Anglin and Speckart, 1988). People with convictions are more likely to have alcohol addiction problems (Farrington, 1989) and to have taken drugs than the general population (Nagin et al, 1995). Schroeder and colleagues (2007) demonstrated the complex routes out of crime for people who dealt with addiction issues. In particular, they showed the different impacts of alcohol and drugs on factors associated with desistance. Narratives of desistance in this study also reflect the complex processes of change for men who struggle with addiction. Most of the English sample and nearly half of the French one

reported addiction issues or at least regular drug use at some point in their lives. Their narratives provided valuable insight into their self-perceptions and how identity changed related to drug consumption. In particular, how participants framed their addictions is interesting in terms of continued consumption and reflections on past selves with regard to addiction. Table 7.6 presents the numbers of participants having reported problematic consumption of alcohol or drugs, and other addictions, including gambling.

Mental health issues related to addiction is thus a common pattern in both samples, especially with the consumption of cannabis. The English and French samples are different in the proportions of participants having mentioned issues of addiction during the interviews. The majority of English participants (N=16, 80%) reported having, at some point in their lives, struggled with alcohol, prescription drugs or gambling addiction or frequent drug use. The descriptions of drug use are often ambiguous and not clear in terms of addiction or controlled use. In contrast, under half of the French participants reported having struggled with either alcohol or drug use.

	England	France
Addiction and frequent drug use	16	9
Alcohol	6	3
Drugs	10	9
Gambling	1	0
Prescription drugs	1	0

Table 7.6: Addictions and frequent substance misuse

The most commonly consumed drug across both English and French samples is cannabis. Regarding cannabis, in both samples, some participants tended to either not consider stopping, or plan to eventually stop in the future. Certain elements of desistance processes are similar to recovery from substance abuse (Best et al, 2016) and this is apparent in the narratives of desisters who have frequently smoked cannabis. English and French participants have described struggles and

cognitive impairments due to prolonged years of smoking. Beyond the physical toll of smoking cannabis, the limitations on the men's social lives were a common topic they reflected upon. Rayan, a French participant, shared that he had not stopped smoking, and recalled turning into a nervous person when he did not smoke. Similarly, in the English sample, Lee recalled when he quit smoking cannabis:

It wasn't helping my mental health in a way, like the more I took stuff and I get paranoid, so I stopped smoking weed.

The limiting aspect of addiction to cannabis was widely recognised by participants who regularly and frequently smoked. These examples show that much like desistance, recovery from substance abuse entails changes in identity that take place in social contexts (Best et al, 2016). Desisters here have shown self-reflexion in thinking back to who they were and how their relationships were affected by their addictions and behaviours. In contrast, those in the English sample that still smoked at the time of the interviews have described cannabis as a calming drug, used to sooth nerves and support desisters to go through their daily lives:

I still smoke my cannabis now, [probation officer] knows anyway. Erm... still smoking, that's what chills me out on a day-to-day basis. I just thought I won't be selling it or owt like that. (Liam)

In the English sample, in narratives of desisters who have consumed several drugs, 'only' smoking weed is framed as a signal for change and a positive achievement. Even though possession and consumption of cannabis is still criminalised in England, consuming it occasionally was perceived as acceptable and not part of 'offending' and therefore not a part of desistance. Nevertheless, desistance was signalled by stating that they have put an end to other types of offences, apart from consumption, which serves as a way of vouching that the

truth is being told. This is a first insight into how English desisters use the decline in the severity of their offending behaviour as indicators of change, which will be further discussed below. What is more, desistance and recovery entail ‘identity change as a socially negotiated process’ (Best et al, 2016) as is demonstrated by the narratives of desisters who disclose still smoking.

In the French sample, descriptions of the cognitive downsides of the consumption of cannabis were framed as lost potential due to frequent consumption. Omar explained this by stating that despite his professional skills and competences, he had trouble with administrative tasks because of consequences of his cannabis addiction. According to him, the addiction did not ‘let’ him do things and led him to continually postpone tasks. Another illustration of the limiting aspect of substance use is Rayan, who was still addicted to cannabis at the time of the interview and acknowledged that he would not have been able to take part in the interview if he had not smoked cannabis.

In both English and French narratives, participants who stopped taking drugs tended to reflect on when they did, focusing on the changes in personality they were able to observe, precisely because they stopped. Edward, who dealt drugs and frequently consumed cannabis, stated:

I didn't feel right in myself do you know what I mean? It were just like it were making me lazy, getting up in the morning it were making, I were just feeling tired in the morning.

Effects of other addictions were also acknowledged, for instance, Vincent stated that he became ‘aggressive’ and ‘impulsive’ when he drank. The descriptions of the addicted self as having different personality traits was taken to the extreme in Ramzy’s narrative, where he supported the idea that he was not ‘him’ when he was taking drugs:

You are not the same, person, you don't have the same values, you don't live with the same people, so you maintain yourself in a sort of euphoric bubble.

The euphoric bubble he mentioned illustrates the disconnect from the 'real' him that the drugs caused, not only mentally but also socially, as he recalled neglecting his old friends in favour of those that shared his drug habits. A specificity of desistance for some addicted participants (English and French) seems to be the lack of continuity in their identity, because of the deep-rooted effects of the drugs on their personalities.

7.3.3. Mental Health

Link and colleagues (2019) have suggested a health-based approach to desistance, highlighting the importance of mental and physical health on trajectories of offending. They proposed that health has implications to structural factors associated with desistance. Opportunities for employment, relationships as well as financial and indeed general stability can be impaired by health issues, thus impacting desistance processes. The availability of pro-social roles might also be restricted if individuals have barriers to autonomy. Mental health issues were recurrent in the narratives of desisters in this study. As Table 7.7 shows, eight of the French desisters and 12 of the English ones mentioned struggling or having struggled with their mental health at some point in their lives. All of these English men have tackled issues including depression, anxiety or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). All but one of the 12 have also suffered from addictions. In the French sample, four men have reported suffering with depression, and four others have reported struggling with their mental health at some point in their lives.

	England	France
Mental health issues	12	8
Depression	6	4
ADHD	4	0
Addiction	16	9

Table 7.7: Mental health issues in participants

A recurrent issue brought up in the English sample is the presence of desisters diagnosed with ADHD. Individuals with attention deficit disorders are more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviours into their adulthood (Moffitt, 1990). A late diagnosis of ADHD was for Harry experienced as an eye opener to childhood behaviour and certain personality traits. He said:

I were ADHD'd up I were bouncing off walls and when I were a kid, they didn't have no diagnosis for ADHD.

For certain participants, their offending behaviour and mental states were associated with personal relationships. This is evident in cases of domestic violence. For instance, Jack had been convicted for domestic violence and framed his offending as the result of a chaotic relationship from which he had recently (at the time of the interview) got out. He framed his breakup as a liberation and kick-starter of his desistance. For him, the incapacitating aspect of his mental illness had been alleviated by detaching himself from the ‘toxic’ environment of his former relationship, after which he was able to move on and live as his ‘true’ self (Maruna, 2001). Opportunities to change were, for him, tied to his mental health so long as it was affected by his relationship.

In English narratives explaining mental health issues, desisters tended to associate their mental state with their inability to move forward. Their mental state was at times the source of incapacitations and feelings of powerlessness. Jack’s feelings of liberation upon his break-up illustrate this. At times, mental health issues and offending behaviour were recalled as being interlinked. Bob, another English

participant, recalled the leadup to his period of homelessness as a low point of his mental health

I suffered with depression (...) I left my wife, my family, I lived on the streets for 6 months (...) I just decided I had enough, I just wanted to leave and so I left I was on the streets, this was 2003. So I was arrested then again.

Bob's depression was so severe that he felt he could not continue to provide for his family. Another more common example of feelings of incapacitation due to mental health is that of securing and maintaining employment.

I've only been doing voluntary work. Erm...I'm not in a position to be working right now. Through my GP... yeah, my GP's told me now, cause I suffer from severe anxiety and ... and I've also seen a psychiatrist in relation to clinical depression. (Adrian)

Adrian is an English desister who struggled with alcoholism and had been convicted for domestic violence. His narration was distinct from the rest of the English sample as he described himself as a sociable person who needed to be active to 'feel good'. His self-perception contrasted with other English participants, who were typically inactive and had low social networks (see Chapter 11). As a result, progress for Adrian was framed as re-gaining active habits and a state of socialisation and getting out of the isolation caused by both addiction and offending. He said:

I think after this [probation] finishes in November, I might be looking at trying doing a little bit of part time work. just something I don't know what it'll be, even if it'll be delivering leaflets in doors, just anything to keep me occupied.

Bob and Adrian were two desisters who were also former servicemen in the army. Offending behaviour and mental health issues in army veterans returning to civilian life are not uncommon (Albertson et al, 2015). In the UK, there is a

disproportionate number of young male army veterans involved in the criminal justice system, notably for violent offences, compared to men of similar age in the general population (MacManus et al, 2013). With regard to non-custodial sentences, army veterans represent 5% of people serving community orders and are more likely to reoffend than non-veterans serving community orders (Kelly, 2014). While there are only two participants in the sample who are army veterans, their narratives reflect the struggles of former servicemen going through the criminal justice system, as evidenced by research and reports (see Albertson et al, 2015).

Mental health issues in the French sample typically include depression and addiction. In the French sample, three participants had a legal status as disabled, which grants them benefits, as they are recognised as not being able to work full-time. Their disability is linked to their mental health issues. This means that the State recognises their disability, and they receive benefits to help them in their daily life. Nevertheless, all three of them were working towards employment, with the aim of eventually working full-time.

Narratives of mental illness in the French sample were also associated with their offending behaviour and desistance journeys, but in a different manner than the English ones. Two of the French desisters with mental health issues have reportedly started offending as a way to rebel against authorities, acting out and exteriorising their frustrations. In these cases, if offending was a way to rebel against the State, desistance was perceived as conformity and acceptance of common norms and laws.

Me, I got a month in prison and six months suspended, which was not a good thing because I have suffered a lot from this month in prison, it was not pedagogic at all and as soon as I got out, I stole a car again, to get revenge. (Remy)

I always had the feeling that...in a way society, in general society, the establishment and all that, that they owed me something. Now it's not like that anymore. But at the time I deemed that they owed me. (Pierre)

Pierre had a difficult childhood, having been abandoned by his parents at birth and being taken on by the social services. He narrated negative experiences with his adoptive family growing up and explained his anger at society and the State as a reaction to his tough upbringing. Desistance for him entailed coming to terms with his frustrations against society and accepting his circumstances. Moreover, while mentions of the incapacitating aspect of mental health were present in narratives of French desisters, State support allowed them to move forward at their own pace rather than being 'stuck'. This means that in the French sample, progress towards employment or other activity was not framed as 'the next step', but something they were actively working towards.

Health issues might also appear as a result of offending behaviour. People who have been imprisoned are more likely to suffer from poor health than the general population (Massoglia and Pridemore, 2015; Wakefield and Uggen, 2010). Some French desisters have framed their mental illnesses as a result of their offending and involvement with the criminal justice system, notably because of the trauma of imprisonment. What is more, four participants in each group have mentioned having gone through a period of homelessness at some point in their lives, due to addiction, mental health, or generally precarious situations. Homelessness is, indeed, not uncommon in lives of people who offend (Edgar et al, 2012).

7.3.4. Religion

An interesting difference in the English and French samples is the proportion of religious participants, as presented in Table 7.8. This table includes participants who reported belonging to a specific religion and not those who said they were spiritual or believed in a god, without denomination.

Religious participants	English	French
	1 (Muslim)	10 (7 Muslims, 2 Catholics and 1 Jewish)

Table 7.8: Religion

When asked about the role of their religion in their journeys out of crime, most of the French religious participants replied briefly, and with much less depth than the rest of the topics discussed during the interview. This might be due to ways in which French society relates to religion. The analysis of the ESS data in Chapter 4 has shown that France is more religious and traditionalist than England. Religion in France is considered as personal, an aspect of life to remain in the private sphere. Rayan’s answer to my prompt about the role of his religion in his life summed this up:

RF: Could you tell me about it?

Rayan: Well...I don't like talking about this, I think that it's personal.

The role of religion was framed as confirming the positive aspect of desistance. These participants were all religious when they were offending, and their spirituality was not new in the context of change. There was a continuity in participants’ morals from the start of their offending, where the immoral and ‘wrong’ aspects of their actions were acknowledged. Nabil remembered fearing god when offending and taking drugs:

On the spot [when offending] yeah this is it: I'm scared. I tell myself "fuck, that's not good", in front of god, I'm a Muslim, it's not good what I'm doing. And the next day I forget, I want to smoke. Ah, I want to smoke, and I forget.

He mentioned in his recollection of his desistance journey, feelings of guilt towards the proscribed nature of drugs in Islam. This shows that faith does not spark desistance but acts as another ‘pull’ factor towards desistance, intervening in desisters’ emotions, as this participant invokes fear and desires. Another illustration of the role of religion in desistance is Kylian, who mentioned his disgust and disappointment when fellow mosque-goers deduced he as a drug dealer from the expensive items he was seen in.

However, in each case, desistance was explained by participants through reasons outside of religion (see Chapter 8). Rayan stopped offending because of the weight of involvement in the criminal justice system in efforts to lead a ‘normal’ life. Nabil changed his behaviour with becoming a parent, his role as a father being incompatible in his eyes with his previous offending activities. Kylian found a legitimate source of income and comfort in his personal life, becoming serious with his girlfriend.

Religion was never mentioned as a *cause* of desistance in narratives of the religious desisters, but was framed as yet another reason to stop, adding to other reasons that amount to a crystallisation of discontent associated with offending. Narratives of these participants show that changes in identity and how they wanted to be perceived by their communities *fuelled* desistance, and religion *added* to considerations of change as a positive outcome. This relates to findings in research on religion and desistance suggesting that spiritual beliefs have only moderate effects on processes of change (Giordano et al, 2008) but provide pro-social bonds for people to engage with and adopt (Baier and Wright, 2001). Involvement with organised religion and positive relationships with religious communities have the potential for shaping pro-social identities and providing opportunities for change.

7.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I explored the narratives of offending, with a focus on how identities are constructed, and how participants formulated their self-perceptions. The differences across the samples provide insight into desisters' complex and changing sense of control over their own lives. French participants have reflected on their actions by reflecting on a sense of lack of choice, while recognising unfavourable social contexts they lived in. Their pathways out of crime were thus framed as changes in priority, whereas desistance for the English men was understood as a result of growing up and general life changes associated with ageing (see Chapter 8). English desisters were more likely to frame their offending as childhood behaviour. Desistance processes entail English participants' sense of agency increasing with age and taking on pro-social roles, while French desisters demonstrated continuous self-reflexivity.

English desisters tended to consider their offending as the norm in their social backgrounds and tied to their social relationships. The start of offending behaviours was largely explained by English desisters as the result of having socialised with the 'wrong crowd', which subsequently explains their self-isolation as a way to ensure and maintain desistance (see Chapter 11). French participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of the role of their social context in explaining their lives. Their narratives were similar to the English ones in some respects, in that there was also an understanding of the role of social background in their start of offending. However, their narratives were framed differently, in that while they recognised the criminogenic environment they lived in, they acknowledged that while they did not realise it at the time, they had options and typically expressed feelings of guilt and regret (see Chapter 8).

This chapter has demonstrated the different ways in which social backgrounds and personal issues were narrated by desisters, and the influence these have had on pathways out of crime. The narrations have allowed us to comprehend how

desisters perceived themselves, constructed their identities and how they made sense of their lives. While there were differences in how identities were constructed in the English and French samples, both have underlined the role of social experiences. Constructions of identity will keep being a focus in the following chapters, particularly in the next one, which analyses narratives of change.

Chapter 8 – Understanding Desistance: Making Sense of Change

In Chapter 7, I explored how desisters told their stories and framed their identities. The analyses were based on the retrospective accounts of the participants' pasts generally and past offending more specifically. Perceptions of themselves and of their social worlds were explored and compared. A pattern was found in the English data of understandings of desisters' offending behaviour as resulting from childhood mistakes and being negatively influenced by others. This meant that, for them, desistance entailed realisations about morality, growing up, becoming more mature and exhibiting more conventional adult behaviours as well as becoming less influenceable, more in control of themselves. French desisters, in comparison, tended to express more consistency in their relationship with morals, leading to more weight given to social, structural factors in their explanations of their offending. In continuation from Chapter 7, this chapter analyses the emotional aspects of their past and future selves. Reflections on offending and desistance provide insights into processes of change as emotional journeys that are impacted upon by external circumstances. Emotional considerations of the self in the course of a life allow us to uncover existential aspects of desistance processes.

Through an existential lens, this chapter explores how English and French desisters make sense of desistance from crime within the context of their lives. Here, I analyse how participants reflect upon their circumstances, their place in within their social world, and their future. First, I discuss the relevance of this existential lens in exploring narratives of change. Then, I analyse the negative emotions that participants have reported with regard to their past offending. I

identify and examine Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) notion of feared selves in the men's narratives, how this is articulated and what the subjects of the men's existential fears are. Continuing with projections into the future and emotions, I explore how desisters reflect on their own change, including what fuels their motivations, what they desire for themselves and how they plan on making these come true.

8.1. Existentialism and Desistance from Crime

Exploring notions of existentialism entails analysing how people experience the meaning that they attribute to various aspects of their lives, their relationship with their social world, how they perceive themselves within it and how they conceive their future. Existentialism also includes delving into people's "slowly evolving sense of inner self" and transformations in self-identity (Douglas, 1984: 69, cited in Farrall, 2005: 369). Existential sociology and philosophy, in particular, are concerned with the individuals' search for and adoption of a meaningful identity (Sartre, 1958). Earlier studies of desistance have highlighted existential considerations in motivations for change, that are tied in with the passing of time: these include, for example, tiredness from offending and penal punishment, the knowledge of possibly longer prison sentences, reassessment of priorities (Leibrich, 1993; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1983). Considering what is known on the internal dynamics of desistance from crime – the important notion of self-perception, the role of relationality, projections into the future (see Chapter 3) – existential concerns are essential to comprehend processes of change. Existentialism and the concern with self-perceptions in the context of desistance can be considered through the notion of redemption scripts, as developed by Maruna (2001) and discussed in Chapter 4. Indeed, part of the rhetoric of redemption involves the expression of a 'true' self, vouching for desisters' consistent and continuous 'good' character. A common aspect of life in Western societies is introspection and a search for one's 'true' self, which entails ongoing

concerns of self-perception, or how/what we understand our true nature to be (Turner, 1976). The findings of Chapter 7 confirm this for English and French desisters, who both have expressed consistency in their sense of self when narrating their lives. This consistency was demonstrated partly by minimising past offending, which was present in both groups' narratives. Beyond this, the expression of a consistent core self with regard to offending was articulated differently.

The English men typically framed the start of their offending as childhood mistakes resulting from the influence of ill-intentioned peers. Desistance for them thus involves the realisation of the incompatibility of offending with their true self. In comparison, the French men reported their social circumstances and environment as the source of their offending. Aspects of their 'true self' tended to be expressed regarding their consistent moral compass, and desistance was understood as changed social circumstances that allowed the men to live out their lives as their true selves. For both groups, desistance entailed a realignment of lifestyles and priorities with the men's core selves. This change occurred in different manners. The emotional component of change is analysed in this chapter.

Moreover, part of existential thought is concerned with individuals' considerations of their future. Existence inevitably involves thinking about one's future, in terms of opportunities, possibilities and options. Hunter (2010: 222), when discussing existentialism with the topic of desistance from crime, stated that "by understanding who one can become and knowing about the possibilities that are open to them, the individual can understand who they are". He argued that the management of tensions between past, present, and future selves is part of existence. In terms of desistance, Hunter linked this to the notion of redemption scripts, that involve a continued, consistent sense of self, considering past offending from which change is to occur. Another application of existentialism to desistance is through notions of projected selves as Paternoster and Bushway

(2009) have conceptualised. Indeed, imagined futures, or possible selves, are dependent on immutable past experiences and present circumstances. Giordano and colleagues (2002) proposed that desistance can occur through the adoption of a 'blueprint' of suitable behaviour, which projections into the future contribute to shaping. Existence, therefore, entails projection and investment of present self into the future (Sartre, 1958), as inevitably, do processes of desistance from crime.

8.2. Emotional Recollections of Offending

While exploring existentialism allows us to discern individuals' sense of self in processes of change, a focus on the emotions experienced by the men provides insight into how it 'feels' to desist. Research has shown the emotional dimensions of offending and engagement in the criminal justice system (Karstedt et al, 2011; de Haan and Loader, 2002; Katz, 1988). More specifically, some studies on the internal mechanisms of desistance have uncovered emotional aspects of processes of change (Giordano et al, 2002; Vaughan, 2007). People who want to stop offending commonly encounter feelings of hope and desire for a better life, as well as guilt, shame, or regret (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). Hunter and Farrall (2018) have demonstrated the usefulness of including emotional dimensions in exploring efforts for desistance, again through the notion of future selves.

Recollections of past offending are especially informative on the emotional component of desistance. French desisters discussed the negative effects of offending on their reputation, and dissatisfaction of being 'known' as an offender. Six of the French participants expressed, in different ways, not identifying, nor wanting to be identified as a delinquent. The victimless aspect of offences contributed to their sense of not really being an offender, therefore, not appreciating being considered as such (see Chapter 7). After a long prison sentence, Christian found himself isolated from his family and friends, with no employment and very little means to survive. He invoked necessity for the fraud

he subsequently committed. His words illustrate the frustration of being associated with offending.

I didn't do it to hurt anyone, I did it for the goal of pulling through (...) I would never be a delinquent.

English participants did not refer to similar struggles, nor did they tend to reflect on their identity as part of their narratives of discontent, as was found in the French sample. Instead, English desisters typically identified external factors as contributing to their discontent. This is a continuation of the pattern found in the English data, whereby explanations for the offences they committed were inscribed in a context of normative behaviour, to be expected in childhood (see Chapter 7). The men became subject to changes in their environment as they grew older, which accumulated, and were over time increasingly a source of discontent. These changes, or accumulation of experiences included dissatisfaction with offending peers, repeated contact with the local police and for cases of domestic violence, strained relationships with friends and relatives.

In the English data, recollections of offending invoking negative emotions therefore often included discontent related to circumstances in which offending occurred (N=7). Luke's case illustrates this as he cited repeated involvement with the criminal justice system, dissatisfaction with offending peers as annoyances that accumulated and shaped, to a certain extent, his desistance. He explained the start of his offending behaviour as a result of losing his mother and socialising with the wrong crowd as a child. Offending was perceived as a sort of harm caused by this wrong crowd, which he had grown to perceive negatively, ultimately cutting contact with them. Luke said:

They [offending peers] were alright until you got to know them (...) I stay away from all of them.

Offending, along with increased severity of offences and repeated involvement with offending peers had a cumulative effect upon discontent, testing the limits of what they would and would not accept. The mention of this type of dissatisfaction with peers demonstrates the role of personal circumstances in kickstarting desires to change. The difference with the French sample, however, lies in the nature of frustrations, which were caused by bad relationships rather than how people perceived them.

A dissonance between actions and the identity as ‘delinquent’ was articulated in the narratives of discontent of French desisters. Offending was recognised as incompatible with desisters’ ‘true selves’, which in turn encouraged change (Maruna, 2001). This discontent became crystallised with the realisation that other people perceived them as offenders, despite themselves not identifying as such. Reputation and labels given to participants was a common theme in French narratives of discontent with offending. Kylian, who used to be a drug dealer, recalled how he felt when he thought members of his community had identified and labelled him as a drug dealer. Having mentioned feelings of disgust and shame at this labelling, he explained:

Kylian: I could feel the looks on me...because they saw us appear with Audis and Mercedes, I could see the way they looked at me, they told themselves those guys, they sell drugs.

RF: How did you feel?

Kylian: Well I was upset that they could tell, that when you see me “oh he’s a dealer, he sells drugs in the estate”, it’s upsetting.

Considerations of right and wrong are emotionally laden existential thoughts, as they shape individuals’ sense of self (Farrall, 2005). For Kylian, negative reactions to being labelled as an ‘offender’ contributed to a change of perspective and outlook on offending as well as a questioning of actions. Inclusion in civil

society is an indicator of success in desistance for French offenders (see Chapter 11) and feelings of being an ‘outsider’ sparked dissatisfaction related to offending. Even Christian and Pierre, the most marginalised of participants in the French sample, demonstrated the role of their social network in providing stability to their lives, which illustrates how important integration into community and civil society was for French desisters. The role of communities in supporting desistance has been highlighted in research (Farrall and Calverley, 2006) and particularly in ethnic minority communities (Calverley, 2013), although there was no notable difference between white French and ethnic minority participants here. Considering the role of labelling on individuals, it makes sense then that desistance entailed a shift, not only in offending behaviour but in identity (see part 3 of this chapter) and in social identity, (Farrall, 2005).

8.2.1. Guilt

A common theme in the French narratives looking back at negative aspects of offending was guilt (N=8). Benazeth (2021) found that realisations of close ones’ suffering caused by offending were common in narratives of French desisters. Similarly, French participants in this study shared feelings of guilt with regard to the harm caused by their offending – mostly drug dealing – but also harm they caused to their loved ones, because of consequences of penal punishment. Part of desistance for Omar entailed realisation of the harms caused by his drug dealing, which started off as a normative habit in his early teenage years in the context of life in a council estate. He explained this realisation:

I realised that it hurts people, you see. It hurts ...society, so I stopped selling drugs (...) because all these really narcotic products, it’s not just the question of money. It’s the question of people’s health, and that’s a guilt that I have to put up with.

However, the notion of guilt was relatively absent from English narratives (only one mentioned feeling guilty for the harm caused by selling drugs). For the French sample, feelings of guilt coupled with alienation from pro-social communities and being labelled as ‘offender’ contributed to the accumulation of negative emotions associated with offending. The realisation of harms and downsides that resulted from offending led to feelings of guilt, which in turn facilitated self-reflection and reconsidering their lifestyle (Benazeth, 2021). Interestingly, fewer French desisters demonstrated desires for generativity compared with English ones (see part 3 of this chapter), even though they expressed considerably more feelings of guilt. Nevertheless, their strategies for desistance relate to frustrations of being alienated from non-offending civil society (see Chapter 11).

Reflections on guilt and regret demonstrate consideration for morality and participants’ own perceptions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. The presence of such emotions in the French data may also be explained by the number of religious participants in the sample (N=13 – see Chapter 7), of which five have expressed guilt because of religious reasons (which is absent in the English data).

I am a Muslim, in the Koran we are told not to harm, not to do this and that, to pray to your God (...) I feel guilty. (Kylan)

[when talking about how he has changed] *Having felt hypocritical regarding religion as well you see. About harm, you do certain things and at the same time...before, well I could do it, I could pray and put my conscience aside but with time the conscience is heavier. The more you age, the more your conscience grows. (Adama)*

Religion has been found to play a varying role in desistance processes (see Chapter 4 – Jang and Johnson, 2017; Calverley, 2013; Chu and Sung, 2009; Giordano et al, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Adherence to Islam can provide a structured environment and codes of conduct to follow which support processes of change

(Calverley, 2013: 102). Among French participants of Muslim faith, only Adama reported religion as the main driver for change, having gained awareness of the incompatibility of his religious morals during a prison sentence. Even in this case, it is his imprisonment that sparked reflections on morality and religion rather than religion by itself. The impact of incarceration on religiosity and desistance was also explained by Calverley (2013). While religious participants mentioned their religion as having helped them through incarceration and other difficult moments, religion seems to be an added motivator, comforting and confirming change away from crime. Nevertheless, feelings of guilt were not exclusive to religious participants, as three out of the eight French desisters who mentioned feeling guilty for having offended reported being atheists. Guilt played an important role in desistance processes for the French men, as it had the potential to spark the association between discontent and offending, but also confirmed change as positive (Farrall and Calverley, 2006).

Chapter 7 demonstrated that French desisters commonly included social and structural factors in explaining their trajectories of crime, all the while recognising consistent morals throughout offending and desistance. Consistent morals meant they had not experienced sudden or newfound changes in perceptions of right and wrong. This may explain the greater presence of guilt in French narratives compared to English ones regarding offending, since they reportedly were aware of the immoral nature of their behaviours.

8.2.2. Regret

A recurrent theme across samples in recollections of negativity in offending was the expression of regret. French participants, in particular, described what could have happened to them had they not offended, or if they had begun to desist earlier (N=7). The emotion of regret was not absent from the English narratives but was framed in a different manner. The French men tended to compare themselves to an image of a 'normal' person who would have made better decisions than they

did while they were committing offences, comparing themselves to people in their social circles who have either desisted or never offended. These imagined scenarios were further expressions of regret of the ‘mistakes’ they made by offending. The French men have, in these imagined scenarios, reflected on the ephemeral aspect of earnings from drug dealing, and compared their involvement in lucrative offences with the stability of legitimate employment.

The dude who works, he earns his €1200 per month, he'll go faster than you even with his small wages you know, because later on, he will be able to get loans and all, but you will only keep wasting your money and in the end the only thing that's left is that you have a giant appetite, you want all the money in the world, but you don't have it. (Abdul)

I spent five years in prison, I left a friend who was working, he didn't earn a lot, €1700 per month...but when I was released from prison, with his modest work, I went to his place, I saw how he was...organised with his little family, he went travelling, he didn't ask anything to anyone and with his modest wage...it intrigued me, I told myself well, you can live better and be happy with € 1700. (Alain)

In thinking about what could have been, French desisters therefore expressed regrets about projects left unaccomplished or not started at all due to offending. English participants did not express regret through comparisons with what could have been, rather they looked back on their offences and past behaviours and articulated what they believed they *should* have done (N=7). Regret among the English desisters was therefore expressed as upset over past actions, and by demonstrating disapproval of their offending. “I should have” and “I shouldn't have” are recurrent expressions in English narratives when reminiscing about the past: *I should have gotten help before* (David); *I probably should have left her* (Jacob).

