

**Turning points and returning points:**

**Understanding the role of family ties in the process of desistance**

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## **Turning points and returning points.**

### **Understanding the role of family ties in the process of desistance**

#### **Abstract**

The objective of this article is to identify the interpersonal factors that explain narratives of desistance among offenders who have been sentenced to prison. Through narrative interviews, we have studied a purposeful age-graded sample of men convicted of acquisitive crimes. Although the results confirm the leading research of Laub and Sampson (2003) about the importance of social bonds as a change catalyst, they also suggest that changes in narratives may not only depend on the participation in new social institutions but also in the new meaning that institutions present during the criminal career of offenders, like family relationships, may acquire in adulthood.

#### **Key words**

narratives of desistance, family, turning points, returning points

## **Introduction**

Research on desistance seems to underline two aspects in the process of changing from a criminal career to a conventional life: a cognitive transformation, which is seen as a type of identity change (Maruna 2001; Giordano et al. 2002; Laub and Sampson 2003) and turning points, which are inter-personal relationships that favour a change of life (Sampson and Laub 1993; Laub and Sampson 2003). Although it seems debatable as to whether subjective changes come first (Giordano et al. 2002; Lebel et al. 2008) or turning points that precede agency (Laub and Sampson, 2003), it may be assumed that both aspects are needed for a successful desistance process (Sampson and Laub 2008). In the present research we assume, as a starting point, that desistance narratives are a necessary step in the process of giving up offending behaviour and this enquiry is focused on the social interactions that may favour those narratives.

When researching social interactions that may favour desistance narratives we are interested both in the institutions that may promote change (family, marriage or partnership, parenthood, work, prison) and in the mechanisms that may explain the relationship between these kinds of interpersonal relations and the desistance narratives. The research is made up of persons who live in a social context which is not common in the principal research (prisoners originally from Spain, the Maghreb, or Latin-America) and some institutions, like family, appear to have a relevance that is rarely mentioned in other desistance studies (but see Bottoms and Shapland 2011; Calverley 2011). In exploring the mechanisms that link the interpersonal relationships with the narratives we used a theoretical framework, which integrates social control, strain and learning theories, trying to uncover which of those theories may be more relevant to explain the process of formation of desistance narratives.

## **Theoretical framework**

The starting point of the research is based on the work of Maruna (2001) who proposes that the transition from a life of offending behaviour to a conventional life requires a cognitive transformation. This cognitive transformation has two relevant dimensions. On the one hand, the person should change identity and be able to construct a pro-social self that contradicts their past lifestyle. On the other hand, the person should demonstrate self-efficacy, the perceived ability to overcome the circumstances that explained past offending behaviour, and carry out the requirements of conventional life (Bandura 1977). Maruna's findings seem very much in agreement with labelling theory: any process of desistance should be based on a self de-labelling process. Self-efficacy seems necessary in order to confront the obstacles foreseen by labelling theory in order to change the labels (Lemert 1967). On the basis of Maruna's work we define a 'narrative of desistance' as one in which a person breaks with past offender identity (identity dimension) and becomes able to fulfil conventional plans (self-efficacy dimension).

The second foundation of the research is based on three main criminological theories that may explain why offenders build a narrative of desistance. First, we take into account control theory (Hirschi 1969) and, in particular, the work of Laub and Sampson (Sampson and Laub 1993; Laub and Sampson 2003), exploring whether the fact that the person has experienced some adult roles (like marriage, job or the military), which have reinforced social bonds and bring about a contradiction with offending. For Laub and Sampson, these new events that occur in the course of life may imply that the person starts moving from an offending to a conventional life style and that is why they should be called 'turning points'. Second, we consider strain theory--or social support

theory- which states narratives of desistance may be dependent on the support the person receive from social networks (Cullen and Wright 1997; Wright, Cullen and Miller 2001). Finally, we focus on learning theory, analysing the acquisition of new social skills in the course of the correctional intervention (McGuire and Priestley 1995; McGuire 2002; Andrews and Bonta 2003) and the giving up relationships that favour offending lifestyles (Warr 1998).

The third foundation of the research is based on the findings of a number of researchers which underline the fact that desistance may be affected both by trajectory and by age. With respect to trajectory, the theory of cumulative disadvantage (Sampson and Laub 1997) shows that the trajectory of persistent offenders tends to be more problematic than those of desisters in many areas (Shover 1985; Burnett 1992; Sampson and Laub 1993; Zamble and Quinsey 1997; Farrall 2002; Laub and Sampson 2003; Bottoms and Shapland 2011). On the other hand, the theories that link age and desistance (Shover 1985, 1996; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Moffit 1993) point to ageing as one of the relevant factors that explains desistance (Glaser 1964; Burnett 1992; Zamble and Quinsey 1997; Uggen 2000). Based on this foundation, we produced an age-graded sample of offenders and to compare persons of similar trajectory.

