Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

by

Adelle (Poppy) Edwards, BA (Hons)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Psychology (Forensic)

Deakin University

March, 2015
I am the author of the thesis entitled:

Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Psychology (Forensic)

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

Full Name: Adelle (Poppy) Edwards

Signed: [Signature Redacted by Library]

Date: July 23, 2015
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I certify the following about the thesis entitled:

Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Psychology (Forensic)

a. I am the creator of all or part of the whole work(s) (including content and layout) and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

b. The work(s) are not in any way a violation or infringement of any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person.

c. That if the work(s) have been commissioned, sponsored or supported by any organisation, I have fulfilled all of the obligations required by such contract or agreement.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

Full Name: Adelle (Poppy) Vivienne Edwards

Signed: [Signature Redacted by Library]

Date: March 15, 2015
Acknowledgements

The seed for this project was planted long before its fruition and I am grateful to those who have inspired, shaped and guided me along this path. I am appreciative of the opportunities given to me that have made it possible to complete this project and that have afforded me the privilege of writing the voices of the participant young men into the ongoing discourse. This thesis would not have materialised without the preparedness of the young men to share their stories and I wish them the success they aspire to as they forge forward in life. Further, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Department of Justice, Department of Human Services, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Bridge Project and Brimbank City Council for supporting the research.

Thank you Dr Terry Bartholomew for your supervision in the initial stages of the project. Your encouragement, insight and wealth of knowledge were invaluable in developing the foundational ideas in this thesis. I am most appreciative of the supervision of Professor David Mellor who kept the project and the pursuit of my research interests alive. Thank you for pushing me beyond my limitations and maintaining the momentum of the research process. I gratefully acknowledge your commitment to my academic endeavours, in partnership with the supervision of Dr Tess Knight. Thank you both for your support and constructive comment.

Thank you to my friends and family who have shared this large undertaking with me and provided endless encouragement and inspiration. I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents who have given so much of themselves so that I may grow and achieve.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. i

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. ii

List of Appendices............................................................................................................ vi

List of Tables and Figures ............................................................................................... vii

Abstract ............................................................................................................................ viii

Overview of the thesis ....................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Introduction to the research .......................................................................... 3
  1.1 Summary ................................................................................................................... 6

Chapter 2: A dynamic approach to crime ....................................................................... 8
  2.1 The life course paradigm ......................................................................................... 8
  2.2 The transition to adulthood ................................................................................... 9
  2.3 Offending from a developmental framework ....................................................... 13
  2.4 Summary ................................................................................................................ 15

Chapter 3: Conceptualising the risk process for offending .......................................... 16
  3.1 The developmental taxonomy of antisocial behaviour ....................................... 16
  3.2 Cumulative disadvantage ..................................................................................... 18
  3.3 Age-graded theory of informal social control ..................................................... 19
  3.4 Untangling subjective and social factors ............................................................... 20
  3.5 Psychosocial adjustment in a context of risk ....................................................... 21
  3.6 The process of desistance ......................................................................................... 23
  3.7 Exploring the lifeworld and narratives of offending ........................................... 25
    3.7.1 The subjectivity of the offending lifeworld ..................................................... 25
    3.7.2 Self-narratives of offending ........................................................................... 31
  3.8 Summary ................................................................................................................ 36

Chapter 4: Methodology and methods .......................................................................... 38
  4.1 Research aim and purpose ..................................................................................... 38
  4.2 Qualitative psychology .......................................................................................... 38
  4.3 Foundations and philosophical underpinnings ..................................................... 39
4.4 Phenomenological psychology ................................................................. 42
4.5 Narrative theory ....................................................................................... 44
4.6 A narrative-phenomenology research design ......................................... 48
  4.6.1 Reflexive engagement ......................................................................... 49
  4.6.2 Narrative content and form ................................................................. 49
  4.6.3 Narrative identity ................................................................................ 50
  4.6.4 Thematic priorities and relationships ................................................... 50
  4.6.5 Synthesis of findings ......................................................................... 51
4.7 Summary .................................................................................................. 51

Chapter 5: Research protocol ....................................................................... 52
  5.1 Participant selection and recruitment ..................................................... 52
  5.2 Description of the data collection sites ................................................ 55
  5.3 Data collection ....................................................................................... 56
  5.4 Participant characteristics ..................................................................... 59
  5.5 Data analysis ........................................................................................ 60
  5.6 Demonstrating validity ......................................................................... 61
    5.6.1 Sensitivity to context ....................................................................... 61
    5.6.2 Commitment and rigour ................................................................... 62
    5.6.3 Coherence and transparency ............................................................. 62
    5.6.4 Impact and importance ................................................................... 62
  5.7 Summary ................................................................................................ 63

Chapter 6: Researcher positioning .............................................................. 64