In expressing regret, English participants signalled change to themselves (and me as an observer) by demonstrating disapproval of their own past behaviours. Like guilt, regret seemed to play a role in processes of change, confirming a break with the past and recognition of the incompatibility of offending with participants' current selves. The different expressions of guilt and regret in English and French narratives are to be considered alongside narratives of offending: The French men tended to express having consistent morals in their stories, which explained why they felt guilt in particular, as they acknowledged having been aware of the immoral nature of their offending all along. Guilt and regret in the French data indicated shifts in values and perspectives, rather than radical transformations. In contrast, the English men expressed having changed through realisations regarding offending, logically regretting their past behaviours with the hindsight of time. Regret has been found to potentially spark desistance (Warr, 2015), although findings across both samples here suggest it was the accumulation of various negative emotions and experiences associated with offending which established a wish to change. For French participants, normalcy and social integration seemed to be important desires that clashed with offending, whereas English desisters derived dissatisfaction from the context of offending itself.

8.3. Feared Selves

The notion of feared selves has been discussed in Chapter 3. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) suggested the 'possible self' as imagined scenarios of what one may become in the future, and the 'feared self' as what one does not want to become. The latter corresponds to envisaged scenarios of what the future would look like in cases of persistent offending. They are 'feared' because of the imagined bleak outcomes that persistent offending would lead to. What is more, the concept of the feared self itself is evidence of the emotional and existential aspects of desistance, for the focus on reflections of preferred and undesirable lives as well as apprehensions and desires. Elements of the feared self were found

across English and French samples, and the following section of this chapter will analyse how these were articulated.

8.3.1. Comparisons with Persistent Offenders

Concerns about future selves are common considerations of desisters when faced with opportunities to reoffend (Hunter and Farrall, 2018). Indeed, in discussing change and desistance with participants, projections into the future and the notion of ‘feared self’ as formulated by Paternoster and Bushway (2009) were recurrent themes. Participants both English and French, expressed fears of outcomes of further offending, confirming to themselves a strong will to avoid possible further harm and discontent. Expressions of the ‘feared self’ demonstrated the internal narrative at work in processes of change, and the negotiations of desistance. English and French desisters reported similar fears, hoping to avoid negative consequences that they would risk with further offending.

There is a pattern in the French data of desisters imagining potential negative consequences of further offending by reflecting on their peers who are persistent offenders (N=8). They often articulated motivations for change using unfavourable conditions of persistent offenders to illustrate what they wanted to avoid becoming. French desisters described their feelings about the lives of persistent offenders that they encountered and acknowledged that they have been in similar situations. By comparing themselves to their persistent peers, they reflected on and recognised their own progress and more favourable current, working selves. There was a certain distance established in these narratives, articulating desistance in contrast with the ‘stagnating’ persistent offenders who ‘have not moved forwards’ and were ‘still the same’. Efforts and progress in desistance were put into perspective and the comparative element with persistent peers was used to confirm motivation for change. The youngest of the French sample, Ousmane, was a 22-year-old former drug dealer. He grew up in a council

estate, a place in which, by his own description, drug dealing was the norm to earn money. Reflecting on his motivations to stop dealing, he said:

I see people, even older people [who still offend], I tell myself that- I don't know, in 20-30 years, I wouldn't want to be like that.

This comparison with others gave them a frame of reference to both the progress they had already made and changes they planned on making. French Desisters identified with persistent offenders for having been in similar situations while observing and recognising unwanted consequences they would face if they kept the same lifestyle. The notion of the feared self was therefore embodied by these offending peers. Observing the consequences of further offending in persistent offenders allowed them to reflect on existential concerns regarding what one did not want to become, and what sort of life they prefer for themselves. While offending was often initially perceived as lucrative, desistance was considered as an investment in their future selves.

This embodied feared self was especially present in narratives of French participants who were marginalised, homeless and who struggled with addiction (N=4 overall French participants with addiction issues). These participants often bore the physical and mental consequences of years of addiction, from which recovery entailed intensive medical and psychological interventions. They therefore acknowledged the change for the better that had already occurred in their lives, and without which they would be worse off. For example, Vincent said:

Today, when I look at people who are still doing drugs, I tell myself "fuck I was like that!" And for nothing in the world would I return to that. And that helps me to fight even more.

The relative lack of comparison with offending peers within the English sample might be explained by the overall self-isolating strategy (see Chapter 11). They tended to shrink their social circles, keeping to themselves and shielding

themselves from potential temptations to reoffend. Moreover, the finding that French desisters compared themselves to others is unsurprising given that they were also more likely to be sociable and to express concerns for their image and place within their communities. What is interesting in the expression of feared selves in the English sample, however, is the focus on the progress already made, and worries of losing it, and what is dear to the men, should they get caught reoffending. Fears and concerns about reoffending were to do with potential punishment, and not with reoffending itself.

8.3.2. 'Too Much to Lose'

In contrast with the feared selves embodied by persistent offenders present in the French narratives, the English consistently mentioned fears of losing aspects of their life that they deemed important. Having 'too much to lose' was a recurrent worry in the English sample (N=7). Like the French narratives, English desisters put their present lives into perspective, reflecting on negative consequences that could occur should they reoffend. They demonstrated reflexivity in projecting themselves in the future, considering elements of their life dear to them that they feared losing. Lewis showed this most succinctly, stating:

Lewis: If I make a mistake, I've got everything to lose

RF: What is everything?

Lewis: I'd lose my home I'd lose my family. Put it one way, if I got sentenced again and I went inside prison, I'd have nobody. That's what I'm looking at. And... it'd be my own fault like why I did it. That's why it [reoffending] ain't gonna happen. you know.

These narratives revealed an aversion to past offending and motivation to change for avoiding further negative experiences. Changed social circumstances from desistance resulted in greater negative consequences of offending and most importantly potential punishment. Newfound stability, strong family ties, employment, housing were some of the parameters encouraging desistance. The

accumulation of these roles and favourable circumstances consisted in a build-up of investments of ‘things to lose’, which subsequently strengthened notions of feared self in maintaining desistance (Gadd and Farrall, 2004). Social ties played an important role in the ‘too much to lose’ narrative, as it pertains to pro-social identities, routine activities and other elements of desisters’ lives that were away from offending.

Seven English participants also mentioned, in different terms from each other, the role of their children in their journeys of change. This included, for example, changing for the sake of their children, because of fears of having them taken away or not wanting to be an absent father in case of incarceration. Desistance as a pathway for becoming a better parent was less common in the French sample (N=2). This could be due to a structural understanding of offending (see Chapter 7), which may not be incompatible with good parenthood, especially considering the consistency of values the French men expressed, throughout their narrations. In contrast, the English desisters typically perceived offending to have started as ‘childhood mistakes’, easily influenced personalities and carelessness, all of which are incompatible with being a good parent.

In the English sample, children were therefore invoked as the subject of shifted priorities, meaning that parenthood was framed as a role that had become more important than offending: *I have a kid now* said John. This shift did not necessarily occur with the arrival of a new child but accompanied a realisation of desires for change. Desistance also entailed performing gendered social roles, in a shifted capacity (Carlsson, 2013). Fatherhood, therefore, has the potential to influence processes of change through motivations for performing positive roles and actions. As a result, ‘being there’ as opposed to losing kids to social care, for example, and notions of providing for children were recurrent concerns in the English sample. Harry had an extensive offending history, having started at 15 years old with criminal damages, assaults, and prolonged drug consumption. His

narrative of desistance was framed on the realisation that offending was unsustainable. His concerns reflected those of the English fathers in the sample, who expressed wanting to change, in part for the benefit of their children. He explained:

I want them to go to school and then try and get some qualifications so they can get a job and work cos if they don't work, they're not gonna have nothing in life.

The performance of masculinity was therefore framed as the role of a ‘good father’. A parental role and meaningful relationships are conducive to adopting a pro-social identity (Datchi, 2017). The motivation from fears and concerns over raising children relates to the Informal Social Control Theory in which investment in meaningful relationships supports processes of change (Sampson and Laub, 2005). The value of these relationships was what English desisters risked losing and contributed to their considering further offending as incompatible with what was deemed important to them. While French desisters who had children (N=8) also mentioned them in their motivations for change, this was not framed as an element of their lives they would miss out on, rather as a point of focus that helps maintain desistance, as part of shifted priorities. English participants had highlighted the role of meaningful relationships in their journeys of change (echoing results of Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Weaver and McNeill, 2015) more so than French ones.

8.3.3. An Unwanted Scenario - Imprisonment

While English and French desisters diverged in the expression of their feared selves, there were similarities in their narratives when it came to the specific unwanted scenario of imprisonment. Of the English sample, 11 participants mentioned avoiding imprisonment as a motivation for desistance, with a further nine in the French sample.

I can keep going down that route and next thing I know I'll be in prison but I don't want that. That's not gonna help anybody, certainly not me. So I pulled away from that. (Adrian, English)

I have said it already, I'm done with prison, I would rather die. (Vincent, French)

These participants could be identified as ‘avoiders’, maintaining desistance for not wanting to be imprisoned (Burnett, 2000). Shover’s (1983) study of desistance among older men who were engaged in property offences also found similar results. Shover found that fears of another prison sentence were important considerations in desistance processes, as the men were aware of the deprivation of their time in society if they were to be incarcerated. Across samples in this present study, nine participants shared fears of being imprisoned for the first time should they reoffend or get caught. These men reported avoiding further offending for fear of more severe punishments given their extensive past offending.

People laugh about it when I tell them like all the stuff I've done, they're like “how've you not been to jail?” (Brian, English)

Do you imagine? In all my life I have never been in prison, but here because of this, I was sentenced to prison, but I never went...it's the modification of the sentence. (Omar, French)

Omar recognised that he avoided imprisonment despite reconvictions, thanks to modifications of sentences that he was granted (in France, short prison sentences can be changed into non-custodial sentences in certain circumstances – see Chapter 5). Having either been punished to non-custodial sentences before, or simply not been caught, there was, for the French men, a sense of heightened risk of imprisonment in case of reoffending due to the accumulation of convictions and escalation of severity in punishment. French participants reported benefitting from sentence modifications in cases where they received prison sentences, which

is often perceived as a first warning, or a free pass. What is being avoided is what happened to Adama, who had several convictions, sentenced for punishments in the community and suspended sentences, after which he got caught again and spent three years in prison because of the accumulation of previous sentences:

Honestly, I won't deny it, I've had chances, I've had chances, they let me go free but I persevered. When I was imprisoned, that's why I stayed a long time.

Similarly, suspended sentences for the English participants were sometimes considered as the step before prison in terms of reoffending. The unwanted scenario fuelling desires for desistance derived from fears of further involvement with the justice system.

There's no point in me getting into trouble again, cause I'm on a suspended sentence, so if I do anything wrong in a suspended sentence, I'm going to jail. (Luke)

The importance given to potential punishment in cases of further offending demonstrates the limited scope of shifted values as driving change. This is unsurprising, considering the crystallisation of discontent derived mainly from downsides of punishment rather than offending itself. A focus on the prospect of punishment was the most salient motive in narratives of both English and French desisters, which leads to question the scope of maturational theories in this instance. As Adama put it:

Honestly if tomorrow you tell me start over your life and I guarantee you you won't go to prison, I won't think twice [about offending]. Now if you don't guarantee that I won't go in prison (laughter) well that's another thing!

In other words, for some English and French desisters, despite recognition of downsides of reoffending, particularly regarding penal punishment, they

remained aware of the benefits of crime. Ultimately, reoffending and potential consequences of reoffending were recognised as incompatible with present desires and desires for their futures lives (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). Overall, English, and French desisters had similar fears and projections of feared selves, including (further) prison time and worse living circumstances. The threat of imprisonment brought awareness to desisters of what they could lose and what they would not be able to accomplish (Shover, 1983). It is the accumulation of discontent, risks, new objectives, and circumstances that made desistance preferable and viable. Both samples demonstrated recognition that persistence of offending would weaken the likelihood of accomplishments unrelated to offending (Hunter and Farrall, 2018).

8.4. Reflecting on Change

This part of the chapter will analyse narratives relating to reflections on the samples' desistance journeys. Part of existentialism entails exploring how individuals adapt and maintain a meaningful identity (Farrall, 2005; Sartre, 1958). In terms of desistance processes, we know that change and the maintenance of desistance entails shifts in self-perceptions (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2005; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). Desisters tend to express a redemption script in which they demonstrate agency, a sense of control and purpose in changed life trajectories (Maruna, 2001 – see Chapter 3). Giving meaning to change and reflecting on life provides insight into existential considerations of desistance processes (Farrall, 2005).

8.4.1. Becoming 'Better People'

When reflecting on past offending and discussing desistance, participants across samples often provided age as an explanation for change. The notion of 'growing out' of crime was present within 12 French narratives and nine English ones. This related to the 'ontogenic paradigm' (Maruna, 1999) and maturational reform theories which explain desistance through the 'sheer passage of time' (Glueck and

Glueck, 1950). Narratives providing ontogenic explanations for change were provided by participants regardless of their age, irrespective of the country they lived in.

It was just something we did when we were younger, do you know what I mean? Now I'm 24, going on 25, it's really different. (Liam)

At sixty I had to grow up. (Bob – 67 years old at the time of the interview)

Before, I was young, now I am 26 years old but when I talk about this [offending] I was 20 years old, I didn't think like I do today. (Kylian)

This is in line with previous findings that desisters become 'acutely' aware of time, pressuring themselves into reconsidering what matters most to them, thereby questioning their offending behaviour (Shover, 1983). Beyond the ontogenic explanation, participants reflected on *how* they changed with age, what kind of person they used to be compared to who they are now/at the time of the interview. Through deeper articulations of ontogenic explanations of change, participants provided further elements of a redemption script (Maruna, 2001).

Indeed, both sets of participants described themselves with positive characteristics and referred to their past selves through negative traits which they linked to their past offending behaviours. More English participants expressed changes from negative to positive personality traits (N=14) than French ones (N=7). Broadly, English participants conveyed having changed from being 'bad' to being 'good'. This is not unlike Shover's (1983: 210) participants who, as they aged, increasingly perceived their past offending as 'foolish'. Positive attributes that the English participants gained involved caring more, becoming more confident, more honest, trustworthy, humble, less reckless, arrogant, brash, and having less of a temper. Recurrent improvements included becoming more in control (N=5) and thinking things through more, in the sense of being less impulsive (N=6). The positive changes reported were directly linked to being better equipped at dealing

with impulses and urges associated with the type of offending they have reported. Being more in control and thinking before acting were elements in the English narratives of a common redemption script (Maruna, 2001). While the English men described having been impulsive and changing to be more in control, the French ones mentioned short-term gratifications of offending being replaced by long-term planning in desistance.

Before delving into the French data for comparison, it must be noted that this difference was not simply a linguistic variation in conveying similar real-world changes, as the context provided by the participants clarifies. The English participants who reported thinking things through more tend to have offending histories that relate to impulsive behaviour. Harry recalled being in fights and stealing when he was younger. David struggled with alcohol addiction and when drunk would contact people he was legally prohibited from contacting. Brian had a past of fighting and was caught driving while drunk. Seven French desisters reported changing for the better with regard to thinking forward and considering consequences of actions. Unlike the English men, these participants, like other French desisters in this study, perceived their offending as resulting from social, environmental factors, among which was the lack of opportunities in the disadvantaged socio-economic areas they lived in. Offending was thus often considered as an efficient way of making money considering the perceived lack of opportunities (see Chapter 7).

Thinking of long-term consequences was typically the type of change mentioned by the French participants. Indeed, French desisters tended to frame their ontogenic explanations as the result of wanting immediate gains and not thinking ahead to their future life circumstances.

I didn't want to see too far [ahead in the future] (...) I wanted to live in the moment, I was even telling myself I need money now. Now, I...I prefer being patient because I know it will be better for the future. (Ousmane)

At the time I was young so I thought I would become rich thanks to that [drug deals]. (Amadou)

This echoes findings in Chapter 7 about explanations of the start of offending: English desisters perceiving immaturity and influenceability as typical traits in children logically considered their desistance as adopting more ‘grown-up’ attributes. In contrast, French desisters understood their offending as resulting from their social context, which explains that they would consider personal changes in their desistance journeys as improvements of their social conditions. These stances also reflect the criminal justice philosophies of each country, in that English probation tends to responsabilise the individual, while in France offending was also explained in terms of socio-economic circumstances.

These narratives of change demonstrate agency and self-reflection. With time, short-sighted behaviours disappeared to make room for forward thinking individuals, changing for the better. English and French men reported changes in self-perceptions that link to the idea that desistance is not merely the lack of reoffending, but transformations in identity (Farrall, 2005): desisters perceived themselves as having more favourable personality traits, as their priorities, objectives, and attitudes towards offending changed. While English and French participants considered themselves as ‘better’ people, with more favourable characters, there was a pattern in individuals using past behaviours to make sense of their present beings. In each sample, six participants indicated drawing strength from (negative) experiences and that these in turn have forged who they were (during the interviews), including positive aspects of their lives.

I had to go through that pathway to get out of this abyss. (Remy)

Well, the offending past is (sighs) it's been a negative thing, but it allowed me to have a certain resilience. (Matthieu)

It's bad, what I've been doing, and it's bad that I got caught but, in a way,...I'm using it now as a weapon to say "oh well this has happened but I'm doing this I'm doing this and I'm getting to this place now" (Brian)

It makes you who you are as a person dunnit? (Lewis)

Participants 'learned the hard way' how they preferred to live their lives, which seemingly contributed to comfort their pathways of change as positive. These narratives exemplify an aspect of redemption scripts whereby desisters "rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a worthy, productive life" (Maruna, 2001: 87).

8.4.2. Thinking About Life

Participants also pondered upon how they did and did not want to live their lives. This referred to 'internal narratives' where individuals engage in conversations about morality, existential desires and ultimate concerns (Vaughan, 2007). English and French narratives showed a re-evaluation of what mattered to desisters in the context of change (Farrall et al, 2011). Seven French participants and six English ones shared elements of what life should or should not be, and what direction it should or should not take.

I knew my life was not going anywhere and I just decided it was time to change. (John)

It [offending] doesn't get you nowhere. (Zach)

That's [offending] not life, life is what... it's better to have a woman that loves you, parents who are happy, happy to see you, even if you have nothing, you have a minimum, you have a lot. (Kylia)

For me, that's happiness, to enjoy [life] with my daughter, that's it isn't it? That's life, that's happiness, that's all. (Nabil)

While not many of them discussed what life *was* about (in those terms, most of them did discuss elements of their lives like employment or relationships), this type of narrative highlighted a break with offending and emphasised disapproval not only with offending but with the lifestyle that came with it. This type of discourse demonstrated agency, as desisters took steps resulting from reflecting on themselves and their situations. Reflections on life further demonstrated a sense of self-control over people's own lives, showing that they now knew how to live according to what life 'should' be. This also conveyed a sense that life starts 'now' as if they were not *really* living when they were offending. Reflections on life are considered part of 'normative patterns of human development' and relate to ontogenic explanations of desistance (Maruna, 1999: 2). With age, people have increasing existential considerations and reflective thoughts on the meaning of life (Gove, 1985).

8.4.3. Generativity and Moving On

Another aspect of redemption scripts to be analysed in narratives of change is generativity (Maruna, 2001). Generativity corresponds to the notion of giving back to others and/or to society in the face of recognising the harm that one has done. Giving back is a way to manage a shift from a damaged, or 'spoiled' identity – associated with offending – to one that is positive and pro-social (Goffman, 1963). Research has demonstrated the importance of generativity in processes of desistance from crime (McNeill and Maruna, 2007; Maruna, 2001). Indeed, narratives of desisters often include newfound interests for others and an inclination for providing care (Maruna, 2001).

The notion of 'giving back' was found in seven of the English narratives. In contrast, this was relatively absent in French narratives, which tended to convey wishes to completely move on from their past and avoid being associated with offending altogether. English desisters, however, reported feeling good about giving back at some point in their processes of change, or planning to give back

once they will be ready to do so. For example, Casper, after feeling guilty for neglecting his parents because of his offending lifestyle, aimed to rekindle his relationship with them, ‘giving back’ the time and love he reportedly took away from them. Generativity seemed to motivate change due to the positive aspect of behaviours and actions, contrasting with negative memories and experiences of offending.

Five of the English participants mentioned volunteering as a way to give back. Indeed, involvement in volunteer work was previously found to potentially reduce offending behaviour (Uggen and Janikula, 1999). ‘Giving back’ here was justified with relation to the participants’ own past behaviours. Adrian, for example expressed gratitude for the support he received from his alcohol support group and eventually joined it as a volunteer himself. Lee engaged in peer-support while in prison, also mentioning that it made him ‘feel good’ to help others who went through the criminal justice system like he has. Bob, who went through a period of homelessness, worked in a charity shop for an organisation that helps marginalised people as a way to ‘give back’ to society. He explained:

If you can help somebody, it feels good. Not that you get a reward for it, but it makes you feel that you've done something you've not taken something, helped somebody, get a leg up in life, not going down the same way I went.

This ‘other-centric’ approach to generativity shows a newfound satisfaction in altruistic actions, which contrasts with previous offending behaviours (Maruna et al, 2003). Generativity appeared as a logical step in journeys of change for English desisters, with regard to righting a wrong. This is also consistent with English-based research which has found patterns of generativity in narratives of desistance (Maruna, 2001; McNeill and Maruna, 2007). Moreover, generativity has been associated with a signal of desistance (Maruna, 2012).

In contrast, the French men expressed desires to move on and turn the page from offending (N=6). Generativity was also largely absent from Healy's (2010) sample of Irish desisters. Nevertheless, there were some narrative elements from the French data which indicated wishes to give back, but these were fleeting, not in terms of consistent work like in the English sample, but more opportunistic generativity, like taking part in this research, for example. The trend in the French sample in terms of desistance was a desire to completely move on from the past. Ramzy's words summed this up:

Psychologically erm maybe the person that I was before, well he is still a bit there, you see? It's [talking about the past] a bit unpleasant, I have turned the page, written it off etc. But it's still pleasant [to talk to] people like you, [probation officer], we have a good rapport. [Probation officer] said it [taking part in the interview] would be interesting considering my profile and yes it will always go very very well but it's just that yeah I would have liked it to be finished.

This links back to the idea that French desisters were more sensitive to labelling and external perceptions of them, as well as holding aspirations for normalcy and assimilations to civil society (see Chapter 11). For them, identity transformations in desistance appeared to involve a complete shedding away of the identity of 'offender' to become 'like everyone else'. Generativity would assume *not* being like everyone else. For French desisters, punishment was the way to give back and make amends with society. For them, once their sentences end, they will have properly moved on from every aspect of their lives linking them back to an offending past. This is all the more a source of frustration for offenders who were serving sentences that resulted from lengthy investigations, during which they have already been changing or desisting.

RF: How do you feel paying for an offence you committed three years ago?

Elias: Ah, it bothers me, it pisses me off a bit because I want to turn the page and...it's coming back up to me. But I'm happy to get it over with, there, I will get it over with once and for all and then it will be done, so there. (Elias)

While this analysis confirms what is known on generativity and desistance in the English context, it seems that 'giving back' was not as important in processes of change for French desisters, who tended to focus on moving on from associations with offending. The following part overviews how desisters plan to move on.

8.5. Looking to the Future

This chapter has so far demonstrated the emotional component of desistance through recollections of past offending, elements of feared selves and reflections on processes of change. The next part of the chapter continues to explore emotions in desistance narratives, focusing on desisters' projections into, and hopes for, their future. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their plans for the future. Their answers illustrate the notion of 'future selves' (or 'desired selves'), that is, the projections of individuals into a future away from offending (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007). The 'desired self' relates to the person that participants hope to become in the future, which informs their pathways of change (Hunter and Farrall, 2018). The presence of answers about future selves in narratives of desistance therefore indicates hopes for a better life. Hope plays an important part in processes of desistance and internal dynamics of change, as it allows people to formulate alternative selves and desired futures (Farrall and Calverley, 2006).

The 'desired self' consists of a blueprint informing desistance. In other words, considerations of a future self help to direct desisters according to actions and behaviours that would guide them to favourable circumstances away from offending. Understanding future selves is crucial to comprehending desistance processes, as they demonstrate people's acknowledgement of the potential of

change away from offending. Not only do expressions of future selves indicate recognised potential for change, but they demonstrate a sensitivity to opportunities for change (Giordano et al, 2002).

8.5.1. Aspirations of Normalcy

English participants commonly aimed for a conventional future, principally mentioning improvements in their lives with regard to employment (N=12) and securing housing (N=4). French desisters also expressed wishes of conventionality, emphasising their hopes for a stable future. A difference from the English sample is that the French participants mentioned completing training and career aspirations rather than simply securing employment.

Nine English participants were not looking for a job at the time of the interview, for wanting to tackle issues one step at a time, prioritising the end of probation, ‘sorting out’ mental health and eventually getting to a stage where they are ready to look for employment. One of them was not looking for work because he was retired. Despite participants not looking for a job at the time of interviews, they tended to project themselves into the future, eventually becoming ready for such change and securing employment (mostly through a new job N=10, a promotion N=1 or self-employment N=2).

RF: So what are your plans for the future now?

Luke: Well...hopefully I get another job lined up in construction. just...get my own place

RF: Your own place?

Luke: Get my own place, for my kids and that

RF: And do you have any other sort of plans?

Luke: Go on holiday...yeah

Having a job, securing housing, and going on holiday were goals frequently mentioned by the English sample, that were perceived as realistic, achievable

easily enough. This confirms existing findings on the goals of English desisters that include a conventional life and generally limited aspirations (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). This in part relates to what Bottoms and colleagues call the ‘English Dream’ which refers to “a not-too-onerous but safe job as an employee of a stable company, enough money, some consumer luxuries, a steady girl-friend and (possibly) kids” (2004: 384).

While the French sample has also provided ontogenic explanations for desistance, their plans for the future were framed less so on expected notions of normality and more towards desired *feelings* of comfort, tranquillity, and stability, including and beyond conventionality. This is also a common finding in Benazeth’s (2021) analysis of desistance in France, whereby desisters conveyed that peace of mind for themselves and their families took priority over any advantage from offending. For the most marginalised French participants in my study, stability was framed as the improvement of their social circumstances. For those participants, getting themselves into stable social situations was a steppingstone into completely detaching themselves from insecure, precarious situations of their past, often involving homelessness.

To find employment, that would be really good. Making plans for the future erm...you have to have a situation with a job and a flat to be able to make projects for the future. (Elias)

Employment and housing were part of what was perceived as basic necessities that participants aspired to or hoped to maintain. Extracting themselves from a situation of instability was a necessary step before being able to plan ahead and formulating what they want out of life. True change and the adoption of pro-social identities was considered as incompatible without the stability provided by employment. Less marginalised French participants also mentioned aspirations for stability as opposed to the instability and unpleasant pace of life when offending. In the French sample, a successful future was framed as a stable,

tranquil life. French participants often referred to tranquillity in the sense of a newfound peace of mind which was to be achieved with the absence of offending (N=12).

The peace of mind it's very important, honestly before when I was told that, I said no, if you have money no worries, you can buy yourself...but you may have money, as much as you want but if you don't have peace of mind, you are not at ease (Adama)

8.5.2. Goals and Future Selves

Pleasures in life that were outside of offending and the benefits derived from offending in the English sample were limited in the narratives of 'future selves'. The presence of a future self in narratives of desistance demonstrates reflexivity and hope for a different life, which shape pathways of change (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Farrall et al, 2011; Farrall, 2005; Giordano et al, 2002). Most of them reported wanting to live a conventional, settled life, aspiring for normalcy (see Bottoms and Shapland, 2016). English desisters generally wished for a simple, cosy life away from the troubles of offending and going through the criminal justice system. Compared to the French, the English sample had expressed limited aspirations beyond normalcy and stability. Five of the English participants mentioned wanting to go away on holiday as part of their plans for the future.

Liam: I want a job and stuff like that (...)

RF: What do you mean a job and stuff like that?

Liam: Just a job to start off with and then you move forward from there

RF: Yeah?

Liam: And go on holiday and stuff like that

In comparison, French participants also aspired for stability with a partner, a job, and a home, but these which were seen as 'basic', so they commonly aspired for achievements beyond them. French participants aspired for more ambitious goals

that while realistic, presented more potential for failure. Considering that future selves inform desistance processes, guiding desisters in how to live according to what they desire to attain, some French participants had a different lifestyle and routines in order to achieve these particular goals and dreams (see Chapter 11).

I want to open a restaurant (...) it's my dream. (Ramzy)

Entrepreneurship was a common objective within the French sample, with seven participants planning on starting their own business. Foucault (1975) suggested that entrepreneurship is a route taken by people who have been imprisoned, to address needs for freedom and independence in response to the trauma of incarceration. Furthermore, the goals in opening a business provide clear opportunities for achievement and having 'made' it. Entrepreneurship was also found in Benazeth's (2021) analysis of desistance in France, as a common pathway out of crime, within which people could reorient their efforts from offending into a legitimate activity.

A difference with the narratives of the English sample is that the French participants demonstrated having given thought to their future plans and were able to provide more detail as to how they would achieve their goals, beyond the brief 'get a job' expressed by the English.

I have a professional certificate in bakery, I know how to make pastries, I have the diplomas, I tell myself why not after the end of my sentence, I could start something, a bakery, that's what I imagine. (Alain)

French participants expressed their professional goals in terms of securing training or employment *and* career progression, including in entrepreneurship, whereas English ones tended to limit their plans to finding a job. The perceived bar for success and achievement was different, and French desisters seemed to be more demanding of themselves in terms of accomplishments. There was a sense in the English sample, of a simple life after offending where contentment was

drawn from limited, attainable, feasible goals. Jacob's words illustrate the overall finding that English desisters' ambitions were bound by simplicity, normalcy, and low levels of aspiration.