## **Method**

### *Population and sample*

The research population reflected the most common features of Catalan incarcerated persons. It consisted of men sentenced for ordinary acquisitive crimes (violent and non-violent property offences and drug-dealing offences) in close-regime or open-regime

institutions, or on parole. They were serving the final months of the sentence: a moment in which re-entry into society is likely to be central in the person's thinking.

The aim of the sampling procedure was to obtain two sub-samples, one with desistance narratives and the other with persistence narratives; each with similar age and social background distributions in order to compare them. We wanted to identify the role of social bonds, social supports and learning in the formation of narratives of desistance.

The sample was obtained in two stages. In the first stage, all the offenders in the province of Barcelona whose sentences were ending between April and May 2010 were asked by the penitentiary administration to participate in the research. The second stage targeted offenders to be released between June and October 2010. In this second stage, their consent to participate was selectively asked for from specific profiles of interest (see below). Taking into consideration the two stages, consent rate reached 60.9 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

In the first stage of the fieldwork 47 qualitative interviews were done, targeting a diversity of ages and the type of release. From a pre-analysis of these interviews, a typology with 4 profiles of offenders was constructed using two criteria: onset of offending and age at release. The first three profiles have an early onset of offending in common but they diverge in relation to the age at release (up to 26 years of age, 27-35, and older than 35). The fourth profile differed from the others in that it dealt with the late onset of offending behaviour (after adolescence).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No significant differences were found in consent to participate by age and nationality of inmates. However, consent rate increased to 77,3% in persons ending their sentence in close regime and declined to 47,7% in parolees, which indicates less willingness to be interviewed from inmates with lower probability of recidivism –and, presumably, more prone to have a narrative of desistance.

<sup>2</sup> As stated by one anonymous reviewer, profiles of young offenders, young-adult offenders and drug-abusing adult offenders have many commonalities that could have made it reasonable to collapse them into a simple profile and contrast the result with the profile of late-onset immigrant offenders. However, we have decided to maintain the contrast among those three profiles for the following reasons: first, only in the profile of young offenders have we found the relevance of turning points and, second, in the

In the second stage, 20 additional interviews were done, focusing on those profiles and narratives less present in the first stage, in order to obtain a sufficient variety of narratives (desistance and persistence) within each of the 4 profiles.

After the fieldwork was completed, the typology was more restrictively defined by adding new characteristics that we found most common in each profile. We added the following variables to the those that formed the initial typology: nationality, social origin, education, work record, drug abuse record and extension of criminal career (see table 1). The objective of this procedure was to obtain homogeneous profiles in order to compare narratives of desistance and persistence constructed by persons of similar age and background and thus identify the role played of interpersonal factors (learning, social support, social bonding) in the formation of these narratives.

From the total of 67 interviews, 39 were selected for the present analysis, taking into consideration their correspondence to these typical profiles (although a few cases may differ in a particular characteristic) and in order to obtain a balance between narratives of desistance and persistence in each profile. The rest of interviews were discarded from the analysis because they did not provide new information or because their social and criminal background differed appreciably from the typical profiles considered.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 summarizes the typology analysed.

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narratives of drug-abusing adult offenders the topic of drugs is of more much relevance than in the other two profiles.

<sup>3</sup> For instance: non-immigrant occasional offenders, upper middle-class offenders or offenders with a long criminal record without drug abuse.

**Table 1.** Profiles analyzed.

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Profile A. Young offenders</i>	<i>Profile B. Young-adult offenders</i>	<i>Profile C. Adults (drug- abusers) offenders</i>	<i>Profile D. Late onset offenders</i>
<b>No of interviews</b>	8	10	10	11
<b>Age at release</b>	Up to 26	27-35	Older than 35	26 to 45
<b>Onset of offending</b>	Criminal career from late childhood or adolescence.			Late onset of delinquency (after immigration)
<b>Nationality</b>	Spanish/foreigner	Spanish		Foreigner or nationalized (immigrants)
<b>Social origin</b>	Poverty / working class / lower middle-class.			
<b>Education</b>	School dropout, without school diploma.			Primary or secondary school.
<b>Work record</b>	Medium length	Short length		Long length
<b>Drug abuse record</b>	Yes			No / Occasional
<b>Criminal career</b>	Long			Short

Table 2 compares the analyzed sample with the population released between April and July 2010.<sup>4</sup> The data shows that the sample reflects the diversity of population with respect to nationality, type of offence and type of release. However, the younger population is overrepresented in the sample in order to focus on mechanisms of desistance in different stages of the transition to adulthood.