Chapter 7: Presentation of findings ............................................................. 66
  7.1 Key theoretical constructs for making sense of participant accounts .......... 66
    7.1.1 Positioning theory .......................................................................... 66
    7.1.2 Bourdieu’s theory of social practice ............................................... 68
      Capital ..................................................................................................... 68
      Field, habitus and practice .................................................................... 69
  7.2 Superordinate themes and their constituent themes ................................ 70
    7.2.1 Critical positions ........................................................................... 70
      7.2.1.1 Institutional competence ............................................................ 71
      7.2.1.2 Funneled down and out ............................................................. 75
      7.2.1.3 Social connection ..................................................................... 79
    7.2.2 Inherent risk .................................................................................. 83
      7.2.2.1 Place ........................................................................................ 84
      7.2.2.2 Culture .................................................................................... 86
7.2.2.3 Relationships ........................................................................................................... 88
7.2.3 Detachment .................................................................................................................. 93
7.2.3.1 Alienation .................................................................................................................. 93
7.2.3.2 Distress ....................................................................................................................... 95
7.2.3.3 Derailment .................................................................................................................. 97
7.2.4 The dynamics of antisocial behaviour ......................................................................... 98
  7.2.4.1 The game .................................................................................................................. 98
  7.2.4.2 Place and belonging ................................................................................................. 101
  7.2.4.3 The club ................................................................................................................... 104
7.2.5 A successful project ..................................................................................................... 107
  7.2.5.1 Wrong is right ....................................................................................................... 107
  7.2.5.2 Limits and resistance .............................................................................................. 111
  7.2.5.3 Desistance .............................................................................................................. 117
7.3 Master offending and non-offending narratives ............................................................... 128
  7.3.1 Offending narrative one: Oppression ......................................................................... 130
  7.3.2 Offending narrative two: Sidetracked ........................................................................ 135
  7.3.3 Offending narrative three: Criminal .......................................................................... 137
  7.3.4 Offending narrative four: Pressure ........................................................................... 140
  7.3.5 Offending narrative five: Dissonance ......................................................................... 144
  7.3.6 Offending narrative six: Failure .................................................................................. 149
  7.3.7 Non-offending narrative one: Control ........................................................................ 153
  7.3.8 Non-offending narrative two: Holding on ................................................................... 158
  7.3.9 Non-offending narrative three: Reversal ..................................................................... 161
7.4 Summary ......................................................................................................................... 164

Chapter 8: Discussion ........................................................................................................... 165
8.1 Re-conceptualising the risk process for offending .......................................................... 165
8.2 A positioning theory of crime ........................................................................................ 167
  8.2.1 Moderating factors ..................................................................................................... 170
    Agency .............................................................................................................................. 170
    Cultural capital .................................................................................................................. 170
    Personal competence ........................................................................................................ 172
    Individuated self ................................................................................................................. 172
    Seeking–accepting support ............................................................................................... 173
    Master non-offending narratives ...................................................................................... 174
  8.2.2 Erosion factors .......................................................................................................... 174
    Detachment ...................................................................................................................... 175
    Psychological distress ....................................................................................................... 176
Substance use ......................................................................................................................... 176
Bullying ................................................................................................................................. 177
Transience ............................................................................................................................. 178
High disruption family conflict ............................................................................................ 179
Absence of a regulating figure ............................................................................................. 180
Master offending narratives ................................................................................................. 180

8.2.3 The movement toward and/or away from offending ...................................................... 183

8.3 Implications of the research ............................................................................................ 185

8.3.1 The risk factor prevention paradigm ........................................................................... 186

8.3.2 Reflexive policy and practice: Prevention and intervention ........................................ 189

8.4 Methodological considerations ....................................................................................... 193

8.5 Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 196

References .............................................................................................................................. 198

Appendices ............................................................................................................................. 216
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval.......................... 217
Appendix B: Justice Human Research Ethics Committee Approval ........................................... 218
Appendix C: Corrections Victoria Research Committee Approval .................................................. 219
Appendix D: Department of Human Services Research Coordinating Committee Approval......... 220
Appendix E: Organisation Invitation to Assist Research: Plain Language Statement.................... 221
Appendix F: Organisational Consent Form................................................................................. 225
Appendix G: Organisations/Justice System Research Flyer .......................................................... 227
Appendix H: General Public Research Flyer ............................................................................... 228
Appendix I: Participant Plain Language Statement ...................................................................... 229
Appendix J: Participant Plain Language Statement (Corrections Victoria).................................. 231
Appendix K: Participant Consent Form ....................................................................................... 233
Appendix L: Timeline of Significant Life Experiences Worksheet............................................... 234
List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Alleged Offenders Processed by Age in Victoria, Australia 2012/13 and 2013/14 ............... 4
Table 1: Continuum and Examples of Agency ...................................................................................... 33
Table 2: Forms of Positioning in the Dialogical Self ............................................................................. 67
Table 3: Superordinate Themes and their Constituent Themes .............................................................. 71
Table 4: Master Offending and Non-offending Narratives .................................................................. 129
Figure 2: A Schematic Representation of a Positioning Theory of Crime ........................................... 169
Abstract