RF: What are your goals for the future?

Jacob: I have none and I never had any goals. (...) I don't know, I never have.

RF: What are your priorities in life?

Jacob: I don't have any.

RF: You don't have any?

Jacob: The only thing I have ever wanted is to be...content

As mentioned above, a recurrent goal in the English data was for people to eventually go on holiday (N=5). Again, this consists of a common, attainable goal, the obstacles to which can be realistically overcome. Probation officers were mentioned as people who could support putting these plans in place. Probation officers are considered as 'go-to' people to solve issues (see Chapter 10).

I'm going on holiday, [probation officer's name]'s authorised me to go on holiday which is a bonus so that's something to look forward to, I've been planning for that. (Lewis)

What is more, English desisters have commonly shared the notion of having 'new' priorities, shifting away from time and effort spent in offending, to focusing on loved ones (N=16). All ten English participants with children highlighted fatherhood as contributing to their process of change. Men who were not fathers mentioned parents and partners as new priorities in the context of desistance. Liam mentioned wanting to definitely stop offending and solve his addiction to cannabis before becoming a father. Having meaningful priorities to focus on played the role of filling the gap of offending with less troublesome and more fulfilling preoccupations.

I was getting all my priorities wrong, like I was putting drugs before my family at one point, do you know what I mean? like my priorities were all over the place. (John)

I've got two kids that I need to think about, I don't need to think about this [offending]. (Jack)

Like other two times I got done and I weren't bothered, right. I didn't have kids then. (Brian)

The new priorities for the English sample seem to replace offending, getting caught and being punished in terms of preoccupations. The meaningful aspect of these new priorities was an added motivator to maintain desistance and these pro-social roles. While for the French sample, motivations for change and the maintenance of change were not articulated in terms of new *priorities*, but new *objectives*, the former consisting in changed values impacting their routines and habits, and the latter consisting in targets to be attained. Because of this, the role of loved ones in supporting change for English desisters was not expressed as a *new* element in their lives, rather as a *constant* (apart from the appearance of new children), and French desisters typically took on ambitious goals, notably in entrepreneurship, studies, or employment.

8.5.3. Eagerness to Move On

Contrasting with shifted priorities were French participants' goals of professional development and business success. Other than employment and entrepreneurship, some French participants also mentioned either being in training or planning to apply for further education. Considering these goals, French participants shared their eagerness for the end of the sentence they were serving, in order to 'properly' move on to future life plans. Notions of serenity and tranquillity were expected upon the completion of sentence, which signalled confidence in their 'desisted' status. Before attaining the tranquillity that was hoped for, there were a number

of hurdles relating to judicial measures that needed to be overcome by French entrepreneurial desisters.

Because I have a judicial requirement to work, I have to pay the civil parties, so now I'm working in a fish shop, for the time being, to resolve my problems with justice, to be chilled at home (...) live my life in tranquillity, have a stable job. (Kylia)

These restrictions from judicial requirements often clashed with entrepreneurial or educational plans, for example, being banned from a particular area, or the requirement to compensate victims. Completing judicial requirements was considered as a step to reach, after which they can focus on becoming their 'desired self'. In the French sample, this eagerness to move on illustrates cognitive transformation towards pro-social identities and blending into civil society through productive and meaningful roles of employment, entrepreneurship, and education.

Last hurdle, after that it's finished, I won't have any problems with justice, bye! That's it, I work and it's finished and that's everything. (Nabil)

A similar eagerness was found in the English data, not in terms of completing sentences but mostly with regard to solving certain personal problems. These involved addressing mental health problems, and addictions, which were commonly reported in the English sample (N=12). In continuation from previously discussed patterns of English men reporting that they had become a better person, projected personal improvement was common in English narratives.

Five English desisters reported having already moved on from offending, despite still being involved in the criminal justice system (see Chapter 7). Some English participants mentioned maintaining desistance in their future plans (N=4). All four suffered from mental health issues, three of them had addiction problems and

the other one was a former drug user suffering from ADHD. For these English desisters, moving on consisted in gaining mental stability.

I'm looking forward to the times where I can say I've done that, I've made it. stood on my own two feet, I've got there, I've managed things, I've sustained my job, I've sustained myself, my health, my mental state you know things like that. (Morgan)

I said my plans are now (...) never drink again. (Casper)

These findings pertaining to ‘desired selves’ suggest different pathways of desistance in the English and French contexts. Broadly speaking, they both aspired to secure a form of employment and stable housing. Both had an eagerness to ‘move on’ from offending and the sentence they were serving. More subtly, the differences lay in the scope of ambition and reflexivity demonstrated regarding these objectives. What is more, both samples fit the description of ‘liminal’ desisters in Healy’s (2014) research into desistance in the Irish context. Liminal desisters refer to those who have formulated a desired future self which is unattainable in their current circumstances but “develop a meaningful substitute self that permits expression of at least some elements of the desired future identity” (2014: 878). Part of this desired future identity is shaped through existential reflections and the expression of goals and aspirations for their future.

Future selves are, by definition, unfinished constructs, with no assurance that they will come true (Gadd and Farrall, 2004: 139). The English sample seemed to prioritise social and personal stability and to be content with attainable, secure goals contributing to avoiding marginalisation. Their involvement in civil society was limited, as they kept to themselves, while the French participants aspired to normalcy through involvement in career development as well as social and cultural activities (see Chapter 11).

8.6. Discussion

In this chapter, I have analysed narratives of change with a focus on the emotional and existential aspects of desistance. Participants' narratives provided insight into perceptions of their past offending, and considerations for their futures. Identity theories of desistance supported the understanding of change throughout this chapter, in particular the concepts of 'redemption scripts' (Maruna, 2001) and 'feared selves' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Although both English and French participants expressed elements of a redemption script (Maruna, 2001), there were some differences in articulations of existential considerations. Identity changes were also similar across samples, but subtly different in how participants perceived and experienced change. The patterns that emerged from the data show that some theories of desistance are not universally applicable. For instance, the role of generativity, which has been found to be important in the English setting, is not a notable part of French desistance narratives.

Notions of feared selves were present in both English and French narratives. Desisters articulated imagined feared selves which they hoped to avoid (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007). Findings in this chapter confirm those of Hunter and Farrall (2018), who emphasised the role of future selves and emotional considerations in the maintenance of desistance processes. Like theirs, the analysis in this chapter found that fears of what one may become if they kept offending was a powerful force in supporting pro-social roles and behaviours. What is more, just like Hunter and Farrall found, the articulation of feared selves by the English men tended to be expressed with fears of *losing* positive aspects of their lives if they were to reoffend. The commitment to desistance and pro-social behaviours was fuelled by these worries of potential loss. English narratives tended to focus on the potential *risks* of offending, concerns on what they wanted to avoid, particularly in terms of punishment and what they could lose, most notably custodial rights to their children. Hopes for

desistance are derived from risks of getting *caught* offending, rather than the risks involved in offending itself.

In contrast, the French men framed the notion of the feared self differently, by comparing their present and projected, future selves with the lives of persistent offenders. The commitment to desistance here was fuelled more by existential worries, fearing deterioration of their lives as they observed it having occurred with persistent offenders. In other words, whilst English narratives conveyed fears of the consequences of punishment, the French men expressed fears of becoming like persistent offenders they knew. In the French sample, motivations for change were thus framed as existential considerations and *progress* as opposed to stagnation and a picture of what they fear becoming if they persist. The French narrations showed that offending was not the ‘way’ in which the men wanted to live their lives. In other words, the French men seemed to have adopted new goals and identities, away from offending, as a shift of their ultimate concerns from the benefits derived from offending, towards benefits of a conventional, ‘normal’ life. Normalcy was an important aspect of the emotional trajectory of desistance (Calverley and Farrall, 2011) and this seems to be all the more valid for the French sample (see Chapter 11). In both samples, fear was central to processes of change and there is a sense of stopping before it gets too late, the line for which is mainly imprisonment.

Narratives of desistance revealed changes in how participants perceived themselves. English and French desisters reported becoming a better person from when they were engaged in offending. Ontogenic explanations were commonly provided by both groups for past behaviours and change. In terms of self-perceptions, English desisters reported changing from ‘bad’ to being ‘good’ as they desisted, and having gained a sense of control over themselves, which links to aspects of redemption scripts (Maruna, 2001). They also reported feeling and acting less impulsively, taking more time in reflecting before reacting. In contrast,

French desisters reported thinking more about the future as part of their processes of change, leaving behind activities that would generate immediate gains for a more forward-thinking way of living. Both English and French desisters framed offending as a necessary prelude to their present selves and better situations than in their pasts. As a result of recognising discontent from offending, desisters reflected on what mattered in their lives and what ‘trajectory’ they wanted to take. All these findings demonstrate agency in desisters, both English and French, highlighting differences in the way this is framed.

French desisters tended to take more risks in planning for their future, in the form of starting businesses or engaging in further education. Similar to the English sample’s focus on attaining a stable life, French participants emphasised a wish for tranquillity and peace of mind in their future. The lives that French desisters aspired to and the notion of peace of mind were framed as resulting from discontent of offending and shifted priorities (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Aspiring for tranquillity as a goal for their future selves also reflected the shifted priorities from potential benefits of offending to harm avoidance. This was distinct from the English sample in which conventional goals were emphasised as part of normative aspirations.

These results support Österman’s findings comparing desistance narratives of women in England and Sweden. Her results showed that Swedish women’s desistance entailed reconstruction of identities toward pro-social selves, whereas English women expressed a ‘survival narrative’ because of struggles to meet basic needs. Much like the former, the French desisters aspired to pro-social identities, building for future lives and identities away from crime. Moreover, the English men’s goals for their future were relatively limited to fulfilling basic needs, mainly in terms of financial stability.

This chapter has focused on certain internal dimensions of desistance. Emotional and existential considerations in the data showed that desistance entailed a more

radical internal transformation for the English desisters, compared to the French desisters whose processes of change instead consisted in shifted perspectives on offending and life generally. The following chapter will explore a more practical aspect of change, analysing the support systems that people engaged with, and how these shaped processes of desistance.

Chapter 9 – Mechanisms of Change: The Role of Support Systems

The previous chapters have presented data from the sample and analysed narratives of offending and desistance. These chapters have focused on introspections and the meanings that desisters have attributed to various facets of their lives. The emotional dimensions of desistance were uncovered, which highlighted different existential considerations that motivated change for English and French desisters. The focus in the following chapters is shifted from an internal to an external lens, analysing what desistance ‘looks’ like, in terms of behaviours, social interactions, while still paying attention to how participants perceive and experience these.

The present chapter, in particular, analyses the support that desisting men engaged with. Here, I explore and compare the different sources and types of support that the men used, which contributes to our understanding of the desisters’ social worlds which facilitated change. This allows us to interpret what desistance *looks* like with the knowledge from previous analytical chapters that provided insight on what change *feels* like. First, I recap some relevant characteristics of the two samples. Then, I analyse and compare the role of the men’s social networks in providing support. Lastly, I turn to the role of third sector organisations, their presence in desisters’ narratives, and analyse the different ways in which these charities have supported desistance.

9.1.1 Social Issues, Peer Support and Desistance

When discussing the sources and types of support that desisters engage with, it is relevant to pay attention to the issues they typically face. People who commit or have committed offences often face common problematics including, for instance,

difficulties regarding employment (Hlavka et al, 2015), mental health (Link et al, 2019), housing (Edgar et al, 2012), addiction (McSweeney, 2010; Schroeder et al, 2007), debt (van Beek et al, 2020) and gambling (May-Chahal et al, 2017). Indeed, these are present in the data, with 80% of the English sample (N=16) and 45% of the French sample (N=9) struggling at some point with issues of addiction or frequent drug use. Respectively 60% (N=12) and 40% (N=8) of English and French participants reported mental health issues. In each sample, 20% of participants (N=4) have gone through a period of homelessness at some point in their lives. This means hurdles and support relating to addiction, mental health issues and practical aspects of housing are to be expected in narratives of change of both samples.

These common issues are factors contributing to considerations of offenders as potentially vulnerable with traits of irrationality, weakness, restricted opportunities, and limited agency (Batty, 2020). These traits are reminiscent of those displayed by persistent offenders in ‘condemnation scripts’, particularly in terms of limited agency and a lack of self-reflection (Maruna, 2001). In this regard, Batty (2020: 2) has argued that “limited agency in particular, reduces the ability of offenders to help themselves and bounds their capacity to conform to societal norms”. The argument here serves to underline the potential for change of external support, in terms of opportunities relating to personal vulnerabilities and socially precarious situations. Indeed, social experiences including relationships, affiliations, and support from peers, figure in processes of desistance (Copp et al, 2020). Relational and environmental characteristics contribute to building a ‘new’ self (Healy, 2014; Maruna, 2001) through motivation as well as the provision of support and opportunities for change (Batty, 2020). This is why analysing social networks and support mechanisms of desisters, in addition to their motivations, is essential. While this chapter focuses

on different sources and types of help that desisters have received, Chapter 11 provides more insight into the men's social networks at the time of interviews.

Most studies analysing the role of peer support to offenders are set in the context of prison and imprisonment (Hinde and White, 2019; Cid and Marti, 2012). Knowledge relating to the dynamics of support systems in non-custodial settings is scarcer. In practice, people's social contexts tend to be neglected in rehabilitative interventions and assisted desistance (McCulloch, 2005). There has been research on explorations of interpersonal relationships in crime and deviance (Warr, 2002) and more specifically in the context of desistance (Martì et al, 2019; Cid and Martì, 2017; Weaver, 2016; Giordano et al, 2003; Laub and Sampson, 2003). Various pathways out of crime have been identified, with social networks having different roles in processes of change. For instance, desistance may entail spending less time with offending peers (Warr, 1998) but can also occur as part of a group process, together *with* offending peers (Weaver, 2016). Either way, the nature and quality of relationships is indicative of how and why people desist. What is more, social networks and interpersonal relationships can contain 'hooks for change' (Giordano et al, 2002).

The importance of people's social networks in processes of desistance is well established (Sampson and Laub, 1993). While transitions away from offending behaviour come from 'within', processes of change can be catalysed, or accelerated, by practical, external support (Maruna, 2001). Previous research has highlighted the importance of social issues being tackled in order for desistance to occur (Sampson and Laub, 1993). The acknowledgement of external factors in narrations of change is a feature of desisters' "redemption scripts", how they relate their stories of change. Exploring the different support systems that desisters have engaged with informs us of the role of social capital in desistance pathways. Social capital is conducive to social opportunities and thus, a life away from crime (Farrall, 2004; Calverley, 2013). Moreover, social capital is considered as

“a property and a quality of social relationships” (Weaver, 2012: 406) which has the potential for social opportunities in the shape of concrete change. While there is literature covering the role of social capital and bonds in processes of change, little is known on the type of support given by the peers of desisters and the extent to which this help is considered as facilitating desistance. The analysis of the role of peers is therefore relevant in understanding how people engage with opportunities to support their desistance. The support systems overviewed in this chapter are those which provide social opportunities to participants in the form of practical assistance and relational, emotional support. Similarly, the obstacles participants face are those that prevent positive change in terms of social and cognitive issues (see Chapter 7).

9.2. Relationships with Families

Despite the knowledge about social bonds and the role of social institutions upon processes of desistance, little is known on the influence of peer support and the dynamics involving families, peers, and behavioural change. Informal Social Control Theory suggests desistance is linked with the strengthening of quality social relations outside of offending (Laub and Sampson, 2003). Strong adult social bonds have the potential to facilitate desistance from crime through internal and informal social control. This means that changes in offending behaviours are sustained by the effects that relationships deemed as valuable have to them. Furthermore, social ties with family members (sometimes friends too) are pre-existing relationships rather than new ones (which would be the case for employment or romantic relationships). These relationships have been referred to as ‘returning points’ to emphasise the constant aspect that family can be (Cid and Marti, 2012). This notion of family (and generally close peers) as a constant, including during desistance, is a recurrent theme in English and French narratives when explaining the type of support that they received from their peers. Beyond

this consistency, there are differences in the quality of relationships between English and French desisters and their families.

Starting with the analysis of desisters' families' involvement in their processes of change allows us to understand their social networks and sources of support that are readily available to them. This section focuses on the reported relationships with families, both of origin and new, in narratives of change. The role of marriage and romantic relationships in processes of desistance has been previously researched (Craig and Foster, 2013; van Schellen et al, 2011; Bersani et al, 2009; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Farrington and West, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1993 – see also Chapter 2). This chapter forges new ground by focusing on peers and friendship networks. While some participants were single, separated, married, with a partner for a more or less long time, all of them had parents, siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles and other members of families, regardless of the quality of these relationships. When referring to families here, I include the nuclear family of parents and siblings, extended family but also new families including partners, partners' nuclear families and extended families. The relevance of families in desistance processes has been explored in the context of early stages of change in young people (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011), of desistance of ethnic minorities (Calverley, 2013) and amongst desisters who have been sentenced to prison (Cid and Marti, 2012). These studies have highlighted the different dynamics and roles of families in processes of change, according to the nature, quality, and understandings of these relationships.

Four French participants reported either having a strained relationship with or being estranged from their parents. In the English sample, there was a much stronger pattern of men having reported damaged relationships with their families of origin. Indeed, in the English sample, 12 participants mentioned not being particularly close to their parents, and/or their siblings for various reasons. These men shielded themselves from the outside world, 'keep themselves to themselves'

(see Chapter 11) and spoke of their estranged relatives in negative terms. For instance, Edward was kicked out of his own parents' home whilst still a teenager when he started offending and spending time with the 'wrong crowd'. His words illustrate his strategy of isolation from his peers, and notably from his family of origin, for desistance:

I don't really speak to them [his parents], I just keep myself to myself and my kids, don't want any of them to be near my kids.

Severed links with families in these English narratives were often framed as self-preservation, alongside generally avoiding unwanted social contact. Chapter 11 illustrates this pattern of isolation in the English data and explains this as a strategy to maintain desistance. While not necessarily conducive to reoffending, certain family members were considered as a hinderance to improvements in their lives.

On the other hand, seven English participants reported supportive family members other than their parents, which included siblings, cousins, aunts, and stepparents. In this context, being supportive referred to the emotional and relational support provided by positive relationships, as opposed to unsympathetic, uncooperative traits. Other English participants reported that their families were geographically close, but not emotionally close enough in their relationships that they would be aware of any offending activity until they get caught. For example, Brian, who was addicted to alcohol and cocaine, and suffered from depression, had become closer to his parents and siblings as part of his efforts to desist. He recalled the changes in his relationship with his family:

They didn't know what I were getting up to. So...now just cards are all on t'table, everyone knows...so they're supportive.

This example illustrates the selective aspect of social relationships typically found in English narrations. The English men isolated themselves from social relationships deemed risky for their wellbeing and efforts to avoid reoffending,

while holding on to relationships with people who were regarded as ‘safe’ for them. In this case, Brian’s inclusion of his family in changes in his life was part of his desistance process, in an attempt to live a more ‘honest’ life. His family acted as a ‘returning point’ (Cid and Marti, 2012 – not the participants’ words) as he started engaging with them in his journey of change and tackling his mental health issues. This is consistent with Bottoms and Shapland’s (2016) findings suggesting that in the early stages of changes, desisters make efforts to restore a link with their families, after strained relationships caused by offending behaviour. Considering the importance of behaviours and the influence of peers in explanations of offending, the recurrence of chaotic and damaged relationships is unsurprising. Since the men tended to interpret the start of their offending as due to certain behavioural characteristics (see Chapter 7), we can suggest that their families had the same understanding.

Those participants who reported being close to their families particularly valued their presence and the emotional support provided. Maintaining desistance therefore involved, for the English men in my sample, sustaining the bonds that were seen as positive and supportive of change, but also firmly isolating themselves from unwanted, external social contact – which oftentimes included parents and families of origin (see Chapter 11). What is more, Chapter 7 demonstrated that the explanation of the onset of offending for the English men was partly attributed to behavioural reasons; the men explained their offending as resulting from impulsive and influenceable traits, coupled with socialising with offending peers. The English men also reported becoming better people in their process of desisting, thus exhibiting more positive behaviours, less impulsive, for instance (see Chapter 8). Understanding offending as ‘bad’ behaviours could be a source of strain in relationships with families, who might not be forgiving. *The English desisters’ unstable relationships and selective socialisation could thus be explained by a behavioural understanding of offending.*

In contrast, the French desisters in my sample, while they mostly reported positive relationships with their families of origin, were not typically emotionally close enough to them to confide and put the ‘cards on the table’, as was illustrated in Brian’s case. Families of origin, for the French desisters, tended to be a consistent presence in their lives, throughout and despite offending behaviour, much like the desisters in Segev’s (2020) Israeli sample. For example, Abdul, a French participant with a large family of origin, having started offending in his teenage years, explained that his family has always ‘been there for him’ despite his tumultuous offending past. He told his family the minimum necessary about his offending through ‘his version’ of the story and what he was comfortable sharing, when necessary. He summed this up:

It’s not taboo but yeah a bit, a bit taboo. We can talk about everything and anything but not so much about that (...) no, me for starters, I would never go talk to them about this [offending and desisting], but if they happen to hear something, or because the police has come to the house or that- then yeah we can talk about it but well I would tell them something small but...support? Meh... they are powerless, how would they support me?

As mentioned before, four of the French desisters reported strained relationships with their families of origin. The rest of them reported ‘tepid’ relationships, whereby the families were present in the lives of the men despite their offending but not active in providing help specific to their efforts to desist. This might be explained by the expected, or normative aspect of offending in the French narratives. White French participants’ families, and more broadly their environments, were often depicted as part of the explanation for the onset of their offending (see Chapter 7). Ethnic minority French participants (all have African cultural backgrounds) mostly came from large families with many siblings and/or close-knit extended families. Their social networks were therefore wider than the white French participants’. Regardless of background though, French participants

did not tend to report having particularly close nor strained relationships with their parents.

This was different in the English context, where more extreme relationships emerged from the narratives. English desisters reported either being very close with their families, who in turn provided emotional support in processes of change, or having strained relationships with them, further confirming the strategies of social isolation adopted by the men in efforts to maintain distance. Considering the French men tended to interpret their life trajectories as shaped by their environment, in which crime was commonplace, it is unsurprising that neither the men nor their families exhibited rifts in the relationships with each other with regard to offending. *In other words, the consistent presence of families despite the men's offending could be in part due to a sense that such behaviour was inevitable because of the environment they lived and grew up in.*

This contrasts with the seemingly more expressive, chaotic relationships and conditional presence of support from some English families. Offending was narrated as linked with unstable familial situations, leading, for instance, to addiction and homelessness in the English context. While this was not necessarily directly expressed in narratives, there seems to be a link between expressions of the onset of offending and chaotic parental circumstances for some English desisters. What is more, the unconditional aspect of familial relationships in the French sample (as opposed to being estranged and not having relationships) is in line with Catholicism, the largest religion in the country, which has shaped much of French culture, as well as Islam, which has shaped the cultures of the families of origin of most of the men with African backgrounds.

Contrasting with the seemingly 'active' emotional support discussed above in the English context, for the French desisters, the mere presence of family members was considered support. The support of their families was narrated as practical actions. While families were present and 'there for' desisters, actual assistance

provided was limited to passive help, like housing (in the sense of ‘letting’ them stay over). For some, like Abdul, past offences were considered ‘taboo’, shameful and topics not to be spoken about. Families’ support was therefore materialised as internalised feelings by French desisters, who ‘felt supported’ by their families ‘being there [for them]’, ‘hanging on’ and ‘not letting go’.

Support in the form of consistently ‘being there’ for someone, ‘never letting go’ despite the let downs and disappointments of offending was conveyed in the French narrations, regardless of age or ethnicity. Peers ‘being there’ for desisters was experienced as opposed to imagined abandonment and leaving as a result of harms caused by their offending. The moral support of relatives ‘being there’ was underlined as the most valued form of help, more so than practical assistance. This kind of help allows them to sustain desistance, as individuals see themselves as valued people, not wanting to ‘let down’ and disconnect with their loved ones (as was recurrent in the English sample isolating themselves), as offending has or could have done in the past.

9.3. Support from Social Networks

This part of the chapter focuses on how both English and French desisters’ social networks were used to get practical support to resolve common obstacles to desistance. Those obstacles that typically emerged in both English and French narratives included a lack of housing (Edgar et al, 2012) and securing employment (Hlavka et al, 2015).

All the French desisters appeared to be overall more sociable than the English men. This means that French desisters had more options to get access to social opportunities and support from peers. The most marginalised participants in the French sample still reported having and maintaining a social network, while English participants largely adopted a ‘keep myself to myself’ strategy, purposefully restraining their social network to avoid temptations of reoffending (see Chapter 11).

In the French sample, three participants reported having experienced homelessness. For them, even without a family to get support from (whether because of a lack of family or lack of resources within the family), there was a sense of wanting to hang on to social relationships through friends and/or charity organisations. The main types of support from peers mentioned by French participants included the moral support from families, which was discussed above. Next, the French men have reported getting support with accommodation issues and employment. In contrast, more of the English sample reported getting practical help from peers, specifically from family members. They reported getting help for housing, childcare, and financial support. Here, I discuss housing because it is a universal concern – whereas, for instance not every participant will have been concerned by childcare problems. I also focus on help given to men, specifically the French desisters, regarding employment, because it illustrates the pro-active aspect of their desistance journeys, contrasting with the pattern in the English data, of unemployed men, not looking for work. I do not delve into issues of financial support, because these are largely dependent on the welfare state of each country and concern a small number of English participants. These would not inform us on relationship dynamics through the provision of financial support.

9.3.1. Housing

In terms of housing, desisters across the sample reported having received support from relatives including parents, siblings, and partners. This is not straightforward to quantify, as some men have had help to find accommodation, some had been hosted temporarily for varying periods of time, and others were permanently housed. What is more, the necessity to find a place to live varies in how severe the issue can be, from being kicked out of home as a teenager, having to find a place after being released from prison or simply moving in with someone, or moving out to a different place.

Where desisters found help with accommodation is telling of the relationships they sustained. Narratives give insight into these relationships and the role they played in the men's life trajectories. Providing housing opportunities is an action that shows support from families despite the offending behaviours. In these cases, family members were a constant presence and source of practical support (as discussed above), which may or may not have weighed towards processes of desistance. The consistent aspect of relatives' moral support and its availability when required is illustrated in recurrent expressions of gratitude throughout English and French samples. Returning to a family member or a partner is illustrative of what Cid and Marti have called 'returning points' (2012). For some, staying with their relatives was a temporary measure, helping them to eventually gain autonomy and subsequently stop offending. For instance, Remy, who had a chaotic, unstable past because of offending and addictions, returned to his mother's home when he was unable to secure employment.

I first went back to my mother's who could host me, that was in 1993, I stayed a year at hers, the time to find a job and a flat.

Addiction issues were more common amongst English desisters, as Chapter 7 has shown. Nevertheless, both English and French participants with addiction issues reported particular problems with securing housing. In the English sample, David's example illustrates this, as he struggled with alcoholism while living alone and having relationship issues with his former partner. The fear of a prison sentence prompted him to change his lifestyle (which was a recurrent motivation for desistance – see Chapter 8) and seek help from his parents. He said:

They were just glad to help me out you know glad to...glad to have me home rather than in jail.

The value of pre-existing social bonds, demonstrated here by practical, housing help, can encourage people to sustain desistance. For others, in both English and

French samples, the opportunity to live at a family member's place was merely a convenience and not necessarily considered a step towards desistance. This was all the more true in French cases where prison sentences can be modified and shortened as their end nears (see Chapter 5). Often, prison sentences are shortened on the condition that people find a place to stay, agree to wearing an electronic bracelet, and being curfewed. When this has happened to men in the French sample, they typically used their parents' or siblings' homes as a place to reside for the non-custodial part of their sentence. This was done out of convenience, the family members agreeing to this *despite* the men's offending, and this availability of housing does not necessarily impact desistance.

The convenient aspect of housing opportunities from family members was also found in the English sample. The constant, consistent nature of peer support that was discussed in relation to 'being there' and moral support can be found with regard to housing support, especially with the help of parents. Morgan, for example, had struggled with alcoholism since his teenage years, which put him in a long-standing offending pattern. Until recently (he was 40 years old at the time of the interview), he was able to return to live at his parents' place when his offending behaviour left him homeless. He said:

I've always been able to fall back home and move back in (clears throat) ...move back in with them [his parents] ...so...it's obviously ...they provided me with everything (...) I think in a way I kinda became too reliant on them.

He expressed gratitude towards his parents by acknowledging the scope of the help he received from them. He stressed that they provided him with 'everything' and related the constant nature of their support in 'always' being there for him to fall back on, despite his offending. In terms of desistance, this seemingly unconditional support can facilitate desistance, in providing stability, as David's and Remy's examples illustrate. However, the seemingly unconditionally available housing can hinder change in validating and enabling offending

behaviour. The social bonds provided by stable housing were present *despite* offending. Morgan's example illustrates this, as he reported becoming reliant on his parents' support, which enabled him to continue drinking and offending. This eventually led to his parents refusing to provide housing or financial support, leaving him 'hurt' and 'vulnerable', at which point he started his journey of desistance. The loss of stability, the lack of viability and the incompatibility of offending with the previously held comfortable living situation marked a 'turning point' which forced Morgan to reconsider his lifestyle.