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<sup>4</sup> Although research participants were released from prison between April and October, available data on the released population was only comprised of the April-July period. However, there is no reason to believe that the two populations are different.



**Table 2.** Sample and population distribution

		Sample	Population expiring prison sentence in the province of Barcelona (April- July 2010)
Age at release	Up to 26	23,1%	16,7%
	27-35	43,6%	35,2%
	Older than 35	33,3%	48,1%
	Mean age	33,56	36,28
Nationality	Spanish	59,0%	58,2%
	Foreigner	41,0%	41,8%
Offence	Property	69,2%	60,0%
	Drug traffic	20,5%	31,2%
	Property & Drug traffic	10,3%	8,8%
Type of release	Close regime	43,6%	46,4%
	Open regime	30,8%	25,8%
	Parole	25,6%	24,8%
	Not classified	-%	3,0%
Total		100,0% (39)	100,0% (330)

Source: Catalan Prison administration (SIPC).

### *Research instruments*

We used the narrative interview to achieve two aims. First, following Maruna (2001), we analyzed how interviewees evaluate their lives and construct their narratives (Gadd and Farrall, 2004). Second, following Laub and Sampson (2003), we used the interview as a means of obtaining information about past and recent life events of participants, as well as determining the context in which these events took place. This double approach allowed us to analyze both objective and subjective factors related to the formation of narratives of narratives.

The interviews consisted of three main blocks: (1) biography of the interviewees (aimed at knowing the trajectory in different areas: family, neighbourhood, education, work record, leisure, drugs, offending behaviour and prison); (2) experience of the last sentenced served (relationships with other inmates, relationships with prison

and parole officers, education, training and treatment, relationships with family, friends and with members of voluntary organizations, time in prison and time outside prison in the case of pre-release or early release prisoners); (3) projects and perspectives after the expiration of their sentence. In order to improve the timing of events in the life course (family, residence, education, job, drug abuse, time served in prison), participants completed an additional life-history calendar (Freedman et al. 1988; Laub and Sampson 2003).

### *Analysis*

A thematic content analysis of the interviews was conducted on the basis of pre-defined categories, which were enhanced while the work progressed. These categories covered the following topics: (1) trajectory (family and social origin, neighbourhood and peers, education, work record, migration, drugs and health, criminal career and prison record); (2) learning (education and work programs, treatment programs, relationships with prison professionals); (3) social support (partner and family, employment, peers, social organizations, state provisions); (4) social bonds (partner and family, employment, peers, social organizations); and (5) narratives (conventionality and the breakdown of the criminal identity –identity dimension–; control over fulfilling conventional plans and strategies for maintaining changes –self-efficacy dimension–).

Although a conventional life-project is a commonality in the discourses of participants, narratives analysed differ in other categories as shown in Table 3. Analysis was focused on concretising the mechanisms that link the narratives with the other factors considered in the research.

**Table 3.** Desistance and persistence narratives.

	Narratives of desistance	Narratives of persistence
(i) Breakdown of criminal identity.	Breakdown with the offending life style from the perspective of maturation: "Look, this morning I put on Facebook that I regret, I don't regret everything I've done, but I wouldn't go back and redo everything I've done in my life. A life of craziness, a life of <i>apathy</i> , of, of <i>unawareness</i> , I prefer my life now, <i>ordered</i> , and ((?)) to put it like that or something" (E200, Young-adult offender)	Persistence of offending identity: "To be a person ... normal, like everyone else, but go evolving little by little, ((?)) well, well until you get into the world of work ...it's tough, it's tough I can tell you...it's tough <i>but if you don't look for it</i> ..Who says that ... you see a camera, you see a bag, you see a mobile phone, you see a jacket... and they're not going to tempt you. If you've ever thieved, how are you not going to be tempted? Of course I'm tempted, of course I'm going to take it ... if you ((wait)) then you take it, <i>but if... you can avoid it, it's better.</i> " (E148, Young offender)
(ii) Control over fulfilling conventional plans	Future depends on own decisions: "Yeah, I've managed it. Thank God I'm strong; well <i>thank me</i> , because I don't even believe in God [smiles]. I'm... psychologically I'm strong, I'm really capable and... everything I've done up to now I've done it myself. All the improvements, they're not because my folks said don't do that I didn't do it. I did it because... I know it's good for me. I mean, people can talk and you can listen, or you hear them, but at the end of the day you don't change until you really realise what's going on, and I realised". (E363, Young-adult offender)	Future depends on circumstances: "...there's a saying 'never say never', but I never say that, my intention is not to go back to prison, my aim, right? Is to be with my partner, with my mum doing things as good as I can and if I have to ask for help for something or from some centre, or whatever, I'll ask for help. I don't know how long I will be free. My intention is to last the rest of my life, but it depends on the circumstances...) so..." " (E213, Young-adult offender)
(iii) Strategies for keeping change	Strategies oriented to conventional projects: "Yeah, every day, going out to look for a job, because every time I tried to work, I've worked and now I'm...looking for a job and courses, I've signed up for a few courses" (E206, Immigrant with late onset).	Lack of strategies. Many obstacles foreseen to achieve conventional projects: " <i>A guy comes out of prison and he's served 5 years and they chuck him out in the street and say, get on with it! Get yourself a life! Get yourself a flat if you want to have your kids, get a job and fight to survive. Someone with no education, without nothing, who's wasted 5 years in prison, ends his sentence and it's, like, get on with it! You chuck him out in the street and hey! He's got his life all sorted out (.)</i> (E217, Drug-abuser adult offender).

## **Results**

### *Narratives and interpersonal factors (profile summary)*

*Young offenders.* These participants, under 27 years old, some of which were Spanish, some of which were immigrants, grew up mostly in poor families and in criminogenic neighbourhoods. They started to offend mostly in late childhood or during early adolescence with older peers. During adolescence offending seems related to obtaining money for leisure activities. Although all these young people report having used alcohol and illegal drugs, the majority did not feel they were addicted to drugs. They have served short to medium (1-5 years) prison sentences and almost all of them had participated in rehabilitation programmes and have benefited from early release.

Although most of the men had romantic relationships during late adolescence or early adulthood, only those who became engaged to a woman who required them to change their lives reported that the new relationship was a turning point in their lives:

She's been with me a long time and she's put up with a lot and I dunno...it's worth fighting for, I quit stealing and all, I mean I am where I am 'cos of her, actually...because if not I wouldn't care, I haven't got any folks! (...) and yeah I've got my girlfriend now and she's helped me and I'd feel like I was betraying her if I let her down. (E80, Young offender)

The participants with narratives of desistance related many changes in their lives since these partner relationships began: they started to work, they changed peers, they had an active life while in prison (working, taking part in education and training programmes), they improved their relationships with their families and received their

families support, and they earned early release. All of these factors seem to have contributed to the participants' feelings of self-efficacy:

My supervisors [prison supervisors] have been good to me, they have helped, you know (...) Because they know than I'm a person that ... I've done bad things, but I haven't been doing bad things always. I've done robberies, I've done them and I've paid for them. That's it. And they've seen that I've behaved well inside, that I haven't misbehaved, nothing, that I've been able to manage things, that I've been working, that I've never been late, always on time. Then they realized that I'm really a person that can be released. And I got article 86.4 [home detention curfew]. (E28, Young offender)

*Young-adult offenders.* This group is composed of Spanish participants in early adulthood. Sharing some aspects of social background with the previous group and also with the early onset of delinquency. Most of this group had an intensive criminal career and had spent a relevant part of their young adulthood in prison.

Turning points (due to new romantic partner or another factor) did not appear in the participants' transition from adolescence to adulthood and later the emergence of turning points was made difficult by the long imprisonments they suffered. However, during imprisonment participants with a narrative of desistance seemed to have experienced a moment of reflection preceded by situations that were not exceptional in prison life (entering into prison, a fight in prison, a conversation over the consequences of drug abuse) that produced an awareness of the consequences of their behaviours and a will to change:

I spoke with the psychologist, I explained my life to her, know what I mean? I... just after entering into prison, I said to her: I have a problem with drugs, you

see? I have a problem, I need help, I need help, please help me. Is there a rehabilitation unit for drug abusers? 'Unit 8', she said. Ok, please send me there. I don't care if I have to serve my whole sentence in prison, but I can't go back out on the street again this way. (E200, young-adult offender)

The key question is why the participants with a narrative of persistence did not develop this moment of reflection as a starting point in the process of change during imprisonment. The desistance narratives suggest that these processes of reflection and the further change actions taken by participants had not developed in a vacuum, but occurred in a context in which they had the support of their families (parents and siblings). What the families did for participants during imprisonment (visits, material support, emotional support) seem to have contributed to the will of the persons to change as a way of compensating them for their suffering:

... just after being released my brother said to me: 'I promised myself that all my worries would finish when you were released'. Hearing this from my brother broke my heart and I felt like shit. Because, Jesus, *it's not only you is (.)It's everything (...)* And then you're released and you realise all the consequences of your shit, your behaviour, that's when you say, 'Fuck it, *I'm going to do it for me and for them*'. (E338, young-adult offender).