Housing difficulties, while common across the samples, were most emphasised in narratives of desisters who faced particularly precarious situations. As mentioned in Chapter 7, three participants each in the English and French samples experienced a period of homelessness at some point. For example, Vincent was a 45-year-old French participant whose offending past was linked to struggles of addiction and homelessness. When talking about his pathway to recovery, he mentioned how grateful he was for the intervention of his friend, a policeman:

This guy, when I was on the streets [homeless], he would take his keys and tell me "here Vincent, you go home, you take a shower, make yourself at home, and I'll be back later". (...) The action of having given me his trust like that, it helped me a lot, to see that there are still people who have trust in me, despite me being homeless, being a drunk, a junkie.

The practical support of housing Vincent came with a demonstration of trust. His friend's gesture had meaning and impact beyond Vincent having a roof over his head. He internalised this 'complete trust' by realising and acknowledging why this trust was exceptional. Furthermore, in explaining that he could have taken advantage of this situation but did not, he demonstrated that he was indeed trustworthy, detaching himself from the dishonesty and indifference he perceives was expected from people like him who have issues of addictions and homelessness. In providing housing to Vincent, his friend demonstrated both trust

and that he was ‘there’ for him, providing him with moral support and evidence of his worthiness of help. This example illustrates the potential impact of receiving meaningful support, for self-perceptions and subsequently on desistance processes. This is an example of the role and potential impact of support from wider social network, beyond families, in shaping desistance both in terms of practical circumstances and cognitive change. Overall, with regard to housing, both English and French desisters reported similar experiences and sources of support from their families and friends.

9.3.2. Securing Employment

As Chapters 3 and 7 have discussed, desistance is often associated with employment, because of the opportunities for strengthened social bonds and pro-social identities and activities (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Research has also demonstrated the role of pro-social peers within employment and disrupting previously held offending habits, networks, and behaviours (Wright and Cullen, 2006). This section focuses on a recurrent theme in the French narratives; mentions of securing or working towards some sort of employment through social networks. Five French participants mentioned specifically the support they received from certain peers regarding work. This was largely absent in the English sample, where participants mostly reported finding employment through institutions such as job centres. The specificity in the patterns found in the French data is the retelling of changes that came about with employment with relation to the role of their peers and how that tied in with their journeys out of crime. Again, these narratives illustrate the potential that the support of peers can have on self-perceptions and pathways away from offending.

For example, Olivier, after a period of incarceration, got help from a friend when preparing for his future after the end of his sentence. He was reportedly granted early release from prison, thanks to a job offer from this friend. Olivier used this

opportunity to change his lifestyle, his routine, and the outcome of his efforts. When explaining how his early release application unfolded, he said:

The way it works is I had a look in my group of friends and I found someone who was willing to give me a chance and who well [said] well the day that you get out, I'm willing to take you in as a salesman at mine (...) I poured myself whole-heartedly in the work so I invested myself 200% for this job for which I was employed, I had to work six hours I did twelve, I had to work five days a week, I worked seven days out of seven, there you go, I was relentless. I wanted to show that, you know, that he chose well.

Here, Olivier demonstrated and confirmed his trustworthiness during his job interview by appearing 'super motivated', thereby signalling change and readiness to move on from offending, grasping the opportunity granted to him by his friend. These efforts formed and strengthened the bonds with pro-social activities provided by employment. The intensity of involvement in his work demonstrated and signalled that he took on a pro-social identity contrasting with his past 'irresponsible' one. This finding supports the idea that attachment to a particular job as well as stability in employment affect processes of desistance (Giordano et al, 2002). Indeed, in other French narratives, the idea of taking employment seriously as a way to confirm change was present in different ways, in the context of enforcing a lifestyle away from offending.

Kylian's example illustrates a different way in which calling upon one's social network can be conducive to desistance because of employment opportunities. Unlike Olivier, Kylian did not seek out employment, but was encouraged by his friend to stop offending and earn money in a legitimate manner. Kylian's offending past involved drug dealing to support a lavish lifestyle, which he swapped for working at his friend's fishmongers after a prison sentence. He reflected on this change of lifestyle, noticing that he was busy now (as opposed to 'free' in the sense of having time when he was dealing drugs) and acknowledging:

Me, I'm lucky, I have people who like me you see. He [his friend] told me come, "stay with me". And I stayed in his shop, he was selling and then there was a little van, he told me "go, go deliver", he delivers to restaurants, I went to deliver to restaurants (...) in reality I see now that with the little money that I have well... it's chill.

Kylian's strengthened social bond with his non-offending friend was described by him as the turning point in his life that allowed him to move on from offending. With him grasping the opportunity for change came the realisation of a shift in his 'ultimate concerns' (Vaughan, 2007) from a 'bling-bling' lifestyle to a 'chill' one. The newfound comfort of his employed life confirmed desistance as the more favourable path. In other words, he no longer associated himself with the luxurious lifestyle he once had but was firmly entrenched in a new life with less money but more conformity and peace of mind. The results show that for sociable people, support from their social network can impact upon not only their circumstances, but also the way they think of themselves, as worthy of being helped and capable of change and conformity.

The lack of such emphasis on peers providing practical help in the English sample emphasises their comparatively less sociable characteristic. This is not to say that English men have not been housed or supported with employment by members of their social network. English desisters have tended to turn to their families when looking for employment or housing. Rather, details of these opportunities have not emerged from their narratives as having had particular impact on their pathways out of crime. When asked about housing arrangements or how they got a certain job they had or have, often answers were given in a matter-of-fact way, for instance, "I stayed at my sister's place" or "he ended up giving me a job", without indications of what that *meant* for the desisters. Also, housing and employment support from peers were not mentioned as elements having shaped their journeys out of crime. This further distinguishes the different types of

relationships desisters typically have with their peers; the English tending to isolate themselves, selectively restricting their social circle with efforts for desistance; and the French who had more consistent relationships despite offending and desisting.

9.3.3. Peers and Desistance

The distinction in the types of relationship reported between French and English desisters can also be detected in the strategies that peers adopted to try and lure people away from offending. There is a pattern in English participants who started offending in their teenage years, in recollections of attempts from their non-offending relatives to distract them from situations where they would offend. Brian, who reported having started offending by hanging out with the ‘wrong crowd’ when he was a teenager, explained his cousin’s attempts to steer him away from offending:

Brian: Me cousin, he's like me best mate, same age, growing up together but he's the smart one.

RF: Smart one?

Brian: Yeah, yeah he's never been done by the coppers or stuff like that (...) so he were like at times like trying to say just “come on man” just you know what I mean just “come and watch football with us rather than going out” you know what I mean.

The cousin and Brian associated ‘going out’ as conducive to offending, which explains why shielding him by keeping busy was a strategy for distraction. Brian also credited his former partner for keeping him out of trouble. He considered himself ‘lucky’ for having met her, considering the impact she had on his desistance trajectory. He explained:

Brian: Yeah, she like she like helped me and like put me away from crime.

RF: How did she do that?

Brian: Just...just silly things like if I say “oh I'm gonna meet them” she's like... she'll be like “oh why don't you just come up here for a bit”.

RF: Yeah?

Brian: So.. so I used to go there [with her] and then obviously I weren't going out.

Here again distraction was used, which sparked the strategy of ‘keeping myself to myself’ he (and other English participants) had employed to sustain his desistance pathway. Self-control in his case has been learned through the support of his cousin and former partner who shielded him from situations and environments conducive to criminality. The involvement of the cousin and the former partner was found in other English narratives, where this role of distraction from offending environments and peers was taken on by mothers, fathers, partners, and friends. When these efforts were unfruitful and participants had continued to offend, recollections of these moments indicated self-reflection and acknowledgement of offending as the ‘wrong’ path for them.

In contrast, in the French sample, reported strategies from peers to encourage desistance were more dissuasive than distractive or actively avoiding. This means that family members and peers generally attempted to talk the men out of continuing with their lifestyle and offending behaviour. For instance, Ousmane, who started offending in his teenage years, explained that his mother would typically talk to him, to persuade him to stop dealing drugs. Similarly, reflecting on his family’s reactions to his offending behaviour, Elias recalled their attempts to stop him and encourage him to attend drug rehabilitation services:

She told me “if you’re doing things, be careful” (Ousmane)

Yeah, he [brother] supports me, he tells me... there’s not much you know, at a certain point erm they’ve spoken to me so much, so often erm to stop

and all that, that after a while we don't talk about it anymore you see, they don't talk to me about this anymore. (Elias)

Families' strategies for encouraging desistance show that for French desisters, change came from within and that despite external forces pressing for desistance (in the form of families urging for participants to stop), until they were ready to stop offending, these efforts of peers were likely in vain. Desistance pathways of French participants were more individualistic, and they tended to express their motivations for change as socially motivated and resulting from self-reflection (see Chapter 8). Practical support sought out with regard to employment, however, indicated a shift in 'ultimate concerns' away from offending (Vaughan, 2007). Stability and investment in employment also has a significant effect as to desistance processes (Giordano et al, 2002). In contrast, in the English sample, actions were mostly employed in trying to distract from offending environment and peers. This links to influenceable personality traits recurrent in English narratives (see Chapter 7) but also to current strategies employed to maintain desistance (see Chapter 11). The results here also link to ontogenic explanation for offending and desistance found in both English and French narratives (see Chapter 8).

These findings on peer support confirm those of a UK government report which urges families to be involved in rehabilitative strategies, particularly with concern to prison populations (Farmer, 2017: 7). This report argues that: "we cannot ignore the reality that a supportive relationship with at least one person is indispensable to a prisoner's ability to get through their sentence well and achieve rehabilitation". Peer support, whether this was formal or informal, practical, or moral support, played a role in both social rehabilitation (in the availability for opportunities for practical change) and internal dynamics of change, through notions of identity, self-worth, and change. Participants, particularly French ones, have underlined the importance of their peers 'being there', rooting for them and

acting as a constant, reliable source of moral support, allowing them to move forward and towards desistance. English participants also value the presence of peers, and their efforts to prevent them from reoffending.

9.4. Support from State Services and Third Sector

In England and Wales, the *Transforming Rehabilitation* initiative implemented in 2015 highlighted existing logics of privatisation and marketisations of the public sector, specifically in the criminal justice system and ‘offender management’ rationales which predated the programme. For instance, rehabilitative services have been increasingly outsourced in England and Wales (Tomczak, 2014), with probation becoming a ‘hub’ in which people are directed to external organisations for the delivery of the sentence in the community (McNeill, 2009). In contrast, in France, the areas dealt with by the private sector remain fragmented contracts rather than the delegation of entire services. Despite experiencing the same global shifts towards increased reliance on market mechanisms and less influence of governance, the effect of these on public services has been comparatively limited in France (Tirard, 2008). Even though the French criminal justice system has also been impacted by policies of marketisation and logics of profit making, a conception of the State as having duties of protection and ensuring the common interest may explain a different shift from public to private than seen in other countries, namely England and Wales.

This does, however, lead to a paradox in cultural considerations of the duties of the State and in practice, the changes in the landscape of efforts for rehabilitation in custodial and non-custodial settings. Indeed, the third sector in France has become a vital agent in the criminal justice system, carrying out work that probation services are “unable or unwilling to do” (Herzog-Evans, 2014: 43). The third sector engaging with criminal justice matters in France aims to complement probation work and state services rather than competing, or replacing them (L’Hour and Lebéhot, 2013). However, in practice, the work provided by French

third sector organisations ranges from delivering pre-sentence reports to providing social, legal, and medical assistance (Herzog-Evans, 2014). Voluntary organisations have, with time, been ‘professionalised’, in that the people working in them are no longer volunteers but paid experts (Matthieu, 2009). This part of the chapter will focus on practical support provided by State services (the following chapter will focus on probation), and the role of third sector organisations in delivering desistance-related support.

9.4.1. Moral Support

In England, where desisters had smaller social networks, the outside agents mentioned were part of the social services support they had already interacted with, including youth officers, alcohol service officers and social workers. Four of the English participants mentioned getting support from charity organisations, all of which provided moral support through a social network. The most striking example of the impact of support from the social services in the English sample is John’s narrative. He started offending as a teenager and upon being released from prison had lost the trust of his mother for stealing from her. He recalled getting help with finding housing from a youth officer, which was beyond his role:

He [the youth officer] helped a lot when like if I thought I was gonna go out and do a bit of crime...I could ring him any time of the day, on his personal number (...) obviously he couldn't tell his boss, but he'd borrow [lend] me the money and I'd give it him back when I could. but yeah, he helped a lot.

Recognising the extent to which his youth officer has gone in order to provide for him, behind his own boss’ back, John made a point to pay back the money that he owed. Reflecting on the impact of this relationship on the rest of his offending trajectory, the following discussion sums up the importance of outside trust in ‘making good’ (Maruna, 2001).

John: Yeah, that helps a lot cause...I couldn't borrow money from my family back then, cause obviously I used to steal a lot from them do you know what I mean so...having someone there that actually trusted me enough to pay them back again, that helped.

RF: Did you see yourself as someone trustworthy?

John: That started making myself, see myself as trustworthy, but before that, I knew I wasn't trustworthy. My mum could give me twenty quid to go to the cash [machine], like I'd go to the cash machine, get a twenty pound out, I'd take thirty pound out, keep the ten for myself do you know what I mean, I wasn't before but that helped me be trustworthy

Just like peers 'being there' was a pattern in the French data, charity organisations in the English data presented an opportunity for pro-social human connection. Links with third sector organisations for the English men can be a way to connect with people and achieve a more positive identity than their previous one associated with offending. Jack, after nearly a decade of being in a toxic relationship where he endured emotional abuse from his partner, was left feeling incapable of securing employment. He recalled an interaction with a person from a charity organisation, which stuck with him for having boosted his self-esteem. He remembered this when talking about his goals going forward.

Jack: She said, "you ever thought about going into care?" And it blew me away because nobody ever compliments me at my house. So, I'm just like no (laughs)

RF: Why did it blow you away?

Jack: It's not very often people say owt nice about me and I don't know why because I'm not a bad person, I just think people judge before they get to know me.

While the practical aspect of the support provided was not mentioned here, as a result of this interaction, Jack went from drifting professionally to having an option to explore. That being said, this example allows us to circle back to Maruna's redemption script and the outside forces sparking a realisation in the desister's self-perception and value (2001). Jack's experience with this volunteer worker shows the impact that external help can have on desistance processes, tying together cognitive shifts, changes in self-perception and opportunities for practical change.

For English desisters, the benefits of involvement with third sector organisations largely involved the benefits of having 'someone to speak to'. For example, both English participants who had been in the army have reported suffering from mental illnesses resulting from their past careers. They both recalled benefitting from involvement with charity organisations, specifically in terms of having opportunities to communicate with others who are ready to listen. Others who were not involved in the army also conveyed similar recollections despite the aims of the charities not necessarily being directly linked with mental health nor moral support. For instance, Lee, while serving a prison sentence, received support from a charity organisation providing classes. He spoke of the benefits of his involvement with them and said:

Just knowing that there's people that have never met you that sort of rooting for you.

Again, the notions of people 'being there' and 'rooting' for desisters was an important source of moral support, helping them to get through difficult times. The availability of moral support provided comfort in the idea that desisters are still worthy despite their past offending and convictions. This relates to Maruna's (2001) findings that desisters have strong internal beliefs about their self-worth. The availability of support from external organisations and for them to be 'rooting

for' desisters confirmed to them that despite their 'mistakes' and often regretted actions, they are deserving.

Interestingly, five English desisters reported either wanting to, or having become involved with third sector organisations, as volunteers themselves, using the vocabulary of generativity with the aim to 'give back' (see Chapter 8). This shows a distinct conception of charities as being fundamentally a force for good beyond the practical, pragmatic aims of organisations. John's words illustrated the meaning of volunteering. Having had a chaotic youth, socialising with the 'wrong crowd', and offending from a young age, he eventually made efforts to desist. He mentored children who got expelled (or were on the verge of getting expelled) from school, as he had been as a child. He said:

I think it's the fact that I could relate to them so much cause I'd been where they was and they were intrigued by all my crime stories obviously but at the same time intrigued at how I turned my life around, like ... they was do you know what I mean like they were they kinda looked up on me more as someone to talk to there because I was closer to their age than what the actual teachers was. So if any of them had any troubles they'd come to me to talk to and it kinda made me feel a bit important do you know what I mean, that helped a lot as well.

Indications of 'making good' and generativity were found in other English narratives, as Chapter 8 has shown. These were absent in the French narratives, as the men were instead more preoccupied with completely turning the page from reminders of their offending pasts and solving practical, social, and administrative issues ensuring stability. Moreover, while none of the French participants mentioned involvement with youth services, the influence of the third sector is considerable. Third sector organisations are involved in all parts of offender management in France, including supervision, administrative, medical, therapeutic, housing, employment, legal and financial support. The third sector is

also directly involved in penal measures, for instance, community measures and *placement extérieurs* (placement in the community) which is a form of sentence modifications for prison sentences, allowing people to stay at ‘foyers’ overnight instead of being incarcerated (Herzog-Evans, 2014). Offender management is therefore partly carried out by state services, including but not limited to probation and social work, as well as third sector organisations. Within the probation profession, there have been discussions as to blurred borders between probation and social work and whether or not probation work should involve social support (Herzog-Evans, 2011a).

9.4.2. Practical Support

Twelve of the French participants reported getting help from a third sector organisation. Some organisations they engaged with provided support with addiction issues or opportunities for human connections and social outings in cultural spaces. However, the main types of practical support sought related to housing and employment. In some cases, organisations directly provided housing, and in others, they provided support for getting social housing.

Regarding employment, the support given ranged from following-up and continuous support with entrepreneurial projects to help with CVs and applications and finding traineeships. Alain, for example, planned to train as a baker and eventually open his own bakery. There was also an element of relational capital gained by involvement with organisations for their non-offending environment, whereby social networks were expanded. Relational capital also meant that involvement with charities allowed for time spent in non-offending spheres and opportunities for social development, easing the return or integration into civil society. Spending time away from criminogenic settings and places associated with offending also allowed desisters to mentally ‘detach’ themselves from the label and identity of ‘offender’ (Maruna et al, 2004). The important role

of securing employment for processes of desistance, is illustrated by Remy's description of his desistance process:

I looked to reintegrate myself [into society], to find employment erm... so I got in touch with charities and one of them called [name] which doesn't exist anymore I think, helped people with administrative procedures even just to make a CV, your own CV.

Finding employment was considered as a clear sign of change in behaviour and lifestyle and getting in touch with specialised organisations was the logical practical step to action change. This was addressed by the Parisian probation services, who, the summer before interviews were conducted, implemented a system to facilitate probationers' involvement with certain third sector and state organisations. These would intervene directly in the probation offices in order to make themselves more available and approachable to probationers who wanted – or needed – to get involved with them. Support was not only provided with securing employment and traineeships but also through administrative help, such as with setting up bank accounts, filling in forms and liaising with the relevant organisations. In the probation offices in Paris, employees from the job centre and volunteers from relevant charity organisations are physically present to help with the administrative and bureaucratic aspects of job searches.

The administrative support provided included help with various social requests and procedures. Rayan summed it up by explaining his interactions with the 'foyer', the housing association that hosted him upon release from prison. This charity looked after various administrative procedures with the aim of helping his reintegration into society. He got help in filing forms for health insurance, fines, forms to get free public transports and other bureaucratic procedures that are not necessarily straight-forward for people who are not used to administration and bureaucracy. Beyond this, he got help from them with coming up with an employment 'plan', which was given to the judge in charge of sentence

modification, who took that into account when forming the terms of his early release. The findings here confirm the importance for desistance of practical support, notably in reaching stable employment and housing (Farrall, 2002), but also more generally in settling into a conventional lifestyle.

Abdul's case also illustrates the scope of the support provided by third sector organisations. Advised by his probation officer to get in touch with them, the charity who helped him provided housing support, which allowed him to gain stability. Consequently, he was able to apply for jobs, again with the support of this organisation in the administrative tasks involved. He recalled the difficulties he faces with administration and bureaucracy as well as the value of the help he was given:

Because I am someone who is erm...it's not that I want to do things badly but I don't know why, all that is administrative and all that, the social security, the little things...well yes I do them but...taxes, I always pay them late, always, I always have late payments for taxes, apart from when I was with the [charity] (...) at the [charity] I really started to work and all, to get 1800 euros [a month] and that...that wasn't a given, I never thought that...well, for me it was more 1500 euros the biggest of the wages that I got.

Again, the help from the charity brought stability to his life, which in turn allowed him to improve his employment situation. Beyond the practical support, third sector organisations have the scope for instilling skills that are useful for social rehabilitation and desistance. These are 'life skills', or 'soft skills', those that are not technical but important to employability, social skills such as "appearance, attitude, work ethic, teamwork, and communication" (Bain, 2019: 657).

Charity organisations can, for some of the most isolated desisters become their sole social network and a starting point for them to rebuild their social capital.

Matthieu's experience reflects this; having dealt with addiction issues, estrangement from his family and homelessness, he reached out to an organisation providing support to people in precarious and marginalised situations. Initially getting in touch with this organisation to resolve an issue pertaining to his housing situation, the support he received was beyond administrative and social assistance. The social capital he gained from them allowed him to form friendly relationships and in turn recognise his value through them. He said:

Me, the people that looked after me when I came out of prison, it's [name], it's in the first instance it's a woman, I had asked for a visitor and...I went to see [them] to have an address too and I always kept contact with them, it's like a second family for me.

A more extreme case of marginalisation and isolation is Christian's. His offending had resulted in him becoming completely estranged from his family and the entirety of his social network. The severity of his crime – child sexual abuse – meant that he has difficulties maintaining social relationships. He shared that whenever people find out about his crime, they distance themselves from him at best, and at worst actively preventing from moving forward. Marginalisation and isolation are also commonly found within narratives of people convicted of sex offences in the English context (Thompson et al, 2017; Harris, 2017). This hostility has resulted in charity organisations closing their doors on Christian and refusing to provide practical support. His social circle consisted only of a woman from a charity he met while in prison and priests from his church. He recalled his relationship with the woman.

I found a prison visitor in [name of prison] who came to see me and that, for me that's good. A woman that I didn't know at all, who was- today I go see her once a month, she is in a retirement house (...) and this woman, she was a prison visitor when I was incarcerated, it's thanks to her that I kept going because I would have killed myself, it wouldn't have been possible

otherwise. I didn't think I could hold on even a week there, the conditions were terrible (...) For me, she is my family, for me she is the only family I have (laughs) so erm... I consider her... it's why I go to see her in retirement home once a month, she is always happy to see me.

While housing and employment were the main topics of support sought after by English and French desisters, those with histories of addiction often got involved with organisations for medical help including alcohol and drug rehabilitation. David struggled with alcoholism and has been involved with different alcohol support services. He reported his link with the alcohol support services as a central strategy for maintaining desistance:

If I was in that position where I would start to drink again, I would contact her. Do you know when it was getting bad, I would contact her and say "[name] can I come see ya"?

The consistency in the support and the medical expertise provided were valued by participants with addiction issues. Unfortunately, third sector organisations both in England and France face financial issues which lead them to close down and discontinue links to people who value continued support. For example, Morgan, who struggled with alcoholism, remembered:

I've been let down by [charity] people cause they've just disappeared for over a month. my officer knows about it, she's tried to get in touch with them for like ...might be even longer, must be a month-month and a half (...) it was three weeks after the people went missing, that I reoffended ... erm... not blaming them obviously but you know obviously it kind of looks that way and it did feel that way to me.

The withdrawal of support had significant impact on desisters who relied on the support of these organisations for their wellbeing. Similarly, in France, Amadou recalled instability with charities with whom part of his sentence was carried out.

In this case, the third sector supervision mandated in the context of his sentence and the organisation responsible for him closed down for a lack of funding. In both England and France, third sector organisations are themselves unstable because of insecure and uncertain funding sources, all the while being central to probation supervision. Indeed, in the French case, core probation supervision work is increasingly delegated to third sector organisations, whose sustainability is uncertain (Herzog-Evans, 2014).

In securing housing and employment, French participants sought situations that provided stability and security to them, in the hopes of moving on from offending. The role of third sector organisations in France largely consisted of providing people with tools to help them gain this stability. English desisters' experiences with third sector organisations were different, however. English participants who looked for practical support towards their job or accommodation search reported getting help from either their probation officers or the job or housing centres. English desisters' relationships with the third sector were more limited than those of the French, and they relied more on State services for social needs, which meant that the relational aspect and the potential for social contact outside of offending was not as present. English desisters' involvement with third sector organisations did not tend to revolve around resolving practical needs but around providing moral support in different manners.

9.5. Discussion

This chapter has analysed the different types of support reported by participants. French desisters reported the role of their social networks in helping with housing and employment issues as having shaped their desistance. They have reported making use of third sector organisations for practical social support and, for the most marginalised of them, for moral support, developing social relationships and forming human connections. In contrast, English participants have also engaged with third sector organisations for moral support, as well as for issues of addiction

and in some cases became involved themselves as volunteers. They typically relied on their very close peers for practical support in housing and finding employment. The value of third sector and state services for them seems to be the provision of moral support, targeting mental health, addiction and improving self-perceptions. English participants have demonstrated ‘redemption scripts’ in their narratives (Maruna, 2001), especially with regard to generativity and volunteering as a way to ‘give back’. Getting actively involved in volunteering and peer-support has the potential for agency and self-worth to emerge (Shelter, 2010) as well as finding satisfaction in altruistic actions (Maruna et al, 2003). Participants gained a newfound sense of self-worth and importance as well as social recognition.

Certain elements of redemption scripts were found in French desisters’ narrations in their descriptions of how they started offending, which include a sense of having no other options and fatality of offending. As Adama put it, when he was a child, his career prospects were “either become a footballer or a drug dealer”. Limited prospects and criminogenic surroundings are seen to be the root of offending behaviour (see Chapter 7), which is subsequently not a cause for rifts in relationships with families. Where French desisters stray from Maruna’s description of redemption scripts, however, is by the notion of ‘making good’ and ‘giving back’ which are absent here. This corresponds to previous research conducted into narratives of French desisters supervised on probation (Herzog-Evans, 2011b). Rather, French participants tend to focus on their families and securing meaningful employment. These are key ingredients for social capital (Farrall, 2002) and this contrasts with the purposeful self-isolation of English participants (see Chapter 11).

Practical support had significance beyond the tangible change made in participants’ lives. Peers getting involved in changing participants’ lives was a demonstration of trust in individuals and confidence in their desistance. A feeling

of being grateful for the trust granted by outside forces was found all through the sample. In sociological terms, trust conveys ontological security (Giddens, 1990). This means that trusting someone requires assumptions of reliability derived from previous consistency and stability. In other words, trust in someone depends on their own past actions, and assumptions about their future actions. In the context of desistance, trust is important because it signals confidence in a person's reliability, looking beyond one's chaotic past. What is more, the practical support sought after by desisters is indicative of efforts for stability in their lives. This kind of practical support responds to desistance-related social needs including reliable, steady employment and stable housing (Farrall, 2002).

Desisters have looked to different types of social capital to perform their motivations for change (Farrall, 2002: 176): through close social circles and immediate family in England and through charity organisations in France. Knowing that the attachment to a job can be a factor in desistance (Giordano et al, 2002, Maruna, 2001), the motivation and efforts to secure employment can be an indicator of desistance, or early desistance at least. Taking this argument further, efforts to bring stability to one's life in the form of conventional goals can be considered as first steps towards desistance (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011; Barry, 2013). The recognition of change can be an influence in the maintenance of desistance, which underlines the importance to consider 'rituals' of re-entry, establishing offending as past behaviours (Maruna, 2011a). Change being recognised also involves desisters being integrated into civil society, in the case of French desisters, as we can see in Chapter 9, through the spaces they occupy and the people they occupy these with.

The complexities of practical and informal support valued by desisters underline the destabilising aspect of the collateral consequences of going through the criminal justice system. This includes marginalisation, loss of homes and employment, the necessity for administrative support. The findings of this chapter

emphasise both the variety of sources of support but also the necessity for support to be provided to establish stability in men's lives. Resources for rehabilitation and assisted desistance therefore need to address the different types of instabilities brought about by offending and convictions to better support meaningful change. Maruna (2011) recognised the impact of these collateral consequences of convictions and suggests considering rehabilitation as active redemption, erasing any stigma and negative ramifications of offending in order to fully reintegrate civil society.

Chapter 10 – Experiences and Perspectives of Probation Supervision

The previous chapter explored and analysed the various support systems desisters reported engaging with. This covered the roles of different social networks, including families and friends, and also engagement with third sector organisations. This chapter continues the analysis of those external factors which shape processes of change, with particular attention to experiences of probation supervision. Elements informing on the impact and influence of criminal justice interventions upon desistance processes are conceptualised as assisted desistance (Farrall, 2016; King, 2013; McNeill et al, 2012). Experiences of probation supervision are closely linked with the meanings that people attribute to their punishment in the community. For this reason, I analyse both experiences of supervision and perceptions of probation as rehabilitative or punitive. Perceptions of probation supervision provide us with an insight into desisters' considerations and understandings of their punishment in the community, and how these fit into their narratives of change (and which were explored in previous chapters).

I start by briefly recapping key aspects of the English and French probation systems comparatively, in order to provide relevant context to the analysis. This will support and give a framework to the analyses of experiences and perceptions of probation supervision that are to follow. I also concisely set the scene of the local settings in which participants were supervised. Then, relationships with probation officers are compared, as well as the scope of support provided and engaged with. I then explore and compare perceptions of probation and demonstrate that rehabilitative aspects are experienced and interpreted differently. Following that, the pains of probation are also compared, which further illustrate the different experiences of English and French probation for desisters. From the analysis, I conclude that there are different forms of compliance in probation, and

finally, I give particular attention to the notion of signalling desistance that has emerged from the French data.

10.1. A Brief Recap of Probation in England and France

Chapter 5 detailed and compared probation services in England and France. Here, I briefly reiterate this comparison in order to contextualise the analysis of participants' narratives. In France, probation supervision is often accompanied by 'obligations' which are requirements for measures to be carried out in the community, in the context of a sentence or amendment to an existing sentence. These are much like requirements of English community sentences, and include compulsory actions towards looking for employment, addressing health/addiction problems, completing accredited programmes, respecting curfews, and restrictive measures (Mair et al, 2007: 11).

While in England the term 'rehabilitation' is commonly used when referring to the aims of probation, 'reinsertion' is the wording used in France, which translates to (re)integration into society. This term refers to processes of social inclusion, reducing marginalisation and resolving social issues, which are assumed to lower the likelihood of reoffending. A focus on social inclusion as a goal in efforts for rehabilitation stems from a culture of social work that is at the root of French probation (Herzog-Evans, 2019). In contrast, the probation service in England is one of the oldest in Europe and the profession is well established. Nevertheless, changes brought about by *Transforming Rehabilitation* have shaken the profession, notably by increasing professional dissatisfaction (Walker et al, 2019) and status anxiety (Robinson et al, 2016). Despite this, there is a continuity of strong professional identity amongst probation officers as providing 'honourable' work (Robinson et al, 2016; Mawby and Worrall, 2013)

An important difference in French and English penal processes is the presence of sentence implementation judges in France, the *Juge d'Application des Peines* (see Chapter 5). They follow-up people during their sentences through probation

officers' reports and have the power to modify measures. The burden of proof for the alleviation of measures is on the individual who was convicted, who works towards accumulating evidence, demonstrating worthiness for measures to be modified. As a result, sentences are not static – unlike most in England – but are adapted with time and according to the progress evidenced (Herzog-Evans, 2019). This way of 'doing' probation reflects a will to responsabilise people with convictions; as they are in control of their own progress, that needs to be demonstrated in supervisions (de Larminat, 2014). This is also found in English probation, albeit to a lesser extent, in that institutional changes have led to strategies of individual responsabilisation for one's own social circumstances and for efforts to prevent one's own likelihood of reoffending (King, 2011). From this, we can expect the present analysis to reflect different experiences and expectations of probation supervision, where responsabilisation is more apparent in the French data.

Both English and French probation providers have increasingly focused on notions of risk while maintaining aims of reducing reoffending. In England and Wales, empirical research has shown that these changes have altered the relationship between probation officer and service user, shifting from "advise, assist, befriend" to a more managerial style of supervision (Robinson, 2016; King, 2013; Hope and Sparks, 2000). Moreover, the implementation of *Transforming Rehabilitation* and the partial privatisation of probation services further disrupted the landscape of community punishment (Walker et al, 2019; Millings et al, 2019). The notion of risk has been institutionalised (Robinson, 2016) through a rationale of public protection and cost effectiveness (Robinson, 2016a). While French probation services remain state-run, they function under a similar rationale and unproductive emphasis on risk at the expense of needs (Herzog-Evans, 2019).

While the delivery of probation work in England and Wales has taken a risk-management perspective in efforts for effective practice, supervisions have

nonetheless evolved to incorporate elements of a desistance approach (McNeill, 2006). In contrast, French probation remains reticent and resistant to evidence-based practice. A study that gathered insight from French probation officers in 2009-2010 highlighted their lack of knowledge both of criminological literature generally and of the concept of desistance more specifically (Herzog-Evans, 2011a). Since then, the notion of desistance has been added to the penitentiary administration guidelines, but this has not been accompanied by changes in practice (Herzog-Evans, 2019). Considering this, elements of desistance-based probation supervision are to be expected, more so in the English than the French data.

10.2. The Settings of Probation Supervision

People who are supervised on probation in France are referred to as ‘PPSMJ’ – *Personne Placée Sous Main de Justice*, which translates to ‘people who are under the responsibility of the justice system’. There is no mention of offending, nor punishment, and this manner of referring to probationers purposefully appears rather neutral. French probation officers routinely referred to probationers as PPSMJs. In England, probation officers referred to ‘service users’, although the term ‘offenders’ was also commonly used.

The probation services in France are under the responsibility of the penitentiary administration, itself run by the Ministry of Justice. The probation office in Paris is located in the city centre. The building itself is hidden away past a gate through which other residential buildings can be reached. In the same building, there are other justice-related offices which many people might have to deal with, including the post-sentencing judge, a section of agents in charge of installing and removing electronic monitoring devices, charity organisations and lawyers. Inside this building, before the entrance to the offices, there is a security guard who checks non-staff members with a metal detector and carries out bag searches. After this

stage, people can be let into separate sections of the building where there is a reception and waiting area.

The Sheffield probation offices are located in a business park outside of the city centre, near a few bus stops, and just over 10 minutes' walk away from a tram stop. 'Service users', if they are not driven to their appointments, get public transport, for which they can get coupons from the reception. Service users are buzzed into the building, where they are immediately greeted by a receptionist. The receptionist is in the same open plan room where the individual meetings take place. This means that there is a lack of privacy as the meeting space is the same as the waiting room, so people having their supervision can be heard by those who are waiting (including other service users, staff, and other visitors to the office).

Probation meetings in France are carried out in individual rooms, past a waiting area with pamphlets and a water dispenser. The meeting rooms are small, box-like offices with a desk, two chairs, a computer (to input relevant administrative data and a summary of the interview) and a window. Privacy is therefore guaranteed as even if the doors to these rooms are open, unless someone comes near them, discussions carried out inside will not be heard outside. Once interviews are over, probationers exit through a different door past the reception area. The layout of the offices has been clearly shaped with privacy of probationers and the safety of staff in mind. The reception staff were sat behind a glass panel and a door requiring a code to be opened.

10.3. Experiences of Probation

10.3.1. The Probation Officer

The working relationship between probationers and probation officers has been identified as central to the efficacy of probation work (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Rex, 1999). The majority of desisters in this study reported positive relationships with probation officers (13 for English sample; 15 for French sample). These results reflect existing findings exploring desistance in probation (King, 2013;

Farrall, 2002; Rex, 1999) and the traits that probationers value in their probation officers (Shapland et al, 2012; Burnett and McNeill, 2005). This finding confirms previous research in that listening skills and availability were considered positive traits of probation officers (McCulloch, 2005; Rex, 1999; Burnett, 2004). It echoes Benazeth's (2021) research which found that French desisters also valued being treated with respect and dignity in spaces that typically are degrading and denigrating. Good relationships with probation officers were valued and impacted desisters beyond any practical support received, as they felt humanised and understood (Leibrich, 1993).

What is good is that [probation officer's name] she is...she has a human rapport you know, it's not just procedure and all that, we feel that there's...yeah there's an interest [in] what we want, who we are. (Pierre, French)

They [probation officer] expressed a lot of empathy you know (...) I think that is important because they're trying to look from your view point you know, don't mean that they agree with ya, but they will...that's what they're there for. You know they're not there trying to create obstacles they're there to try and progress you forward. (Adrian, English)

These positive results may reflect possible selection biases in the study, whereby those who had good relationships with their probation officers might have been more likely to accept participation in the study. That being said, this finding can also be interpreted in that people who were motivated to stop offending tended to maintain good relationships with their probation officers. Participation in a study suggested by one's probation officer might be considered as a way to signal change. Nevertheless, the study aims to understand desistance, so data reflect experiences of men who did express motivation for change.

Good relationships with probation officers also meant that they were at times considered as people who can vouch for probationers. During interviews, four English desisters spoke of their probation officers as having knowledge on their situation and progress. This suggests that officers were considered as trustworthy and reliable enough to be given this information in the first place. While French participants did not relate to their probation officers as people who could vouch for their stories, they did illustrate their relationships through examples of the support they had received, which improved their situations, as is discussed below. Probation officers vouching for desisters was mentioned as evidence of change in the English sample: *I'm good now, ask [probation officer's name]* (Harry), and to express limitations to their progress, through challenges they encountered, for example with regard to the continuous consumption of cannabis or relapse in addictions:

I've still got urges to gamble, I'm not gonna lie, if I think that there's summit worth gambling on, I'll gamble, but [probation officer's name] knows all of that. (Lewis)

Probation officers, therefore, 'bear witness' to positive change (Anderson, 2016) which in turn fosters their legitimacy as agents in the rehabilitative process, but also develops trust in the relationship with the probationer. This type of honesty and trust towards probation officers was expressed in anticipation of potential further convictions for the behaviours mentioned, in which case the officers can testify to change and not 'lose' progress. In expressing this trust, the men demonstrated that desistance occurs as 'zigzag' and a gradual decline in offending behaviour (Burnett, 2004), while highlighting the importance of institutional support during this process. Trust and respect from probation officer is important to successful desistance (Leibrich, 1993). Furthermore, this links to fears that English desisters expressed with regard to reoffending, which typically involved apprehensions of being re-convicted and being imprisoned (see Chapter 8).

The French participants also suggested that they saw their probation officers as witnessing progress; however, this was framed in a different manner, because of different stakes and desired outcomes of supervision. Rather than probation officers observing change and progress, as the English data suggests, the French participants commonly shared a more punitive interpretation. Probation officers were seen as the link between themselves and the wider penal system. They therefore made active efforts to signal change to their probation officers through successfully completing their judicial requirements. More on the notion of signalling change found in the French data will be available towards the end of this chapter.

10.3.2. The Scope of Support

Another interesting difference emerging from the data is that the English desisters tended to value the ‘check-up’ and well-being aspects of supervision, while the French men recalled it as a platform for monitoring their requirements. The scope of support that English and French desisters engaged with on probation was therefore not the same for both samples. Probation meetings were described by 12 English participants as a place where they spoke with their probation officers, for instance, saying that they *talk about any issues* (John) or *have a bit of a chat* (Jacob). Probation was generally a place where they would answer their officers’ questions. This was expressed as a positive aspect of supervision, framed as an opportunity for the men to have someone to exchange with. English participants’ experiences of probation supervision related more to a casual ‘check in’ and a space to get support and advice if needed, as illustrated by the following quote:

It's [probation] not too bad you just have to come in and talk to 'em and... that's it really... (...) well he just asks us how your day's been how your week's doing if you need support with stuff basically. (Kieran)

English participants explained their supervision meetings as a more casual and relaxed experience than the French did, and unlike them, did not associate control

or monitoring with their appointments (see below on perceptions of probation). English participants valued being listened to and having someone to go to in case they had issues they needed help resolving, which echoes existing research exploring relationships between probationer and probation officer (Shapland et al, 2012; McCulloch, 2005; Burnett, 2004). This also echoes to the notion of instrumental compliance (see below on compliance and rehabilitation), which refers to engagement in probation supervision led by self-interest (Robinson and McNeill, 2008; Bottoms, 2001).

In contrast, in French narratives, probation officers' *actions* (rather than words, or availability for discussion) were highlighted as valuable. Nine French participants reported examples where their officers *did* something for them. This included referring them to external organisations, lifting judicial requirements, visiting them in the hospital and general administrative support, all of which leading to favourable outcomes for the desisters involved. This type of support indicated active co-production of rehabilitative efforts whereby officers and probationers contributed to improving the men's lives. For example, through their probation officers, Pierre was able to get coupons for food, Ousmane got valuable information about employment prospects, and Christian and Kylian managed to secure housing. Greater focus on the social aspect of probation was to be expected in the French sample, as social work and care is central to French probation work (Herzog-Evans, 2016). In contrast, three English participants mentioned practical assistance provided from probation officers. These included an authorisation to leave the country for a holiday, access to training and support with employment.

In the French sample, the value of probation officers was therefore also largely attributed to the institutional links they provided to participants. Probation officers were considered as the link with post-sentencing judges, who have the power to modify measures or shorten sentences. They also had valuable links with public sector agencies and third sector charities that provide socio-legal or even medical

assistance. The third sector is omnipresent in the French criminal justice system (Herzog-Evans, 2014), so it is unsurprising that 11 French participants reported being in contact with a charity organisation at some point. As discussed in the previous chapter, the main reasons French desisters had got in touch with charities were to address employment or housing issues. In some cases, they reached out for support regarding addictions, mental health issues or to participate in cultural activities. The scope of third sector organisations that French desisters engaged with was therefore wide and not limited to providing support for people with convictions. This is valuable for desisters with regard to forging and maintaining a pro-social identity through involvement with conforming networks and increasing opportunities for practical change.

Where the third sector provides opportunities to change, part of the role of the probation officer is to direct people to the relevant agencies in order to facilitate improvements in social circumstances. In other words, one of the roles of probation officers is to introduce probationers to relevant third sector organisations that can help with their progress. The French men gained stability and autonomy thanks to increased social capital as well as support regarding employment, training prospects, housing, or other problems such as medical issues. The work carried out by third sector organisations arguably corresponds to efforts that French probation officers are 'unable' or 'unwilling' to do (Herzog-Evans, 2014). That being said, the third sector provides, in theory, a purely rehabilitative platform for support, without the punitive, mandatory aspects of probation. Probation officers referring probationers to third sector organisations therefore allows the men to address collateral consequences, or aspects of 'social and civic death' brought about by penal punishment itself (Henley, 2018).

This is not to say that French probation officers referred their probationer for any type of support needed. The provision of administrative support by probation officers was recurrent in the French narratives. Help with filling out paperwork

and administrative procedures in and out of the criminal justice setting has been noted as valuable support provided by probation officers. Administrative help and general tangible support tended to be the most valued actions of probation officers by French probationers. Nevertheless, the overwhelming aspect of administrative tasks during probation is also to be challenged. French probation practice has been described as essentially a ‘tick-boxing’ exercise neglecting people’s needs (Herzog-Evans, 2016; de Larminat, 2012; Dindo, 2011) and has been criticised for consisting purely in administrative work (Herzog-Evans, 2014).

10.4. Between Punishment and Rehabilitation

Having explored English and French desisters’ experiences of probation, this section analyses the desisters’ narratives, exploring their perceptions and interpretations of punishment in the community as punitive or rehabilitative. Specifically, perceptions of probation, pains of mandatory supervision and the notion of compliance are analysed. Analysing perceptions of desisters allows us to discern and compare the tensions between care and control that are common in probation (Willis, 1983). Research in England shows that most probationers perceive probation as rehabilitative (Rex, 1999). The lack of similar empirical work based in France means that there is no indication of how probationers consider and understand probation in that country. Similarly, existing research conducted in England has pointed to the recurrent pains and collateral consequences of probation (Henley, 2018; Hayes, 2015). This information is, again, lacking in the French context. Compliance in the probation context is a relatively underexplored area, with regard to desistance from crime. The interactional processes of engagement between probation officer and probationer shape the extent of engagement and thus compliance with rehabilitative measures (Ugwudike, 2012). This means that the quality of the relationship between probationer and probation officer has an impact on the probationer’s level of engagement in their supervision. Considering different patterns in relationships

reported with probation officers and varying types of support engaged with, different types of compliance are to be expected in English and French narratives.

10.4.1. Perceptions of Probation

The literature on offenders' perceptions of punishment is mostly concerned with views on imprisonment (Ashkar and Kenny, 2008). Such research is limited in the context of probation (though see van Ginneken and Hayes, 2017). Community sentence has been found to be perceived as less punitive than imprisonment (Applegate et al, 2009). Exploring perspectives and interpretations of people who are subject to punishment provides valuable insight into the effectiveness and impact of penal philosophies in practice. This means that if a penal system is shaped by, for example, a deterrent rationale, exploring subjective aspects of punishment will help to discern whether particular sentencing actually contributes to deterring people from offending or not. In the cases of England and France, both probation services work from a logic of rehabilitation and preventing reoffending. Focusing on perspectives and experiences allows us to determine desisters' mind-sets surrounding supervision and the role this has on processes of change.

During the interviews, participants reflected on their punishment in the community, conveying their understandings of probation. Six English participants interpreted probation as a step below imprisonment, as illustrated by the following quote:

Probation's just probation innit like, it's...it's the next thing down from going to prison innit? (Liam)

Considering community sentence as the 'step below' imprisonment can act as a deterrent to further offending in order to avoid that next step. Rex (1999) also found that, for some people, being supervised on probation itself was a deterrent from reoffending. In some cases, the threat of a (or another) prison sentence was

included in the motivations for people to desist (see Chapter 8). Serving a sentence in the community as opposed to a custodial sentence was sometimes expressed as a ‘second chance’, with the threat of a potential breach, or further offending, resulting in worse circumstances (or even imprisonment). This links to the threat of sanction in case of a breach of the conditions of the sentence (Phillips, 2014). There were also expressions of relief for not being sentenced to imprisonment in the English data.

It's better this way...cause if I went to jail then I would have lost my job.

I'm not losing my job, I enjoy it. (Luke)

The threat of a custodial sentence therefore influenced English participants' perceptions of their community sentence. The recurrent comparison of probation with imprisonment in the English data is illustrative of Armstrong and Weaver's (2011) finding that people serving a sentence in the community tend to recognise the benefits of not being incarcerated. The men's routines were not disrupted as much as they would be if they were imprisoned, which allowed them to ‘keep their lives going’.

From a deterrence approach, exposure to punishment can interfere with decision-making in any future offending situation (Applegate et al, 2009). The deterrent aspect of probation is illustrated in considerations of the consequences of not respecting an order. While comparisons with imprisonment were absent in the French data, deterrence in the threat of sanction did appear in the French narratives, where it seemingly motivated desisters to respect their penal requirements. Indeed, the French participants commonly understood probation as the control and monitoring of their compliance to measures and requirements to which they were subject. Also, a shift towards a risk-assessment approach in French probation means that even more weight is given to ensuring measures are being respected (Vanderskuten et al, 2018).

It's [probation] mostly the control of obligations that the judge has given us to do, erm, [probation officer's name] is there to put that together and see if I move forward. (Pierre)

The French men therefore tended to have experienced probation as more punitive than the English desisters. This echoes previous findings that picked up on the deterrent aspect of probation when perceived as punitive (Applegate et al, 2009). Eight French participants, while they reported a positive rapport with their officers, conveyed feeling fed up with their requirements, underlining their controlling aspect. Nabil, after reporting a good relationship with his probation officer, admitted:

Honestly, I am a bit fed up, yeah, I'm fed up of dealing with requirements and all. (Nabil)

While French participants narrated probation as a controlling and imposing measure, the English participants expressed a more favourable view. English desisters thus considered their sentence in the community as less punitive than the French men, with a greater focus on rehabilitation. The English men typically understood the measures they received by acknowledging probation as punishment and an opportunity for rehabilitation, but also less punitive than imprisonment. This links back to the projection of a feared self that comes into play in dynamics of desistance (Patemoster and Bushway, 2009), except rather than imagining a future in which offending persists, the English participants imagined an alternative present where they would be subject to harsher punishment. While the narratives of the feared self were present in both sets of participants (see Chapter 8), the English sample articulated this in terms of their interpretation of their sentence, as a second change, whereas the French focused on the punitive, controlling aspects of probation. Deterrence was also expressed in the French sample through the 'pains' of probation (Hayes, 2015) which are discussed below.

10.4.2. Pains of Probation

Accounts of generally positive experiences of supervision were accompanied with mention of certain ‘pains’ of probation. The concept of pains of probation was identified by Durnescu (2011), who, in a study based in Romania, identified a range of pains associated with punishment, specifically probation. Loss of time, the costs of travel, threat of breach and rescheduling appointments were among difficulties mentioned by probationers.

One of the institutional aims of probation in France is to ensure that measures pronounced alongside sentences are being respected. These measures include, for instance, active job searches, unpaid work, restrictions on movement, or an obligation to address an addiction. For some of the measures that can be given, there can be administrative ‘work’ and paperwork involved. As mentioned above, some French participants reported getting help from their probation officers with administrative matters. A recurrent theme in the French narratives was the pressure of fulfilling the bureaucratic aspects of judicial requirements (N=5). Some of these participants explained that they were never ‘good’ with administrative tasks to start with, and others mentioned their dependence on cannabis as hindering their ability to complete such tasks. Referring to his state of mind with regard to probation supervision, Kylian, a French participant, stated:

I always tell myself when I have a meeting with the probation officer “shit I need to bring my pay sheet, I need to show that everything is in order when he writes his report [to the post-sentencing judge]” that’s how I think.

While the administrative procedures required were at times experienced as pressuring, they seemed to be implemented to encourage social integration through civic engagement. They can also constitute obstacles to be overcome collaboratively during the course of the punishment, involving probation officers or other people or agencies as competent authorities. The completion of administrative tasks and becoming legitimate in the eyes of the State reflects

institutional efforts for social inclusion and is considered as a sign of positive change.

As mentioned previously, administrative concerns may be absent from the English data because of differences in public lives in the two countries. Concerns for respecting judicial measures and appearing to be serious about tackling problems were linked to key aims of probation practice in France, which are to instil autonomy and to encourage individual responsibility (de Larminat, 2014). The goal of increasing people's autonomy was not present in English probation. The findings suggest probation officers in France worked on both human and social capital with the aim of socially (re)integrating people by helping them to become autonomous citizens. In contrast, English probation seemed to focus mostly on behaviour and well-being, with the assumption that this will reduce the likelihood of reoffending in and of itself.

Nevertheless, certain pains of probation were expressed by English desisters. While the French data underlined the importance of social integration and conformity for desisters (see Chapters 8 and 11), the English narratives showed that mandatory supervision can be considered a threat to their own current sense of normalcy. In other words, English desisters were more concerned about maintaining their normal, usual routine, despite their ongoing sentence. In contrast, the French participants were actively engaged in carrying out their punishment 'correctly' and in a 'serious' way, which entailed demonstrating to their probation officers that their judicial measures were being respected. A recurrent theme in English narratives was that desisters 'could not be bothered' with their supervisory meetings, and particularly with the inconvenience of attending them in the first place (N=5). Supervisions were often considered as disrupting English desisters' routine, as John expressed:

I've done the crime I'm doing my time do you know what I mean, I'll just be happier when I don't have to get out of bed or leave work early to go to probation cause it's money out of my pocket.

Out of town locations, like the South Yorkshire CRC, are a key problem to compliance (Ugwudike and Phillips, 2019). The results for English desisters here confirm Ugwudike's (2017) findings that formal compliance consists in the attendance at probation meetings, which is the minimum required. This also echoes the positive evaluations of probation officers identified in the English narrations, focusing on the welfare-based 'check-ups' they lead (Rex, 1999). The pains of probation were not dependent on the probation officers but were seemingly entirely due to the mandatory attendance to start with. In contrast, the French desisters considered compliance as a more active task, in fulfilling the administrative requirements set by the probation officer and the post-sentencing judge (see below). The pains of probation for them were, therefore, shaped by the relationship established with the probation officers, the pressures attributed to respecting the measures and the administrative load to work through.

In summary, in both groups, probation officers' qualities in listening and providing practical support encouraged compliance, in that attendance was also motivated by what the desisters could get out of supervision, as well as the threat of breach. A downside of motivation by threat of sanction is that it means desisters experience probation as a controlling measure and the 'pain' of self-government (Crewe, 2011), and this was especially true for the French men, who had more to manage. The French data indicated that some men were under pressure to respect measures set by the judge. At times, they felt controlled, and monitored by their probation officer. The English data, however, showed that loss of time and costs of travel were the prevalent pains of mandatory supervision. The actual contents of probation supervision were not source a of pains nor hindrance since they were typically experienced as welfare checks.

10.4.3. Compliance and Rehabilitation

When analysing the narratives of desisters regarding their experiences of probation supervision, an interesting distinction emerged in terms of compliance. Exploring compliance is important as it gives insight into the effectiveness of probation supervision. As Bottoms (2001: 89, cited in Robinson and McNeill, 2008) argued, “effectiveness and compliance are, in the field of community penalties, topics that are inextricably linked”. Non-custodial sentences rely on compliance for effectiveness and success of interventions, more so than imprisonment (Robinson and McNeill, 2008), so it is crucial to explore the content of supervisions as experienced and narrated by desisters. The following section analyses what motivated English and French desisters to comply to their probation measures.

Narrations of the nine French participants who reported instances where their officers *did* something for them indicated that they perceived their probation officers went ‘above and beyond’ their institutional responsibilities. These narratives suggested that this perception of probation officers as fully engaged with the men’s progress led to strengthened relationships and increased motivation to comply to requirements. At times, the scope of the support from probation officers went beyond practical actions, as mentioned above. It also included general guidance, advice on posture, presentation and ‘life skills’ useful for long-term integration into civil society and therefore desistance.

The type of support mentioned in the French data was somewhat similar to the advice and discussions valued by certain English desisters, but went beyond the conversational aspect, specifically to include these tangible ‘life skills’. These acts of support were gestures that contributed to perceptions of probation officers as ‘kind’ people who were ‘on their side’. Investment of probation officers in the progress and improvement of their probationers’ situations has been found to fuel motivations for change in the French context (Benazeth, 2021). Examples of these

gestures of investment included impromptu phone calls to see how a meeting had gone, visits to hospital in cases of relapse, or advice on posture and speech in anticipation of a job interview.

She [probation officer] helps me in the sense that she gets informed, she tries to learn about my projects, I communicate with her a lot, she calls me often to know about my meetings. Last time I had a meeting with the job centre, and she called me (...) normally I see her about once a month, but she called me the day of my meeting to see if everything went well, and she didn't have to, honestly probation officers don't have to do that. The fact that she did, it means that myself I want to be serious towards her. (Adama)

Desisters were encouraged to maintain positive change by the perceived investment of their probation officer in them. This pattern in the French data demonstrates the importance of the relationship with the probation officer, as was discussed above, and highlights the impact on compliance. It echoes Benazeth's (2021) research in the French context showing that the maintenance of desistance can be fuelled by feelings of gratefulness towards probation officers. His research also found that probation officers' work had a greater impact on probationers when supervisions focused less on controlling and monitoring, and more on individualised, relevant problematics, which is in line with the French narratives in my study. Indeed, the analysis also suggests that the French men valued support from their probation officers, which was at times interpreted by the desisters as efforts beyond the scope of their officers' professional responsibilities.

Probation officers' proven interest in the progress of the French desisters therefore seemed to encourage mutual engagement in supervisions. Instances where desisters and probation officers actively contributed to tangible improvements seemingly led to substantive compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). Substantive compliance refers to the active engagement of probationers in their supervisions, beyond what is required of them. It reflects probationers' attitudes

in the acceptance of their sentence and measures. Indeed, French narratives indicated substantive compliance and active engagement to be ‘serious’ in their completion of supervision, at times in part due to investment from their probation officers. In demonstrating active engagement in their rehabilitative efforts, the French men signalled change to their probation officers. More analysis on elements of signalling change will be provided below.

In comparison, there was also a pattern in the English data of desisters holding their probation officers in high regard, but this was for different reasons than for the French desisters. English participants tended to consider their probation officers as resourceful and knowledgeable, keeping them in mind in case they needed something (N=8).

If you need any support, they give it, like I could ring him [probation officer] and ask him anything and he'd give me an answer like [snaps finger] do you know what I mean. (Liam)

This suggests instrumental compliance whereby probationers only engage with the minimum required (which is showing up to the mandatory supervision meetings) and are motivated in part by what they could potentially get out of it (Robinson and McNeill, 2008; Bottoms, 2001). Considering previous findings in this chapter, it is unsurprising to find patterns of instrumental compliance in the English data: English men typically experienced probation as a welfare check and a discussion, which indicates that they recognised the potential benefits of supervision. This supports Ugwudike’s (2010) research that found therapeutic benefits of interactions with probation officers which motivated engagement of probationers.

Moreover, three of the English participants reported getting practical support from their probation officers, in finding training, employment, or authorising holidays abroad. While there was no expression of probation officers going above and

beyond like in the French data, English desisters did note that they valued their probation officer being there for them if needed. This might be in part explained by the relatively less bureaucratic aspect of English life compared to the notoriously paperwork-heavy French public administration. In other words, English participants may not need as much help as the French ones because of different organisations of public life. It could also be in part due to relatively limited ambitions of English desisters compared to the French ones (see Chapter 8), which would lead to less support being necessary in the first place. Nevertheless, the English men seemed to consider their probation officers as approachable, and people they could go to if needed. This suggests *instrumental* compliance for the English men, which contrasts with the *substantive* compliance of the French men. This is in line with existing English-based research showing that attendance to probation meetings is in part motivated by the availability of support (Ugwudike, 2012; Robinson and McNeill, 2008).

10.5. Signalling Desistance

Earlier in the chapter, it was demonstrated that some English desisters considered their probation officers as people who could vouch for their stories and any progress towards rehabilitation they will have achieved. This was absent in the French narratives, perhaps because of the more active rehabilitative approach expected from them. As mentioned previously, one of the institutional aims of French probation is for probation officers to monitor the engagement and progress of probationers regarding measures pronounced by judges. This was apparent in expressions of what being on probation meant to them. As discussed above, some French participants mentioned requirements specific to their sentences when relevant, particularly as ‘pains of probation’ for the pressure they felt to comply to them. Seven of the French participants explicitly referred to probation as the place where the monitoring of these requirements took place. In line with institutional objectives, these French desisters perceived their probation officers

as the people to whom they have to demonstrate compliance and justify rehabilitative efforts.

Probation officers in the French sample were not reported to vouch for *behavioural change*, as was the case for English cases, but for *the respect of measures*. The respect of obligations imposed on French probationers corresponds to substantive compliance and what is considered successful supervisions. Unlike the pressures of attendance found in English narratives that were concerned with the threat of breach if the men did not show up for their mandatory meetings, the pressure that emerged from the French narratives was that of demonstrating to their officers that they were complying with the judge's measures. By continually respecting their measures throughout their time on probation, desisters 'signalled' change to both their officers and the post-sentencing judge, who has the power to modify or shorten their sentence if they are deemed worthy. As Maruna (2012: 81) stated, "signals are supposed to make visible some invisible quality". The words of Adama demonstrate the French men's understanding of the stake they have in signalling their efforts towards fulfilling requirements:

She [probation officer] does the relay between me and the judge, she's the relay between myself and my judicial problems so if it goes wrong with my probation officer, it goes wrong with the justice system, so the goal is for it to go well with the justice system, to move things forward.