In contrast, the participants with a narrative of persistence had not benefited from these supportive families during imprisonment. In some cases the relationships had been broken, and in other cases, the participants had felt discarded by their families. The fact that the participants regretted the lack of support from their families during imprisonment may explain why the motivation to change did not emerge:

If I had a different family, if my parents hadn't divorced (...) If I could find support, support from someone, even for five-minutes, support from someone, this would help me. But I know that I'm not going to get this support. Not from my father, even if I go to his house, not from my mother, not from my brother, not from anyone (E58, young-adult offender).

After the motivation to change occurred, the participants with a narrative of desistance enrolled in programmes directed at facing their drug problems and, in some cases, their needs to control impulsivity. At some point of the sentence they received release and benefited from a job they found on their own, or that was provided for them by the correctional system. Although these persons considered that rehabilitation is something that they should be given credit for, not the correctional system, the narratives illustrate that the opportunities given by the correctional system increased their feelings of self-efficacy:

Well, really... society, with respect to this rehabilitation stuff, it's been thanks to me; they haven't helped me in any way. In no way. The only thing they've done is to pressure me. When I got open regime, they said to me, well, if you don't find work in two weeks, we will give you a job. You'll earn 600 € and you'll work who knows how many hours. So, they haven't helped me in any way. The only help I've gotten has been from me. I'm a person that knows how to manage things, and I am very stubborn and I get what I want, that's it. (E363, Young-adult offender).

*Drug-abuser adult offenders.* This group, mostly about 40 year olds, grew up in neighbourhoods in the metropolitan area of Barcelona which suffered from high levels

of drugs and crime in the 1980s. Most participants have spent a significant part of their adult life in prison, and drug abuse, with its corresponding negative effects on their current health (most of them suffer from illnesses such as HIV, hepatitis or mental disorders), was a central topic of their past and present. Romantic relationships existed for all of the participants (some of them are parents), but these relationships had usually been broken due to drug abuse and entering into prison. It seems quite relevant for the narratives that a few of the participants had been able to maintain these relationships during imprisonment.

Some of the participants took part in programmes aimed at overcoming drug addiction during their present prison sentence and were able to quit drugs, obtain early release, and finish their sentences with a narrative of desistance. Others, with very similar trajectories, did not take part in these programmes (or they took part in them but did not benefit) and they ended their sentences with a narrative of persistence.

The participants with a narrative of desistance developed this change attitude within the context of families and/or partners who were very supportive:

... you have to take things into account and of course my wife has more importance, my family has more importance - my parents, who have never abandoned me. (E119, drug-abuser adult offender).

In contrast, participants who failed to develop this attitude to change did not benefit from a supportive family during imprisonment and, with the perspective of release, did not feel attached enough to their families and they feel ashamed of accepting the help the family could provide them with after release:

The bond with the family has been lost! Know what I mean? Waking up and going to sleep with your family for twenty years is not the same as seeing your



family for twenty years through the window, once a week - the weeks they can come, and for only twenty minutes! It's not the same! The bond gets lost!

(...) if I have to be dependent on my parents I'll go and steal again, because I'm not able to go to my mother and say 'Mum, give me'... I'm not able to do that, I feel ashamed. I can't say that to her! (E53, drug-abuser adult offender).

*Late-onset immigrant offenders.* These participants, all immigrants, were born in non-criminogenic neighbourhoods, and did not report offending during childhood or early adolescence. They immigrated (alone) to Spain and all of them had work records in the years after immigration. Participants reported periods of unemployment as a factor related to offending (drug problems are absent from this profile). They were serving their first prison sentences, and once released, some of them may face problems of legal residence.

We found two alternative factors than may explain the narratives of desistance among these participants. The first consists of persons that were married (or cohabitated with a significant other) before starting to serve their prison sentence and during imprisonment they had the support of their wives or partners. The participants feel that their commitment to their wives and children is, at least partially, a compensation for the support from their wives, who have accepted the offending behaviour and the imprisonment of participants:

When I was arrested, the first thing that came to my mind was: and if she leaves me? I thought: ok, if she leaves me, she leaves me. Once I've served the sentence, I'll visit the children, if I work, I will pay them something. This was my thinking. But it was just the opposite. The wife ...didn't let me down, not one day. Every Saturday, every Saturday of my whole sentence. Look, I don't

know...if I'm different or if she's different but... it's not normal. I've seen people sentenced to... one year... and they were abandoned, after 20 o 30 years of marriage. In my case, we had only been together one and a half years. (E360, Late-onset immigrant offender).