The narratives suggested that the men considered they would be seen as worthy of 'things moving forward' because of the efforts displayed to their probation officer, which would be relayed to the judge in charge of sentence implementation. That being said, meeting and completing requirement of orders does not necessarily mean the person is invested in long-term change or inscribed in a desistance pathway. Indeed, as Robinson and McNeill (2008) argued, "it is possible for an offender to technically meet the requirements of an order without necessarily engaging seriously or meaningfully with it" (2008: 434).

Nevertheless, in practice, the aims of probation give more weight to ensuring the respect of requirements rather than longer-term plans and efforts for change. Especially considering the pains of probation identified in the French data, this means that despite institutional aims of rehabilitation or reintegration, the French desisters' accounts suggest that probation is deemed successful if requirements were *shown* to be respected. This could explain the recurrence of narrative elements highlighting the importance of signalling compliance to probation officers over accounts of meaningful change during probation supervision.

Furthermore, these findings reflect the expectations for French prisoners to demonstrate enough dynamism and active efforts to rehabilitate *themselves* in order to successfully apply for their release (Herzog-Evans, 2019). Modification of sentences granted by the sentence implementation judge is guided in theory to encourage, support, and prepare for social integration (Herzog-Evans, 2019). A focus on social integration, coupled with the managerial aspect of the delivery of probation work, can be at the detriment of the adoption in practice of a desistance approach (Anderson, 2016). In other words, substantive compliance sends positive signals to the probation administration in terms of 'box ticking' but does not necessarily contribute to meaningful change towards desistance. More broadly speaking, a responsabilisation rationale in French probation considers the convicted person as main driver of their own sentence (de Larminat, 2014). People are therefore expected to rehabilitate themselves in probation and to stop offending as a result, rather than co-producing rehabilitative efforts like the institutional aims would suggest. This is not unlike the situation in England, where individuals are largely considered as responsible for their own rehabilitation (King, 2013), the difference being that they seemingly did not recall needing to actively demonstrate change to their probation officers.

The reality becomes even more bleak as criminal justice systems take less and less accountability for delivering and providing rehabilitative efforts. The

Transforming Rehabilitation initiative was considered a failure and overall flawed, for the underfunding of Community Rehabilitation Companies (among other issues)³⁷ as well as the under reliance on the third sector (Clinks, 2018). Increasing financial strain on the French criminal justice system means that probation officers have unmanageable caseloads and are unable to allocate adequate resources to probationers (Herzog-Evans, 2019). In both countries, individual responsibility is encouraged, and probationers are left to address their criminogenic needs outside of the criminal justice setting. In France, respecting requirements shows individual responsibility and signals worthiness for sentence modification but does not necessarily entail addressing people's needs in terms of meaningful change. The French probation services therefore are not directly concerned with neither providing rehabilitative efforts nor facilitating change. Instead, compliance is monitored through the control of 'obligations', individuals are encouraged to demonstrate dynamism and criminogenic needs are left to third sector organisations to deal with (see previous Chapter).

10.6. Discussion

The analyses in this chapter have demonstrated key similarities and differences in the experiences of probation supervision in England and France. English desisters experienced probation supervision as more rehabilitative than the French ones, who recalled probation supervision as more punitive. Both samples reported positive relationships with their probation officers, for varying reasons. Similarly, both English and French men reported different benefits of probation supervision, for varying reasons. The value of positive relationships within probation has been researched extensively (King, 2014; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Burnett, 2004; Rex, 1999), however, this finding here is not insignificant, because of what the differences indicate in terms of the structural factors shaping desistance pathways.

³⁷ The latest on TR: <https://www.russellwebster.com/transforming-rehabilitation-resource-pack/>

The French men's positive relationships with their probation officers were linked to the type of support they were given. This was largely absent from the English data. This finding was in part due to the blurred outlines of the profession of probation officer in France, which stems from social work (see Chapter 5). In particular, the probation officers' work seemed to be especially appreciated by the men when they interpreted the officers' actions as going 'above and beyond'. A 2011 French government report investigating the probation services found that probation officers deplored the limited time available for them to establish relationships and deal with each person they supervise (Lacoche et al, 2011). This suggests the exceptional nature of the reported acts of going 'above and beyond' and heterogeneity in the allocation of resources. Certain probationers may be aware of these limited resources, confirming their feelings of gratitude when their probation officers do something for them.

Benazeth (2021) found similar results in narratives of French desisters and their relationships and experiences of probation supervision. He found that many desisters had negative experiences with institutions and 'vertical' authority, whether in the context of school, family, involvement with the police. He argued that positive characteristics of probation officers lead to them becoming 'resource-bringers' who allow desisters to rebuild this previously broken bond with institutions and authority. He also found that the authority of the 'resource-bringer' is no longer perceived by desisters through the institutional, and vertical power of the probation officer. Rather, the authority and power of the probation officer stem from their competence, skills, and capacity for actioning meaningful help. The positive relationship with probation officers is therefore important in humanising and softening the harsh and negative perceptions of authority and institutions.

French desisters' understandings of positive change and rehabilitative efforts in the context of probation supervision were drawn from experiences and

relationships with probation officers, namely instances where practical, tangible support was given. Actions of probation officers that contributed to increased autonomy and more stable and favourable situations were valued and considered as the elements in probation supervision that contributed to progress. In contrast, in the English sample, understandings of change stemmed more from the perceived opportunity of carrying out punishment in the community rather than in custody. These findings highlight the importance for French desisters of addressing criminogenic needs in probation. For the English men, the non-custodial aspect of probation can be utilised to optimise efforts for rehabilitation by intervening within people's everyday lives (Andrews and Bonta, 2006).

The analysis has shown that talking things through and addressing issues verbally in probation were recurrent themes in English narratives. In line with previous findings in this thesis, desistance in the English context was considered as mainly behavioural change, which the informal chats with probation officers could address. This also confirms previous Anglophone research which found that probationers mention 'talking methods' as the most common way of dealing with problems during supervision (Shapland et al, 2012; McCulloch, 2005; Rex, 1999). That being said, it can be argued that conversational approaches in probation delivery may be at the expense of work on personal and social issues (Farrall, 2002). This rings true for the French desisters, who did not mention the desire, or value, in talking things through with their probation officers. The authority and power of probation officers were derived not from their institutional authority but from their capacity to help and specific interpersonal skills that the men could benefit from (Benazeth, 2021). Direct help from probation officers was valued, particularly so when it was perceived as being beyond the scope of their professional duties. More indirect support was also valued, in the form of referrals to third sector organisations.

In his research into experiences of probation supervision, King (2013) found that his (English) participants were often referred to external organisations. However, this was not the case in the English sample in this study (unlike in the French sample, as discussed above). King suggested that the common referral of probationers to external agencies might be due to the contracting out of services. Fieldwork conducted by King would have taken place before 2010, while the English part of my fieldwork took place in 2019, after *Transforming Rehabilitation* was implemented. A report published in 2018 has found that plans to include the third sector in rehabilitation efforts had failed, leading to charities being underrepresented in the delivery of community sentences (Clinks, 2018). This change in the criminal justice landscape in regard to third sector involvement could explain the lack of English desisters' involvement with charity organisations in this study.

This analysis also demonstrated that varying experiences of probation in English and French narratives hinted at different types of compliance in each group. On the one hand, desisters' actions towards progress in the French context indicate substantive compliance, whereby the probationers and probation officers co-produced rehabilitative efforts. On the other hand, the English context entails informal supervisions where probation officers' resources were engaged if needed, which suggests instrumental compliance. While active compliance supports change and facilitates desistance in the French context, the pressures of complying to judicial requirements during probation supervision also consisted in a 'pain' of probation due to the monitoring and controlling aspects of supervision, as discussed above.

Bottoms (2001) had distinguished between two types of compliance. First, the 'short-term requirement compliance', which refers to the specific engagement and completion of legal measures, corresponds to what has been analysed in the French data. The second type is the 'longer-term legal compliance' which

corresponds to wider compliance with the absence of reoffending and thus can be associated with desistance. Robinson and McNeill (2008) have argued that short-term requirement compliance does not necessarily lead, nor is it likely to lead, to desistance. In other words, people can meet and complete requirements without motivations or intent for desistance. From this observation, Robinson and McNeill have differentiated between formal and substantial compliance. They wrote that substantive compliance is achieved when “the offender on probation shows a genuine desire to tackle his or her problems” (2008: 369).

The analysis has shown that certain elements of substantive compliance were present in the French data, however, the genuine aspect of efforts for engagement can be challenged because of the pains and pressures emerging from mandatory requirements. The ‘substantive’ nature of efforts and engagement in probation may or may not be linked to longer-term change and desistance. They may in part be due to desires to avoid the downsides of breach, or unfavourable reports to the judge in charge of sentence modification.

They may also be fuelled by positive incentives, which is likely in the case of the French desisters, who, as this chapter has demonstrated, were more active during probation supervision than the English men. Substantive compliance in the French data was also linked to the notion of signalling change. By demonstrating active engagement within probation, the French men signalled to their probation officers that their mandated requirements were respected and that they were ‘serious’ about change. The signals mentioned in the French context can be questioned in terms of indicating efforts for desistance, as respecting and fulfilling judicial requirements is in the probationers’ interests to avoid breach. In contrast, there was a certain passivity in narratives of English desisters, who expressed experiencing probation as a ‘check in’, where they were expected to talk informally with their officers and bring up issues if there are any. The English results echo Leibrich’s (1993) and Farrall’s (2002) findings, respectively

conducted in New Zealand and England, which both suggested that probation supervision had little impact upon desistance processes, at least not around the time when supervision occurred. Certain pains of probation did emerge from the English data, notably around the loss of time and the disruption of their routine in order to show up to supervision meetings.

French desisters, because of the monitoring and controlling of the penal requirements within probation, experienced supervisions as a more punitive measure than the English, who embraced the rehabilitative aspect of follow-up appointments. The idea that treatment and rehabilitation can be administered at the same time (Andrews and Bonta, 2006) might not be valid in all criminal justice contexts, and supports the tensions found between caring and controlling responsibilities of probation (Willis, 1983). This is not to say that French desisters did not engage with rehabilitative efforts provided in probation interventions, but that they seemingly experienced probation as more punitive than rehabilitative. In other words, the rehabilitative aspect of probation was explained through the intervention of probation officers and not through being given a sentence in the community. In contrast, English desisters considered probation as rehabilitative because of the non-custodial aspect of the measure. Probation was seen by English desisters as a rehabilitative measure, in that they experienced being sentenced to a community measure as having avoided being imprisoned.

Different organisations of the penal process involving probation supervision (the role of the post-sentence judge or different criminal justice philosophies for example) lead to distinct experiences of probation for English and French desisters. This explains the different results in English and French narratives of probation. Despite the relatively little literature on compliance in probation, the Anglophone research mentioned in this chapter has allowed us to frame the results of the analysis. Research in the French context on experiences in probation supervision would also allow us to better discern dynamics of compliance,

engagement and ultimately, long-term change as well as short-term completion of requirements.

Chapter 11 - Comparing the Spatial Dynamics of Desistance

The previous chapters have compared elements of narratives and provided insight into English and French desistance processes. We know from Chapter 7 that English participants explained the source of their offending as the influence of criminogenic peers, whilst French desisters, in contrast, understood their offending as resulting from both social and personal circumstances. Chapter 8 showed the fears and hopes of desisters shaping their motivations to change. English and French desisters both aspired for normalcy, the former focusing on achieving simple and peaceful lives and the latter expressing more ambitious and risky goals. Chapter 9 explored the types of support engaged with by desisters and what these informed about the social world in which change occurred. In Chapter 10, there was an analysis of the men's experiences and perspectives of probation supervision. These chapters have analysed narrations by comparing perceptions, emotions and recollections of elements helping or hindering change.

This final analysis chapter is different, as it is concerned with English and French desisters' use of time and space and aims to shape an image of what their lives typically 'looked' like, and how their environment, in turn, shaped processes of desistance. This analysis provides insight into the interactions between the desisters' social lives and their surroundings. This chapter is based on the idea that desistance is not merely the absence of offending but the changes in lifestyle and the routines associated with it. The first part of this chapter compares the daily lives of desisters, first for those who worked and then those who did not. Then, desisters' 'down time' is analysed, with particular attention to their social networks, the places they inhabited and the activities they carried out. The last

part of this chapter focuses on a common theme in the English data whereby the men reported moving away as impacting their journeys of change.

11.1. Analysing the Use of Space: An Introduction

Analysing the places people routinely inhabit is valuable for exploring desistance in terms of identity and behaviours. Knowledge of the spaces that people occupy provides information on who they are and what they typically do (Meisenhelder, 1977; Goffman, 1963). The places that people are routinely attached to are telling of who they 'are' (Eyles, 1989). This is all the more informative when considering who they used to be, how they used to perceive themselves and who they want to become. Chapter 7 has shown the type of change brought about by desistance in terms of personality: English desisters have reported being less influenceable and impulsive than earlier when they were offending. French desisters framed their change in terms of becoming forward-thinking and aware of the consequences of their actions. An exploration of routine activities therefore helps to frame the men's sense of identity (Hunter and Farrall, 2015). This chapter proposes, through the analysis of the use of spaces, to explore what these types of change look like, in the daily lives of desisters. By looking at where they go and what they do, we can discern how changes in identities can be transposed into concrete actions and behaviours.

An important previous research of note to this analysis is Segev's (2020) doctoral thesis, where a time-space budget was used to compare English and Israeli desisters' daily lives. In her study, she found that English men preferred being at home, whereas Israeli men inhabited a wider variety of spaces outside their homes. Her English participants spent more time in resting activities indoors (at home), while Israeli ones were more active and sociable. I anticipated similar findings for English participants, as the criteria for participant recruitment were the same as in Segev's study. What is more, I expected results for French participants to be similar to the Israeli men's routines of leading comparatively

more sociable lives, for various reasons. First from Chapter 8, we know that the French men have wider social networks and availability of different types of support systems than the English. Secondly, Chapter 6 showed that a lot more English men were inactive, unemployed, and not looking for a job (N=7) in comparison to their French counterparts (N=2). Thirdly, Chapter 7 has demonstrated different ‘feared selves’ formulated whereby the French desisters wish to avoid becoming like persistent offenders they have encountered, while the English desisters fear consequences of the punishments they would get if they persisted and got reconvicted. In terms of how these fears translate into daily routines, we can anticipate French men work towards lives that are distinct from persistent offending, and English men live to safeguard what they stand to lose if they get caught.

The analysis of the use of time and space entails an approach of existential geography, which is concerned with “the meaning individuals attribute to places” and how their lives can be considered through experiences of spaces (Hunter and Farrall, 2015: 950). Wikström and colleagues (2011) have explored the interactions between environment and personal characteristics and experiences in understanding individuals’ propensity to offend. They analysed the use of time and space of young adults who participated in the Peterborough Adolescents and Young Adult Development Study, by asking them to report on their locations and activities for each hour of the day, for five days. This provided insight into the relationship between environment and individual behaviour. Taking an existential geography approach, Farrall and colleagues (2014) similarly explored the use of time and space, comparing the habits of desisters and persistent offenders. Using the same data, Hunter and Farrall (2015) have analysed the use of time and space specifically in people who were, or still are, drug-related offenders. Flynn (2010) also explored dynamics of offending and desisting within the context of place,

highlighting the need for policy and practice to consider criminal behaviour in context for more robust and effective rehabilitative efforts.

There are certain limitations to the data used for the analysis in this chapter. Due to time constraints during interviews, participants were not asked to account for each hour of the day they were describing. This means that the analysis is based more on the use of spaces, at the detriment of the use of time. Participants were asked to describe a typical Wednesday so I could explore a typical active/working day and a typical Saturday for an example of a rest day. In cases where Wednesday was a rest day or Saturday was a working day, they were asked about another working or rest day, respectively. What is more, due to time constraints not all participants were asked these questions, and some were not able to address them fully, so answers have differing depth. For this reason, the numbers of participants in each sample mentioned in this chapter do not always add up to 20. Nonetheless, this data provided a coherent insight into the places desisters frequent, the activities they undertake and the people they spend time with.

A typical day in the life of a French desister entailed going to work in the morning, after which, generally around 5-6pm, they would be either spending time outside of their home with friends or relaxing alone or with a member of their household at home, watching television. In their rest days, the men tended to spend time outside of their homes, with their families and/or friends, and to take part in cultural activities such as going to the cinema or the museum. An English desister's working day started off the same, with going to work in the morning, but they were more likely to finish later, typically around 7pm, and go straight home afterwards in the evenings because they lacked the time or energy to undertake any more activities and would end up spending their rest time alone. During their rest days, English men tended to spend time indoors, in their homes, with their families. French desisters who were not active typically spent time looking for work both at home and outside, for example with a charity

organisation or the job centre. Their rest days were similar to those of the French men who worked. In contrast, the English men who were not active, were likely not to differentiate between rest days and ‘active’ days, and mostly stayed indoors, watching television, or playing video games. Whether they were working or not, French desisters were likely to have the occasional meal outside of their own homes, alone, with a friend or family member. This was completely absent from the English data, which showed that the men typically ate indoors, alone or with a member of their household.

Table 11.1 summarises the characteristics of the participants, which provide the basis for understanding the activities that comprise the participants’ days. Around half of the participants in each sample were working or studying. Most of the inactive French men were actively looking for employment, while a quarter of the English ones were not. Table 11.2 shows the common activities undertaken by each group. The analysis of the men’s use of space has highlighted differences in how desisters spent their leisure time. Table 11.2 shows that English desisters mainly spent their down time indoors, at home, alone or with their partner. In contrast, the French ones spent their downtime outdoors, with friends and family, eating at restaurants, going for drinks, and going to places related to culture and the arts.

		English	French
Working or studying		8	11
Unemployed or retired		12	9
Looking for employment		3	7
Inactive – not looking for employment		7 (2 of them retired)	2

Table 11.1: Participant Activity

	England	France
Indoor activities	TV, video games, music	TV
Outdoor activities	No recurrent activities mentioned	Sports, meals, drinks, cinema, museums

Table 11.2: Common Leisure Activities Mentioned

11.2. Active Days

11.2.1. Those who Worked

Over half of the French participants (N=11) and nearly half of the English ones (N=8) were actively employed or studying at the time of the interview. For them, the main occupation taking up their active days was therefore work. Descriptions of work convey a sense of normalcy to the French men's lives, whereby they lived like 'everyone else' and took on activities and roles distinct from their past offending. The French participants' responses made it sound obvious that their active days revolved around working. At times, a sense of monotony was conveyed in descriptions of their days: *I go to work, I take my little breaks* (Samy). This monotony relates to the French idiom "metro, boulot, dodo" (commute, work, sleep) that describes mundane, repetitive aspects of city life revolving around work.

Discussions of work in French narratives were often accompanied by indications of what it meant for them. These were not necessarily explicit but found in the ways the men described their activities and the emphasis they placed on certain aspects of their work. For example, Ramzy's discussion on efforts to set up a restaurant illustrated what this work 'looks' like and the impact it has on his daily life:

I have stuff to think about, my restaurant, I need to locate it well, I need to use the strategy adequately, where I go, that I make use of the client base, what I need to do to adapt, I need to make two three phone calls to people

who are in the industry. I worked a lot before being here so I know, working in restauration is demanding and very tiring.

After having spent five years dealing drugs in an organised gang, he re-connected with his lifelong dream of being a restaurateur. This project was a way of filling time and using excess energy, away from the stress and chaos of drug dealing, and allowed Ramzy to focus on his goal. Hard-working personas emerged from the narratives of the French men describing their working lives, particularly for the entrepreneurs of the sample who worked to achieve their goals and make ‘dreams’ come true. This echoes Benazeth’s (2021) findings of a trend of passionate entrepreneurs within his sample of French desisters. He found that efforts in entrepreneurship structure the desisters’ days, reducing the time available to offend. Entrepreneurship also allows them to adopt a new, pro-social identity and, particularly, an identity that comes with status in success, a sense of accomplishment that is recognised within a new sphere of socialisation unrelated to offending. This was certainly confirmed in the French data of the present study and applies to participants beyond the entrepreneurial ones. Narrating employment and other activities as goals signalled that the desisters took their projects seriously and showed that they are running legitimate businesses.

For other French desisters (not involved in entrepreneurship), their main activity was often considered as a way to reorient efforts from offending to legitimate projects. This was also seen in the narratives of French men who were studying towards a degree or traineeship. They expressed feeling pressure about their hard work, and about making the ‘right’ choices to secure a favourable future. Ousmane was a student supervised on probation for drug dealing. He was, around the time of the interview, about to enrol in the equivalent of a French bachelor’s degree and expressed anxiety about making the right decisions for his future. He was, like others, anxious to ‘do well’ and make the right choices, indicating a

distinctly different lifestyle from past offending and a more ‘serious’ and legitimate lifestyle.

I put pressure on myself (...) I don't want to make mistakes and that's it actually, I don't want to have made mistakes.

Pressures to succeed are common for these French desisters who were making considerable efforts in their respective fields, whether this was business, employment, or studies. There was a sense that the pressures to ‘do well’ and make the right choices are self-inflicted, and stem from a newfound control over their lives, contrasting with the inevitable aspect of their offending (see Chapter 7). The men demonstrated agency in emphasising the importance of their choices and actions on their future selves. In other words, while the French men explained the onset of their offending as shaped by their socio-economic backgrounds and the general environment in which they grew up, their new pro-social goals were *chosen* by themselves. The recurrent pressures expressed by the men indicated an acute sense of the importance of their choices to their future circumstances. This links back to findings in Chapter 8 that highlighted future-oriented existential considerations and goals in the French narratives.

While feelings of pressure regarding choices were absent in the English narrations, there were some descriptions of hard work and the monotony of work. Whereas the demanding nature of employment for the French participants stemmed from their own engagement in their professional endeavours, the English working men communicated stresses about the very nature of their jobs. Eight of the English participants were employed at the time of the interviews. Four of these have indicated working ‘hard’, to the point of it affecting their physical health.

Wake up, go to work, go to work, come home, something to eat and then it's bed, and then same again next day. cause like I said it's long hours,

twelve thirteen hours at work ...so by the time I'm done with work, I'm that tired I can't be bothered. (Brian)

This participant's 'travel, work, travel, eat, sleep' is reminiscent of the French 'metro boulot dodo' routine. For him, this did not allow for down time because of the physically demanding nature of his employment. Working in a foundry as a forklift driver, his exhaustion came from handling heavy machinery on a prolonged basis. The demanding aspect of employment was not uncommon in the English sample, and the monotonous dimensions of work reflected a sense of 'going through the motions'. English participants mostly worked in low-skilled, physically demanding jobs, for example, in construction, warehouses, supermarkets. Tiredness from employment was thus an unsurprising recurrent theme in narratives of English working men. The sense of achieving a goal through employment which was found in the French narratives was absent here, and there was not much room for professional/career progress (see Chapter 8). These results confirm that employment, for English and French men, shaped desistance processes in modifying lifestyles and routine activities (Sampson and Laub, 1993; 2003). The nature of employment, however, was important as informal labour increases the likelihood of offending (Nguyen et al, 2020). What is more, the difficult working conditions in the English case seemed to prevent agency when compared to the French data in which there was an emphasis on choices. The importance of availability of opportunities here was apparent for positive change beyond simply the absence of reoffending.

11.2.2. Those who did not Work

Those participants looking for a job had a distinctly different routine to those mentioned above. Five French participants were looking for a job and described doing so actively. French participants showed a high level of engagement, proactiveness, and resourcefulness in their job search. Three of them described

interactive job searches involving going to job fairs, charities and reaching out to employers directly. Job searches were often incorporated into their daily routine:

Usually at 8am I drop the kids off... I look a bit on leboncoin [an online forum] since it's the morning, two three opportunities there, I'll call if there's a number, I'll send my CV by mail. (Abdul)

The importance of having a job for Abdul is illustrated by his words elsewhere in the interview, when discussing his initial life plan before he 'fell' into drug dealing: *my goal was that, to have a job like everyone*. Here we find again early indications of aspirations for normalcy, stability, and assimilation with civil society, which were common in French narratives, and which were derailed by involvement in offending. Employment, along with a stable housing and good health, were often discussed as healthy ways of living. Employment was highly regarded and had meaning beyond the financial gain in what it entailed for normalcy. Throughout the French narratives, there were indications of the importance of employment in desisters' lives, in mentions of feeling 'useful', of shaping identity, valuing certain aspects of past or present employment, valuing having employment in the first place and contributing to society.

RF: Is it important for you to work?

Remy: Oh well yes yes yes because...there is something that is terrible it's that when you meet someone, the first question that you are asked is 'what is your occupation'?

The role of welfare benefits given by the state was also apparent in some of the French narratives when discussing employment. Often, they were considered as a last resort measure, to be taken temporarily while they got back on their feet. This may be linked to the notion of autonomy that French probation has identified as a key element to work on. Perhaps it is also in part due to the common understanding in French society of welfare as 'solidarity', a collective assistance

to the needy (Reydz, 2006; Clasen and Clegg, 2003). Avoiding prolonged reception of state welfare might then be linked to avoiding the label of ‘needy’. Vincent explained what other participants indicated with regard to employment:

Me, I want to be autonomous, I don't want handouts. Well, I receive benefits because I don't have the choice. But as soon as I can be autonomous...I've always managed with my own means. I've always worked, I started to work when I was 13 years old.

Having dealt with addiction and homelessness, he could be considered as a legitimate recipient of benefits for his ‘neediness’ but rejected the label of someone who receives handouts and took pride in having worked. While this positive approach to employment and use of state benefits as a last resort might not be universal, especially with persistent offenders (as desisters are more likely to have stronger bonds with institutions), they may also be more likely to hold these views. Chapter 9 has shown the social aspect of desistance in the French context and Chapter 10 highlighted social integration as a goal of probation, so it is in a way perhaps unsurprising that French desisters worked towards reflecting a good image of themselves to society. Instilling responsibility is also an important effort in French probation work, and employment is recurrent in efforts of rehabilitation. Securing employment may therefore constitute a signal of newfound responsibility, which in turn may indicate ‘rational’ behaviour (Reydz, 2006), contrasting from past offending. In contrast, while 12 of the English participants were out of work, only one was looking for employment:

Well the last fortnight now I've been back trying for jobs now, which is good, so I've been going on to my [online employment search website] account, for jobs, trying for a couple of jobs. (Casper)

Seven English participants reported being inactive and not looking for employment. Four English participants were inactive and not looking for a job.

Of the four, one of them was retired, one was figuring out what he wanted to do before starting to look for something, another was taking a break during the winter before starting to look, and lastly one was focusing on addressing his mental health issues before thinking of employment. Mental health issues were more common in the English sample than in the French one (see Chapter 7) and were seen as a barrier to employment.

Nevertheless, receiving benefits was not considered as a favourable situation by those English participants who were concerned, and there was a sense of employment being unattainable. Six English participants spoke negatively about benefits, like them not being enough or not wanting to be 'on' them. Interestingly, there was a sense that they 'settled' to be on them because employment was not perceived as an option, or receiving benefits was a *more favourable* option than their current situation. The notion that the men's options were limited emerged from their narratives, for a variety of reasons including that being in employment was at times considered 'not worth it' (because of employed partners, other priorities like looking after children or sorting out mental health). Another element discouraging the men from seeking work may be the 'flexible' or unstable characteristic of the labour market in the UK for low-skilled people, also considering its deregulated aspect and the low workers' rights with comparison to France (Broughton et al, 2016).

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 7, the weight of a criminal record in finding employment was more pronounced for the English men, which might consist in an added obstacle for them to secure work and consider activity as more favourable. A notable example is that of Jack, who suffered from mental health issues after a long conflictual relationship and having been convicted for domestic abuse. At 30 years old, he had been out of work for eight years and was, at the time of the interview, considering starting to look for employment. He described:

RF: So you said, you didn't have a job for the past 8 years, how did you manage?

Jack: Well, I used to be my eh my ex-partner's carer as well at one point so that were...plus eh benefits, universal credit which is not...that good (chuckle) it's been all over the, it's not a very good scheme. So yeah, benefits... I didn't feel like I were good enough to work back then

RF: Can you explain?

Jack: Just cause of relationship, do you know if you're in a toxic relationship you just you feel like you're not good enough for owt [nothing]

Inactivity in the English and French samples was therefore vastly different, particularly in terms of the men's relationship with work. This might be due to different labour markets trends and employment prospects in the two countries. Employment has been put forward as a key factor in processes of desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000; see also Chapter 2). People with convictions typically take on low-skilled jobs within the informal employment market (Nguyen et al, 2020; Giordano et al, 2002), the changing nature of which might explain different outlooks on employment. The rise of the informal economy entails low paid, unstable, and precarious, low-skilled work in both countries (Nguyen et al, 2020). While in France unemployment rates are higher, safety and stability are also stronger for those with employment. To the contrary, unemployment is lower in England, however, low-skilled, informal jobs entail financial instability and little prospects for growth from precarity (Broughton et al, 2016). There are more people at risk of poverty in the UK than in France (see Chapter 4). What is more, involvement in informal employment is associated with increased likelihood of offending (Nguyen et al, 2020). In terms of explaining the pattern of inactivity found in the English sample compared to the more active French sample, prospects of life in employment might be more dire for the former. Evidence of this is in narratives of desisters in employment in each country. The

English men's accounts suggested strain and physical health concerns from their employments, while the French narratives recounted less strenuous but more monotonous experiences of their jobs. If job satisfaction may support processes of desistance (Maruna, 2001), poor prospects about employment may hinder change and improvements in lifestyle, as these results suggest.

Two French participants reported being inactive and not looking for a job. One of them, Amadou, was waiting for his particularly demanding probation supervision to end before starting the search. Having been convicted for attempted terrorism, he was subject to intense supervision on probation but also by his psychologist and a third sector organisation. His days were therefore occupied by fulfilling these requirements, as well as preparing his application for a prestigious arts school. The other, Alain, was recently in prison, and as part of a modification to his sentence, released on partial custody, where he spent nights in prison and days outside. He has had a traumatic experience of prison, after five and a half years incarcerated for drug dealing, during which he was absent from his children's infant lives. Having been partially released, he spent his limited freedom with his family. He was not employed and not looking for work at the time of the interview. When asked about his employment status, he responded:

At the moment now, I am narrowing down my life, and to remind you that I am father of two kids now, I have created a family. (Alain)

Nevertheless, French participants who were not in employment were not inactive, as they reported spending time with friends, family, and generally being outdoors. In contrast, English participants overall did not report spending much time outdoors and their social lives were restricted, as the next section demonstrates.

11.3. 'Down Time'

The differences in how French and English desisters spent their down time were much like the findings in Segev's (2020) comparison of English and Israeli men's

activities outside of work. Both English and French men recalled spending time with their families, but only the latter reported spending time with friends. Both spent time taking part in artistic activities, with the English staying indoors and participating in creative tasks, whereas the French men went outside to consume different types of arts, notably at the cinema.

11.3.1. Peers and Social Networks

Spending recreational and leisure activities with friends and family is known to have an impact on desistance (Wooditch et al, 2014). Chapters 8 and 9 highlighted the role of families in the lives of desisters and in their journeys out of crime. A similar number of English and French desisters reported spending time with their families (N = 8 and 7 respectively). For four of these French participants, this was in the context of parenthood. The idea of harm caused to ones' children because of offending was also a factor in both the time and the quality of the time spent with them. A sense of guilt from offending (see Chapter 8) was resolved by spending quality time with family. This was apparent in Alain's case, which was mentioned above. Having spent over five years in prison and missed out on his young children growing up, he was anxious to devote himself to his family. Narratives of spending time with family often indicated either aspirations of or having already attained a 'normal' life and pro-social identity. For instance, Nabil, in describing down time said:

I will go to see my daughter erm I go outside with her in a park, we walk around a bit and there, that's it. That's my day (laughs) there's nothing special.

Down time for the French participants also consisted in spending time with friends, which was largely absent from English narratives. The French men seemed to have more of a social network than the English ones, even if some reported not being friends with certain people (offenders and non-offenders) anymore after offending and desistance (N=8). While ten French men reported

spending time with friends, only two English men did. Time spent with friends for the French men included mostly going outdoors, having meals or drinks, or spending time at a café together. Socialisation was expressed as a form of normalcy in the men's lives, as Nabil's quote above conveys, and just like descriptions of time spent with families.

At evenings well either I go home relaxed, I eat a little bit and I go to sleep or erm I go out I go to a little restaurant with some friends, it depends on the evenings (Olivier)

With my girlfriend we go for a little walk around Paris, we walk around, we see a friend...yeah the routine (Elias)

As was seen in Chapter 8, desistance in the French sample is framed as building a 'normal' life through social integration and assimilation into civil society. In their everyday lives, normalcy for the French desisters took the form of non-offending activities and peers. Desistance for the English sample was framed differently, through the avoidance of further offending. In terms of daily routine, this took the shape of shielding themselves from potential factors of reoffending, which the men associated with 'the outside'. Chapter 7 demonstrated that the English sample largely understood the onset of their offending behaviour as resulting from bad company with criminogenic peers. Their strategy for maintaining desistance was therefore to avoid contact with potential criminogenic peers as is explained below.

11.3.2. Leisure Activities

Avoiding contact with potential criminogenic peers involved leisure time for the English participants being spent indoors. Indoor activities included participants 'chilling', 'watching tele', 'watching the football' and 'doing what I'm doing'. When asked how they spent their time, four English participants mentioned enjoyment in staying at home and playing video games. Much like the Israeli

desisters in Segev's (2020) research, the French men were less inclined to play video games. A life spend mostly indoors was a way for the English desisters to shield themselves from dangers of the outside, which were associated with offending. Liam's words illustrate this tendency:

I play all sorts, GTA, fortnite, everything (chuckle) I just like to play games, I don't know what it is, I just keep myself to myself now and... it's just the way I like it, playing the games and I don't have to go out and I don't have to be involved with the wrong people.

A similar finding across the samples is in another activity carried out indoors. Four French desisters and five English men reported watching television at home. This appeared as a common way to spend 'down' time and was also found in some of the Israeli narratives in Segev's (2018) study. Moreover, seven of the French participants reported carrying out administrative tasks at home, which was not mentioned in the English sample. This is unsurprising, considering the particularly bureaucratic aspect of life in France (DITP, 2019). Down time in France was therefore spent with friends and family out of their homes, and indoors watching television and doing administrative tasks. Most of the English men's downtime was spent at home, either alone or with family, watching television or playing games.

In both English and French samples, a minority of participants reported spending time doing different types of hobbies, namely artistic ones. Activities relating to arts in the English sample involved playing music. Four English men reported spending time playing music, two participants being part of a band. David mentioned spending a lot of time at his band's rehearsal studio, which he described as somewhere he could 'chill out'. Music was expressed as a tool to 'escape'. This had a significance on maintaining desistance, as he put it:

Whenever I'm in the house I've always got the guitar in my hands, always you know. so that sort of like keeps me occupied, keeps me away from from you know, having a drink and stuff like that.

Similarly, Lewis used music as a distraction:

If I wanna get out for an hour, I'll get my guitar. as before, if I wanna get out for an hour, I'll go sit in the bookies all afternoon.

David, like many English desisters, had issues with addictions, so both the space and activity for music facilitated desistance in providing a distraction. There was the added value of music in terms of desistance, because of the social component of being in a band, which provided positive links and pleasurable activity that contrasted with the strains and pains of offending. As Lee put it, he was *not running away from anything anymore*. A common aspect of the role of music in these English desisters' narratives was that they all played it indoors, most often in their own homes. This relates to Segev's (2020) findings that English desisters preferred spending time in their homes, as 'outside' is associated with potential offending. Leisure activities of French desisters during their down time in contrast, tended to take place outside of their home environment, which in some respects was similar to Israeli desisters' rest days, barring the religious aspect.

Artistic activities were also present in French participants' lives, mostly in terms of consumption rather than creation, and as mentioned above, taking place outside of the home environment. Five French participants mentioned spending time taking part in activities surrounding arts, with other people. This included workshops, cinema, museums, or art exhibitions. Going to the cinema, alone or with others, was a particularly common activity. This underlines the social aspect of desistance for the French participants, partaking in activities with non-offending peers. This supports the ESS analysis in Chapter 4 that found that

French people gave more importance to notions of creativity and independence than English people.

The difference in consumption of arts between English and French samples might in part be explained by the availability of art forms as well as common social, cultural habits. In France, especially in Paris, there are a lot of museums, exhibitions and art galleries which are accessible to most. The artistic sector is subsidised by the government, which has schemes in place to reduce the price of tickets for certain categories of people, for example, unemployed people, students, or senior citizens. What is more, the consumption of these art forms outside of the home is common in French culture, seemingly much more so than in England. This adds to the normalcy to which French desisters aspired, and in the depictions of their everyday lives, it is apparent that they were assimilating to civil society, leaving behind an offending lifestyle.

Two English participants mentioned playing sports in their down time. Five French participants have mentioned a physical activity as part of their routine. Olivier, for instance, recalled when describing a typical day: *I get up at 6am, I go for a run, I do an hour of jogging every morning*. Physical activity in daily routines was common in descriptions of rest days in French narratives. In whichever manner – alone or with friend, early or late – a physical activity provided a structure to people's days and weeks in a periodic manner. Physical exercise therefore added to the routine and habits of these participants' lives.

Sport was mentioned during interviews by the French participants as an activity that adds to a healthy, meaningful lifestyle. Physical activity generally was mentioned as a direct tool to support desistance. Interestingly, even a participant who did not take part in physical activity acknowledged its benefits, particularly in terms of the potential to let off steam and become busy outside of an offending environment:

I realised the energy that I had and actually em all the highs that I get, it serves to repress that energy, because I don't know where to direct it. So you need to find something...I would say the best thing is sports, to let off steam in a sport...you need to find an occupation... me, sports is not really really my thing but rather em... I'm more into creativity. (Remy)

While sports were mentioned in passing in two of the 20 English narratives, it appeared meaningful in the lives of the French desisters as an activity that brought structure and provided an outlet outside of offending. French narratives conveyed a sense of 'well-roundedness' that was either lived or aimed for in the variety of activities the men described. They seemed to aspire to a 'normal' life, which was expressed by an eagerness to move on from both offending and their involvement in the criminal justice system (see Chapter 8). The French men's aspiration for normalcy and assimilation to civil society was in contrast with the English desisters' lives and how they 'lived' desistance. The following section delves into the particular strategy for desistance and maintaining change identified in the English data.

11.3.3. Self-isolation

Overall, 12 English participants indicated that they purposefully refrained from socialising, which was in stark contrast with the French narratives, in which all participants reported spending time outdoors and with other people. English participants saying *I keep myself to myself* or a variant of this expression was common, and they communicated a sense that the less they socialised, the better off they were. These narrative recurrences illustrated how their use of space was linked with their understandings of who they are, their self-perceptions and efforts to desist as well as to remain desisted. The English men typically refrained from socialising by staying at home as much as they could. Kieran, who offended from a young age, said:

I don't associate with nothing. I get up in the morning ... and I stay in t'house most of the time. I don't really go out.

Chapter 8 demonstrated that English desisters tended to perceive their past selves as easily influenced, partially explaining their involvement in offending. Part of the process of desistance, therefore, entailed becoming less prone to external influences. The men grounding themselves within their homes was telling of their social lives, in the sense that particular attachment to a certain place is informative of who people are (Eyles, 1989). The findings here in terms of self-isolation suggest that the men still considered themselves as influenceable to a certain extent, not completely immune to the temptations of offending that are present in the outside world.

The avoidance of situations where offending may occur is called 'diachronic self-control' and has been found in previous qualitative research on processes of desistance (Segev, 2020; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Diachronic self-control refers to deliberately refraining from certain activities, in order to avoid a future "situation of temptation which one believes, from experience, is very likely to result in a failure to act as one truly believes one should" (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 274). Often, this diachronic self-control in the English data was put in place after individuals had distanced themselves from their offending peers. In other words, as part of their journeys of change, desisters stop spending time with, or 'break up' with the people they used to offend with. Desistance was lived by staying away from offending peers and favouring relationships with non-offending people. When discussing his social network, Luke highlighted this link between desistance and diachronic self-control:

I keep myself to myself. So like the only people I talk to now is either my family, or the kids I work with. I don't even talk to my old mates, cause I don't want to go back down that road.

Avoiding offending peers was therefore a strategy to support change, in a pragmatic way, as reoffending would infringe on the type of life they want. Beyond the risk of reoffending, these narratives link back to the mentioned motivations to desist: Chapter 8 showed how English desisters were motivated to stop offending because they had ‘too much to lose’. Self-isolation allowed English desisters to protect themselves and what they have to lose, should they reoffend and be reconvicted. Much like Segev’s (2020) English desisters, the ones in this study imagined an increase of their likelihood of reoffending if they spent time with offending peers. Staying indoors was also a strategy to maintain desistance and minimise the likelihood of being in a situation or in a location where offending could be a possibility. Forms of diachronic self-control were found in Goodwin’s (2020) analysis of narratives of women desisters, as well as in Kay’s (2016) research into narratives of desisters subject to intensive probation supervision, both of which are studies based in England.

Negative perspectives on socialising were not completely absent from the French narratives. Severed ties with their offending peers were not uncommon, however, the distinction in how these narratives were framed lay in perspectives on socialising generally (as opposed to with offending peers). All the French participants had, at some point in their interviews, mentioned socialising, whether this was with friends or people from charities or organisations they have been involved with. Severed ties with offending peers were framed in the sense of choosing the ‘right’ friends (those who do not offend), with the hindsight of time and experiences. Unlike the English desisters, the French ones did not seem discouraged by getting to know strangers. The ‘outside’ was associated with ‘normal’ life and civil society, whereas for the English men, the association was with offending and risk. Moreover, people that desisters could meet were considered part of civil society for the French men, but as a potentially bad influence by the English ones. Even the most marginalised French participant,

Christian, reported suffering from social isolation and difficulties maintaining social links when people found out about his offending past. The English desisters isolated themselves in a logic of self-protection/preservation from the dangers of the outside world.

Often, English participants associated the 'outside' with possibilities of 'relapsing' back to offending and remembered the 'wrong crowd' that got them into crime in the first place (see Chapter 7). A similar pattern was found in narratives of intensive probationers who reported self-isolating to avoid reoffending, in Kay's (2016) qualitative study of desistance in the context of *Transforming Rehabilitation*. He identified that a common use of diachronic self-control entailed a reshuffling of social networks. This was found in the English data in this present study, which is illustrated by Liam's reply when asked about his reticence to form new relationships:

Liam: I don't wanna go out anyway do you know what I mean? I like to keep myself to myself

RF: So you don't know anyone in Sheffield anymore?

Liam: Not really no, hu, not that I'd wanna know if you know what I mean so

RF: Why?

Liam: Just in case they do lead me down the wrong crowd you know what I'm saying so I'd rather keep myself to myself where I know I'm alright.

Research has shown that having offending peers is highly associated with offending behaviour (Wilkström et al, 2012). Chapter 7 demonstrated that offending for the English participants was considered as a result of involvement with offending peers. It is, therefore, unsurprising that spending time with offending peers was considered by the English desisters as a step back in efforts for desistance and potentially infringing on their processes of change. This confirms previous studies in the English context that delved into the role of

offending peers and criminogenic circumstances to processes of change (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Bottoms and Shapland, 2016; 2011). This explains the prominence of English participants spending time indoors and restricting their social networks. Similar results were found by Giordano and colleagues (2003), in that a small group of desisters reported isolating themselves from peers to avoid negative influences and ultimately reoffending. Furthermore, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) found that the detrimental effects of excessive diachronic self-control may lead to restrictive lives and impoverished experiences. This puts into perspective findings of Chapter 8 that suggest English desisters have more limited life goals than French ones.

11.4. Residential Moves

This section of the chapter specifically focuses on the geographical, residential moves reported by English participants. The French cases are excluded in this section because residential moves were not recurrent in the French data. While some participants reported moving away when telling their stories, these were not associated or narrated with relation to changes in offending behaviour, nor were they linked with desires to stop offending. In this section, I explore and link residential moves to English participants' experiences of desistance. Indeed, the changes brought about by residential moves are informative of efforts to desist.

Moving away, or geographical distancing, has been linked to desistance from crime with the concept of 'knifing off' (Maruna and Roy, 2007; Sampson and Laub, 2005). Farrall and colleagues (2014) have found the recurrence of residential moves as part of the desistance story of former drug-injecting users. Widdowson and Siennick (2021) also conducted research into the effects of residential mobility on persistence and desistance. They found that residential moves, and long-distance ones in particular, had the potential of a turning point, in facilitating a decline of offending behaviour. The 'fresh start' which comes with moving to a new location provides the opportunity to drastically change

offending habits. Indeed, distance from the causes and surroundings of offending (Farrall, 2002) and changes in social network have been associated with desistance (Best et al, 2018). As Kirk (2012: 330) puts it:

“If criminal behavior is inextricably tied to social context, then by separating individuals from those contexts associated with their previous criminality, residential change may be one way to reduce offending and foster desistance”

Research into residential moves and offending has demonstrated the impact of long-distance moves onto desistance processes (Widdowson and Siennick, 2021; Kirk, 2012; Sharkey and Sampson, 2010; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Osborn, 1980). These studies have shown that people who do not move or who make short-distance moves are less likely to stop offending than those who make long-distance moves (short distance moves being those where people remain in their local communities). Moves beyond city-limits have been shown to reduce the likelihood of violent behaviours in adolescents (Sharkey and Sampson, 2010). This further suggests the positive impact of getting away from criminogenic environments onto behavioural change.

Nearly half of the English sample (N=8) mentioned having moved to a new place and explained changes in their offending behaviours through these, whether it was intentional (specifically so they could stop offending), or not (eventually leading them to adopt a non-offending lifestyle). This was absent from the French narratives, barring one participant, Elias, who moved to Algeria, where he had family, and where he felt he would be better able to stop taking heroin. Considering that a recurrent theme in the English sample was that the onset of offending was in part caused by offending peers (see Chapter 6), it is unsurprising to find a pattern in narratives of moving away from criminogenic environments to sustain desistance. In contrast, the French men had a more consistent sense of

morality and conveyed changed priorities and newfound desires for normalcy in explaining journeys of change.

Sampson and Laub have conceptualised turning points as entailing new situations that have a ‘knifing off’ effect; that provide opportunities for social support; that allow for new routines distinct from previous offending lifestyles and the potential for identity transformation (2005: 17-18, discussed in Kirk, 2012). Residential changes are therefore new situations that can constitute a ‘turning point’, fostering desistance processes through different opportunities for potential changes. As the analysis of desisters’ use of time and space in this chapter has shown, the English men mostly spent time indoors, at home, isolating themselves from potential temptations to reoffend. This highlights a specific routine, distinct from their previous offending days that brought discontent (see also Chapter 7). In the English narratives, it was particularly the ‘knifing off’ that emerged in discussions of residential moves and their consequences on desistance.

Indeed, when English participants discussed their residential moves, they conveyed a sense of renewal in living in a new environment with characteristics distinct from their previous criminogenic environment. Three of the English men had explicitly referred to their move as a ‘fresh start’, which highlights distinctions from a previous (criminogenic) environment to a new, more favourable setting and lifestyle. The overwhelming presence of criminogenic elements in previous locations was cited as a motivation to move away. In particular, offending peers were commonly cited as characteristics of previous environments, that the men reported getting away from. The criminogenic environment for most participants who mentioned moving away consisted in people they associated with offending, which confirms the role of social networks in processes of change (Best et al, 2018). Zach’s explanation of his residential move reflects this:

RF: You said that you moved away to get away...

Zach: Yeah because I knew too many people down there like, do you know like my mates from school, dealers, other dealers and then customers, my customers so I just wanted to leave there really because if I stayed there I'd probably still been carrying on. Because if I see them people every day I might as well make some money off of it do you know what I mean but I just left and left that shit behind me.

RF: What kind of people is it that you wanted to get away from?

Zach: Well like pfff people that use crack and heroin mostly because they're not very nice people to hang around with is it, that's what drags you down.

This quote illustrates the overwhelming nature of a criminogenic environment because of offending peers' influence and impact on desisters' lives. What is more, there was a clear understanding of the consequences of moving away as an improvement, as opposed to staying, which was considered as inevitably leading to further offending. Zach was a drug dealer and stopped offending upon his move to Sheffield. He shared that he planned on finishing his sentence and carrying out training in order to secure employment and definitely put a stop to making money illegally. In terms of a turning point, it is thus apparent that residential moves can have a 'knifing off' effect on the drastic changes in social network and socialising habits which are associated with offending. Changes in social networks were not necessarily associated with a residential move to have an impact on processes of change. Shifting towards a recovery-oriented social network is associated with desistance and recovery for those with substance issues (Longabaugh et al, 2010). Casper, who was convicted for drug-related offences, had consciously detached himself from his friends with whom he used to drink. When asked why he moved away, he said:

To get a fresh start and to get away from all them people.

Casper recognised the criminogenic aspect of his social network and acted on it by 'knifing off' from the people he surrounded himself with. The particularity of

residential moves lies in the opportunity for the drastic aspect of this change, leaving behind one's offending *environment* as well as the offending peers. Best and colleagues (2016; 2012; 2008) researched desistance and recovery and also highlighted the importance of a supportive social environment in facilitating desistance from substance use. They found that the identity of 'non-user' or a person 'in recovery' can be nurtured by the norms and values of a positive social environment. Moving away from an area associated with offending provided, beyond changes in social networks, a new frame of life, where desisters can take control of their lives, hence the 'fresh start'. Narratives of desisters who moved have shown reflexivity in the projection of a feared self that was associated with staying in the environment where offending took place, as illustrated by Liam's explanation of his move.

Liam: It was either get arrested and carry on doing what I were doing, eh or stop what I were doing and move down here. So that's what I did.

RF: Do you think if you hadn't moved you would have carried on?

Liam: Yeah definitely been something I been doing you know what I mean

RF: Why?

Liam: Because it were just the place that I was in at the time, the people that I knew erm... and just what I was getting myself into.

RF: So what was the place like?

Liam: It was like a normal seaside area but to me [and] my mates at the time it was just about the money if you know what I'm saying because obviously you get lots of people there that are taking drugs, smoking drugs...

Failures were linked to offending, which was associated with the environments that participants used to live in, and offending peers they used to socialise with. Interestingly, this is reminiscent of the notion of 'crystallization of discontent' which Paternoster and Bushway (2009) conceptualised in the context of feared

selves and changes in offending behaviour. When discontent from offending accumulated, this was ‘crystallized’ in the form of a realisation of the unsustainable nature of an offending lifestyle. The findings here show that realisations of discontent were not necessarily associated with offending *per se*, but the environment and the places commonly occupied by the men, in which offending (generally, not necessarily only their own) took place. Desistance processes resulted from action taken to minimise dissatisfactions associated with location – through a residential move – which in turn provided an opportunity for a change in lifestyle. This is not to say that the participants did not associate discontent with offending, but that offending was often associated with the environment in which they resided. In other words, the accumulation of offending behaviours led to certain consequences – like being labelled as an ‘offender’ – which contributed to unhappiness regarding their lifestyles and considerations of change.

In not associating with their previous offending peers, desisters could forge a new, non-offending identity in a *place* where they were safe from being labelled as ‘offender’. Farrall and colleagues (2014) also found a pattern in people’s desistance stories of residential moves from an area where individuals were associated with offending to one where they did not have a reputation. Continuously inhabiting certain places that are associated with offending may hinder behavioural changes and send the wrong message about who individuals ‘are’ and what they ‘do’ (Meisenhelder, 1977). Two English participants in particular reported that moving away provided a frame where they could have interactions that were not related to their past offending.

RF: What made you move?

Eng7: Just for that really ... just to get away cause it was just too much, it were getting too much...police coming around and... bit by bit police officers know you by your first name...

RF: Yeah?

Eng7: Cause they've dealt with you that many times (Brian)

I used to get a lot of that: I'm walking through town with my mum, for example, and people would be come up to me and I'm like mate, go away I'll meet you after I finish with my mum, have some respect at least do you know what I mean, but they never used to bother, they'd come up to me even with my mother (laugh) and that's how they [his parents] found out. (Zach)

Being known as an offender was a negative consequence of offending, which a residential move had solved for these participants. By moving, they avoided being labelled through their past offending and by maintaining desistance, they could sustain their new identities. The English men have shown that the culmination of discontent stemmed, not only from downsides and consequences of offending, but also from their environment, and the types of interactions they commonly had within it. Moving away therefore provided an opportunity for a complete reset in lifestyle and a transformation of how they were perceived by their new community. Self-isolation, as discussed earlier in the chapter, was a strategy for maintaining desistance by avoiding potential harm from temptations of reoffending.

This pattern in the English data is consistent with other findings in this thesis in terms of the men's understandings of their offending pathways. It is also unsurprising that the 'knifing off' narratives were absent from the French sample, as their social networks tended to be a blend of offending and non-offending peers. What is more, the French desisters, while they had recognised the criminogenic nature of the environments in which they lived, gave more concern to employment in terms of changes in lifestyle associated with desistance. Their sense of self was more consistent throughout their narratives and there was less of an 'identity transformation' that emerged from their recollections of change.

Even though the French men took on pro-social roles in their pathways of change, they did not tend to take on the identities of ‘offender’, at least not in the same way as the English men appeared to have done (see Chapter 7). The identity transformation found in the English narratives may not have been relevant in the case of a French residential change.

11.5. Discussion

This final chapter has demonstrated how different processes of desistance identified in previous chapters entail distinct daily lives of desisters. An important theme recurrent in the English data was the harsh working conditions which are consistent with the characteristics of low-skilled work in the UK. This in part explains the relative lack of activities carried out outside of the home, since the little down time they got was spent relaxing at home. English desisters tended to inhabit a smaller variety of spaces than French ones, and had a more restricted social network, in efforts to avoid reoffending. Descriptions of French desisters’ days corresponded to their goals of social integration and normalcy, through activities outside of their homes, with friends and family. There was also a pattern in the English data of unemployed desisters who were not looking for work. This contrasts with French unemployed participants who were mostly actively searching for employment.

Differences in the nature and availability of employment might explain the results here, in different narratives of desisters who were active. High levels of regulation and social protection in France lead to stronger workers’ rights and generally more stability in work, as 86% of employees in the country are on permanent contracts (Broughton et al, 2016). This may, in part, explain the higher number of active French participants in the samples to start with. While unemployment rates are much higher in France, precarity in the labour market is higher in the UK, with weaker workers’ rights, worse working conditions, and unfavourable contracts exemplified by increasing ‘zero hours’ contract work (Broughton et al, 2016).

These observations, along with the results of this section, suggest that English desisters were more likely to be in more precarious, strenuous, and unstable work than were French ones.

Different cultures of welfare in the UK might also explain variations when it comes to inactivity in unemployment. In England, the provision of benefits tends not to be seen as a right and as the duty of the state as it is in France (Reysz, 2006). Individuals in England are more considered as being responsible for their own fate from the outset, and welfare is seen as help provided on certain conditions. In contrast, French welfare is provided with the logic of social solidarity and the causes for claiming benefits are not considered as necessarily resulting from individuals' decisions or failings (Clegg and Clasen, 2003). This high level of emphasis upon individual responsibility may in part explain the larger proportion of inactive desisters in the English sample. Indeed, in comparison, the notion of solidarity at the heart of the French welfare system conveys the idea of temporary collective support towards eventual autonomy. The conditional aspect of the provision of English welfare benefits may convey the idea that individuals are on their own, and responsible for their failings. This, alongside greater difficulties in the job market for people with convictions, could in part explain the pattern of inactive unemployed English participants not looking for employment.

The second part of this chapter has focused on a pattern of residential moves found in the English data, which provides additional information on the link between self-perceptions, identities and spaces occupied. The findings in this chapter are not surprising in light of the results presented in previous chapters as well as existing research on the desisters' use of space. This last analytic chapter of this thesis expanded on and illustrated findings from previous chapters with data on English and French desisters' daily lives. The variations that emerged cement the different pathways out of crime that are typical in English and French contexts. The following chapter will conclude the thesis by summarising and interpreting

the findings and discussing the implications of variations between English and French desistance.

Chapter 12 – Conclusion

This thesis has compared desistance processes in England and France. Through 40 in-depth qualitative interviews, narratives of desisters were gathered, the analysis of which provided insight into English and French pathways out of crime. The design of the thesis has allowed us to explore the subjective aspects of desistance, and the extent to which these vary by structural-level processes. As such, the findings suggest that there are distinct pathways out of crime that emerge from, or are shared by, different national settings. The results demonstrated that processes of desistance in England and France contain broad similarities, for instance, in terms of onset of offending, emotions, existential considerations, and specific differences like perceptions of offending, of non-custodial punishment, strategies for maintaining desistance. Variations were thus identified in individual, relational, social levels and criminal justice experiences and perspectives.

As Segev's (2020) and Österman's (2018) comparative work on desistance has highlighted, the findings of our cross-national comparative analyses have informed us on the influence of wider structural, contextual factors upon individual behavioural change. Segev's concluding thoughts eloquently sum this up and can be applied to the present study: the similarities and differences in dynamics of desistance in different national contexts "were indicative of wider contextual factors that operated in processes of desistance in both countries and shaped the social conditions and internal mechanisms related to agency" (2018: 438).

In this final chapter, I bring together the findings that have emerged from the analyses of this data and demonstrate how the variances between English and

French findings link to factors specific to each context and setting. I start by reiterating the state of the literature on desistance from crime, to locate the study and justify the necessity of this research. In doing so, I demonstrate the gap in the knowledge on comparative approaches and then reiterate the aims of the study. After this, I summarise the key findings of this thesis, before providing outlines of typical journeys of offending and desistance in English and French contexts, drawn from the results of the analyses. I then bring together the findings to provide an explanation of the key, overarching differences that emerged in the way English and French men stop offending. I also provide concluding thoughts on the necessity of international research on desistance from crime. Finally, I argue for more comparative research on desistance to better discern how different factors influence pathways out of crime.

12.1. Summary of What is Known on Desistance

As Chapters 2 and 3 overviewed, research and theory on desistance have evolved towards more precise and specialised understandings of processes of change. Empirical research has greatly contributed to the comprehensive knowledge on how people stop offending. From initial observations of patterns of declining offending behaviour with age, to the identification of the variety of pathways out of crime, there is a breadth of knowledge on processes of desistance. We now know of the role of social factors such as employment (Uggen and Wakefield, 2008), relationships (Weaver, 2016; Skardhamar et al, 2015) and family ties (Copp et al, 2020) in processes of change (Sampson and Laub, 2003). These studies have shown the importance of social change in shaping processes of desistance (Farrall et al, 2010). We also know of internal mechanisms and cognitive dimensions of desistance (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007; Giordano et al, 2002; Maruna, 2001), highlighting the role of motivation, emotions, and existential considerations in behavioural change (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Healy and O'Donnell, 2008;

Farrall and Calverley, 2006). Another crucial aspect of recent desistance research is the knowledge on assisted desistance, which includes the impacts of criminal justice interventions generally and probation supervision specifically (Villeneuve et al, 2021; Farrall, 2016).