A second factor that may explain the narratives of desistance is the support that participants may have in finding a job. Two reasons seem to make it understandable that the fact of having support in finding a job after the expiration of the sentence may be enough for the persons with this profile to achieve a sense of self-efficacy in order to fulfil their conventional plans. First, the fact of having migrated to get a job and long work records produce a worker identity. Second, ethnic social resources seem to be of major importance.

The narratives of persistence were more prominent among those participants who neither feel bonded to a wife or children, nor do they have family support to find a job after the expiration of the sentence. In those cases, peer networks were the main sources of finding employment. However, the subjects that rely on these networks do not have full confidence in carrying out their conventional plans, because they are also aware that peer networks may be also a source for criminal opportunities and see the lack of legal permission to work as a relevant obstacle to desistance.

### **Explanatory model of narratives of desistance**

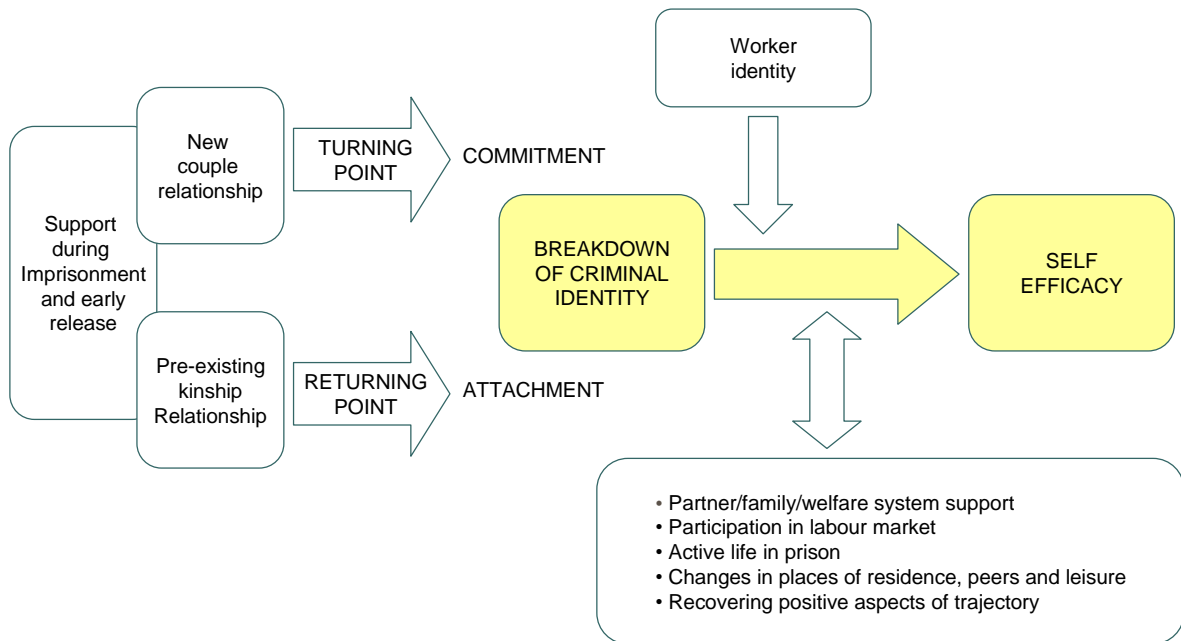
Although there are observed differences among the four profiles, the formation of narratives of desistance presents some commonalities that may be summarized as follows.

### *Role of social bonds*

The research has found two different kinds of social bond that seem to act as a catalyst in the formation of narratives of desistance. The first bond consists of a new partner relationship with a woman who disapproves of the participants offending behaviour. The value the participants give to keeping this kind of relationship explains the motivation to make some life changes that are then reflected in narratives. The new partner relationship is one example of what developmental criminology has called *turning points* (Sampson and Laub 1993). The second bond consists of pre-existing relationships with the nuclear family (parents and siblings) or partners who were not able to prevent participants from offending in the past but now, under new circumstances, these relationships acquired a relevant role in the process of the construction of a narrative of desistance. These new circumstances consist of the supportive role of the family and partners during imprisonment that may influence the participants to make some life changes, at least in part, to compensate family/partners for their effort and suffering during imprisonment.

We call these kinds of social bonds *returning points*. Returning points are different from turning points in two aspects. Returning points are pre-existing rather than new social bonds. In addition, the mechanism that produces motivation to change is compensation for the supportive role of the pre-existing relationship rather than maintaining a new relationship. Although there are different social bonds that may explain the origin of desistance narratives, the dynamic that takes place afterwards, as reflected in figure 1, are similar in both turning and returning points.

**Figure 1.** Formation of narratives of desistance



The role of social bonds is two-fold. On the one hand, they explain the motivation of the person to change, this being the more relevant element for the change of identity (breaking with the past and the building of a conventional identity). On the other hand, through this process of a change of identity, the social bonds allow the person to mobilize other factors that may be present in the process of transition from prison to community that contribute to the feeling of self-efficacy in achieving conventional aims. The most common of these factors are the following: (1) getting the support of the family/partner during the re-entry process (complementing the support from state welfare ); (2) taking advantage of work opportunities; (3) having an active life in prison: taking part in training and treatment (when needed), establishing good relationships with prison personnel and achieving early release; (4) changing peers, places of leisure and place of residence; (5) recovering positives aspects of one’s past life that may favour change.

### *Role of supports*

We have found three main kinds of support: job, family and state welfare. With respect to jobs, most persons with a narrative of desistance have had some periods of job experience since they started their process of change. It seems then that the job experience, at least for persons able to work, was a necessary element in the construction of a narrative of desistance, and in particular in the perception of self-efficacy.

With respect to the support of the family and partners two situations should be distinguished. When support comes from a person with whom the person feels bonded (the partner who was a turning point in the life of participants or the family or partner that assumed a supportive role during imprisonment), then this support contributes to increasing the self-efficacy of the person and, in particular, the confidence of succeeding in his conventional plans, in spite of the objective obstacles (such as unemployment) that the person may face. However, when the support foreseen by the participant would be provided by a member of his family that has not taken a supportive role during imprisonment, then the person feels ashamed about the need to ask for family help. Support may be accepted as a temporary help, but it does not contribute to the confidence of the person in reaching his conventional aims.

Finally, support from the state in the form of benefits for released prisoners who are unemployed and other benefits for persons with some type of work disability was also useful in increasing the confidence of the persons to achieve their conventional plans of life. However, when the participant who receives these supports is not bonded to family or partner then the person does not feel confident in achieving their conventional aims.

The conclusion that we may reach with respect to the role of supports in the construction of narratives of desistance is that they are a necessary element in building a feeling of self-efficacy but that they may only play this role when the person that receives support is also bonded with family, a partner, or both, though this may be an exception with the immigrant population of the sample. In this case, the fact of not having a criminal trajectory during adolescence and having constructed a worker identity seems related to the fact that the support may be enough to build a narrative of change.

### *Role of learning*

With respect to learning within the context of correctional intervention the research has provided two main findings. The first one is that correctional intervention helps to build a narrative of desistance, in particular in the dimension of self-efficacy. Some examples of the positive contribution of correctional intervention are: perceptions of having more skills (education and training programmes); perceptions of increasing their employability (diplomas obtained in prison); perceptions of being able to overcome criminogenic needs (treatment programmes, like the ones focused on drug-addiction); and perceptions of being able to succeed (early release programmes). The second finding is that only those who are previously motivated to change take benefit from participation in these types of programmes and the positive effects are reflected in the narratives. Similar to other resources that can be mobilized by participants, learning produced within the context of correctional intervention is not catalyst of change but it is a fundamental element in the building narratives of change.

### *Role of trajectory and age*

With respect to trajectory, the inter profiles comparison makes it clear that, in agreement with the theory of cumulative disadvantage (Sampson and Laub 1997), in the late-onset profile, in which there persons have been able to avoid a criminal identity, social supports to overcome obstacles may be enough to build a narrative of desistance. However, in the profiles with an early-onset of offending, for the construction of a narrative of desistance a more intense number of factors and socials bonds as a catalyst of change seems needed.

With respect to the role of age, the idea of having an age-graded sample came from the idea that ageing may be a factor that favours a narrative of desistance. The more consistent finding we have found in this respect is that “returning points”, based on the new meaning that the family or partner acquires for the persons because of their supporting role during imprisonment, appeared only in the profiles of young-adult and adult offenders, but not in young offenders. This finding suggests that some pathways to narratives of desistance may more easily be activated by more mature persons.

### **Discussion**

In this final section we focus on the implications of the present research for the theory of desistance as well as its policy implications and the limitations of the research.

### *Theoretical remarks*

With respect to the theoretical implications of the research we should explore if our findings should be considered as a replication of the theory of desistance by Laub and Sampson (2003). According to these authors, ‘... most offenders desist in response to structurally induced turning points that serve as the catalyst for sustaining long-term

behavioural change' (Laub and Sampson 2003: 149). Two main points deserve discussion: Are returning points a type of turning points? Why are returning points relevant in our research and not in Laub and Sampson's research?