While there is no universally accepted definition of desistance from crime, it is widely acknowledged as a process (Bushway et al, 2001), and a gradual change involving the interplay between structural factors and internal mechanisms (Farrall et al, 2011; McNeill, 2006; Bottoms et al, 2004; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Research has, over time, explored specifics of certain desistance processes, providing explorations of change in distinct contexts and for different groups of people, highlighting the variety of pathways out of crime (Farrall, 2019). That being said, less attention has been paid to broader, structural factors, macro-level influences that shape the societies in which offending occurs and therefore desistance itself. In order to pay attention to these, this thesis has adopted Farrall and colleagues' (2011) integrated model of desistance, which accounts, among others, for the influence of macro-level factors.

This model has allowed us to thoroughly conceptualise individual behaviour with consideration of a wide range of macro and meso level factors. Indeed, behavioural change is considered with attention paid to past experiences, projections into the future, existential reflections, emotional dimensions, and negotiations of an 'offending' identity, which were discussed in this thesis. Processes of change are also understood as influenced by external factors and circumstances that contribute to shaping individuals' sense of self through available alternative identities. These external factors include, for instance, 'situational contexts', social institutions, collective perspectives on offending, punishment and rehabilitation, economic contexts or collective social norms (Farrall et al, 2011). This integrated perspective on desistance was most appropriate to adopt here for its approach of behavioural change as "the result of

the *interplay* between individual choices and a range of wider social forces, institutional and societal practices, which are beyond the control of the individual” (Farrall et al, 2011: 224; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Chapters 4 and 5 provided insight into the English and French societal, economic, institutional contexts in which my participants lived, offended, and desisted.

12.2. Summary of Aims

This thesis has addressed the gap in the literature with regard to the *ways* in which structural factors shape individual desistance processes. In other words, existing research has highlighted that structural and societal factors had an impact on behavioural change, yet there is limited knowledge on how these influences operate. This cross-national comparative research provides accounts of desistance in two distinct societal settings, which allows us to explore the ways in which structure shapes how and why people stop offending. The aim of this thesis was to compare desistance processes in England and France. To reiterate, the research questions of this thesis were as follow:

- How do people make sense of their experiences of offending and desisting? How is this different in France and England?
- What are the differences and similarities between English and French desisters in terms of relational and institutional experiences and perspectives?
- How do these differences and similarities inform us on the influences of national, societal contexts on individual pathways of desistance?

There is a significant lack of empirical knowledge about processes of desistance in the French context (see Benazeth, 2021 and Kazemian, 2020). Research on desistance has been conducted in the Anglophone sphere, to the point where it is at times considered a field of study in its own right. We now know how and why people stop offending in the national contexts where research has typically taken

place (Farrall et al, 2014). Therefore, this thesis also aims to contribute to the knowledge on desistance in France.

The main objectives of the research were therefore to better understand processes of desistance, and to explore the influence of national contexts on individual pathways out of crime. Hence, this research has compared and contrasted desistance processes in England and France, to ascertain the relationship between national, structural characteristics and individual pathways of change.

12.3. Summary of Findings

Chapters 7 and 8 focused on the internal dynamics accompanying desistance from crime. They examined the patterns identified within the narrations of offending and desistance and emphasised cognitive mechanisms including aspects of emotions, motivations, projections, and identity. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 focused on the wider, more explicitly ‘social’ characteristics of desistance, including the roles of social networks, probation, and social habits. These chapters have shown what desistance ‘looks’ like and analysed how this was reported. In this section, I briefly summarise the key findings of the analyses that were conducted in this thesis.

Chapter 7 brought us up to speed on the participants’ profiles through their past offending and the key problematics they faced in their lives. This chapter established the circumstances and the profiles of the participants in this study. In it, I showed the range of offences committed by the men, including those they admitted to being involved in but had not been convicted for, as well as the circumstances of their employment, addiction, relationships, and mental health. This allowed us to gain an initial understanding of the contexts in which their offending took place and the ‘baggage’ that the men were carrying with them when they embarked on their efforts to desist.

Broadly speaking, English and French men have committed a similar range of offences, with a few notable differences. The most common offences committed by the English participants were, in order, violence, drug and property related crimes, and for the French men, they were drug offences, property crimes, and violence. There was a notable difference in the proportions of participants having reported being convicted for motor offences, which were 40% in the English sample and 10% in the French one. This could be explained by strikingly different public transport networks in Sheffield and in Paris. Drug related offences were recurrent in the samples, including consumption and dealing. There was a notable difference in the proportions of participants having reported addiction issues, which were 80% of English men and 45% of French men.

The analyses in Chapter 7 highlighted the different ways in which English and French participants rationalised their past offending when telling their stories. The English men framed theirs by minimising their actions and presenting them as the norm for young people. The French men rationalised their offending by comparing them with worse crimes, expressing their sense of boundaries and the sort of offending that they would never commit. Rationalising and relativising past offending shows consistency in self-perception and consideration of the self as a 'good' person. This chapter also demonstrated differences in how the participants framed the onset of their offending. The English men explained the start of their offending as resulting from socialising with offending peers, whereas the French men shared understandings of offending as related to their disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Chapter 8 continued to examine the samples' narratives of offending and explored the motivations for change through the emotional and existential considerations as expressed by desisters. A pattern was found in the French data, of men expressing feelings of guilt with regard to their past offending, recognising the harm that had been caused as a result. In the English data, regret was the recurring

emotion, which was also found in the French narrations, and was framed as considerations of what the men deemed they should, or should not, have done with regard to offending. Expressions relating to what might be thought of as ‘feared selves’ – imagined worst case scenarios if they persisted in offending – were found in both groups, framed in distinct manners. English desisters tended to project themselves into a shorter-term future than the French ones, imagining what they would lose if they were to reoffend and be reconvicted. In contrast, the French men projected themselves into the long term, imagining what their lives would be like if they were to persistently reoffend, by comparing themselves to people they know to have persistently reoffended. In both groups, the fear of imprisonment in part fuelled motivations for desistance. Motivation was also fuelled by desires to become what they perceived as ‘better’ people and attaining goals for their future.

In Chapter 9, the focus shifted from internal considerations, to include an analysis of the support systems the men typically engaged with. This chapter analysed the types of relationships, notably with family members, that the sample members reported. It also examined the type of support that the men had engaged with and what they gained from it. In addition, third sector engagement and support were analysed, highlighting interesting differences between the groups. English involvement with third sector organisations largely included moral support. In comparison, the French third sector was mostly used by desisters for resolving practical issues and providing administrative help to enable changes in people’s lives. This emphasises the importance of exploring the availability of support and the impact this support had on people’s trajectories of change. This chapter also found that involvement in third sector organisations, whether this is as a recipient of support or being actively involved in helping, is significant in providing desisters with valuable social and human capital. This is especially true for

marginalised and isolated desisters who may not have had access to social networks elsewhere or did not consider their peers as a source of moral support.

Chapter 10 explored experiences and perspectives of probation supervision. It started with the finding that English and French desisters both reported positive relationships with their probation officers and valued similar characteristics in the people supervising them. Differences emerged in experiences of probation supervision. English desisters reported probation supervision as a space for discussion, for probation officers to perform a sort of ‘welfare check’ on them. In contrast, French desisters reported probation supervision as punitive. The punitive aspect in the English data was framed through considerations of probation as a non-custodial measure, and as a ‘second chance’ before imprisonment. English desisters also reported pains of probation, mostly with regard to loss of time. In the French data, pains of probation consisted in pressures to respect measures set by the judge and controlled by their probation officers.

Chapter 11 explored what desistance ‘looked’ like through an analysis of participants’ daily lives. The findings of this chapter illustrate the differences and similarities identified in the previous chapters. For instance, I found that English desisters tended to spend most of their days at home, with people with whom they were emotionally close, generally limiting social interactions. In contrast, the French desisters made use of a greater variety of social spaces, which included the homes of friends and family, cultural spaces, restaurants and bars and places to play sports. This finding confirmed the strategy of ‘self-preservation’ emerging from the English narrations, and aspirations of normalcy and desires for a pro-social identity in French narrations. I found a trend in the English data whereby harsh working conditions explained in part the lack of hobbies and leisurely activities carried out outside of homes, in contrast with the French habits. Another pattern emerging from the English data which confirmed their strategy of self-isolation was the recurrence of short distance moves of home, which allowed the

men to restrict their involvement with offending peers and gain a sense of control over their likelihood of reoffending.

12.4. Typical Journeys of English and French Desisters

In order to illustrate these findings, a recap of the typical journeys of English and French desisters is proposed. This is drawn through the patterns identified in the analysis of the data which, collated together, provide a picture of the typical experience and recollections of desistance in England.

First, the English desisters, whose mean age was 37, were likely to have grown up in a council estate. Describing their past selves as easily influenced, they were likely to have started offending in their early teenage years, as part of a social circle which was retrospectively characterised as the “wrong crowd”. The English desisters had committed a range of offences and consumed drugs, although not necessarily having been convicted for these. Motor offences were the main conviction that they had, followed by violence and drug-related offences. That being said, drug, property and violence related offences were common past offences. Members of their family were likely to have provided some sort of practical support, in the form of housing, finding employment, and generally ‘being there’ as opposed to abandoning them for their offending behaviour. Attempts to distract themselves from offending behaviour were also common.

Reflecting on the negative consequences of further offending, desistance is partly motivated by the avoidance of further punishment and the prospect of imprisonment in both samples. Desistance was also fuelled by fears of losing certain positive aspects of their lives that had accumulated with time. Addiction and mental health issues were common in English sample members, which were also topics of focus moving forward in pathways of desistance. Positive change is perceived through notions of becoming a better person, shifting from negative characteristics of their youth to more grown up, adult, responsible and conventional identities. Offending was seen as unsustainable and incompatible

with their desires for the future and priorities accumulated with time, for example parenthood. Desires for the future involve living what they perceive a 'normal life' to be, including eventually gaining stable employment, housing, and having solved issues of addiction and mental health.

English desisters were typically aiming for a tranquil, hassle-free life and experienced probation as a disruption of their daily routines. Successful involvement with their probation supervision was considered as fulfilling the mandatory aspects required of them. They had a good relationship with their probation officers and perceived their punishment in the community as the step before imprisonment. Any involvement with a charity organisation was likely to be with regard to mental health support. In order to avoid being tempted into reoffending, English desisters were likely to have 'shrunk' their social circle, restraining their relationships with close family members, romantic partners, and their children.

The mean age of French desisters was 38, and they were also likely to have grown up in a council estate. The French desisters were acutely aware of the disadvantaged socio-economic conditions in which they had grown up and now lived, as well as the limited opportunities for legitimate earnings. There was a clear understanding in the French desisters' stories of the role of their social environment in the trajectories of their lives. They were likely to have started offending in their early teenage years, picking up from actions of others in their surroundings. Drug dealing was a common occurrence in the neighbourhoods they lived in, and a common means to achieving material goals, providing them with short-term gratification. The French desisters had also been convicted for a range of offences, most likely drugs related and violent offences. Other past offences included mainly drug-related crimes, property, and violent offences. They were likely to have received practical support from family, friends, and charity organisations. Practical support included help with housing, employment,

addictions, and administrative issues. Friends and family were also likely to have attempted to talk them out of further offending.

French desisters reported that the weight of others' perceptions of them as 'offenders' contributed to increasing their discontent with offending. Feeling guilty for the harm caused by their past offending was recurrent, particularly when it came to drug dealing. French desisters reported becoming more 'forward thinking' with time, expressing fears of becoming like the people they knew who still offended. Positive change was framed as moving on completely from offending, finishing probation supervisions and other mandatory requirements. Offending was seen as incompatible with the increasing appeal of conformity. Desires for their future involved gaining 'stability' and mainly becoming an autonomous, independent citizen, embracing conventionality and conformity. Goals for the future were likely to involve ambitious projects for their professional careers.

Probation supervision was understood as a way to monitor the progress of mandatory measures, to be reported to the judge in charge of sentence modifications. As such, French desisters were likely to be under pressure to actively comply and demonstrate their respect and completion of the measures imposed by the courts. Nevertheless, they tended to have good relationships with their probation officers and got guidance towards relevant third sector organisations through them. These typically provided support for education, training, employment, addiction, administration, or housing issues. French desisters were likely to be sociable, especially engaging with people who were not involved with offending. They were likely to have an active social lifestyle, going to various places and socialising with friends, family, work, and entertainment.

12.5. Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I interpret the findings and link them with each other. In other words, the key findings across chapters will be linked together to form a comprehensive analysis of processes of desistance in a comparative lens. Segev's (2020) argument that similarities between Israeli and English desistance processes were indicative of underlying differences resonates with the findings in this thesis. Here, I argue that the key difference that underpins broad similarities in the findings is that English desisters tend to mostly look 'inwards' in their narratives, whereas French desisters look 'outwards'. In other words, English men tended to interpret facets of their lives pertaining to offending and desisting by focusing on themselves, whereas the French men typically contextualised their circumstances. This is indicative of distinct societal characteristics, whereby offending is mostly expressed as a behavioural issue in English criminal justice settings, whilst in France, offending tends to be explained as shaped by socio-economic circumstances, which then feeds into individuals' understandings.

12.5.1. Narratives of Change: Looking Inwards vs Looking Outwards

As was previously discussed, English and French participants broadly committed a similar range of offences, from a young age, most of them before 21 years old. While there were certain similarities in the ways in which past offending was narrated, underlying differences were found in how these were framed. The English narrations underlined the role of *behaviours* throughout offending and desisting: the onset of offending was commonly explained by personality traits, character. They also typically rationalised desistance from the unsustainable aspect of offending, invoking ontological explanations for change. Motivation for change was mostly fuelled by fears of losing their freedom. Desistance, for the English men, was expressed as changes in behaviours, with a focus on becoming a better person and leaving behind specific habits associated with crime. Probation

supervision was mostly experienced as a space for the men to talk, indicating that behavioural change was at the heart of their assumptions of rehabilitation.

In contrast, the French participants narrated offending and desistance as shaped by their *social environment*. The onset of offending behaviour was typically interpreted as resulting from a lack of opportunities, being brought up in an environment where prospects were limited. What is more, offending was reportedly common in the communities and areas where the men had grown up and was often considered as a way to attain material gains. Motivation for change was in part fuelled by desires not to be labelled as an offender by members of their community, and to project a positive image of themselves to their peers. Desistance, for them, was framed as a shift in ultimate concerns, whereby goals of material gains were replaced by more conventional objectives involving stability, autonomy, and conformity. While this essentially also concerned behaviour, the French narrations framed this shift within the men's changing social contexts and circumstances. The analysis of desisters' daily activities demonstrated that French desisters were more sociable than English desisters. This reflects findings of the ESS analysis discussed in Chapter 4 which highlighted that French society gave more importance to loyalty to friends and was generally more geared towards sociability. Furthermore, probation officers were considered by the French men as resourceful people, who were capable of addressing practical issues and contributing to improve the men's social situations. The institutional stance on rehabilitation in France was to target social problems, with the assumption of reductions in the likelihood of reoffending.

Moreover, the rationalisation of offending, and comparisons with worse crimes that was recurrent in the French data indicated a consistent sense of boundaries that they would not cross, and confidence in one's behaviours. This showed a view turned to the outside, and acknowledgement of their actions as linked with the outside world, through notions of (im)morality and external judgement of their

offences. It also contrasts with the changed personality traits mentioned by the English men, who typically recalled being easily influenced and impulsive. This indicates a view ‘inwards’ in understandings and considerations of offending behaviour. In comparison, French desisters (and their experiences of probation officers) work to the assumption that rehabilitation through practical changes in lifestyle, conformity, stability, and autonomy are all changes that reduce the likelihood of reoffending. English desisters, and their experiences of probation, highlight the idea that individuals are entirely responsible for their behaviours, and efforts for reducing the likelihood of reoffending are mainly based on ‘talking methods’. This may explain the explanations of change in English narrations, through changes in behaviours and personality traits, whereby the men perceive themselves as more calm, less impulsive and forward thinking.

In both groups, projections into the future were essential in narrations of desistance, confirming the applicability of the theory of the feared self in the French context. That being said, the ways in which this was framed were subtly different between the samples. The French men tended to look outwards, comparing their situations to those of persistent offenders, fuelling their motivations to change with the fears of becoming like them. In contrast, the English men typically look inwards, fearing the losses that they could experience should they reoffend. The comfort of their everyday lives is an asset that desistance would ‘protect’, and this was challenged by the mandatory probation supervisions that disturb and disrupt their routines.

The sense that emerged from the findings and interviews more generally was that English desisters understood their lives in the context of their communities, the social networks, the nature of relationships and attributes given to people. French desisters also tended to explain their lives in the context of their communities, but also of their broader societal circumstances. This is valid with regard to their recollections and explanations of the start of their offending as well as their

perceptions of probation, or the articulations of normative aspirations, whereby there was consistent consideration for the societal aspect of their lives. This echoes findings from the European Social Survey data analyses presented in Chapter 4 which showed the greater importance of conformity, tradition, and benevolence (which includes social relationships, loyalty, and care for others) in French society when compared to English.

These findings also have an implication for the notion of signalling desistance in probation. Continuing from the observation that English desisters tended to focus on their individual selves, the data suggest certain narrative specificities that confirmed desistance inwardly. For instance, perceiving the past offending self through different characteristics marked a break with the past that was irreconcilable with both the present and the future. Reoffending was not compatible with the present self, because it would correspond to childish behaviour resulting from influenceable traits, which the desister does not have anymore. This is in line with purely behavioural considerations of change.

In contrast, signals in the French data are more outward-oriented and concerned with actions rather than personality traits. They were also not found in the way in which the men chose their words, but mostly in the emphasis they gave to notions of conformity, particularly in the descriptions of their daily lives. The offending lifestyle was distinct from the non-offending one, and by adopting conventional spaces and habits they were also signalling their own conformity to conventional routines. Moreover, in making clear that the ultimate concerns were distinct and incompatible with offending, French desisters signalled a break from the past, almost as an evidence of their changed behaviour. Desistance processes in the English context appeared more passive in comparison to the French, more as the *absence* of offending than a shift in the direction of their efforts. For the French men, desistance seemed to consist in shifting where their efforts were going, towards employment, entrepreneurship, studies, or other goals they have to work

for. The emphasis on non-offending concerns and interests signalled, to themselves and to the researcher, that they have moved on.

12.5.2. Pathways of Desistance: Conformity vs Self-preservation

One approach to desistance is its consideration as a journey towards social inclusion (Sampson and Laub, 1993). This thesis has demonstrated that this approach is certainly valid in the French context but less so in the English one. This was illustrated by the sociable lives of the French desisters, whose routines involved spending time with non-offending peers, in spaces that were not associated with crime. The strategies for maintaining desistance were in line with the English and French men's respectively inward and outward looking narrations of offending and desisting. Again, broad similarities contain subtle differences in processes of desistance.

The men's strategies for maintaining desistance were linked to their goals for the future. Aspirations for normalcy were common in both groups, however, goals beyond this varied between them. On the one hand, English desisters valued stability in housing and employment, with no particular pattern of goals beyond these. The English men mostly desired stable lives (as opposed to the chaos of offending), preserving their routines and what they could lose should they reoffend. French desisters also valued stability and peace of mind, but additionally aspired to challenging goals, mostly in terms of professional objectives, which were relatively risky, particularly if they were to reoffend. Entrepreneurship has been found to be an important outlet for redirecting the energy that was previously spent in offending, in the French context (see also Benazeth, 2021). The French men aspired to conformity and roles that were challenging and rewarding, which typically involve being sociable. This relates to the ESS analysis in Chapter 4 which showed that French society gave more importance to conformity, independence, and creativity, compared to English society.

These findings also resonate with Segev's (2020), Bottoms and Shapland's (2011), Calverley's (2013) and Schinkel's (2015) work, which found a trend of self-isolation as a strategy for desistance. Involvement with peers being associated with offending, in order to avoid temptations and negative influences, English desisters shut themselves off from the outside world, carefully choosing the people they did socialise with. Bottoms and Shapland's (2011) study revealed tactics of what they called 'diachronic self-control' whereby people avoided certain situations in order to prevent anticipated potential temptations for reoffending. This is consistent with findings from the European Social Survey analysis, which found that French society was significantly more sociable compared to British society. The findings that French desisters were more likely to spend time with friends and family, and that they aspired to goals that involve being sociable, can be interpreted as efforts for living what is typically a conforming life in France. In comparison, English desisters' goals are more akin to self-preservation, in the form of financial stability through employment and caring for their close loved ones. As discussed in Chapter 4, the general public in France seems to be more sensitive to the social problems faced by offenders, the disadvantages of growing up in socially and economically deprived areas, and the often inhumane conditions of imprisonment, which could explain the relatively higher levels of conformity in the French sample. The English desisters may face more social stigma regarding their convictions and offences, because of growing punitive attitudes of the general public, coupled with strict employment checks, making it more difficult to socially (re)integrate into communities and achieve a sense of belonging.

This leads us to question what desistance ultimately entails for individuals' quality of life. We can suggest whether societal and institutional efforts (particularly in England) could, and should, pay attention to fostering ambition, and contribute to dignified lives after crime. From the findings of this thesis, it seems that desistance

in England entails a life of avoiding reoffending, whereas in France, it consists in becoming a thriving, legitimate member of society. Despite lower unemployment levels in England, more French participants were active, either in work, entrepreneurship or studies. There are differences in the availability of opportunities, not only in practical terms with employment and education, for instance, but also in terms of societal expectations, collective attitudes, and institutional philosophies. As Giordano and colleagues (2002) have argued, the availability of opportunities for change is crucial. Also, as Bottoms and Shapland (2011) underlined, perceptions of current circumstances as related to future perspectives are important in negotiations of desistance. The results of this thesis cement these findings, highlighting the importance of characteristics of the context people desist into, for better lives beyond simply the absence of reoffending.

12.6. Implications for Policy and Probation Practice

The findings in this thesis confirm existing knowledge on desistance processes in England and inform us on desistance in France. The comparative analysis has allowed us to formulate certain policy recommendations from observations of processes of change according to different societal, political, economic, and criminal justice settings.

Across the analyses, as mentioned above, there is a recurrent sense that English desistance processes are more passive than French ones, through mostly inwards looking narrations and pathways of self-preservation. This can be explained in part by different societal and criminal justice perspectives on individual behaviours, crime, and offender management. In England, individuals seem to consider themselves as largely responsible both for their past offending and their rehabilitative efforts. Indeed, we found in Chapters 6 and 7 that English participants explained their offending through elements of their personalities, which improved with time, thereby leading to changes in offending behaviours.

Their strategies for maintaining desistance also suggest that their propensity to reoffend is related to their influenceable characteristics and impulsivity, therefore shielding themselves from spaces of potential temptations. The bulk of the efforts for avoiding reoffending is hence considered as the responsibility of the individual (King, 2013). Despite being written long before the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, Robinson and Raynor's words in discussing the role and future of probation services reflect the current situation of the delivery of probation work as observed in the English context:

“The more recent model of probation as a purely correctional service seems to face in one direction only, and *sometimes behaves as if criminal justice has nothing to do with social justice.*” (Robinson and Raynor, 2006: 343, emphasis added)

King (2013) also argued that the focus on human agency in approaches to probation in England and Wales leads to people being encouraged to reduce their own risk of recidivism. The reform and welfare of convicted people is seemingly no longer the responsibility of the State, but up to individuals to manage. Findings in the English context related to the notion of a ‘new penology’ whereby the exercise of power has shifted from a normalising, ‘disciplinary’ type of penalty (as seems to be the case in the French context), towards a managerial mode of probation (Robinson et al, 2012). In this respect, the French context of probation supervision seems to be closer to its roots in social work, despite uncertainties and unclear professional boundaries as well as strained resources. An institutional recognition of the criminogenic factors external to individuals could potentially facilitate desistance, through the delivery of practical support tailoring people's specific needs. The relative lack of research into desistance processes in the French context prevents us from making as confident conclusions, but the analyses in this thesis suggest that French society and criminal justice consider offending as shaped by social conditions. What is more, the roots of French

probation in social work suggest the use of normalising, disciplinary types of penalties that England and Wales previously adopted.

These interpretations of the findings lead us to think about desistance as not simply the absence of reoffending, but processes of change for people to improve their lives when shifting away from offending. If desistance entails an enhanced sense of agency from the individual's perspective, there should be processes in place to facilitate desistance through the availability of opportunities for change. The lack of opportunities for English desisters becomes apparent when compared to the activities of French desisters. Differences in the availability of opportunities for making choices can help us in part to understand the relatively passive processes of change and inward-looking strategies of maintaining desistance. In the English context, it seems that the lack of opportunities and options hinders self-reflexivity and establishes a "survival" lifestyle, highlighting the collateral consequences of offending and penal punishments. Most strikingly, the option to work towards the modification of sentences in France could give legitimacy to the person within their own penal process, encouraging self-reflection. The lack of research on individuals' considerations of sentence modification processes prevents us from drawing confident conclusions on whether decision making in an institutional setting does impart a sense of legitimacy and if it does encourage self-reflection, or, on the contrary, whether this is experienced as going through mandatory administrative motions. Empirical work on the perspectives and experiences of sentence modification in France could, therefore, provide insight into its impact on agency and influence on desistance processes.

This is illustrated, for instance, in the motivations for change shared by participants: English desisters tended to mention fears of losing positive aspects of their lives if they were to reoffend, more specifically if they were to be reconvicted. Change, therefore, was not motivated by imaginations of a better alternative, but by feared scenarios. In the French context, however, change seems

to be fuelled by both projections of feared selves and imaginations of positive alternatives, as evidenced by ambitious goals. The availability of options and opportunities makes these imaginations and ambitions possible, realistic, and attainable. Attention could be paid in the English context, therefore, to social circumstances and increasing people's options, with regard to training, studying, entrepreneurship and employment for instance.

On the flip side, the focus on social circumstances and administrative tasks regarding judicial requirements can be at the detriment of engagement during probation supervision, with discussions on well-being, which is particularly important given the pressures expressed regarding supervision. It may be that the positive relationships found in the French data are in part explained by participants having been inscribed in processes of change before their punishments in the community. In other words, people already motivated to desist may have better relationships with their probation officers, than persistent offenders.

12.7. Concluding Thoughts

This thesis has confirmed that desistance does not simply entail the absence of recidivism, but processes of change involving various factors and influences that lead to reduced reoffending. Certain aspects of these processes are common to desistance in the English and French contexts, in subtly different manner. The findings in this thesis confirm the key argument in Segev's (2020) cross-national comparative analysis, in that there are broad similarities in desistance processes across societies, that underpin more subtle yet important differences, which are telling of characteristics of the national context in which change takes place.

Cross-national research is a valuable tool to explore and learn of the applicability of established theoretical perspectives (Stamatel, 2009). It allows researchers to step away from national boundaries in generating and testing theories (Karstedt, 2001). "It is precisely the range of experiences found in different countries around

the world that allows cross-national research to push the boundaries of criminology” (Stamatel, 2009: 6). A cross-national approach allows us to incorporate considerations of social, historic, economic, cultural, and criminal justice context into our understandings of crime-related issues. It provides perspective and a fresh insight, even in considering a context where there is significant knowledge on social phenomena. For instance, contrasting English experiences and perspectives on probation with the French side allowed to highlight the role of institutional aims in shaping individual considerations of punishment and successful rehabilitation. The comparative aspect of this research allowed us to contrast how different aspects of life in England and France contribute to specific pathways out of crime.

Adopting Farrall and colleagues’ (2011) integrated model of desistance allowed us to consider processes of change beyond the traditional spectrum of agency and structure and including factors on different levels. By doing so, this thesis highlighted the influences of certain societal characteristics onto individual pathways out of crime, controlling for national contexts. The results have demonstrated that processes of desistance are not universal, and that some people in some contexts will have different journeys of change. Illustrated by the final analytical chapter, the thesis highlights the cultural dimensions of desistance from crime, particularly in what it ‘looks’ like to stop offending.

Indeed, the analysis in Chapter 11 allows us to understand the differences in desisters’ daily lives and interpretations of the findings through the lens of culture. Cultural aspects of desistance that have national dimensions were therefore identified in the comparative work. These help us to better understand the societal specificities impacting different pathways of change.

This includes on a relational level, a greater importance given to social networks and relationships in France, shaping a more outward looking, busy desistance journey, as opposed to an inward looking, more passive one in the English

context, as was mentioned above. The identified focus on social factors in explaining the start of participants' offending in their narratives reflect a particular understanding of crime as influenced by socio-economic conditions in France. A culture of individual responsibility is found to be less important in France than in England. In contrast, in England, more focus is given on individual behaviours. The results of the ESS analysis confirm this cultural difference, as it demonstrated higher levels of sociability in France than in England. In a similar vein, there is a notable difference in the importance given to reputation and social image and the desire to blend in with conforming peers. This is an important cultural, national difference which is supported by the ESS findings on levels of conformity, which again, are higher in France. A culture in France where importance is given to conformity, sociability but also benevolence further explains larger social networks, more opportunities for resources, and attention to the identity projected to peers in France, and smaller social networks as well as little weight given to reputation in England.

These cultural differences are also identified in different expectations of a good life and goals, found in higher levels of risk taking, entrepreneurship and professional ambition in the French narratives. This specificity was also found in the narratives of French desisters analysed in Benazeth's (2021) work. This is perhaps the greatest illustration of the cultural differences highlighted in this thesis, as it demonstrates (in the French context) at the same time overcoming socio-economic conditions, the importance of agency, keeping active, maintaining a social life, and performing conformity, which are common national, cultural aspects in pathways of change.

While there is already a breadth of research conducted looking at how different groups of people stop offending, little comparative work was carried out. Further comparative research in different contexts could shine a light on how certain factors have different impact on individual behaviours, allowing us to understand

the role of different influences on desistance pathways. This would give further insight on the specificities of desistance processes for different groups of people, as well as inform and indicate the type of support, interventions, or changes in common mentalities that would be most useful as relevant.

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