If turning points need be something new in the life-cycle (such as marital relationships, job and military) then returning points, which imply an interaction with an institution already present in the life of the person like family or a partner, should be considered as something different from turning points. However, we think that institutions like family or a marriage partner may have different meanings for persons in diverse moments of their life: one thing is the family in childhood or adolescence, in which parenting is the relevant role, and another thing is the family in adulthood for persons that have been imprisoned for several years, in which the supporting role may be of primary importance. Pre-existing relationships (family or a partner) might then be considered as a turning point if they are able to produce explanatory mechanisms similar to being involved in new institutions such as marital relationships or a stable job.

What we have found in our research with respect to returning points is that the motivation to start a change emerges in a context in which the person feels a moral duty to change as a compensation for all the family or partner support during imprisonment (see Calverley 2011 for similar results). Although there are probably differences in the main mechanisms that activate the process of change (commitment in turning points and attachment in returning points) in both cases the social control theory (Hirschi 1969) operates as a framework for understanding those changes. Similar to turning points, returning points are not a determinant of a change but a factor that may mean the person experiences some conventional roles (job or family responsibilities) which allow narratives of desistance to emerge (Bottoms 2006; Sampson and Laub 2008).



The second theoretical question we would address is why turning points are the main factor in explaining desistance in Laub and Sampson's research, while in the present research turning points explain narratives of desistance for young offenders but returning points are more relevant to understand narratives of desistance for young adult and adult offenders. There are two complementary answers to this question. On the one hand, the sample in Laub and Sampson (2003) also included non-imprisoned offenders, our sample was composed of only imprisoned offenders who could have had fewer opportunities to encounter turning points (Sampson and Laub 1993). On the other hand, it should be taken into account that this research has been carried out in a social context in which the degree to which families look after the welfare of members is one of the highest of the western world (Esping-Andersen 1999). Probably, the idea that parents have the moral obligation to provide for the needs their sons and daughters, even when they become adults, may imply that its role as a source of engaging offenders in their moral reflection on the need to change in return for the support provided may be more powerful than in other contexts in which the role of the family as 'perpetual provider' may be less prevalent (Martinez and Abrams 2011). The more or less relevance of the family in different contexts give credit to the theorist that require to take into account structural factors of desistance (Farrall et al. 2010).

### *Limitations*

Regarding the limitations of the research we considered the following as the most relevant. First, this is a study about narratives *of* desistance, rather than *about* desistance, and we could bring any evidence to the present study that the persons with narrative of desistance at the end of their prison sentences would desist in the future. We are currently engaged in research concerning the interaction between narratives of

desistance and desistance. Second, this being a cross-sectional qualitative research, our results are devoted to enlightening pathways to narratives of desistance. Further research is needed to make causal inferences about them. Third, due to the retrospective character of this research, all the explanations about the formation of the narratives of desistance are exclusively based on the story constructed by interviewer. Fourth, the research population most likely to have a desistance narrative (those prisoners who end their prison sentence on parole) were less willing to participate in the research and this may have obscured some other pathways to desistance. Finally, the research is limited to profiles analysed and other differences may have emerged had other profiles among the sample been considered, or if the sample had included other kind of offences or women.

### *Policy Implications*

Moving on to the policy implications of this research we have devised the following three ideas. First of all, the fact that turning points are not in our sample the more common pathway to narratives of desistance may be seen as a consequence of having spent a very large proportion of their (adult) lives in prison. As Sampson and Laub (1993) state, imprisonment may be criminogenic because it reduces the possibilities of establishing adult social bonds that may promote desistance. Our findings confirm this view and may be read as favouring alternative punishments that do not interfere with turning point opportunities.

The second policy implication consists of promoting strategies with imprisoned offenders that favour the emergence of returning points. As other research has highlighted family visits seem effective in the reduction of recidivism (Mears et al. 2011) and many authors suggest that the involvement of the family in the supervision

process may be effective in preventing reoffending (see Shapiro and diZerega 2010; Vogelvang and Aphen 2010; Trotter 2010). A key point in our research is the fact that most of participants who ended their sentence with a narrative of persistence did not feel bonded (or felt weakly bonded) to their families. Policies should promote families adopting a supporting role as a way of increasing the motivation to change in the offender. The most critical point of these policies is intervening with offenders who have lost their family or have broken off their relationships with them (Mills and Codd, 2008). In the cases where relationships can not be repaired, it may be that persons or organizations from the community could act as an alternative family to the offender.

The final point concerns correctional intervention with the offender. Our participants with a narrative of desistance underlined that their families and partners were proud of their efforts to change. This finding suggests that in order to strengthen the social bonds between the offender and their family and to favour the appearance of returning points, the process should also start with correctional interventions aimed at promoting change in the offender: participation in treatment, education or training, or working inside or outside prison which may be seen by the family as an effort to change and as a result improve the family's social bond with the offender.

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