A consistent finding of positivist research is the strong relationship between age and crime that suggests for most young people offending is a process of change that takes place in parallel with the transition to adulthood. However, most criminological research has failed to integrate knowledge of crime with age-graded transitions in the life course. While dynamic developmental approaches to crime address the complexity of offending more adequately than static non-developmental approaches, they have produced deterministic understandings of risk factor influence. Developmental theories have further neglected the liminal status of young people and the concomitant disparities of power in social life, rendering youth a marginalised group. Few studies have given a voice to this group in order to understand how young people experience, interpret and make sense of their personal context of risk as they forge their path in life. Using an innovative narrative-phenomenological approach, this research analysed 69 narrative accounts from emerging adult men in an exploration of the phenomenological experience of moving toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions. A re-conceptualisation of the risk process was an outcome of this research, from which a positioning theory of crime was developed to explain more comprehensively the causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted and conduce to offending behaviour. The proposed model offers a theoretical framework that has practical application in contexts related to working with young people.
Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 situates the research topic within the broad area of the sociological and psychological study of criminality. It establishes the limits of current research and theory and sets out the scope and aim of the study with the purpose of expanding current knowledge in the field.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide the background to the research. More specifically, Chapter 2 establishes the context for studying the processes of offending in parallel with the developmental process of the transition to adulthood. Thus, the life course paradigm that underpins a developmental theoretical approach to crime is explicated, the distinguishing features of the transition to adulthood are defined and offending from a developmental framework is discussed. Chapter 3 conducts a review of pertinent research and theory and attempts to provide some organisation to the literature by pulling together threads in a conceptualisation of the risk process that considers: (a) divergent offending trajectories, (b) the impact of life events and disruptions on patterns of offending over the life course; and thus, (c) the onset, maintenance and desistance phases of offending.

Chapters 4 and 5 return to the aim of the research and outline the narrative-phenomenological approach adopted to fulfil the research purpose. Attention is given to the philosophical assumptions underpinning the theoretical perspective, the translation of the methodology into specific methods and procedures, and the criteria for methodological rigour that demonstrates the validity of the research findings.

Chapter 6 details a reflexive account of the researcher’s positioning that acknowledges the way in which the subjectivity and discursive positioning of the researcher influences the particular framing of a narrative, which is viewed as a co-constructed and contextually bound story. The research findings are presented in Chapter 7, which is divided into three parts. In the first part, a brief overview is given of two key theoretical frameworks, specifically positioning theory and Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, which emerged during the analysis as useful constructs for making sense of the young men’s narrative accounts. In the second part, the thematic priorities and relationships are presented, which are further explicated in the third part by the organisation of the predominant stories in the text into master offending and non-offending narratives.

Chapter 8 brings together the findings from the previous chapter and presents a re-conceptualisation of the risk process. This formed the basis for the development and exposition of a positioning theory of crime that explains more comprehensively how risk effects are exerted in the lives of young people. The implications of the proposed theoretical model are discussed with
reference to policy and practice development that suggests focused targets for prevention and intervention efforts. It is further argued that the design of policy and practice must address crime as a problem co-produced by individuals, social arrangements and institutional structures. Additionally, this chapter offers some methodological commentary and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 1: Introduction to the research

Crime and criminality are phenomena diverse and complex in nature with causal explanations spanning across psychological and sociological fields, which respectively conceptualise the causation of crime at the individual level and the broader social level (Wortley, 2011). A schism between these two disciplines exists in the history of criminology, reflecting the firm sociological basis for understanding criminal behaviour that has stood in opposition to psychological perspectives of crime. In a criminological realm where the root causes of crime lay in socially structured inequalities (particularly during the latter half of the twentieth century), psychological theories were rejected for appearing to blame the individual for their criminal propensities. However, such rigid adherence to the sociological underpinnings of crime avoids examination of the psychology of the individual within the social context; and thus, this schism is not tenable (Jones, 2008). An impasse is reached without sufficient cross-disciplinary theorising, as subjects are either devoid of individual agency, representing pure social constructions and merely products of their social circumstances; or conversely, they are defined as self-interested and rational actors, detached from the social world within which they function. As it currently stands, there is a lack of continuity and congruence in theory, as the socially determined subject features prominently in explanations of the onset of offending, while the individually determined subject is at the centre of explanations of desistance from crime (Barry, 2006).

Recognising how these distinct disciplines complement one another and can be integrated within the criminology discourse overcomes this conflict in an articulation of psychological and sociological perspectives that forms an atheoretical ‘psychosocial’ approach to articulating offending as a process of change. From this perspective, the psychosocial subject is the simultaneous product of their psychological world and shared social world; and thus, the individual and society are intimately connected and represent a seamless entity (Frosh, 2003; Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). In other words, “the social is psychically invested and the psychological is socially formed, neither has an essence apart from the other” (Frosh, 2003, p. 1555). Thus, it is argued that statistical analysis of factors abstracted from context and person in order to determine their correlative effect diminishes the meaning that can be attributed to such factors, since they only operate as they do with reference to individual biography and people’s personal milieu (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). It is against this background that the research reported in this thesis explores narrative accounts of the movement toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions.

Bonino, Cattelino and Ciairano (2005) define antisocial behaviour as “behaviour that goes against the norms, values, and principles of the community” to which one belongs (p. 142). While
offending behaviour is included within this definition, antisocial behaviour is not necessarily criminal. For this reason, the terms ‘antisocial’ and ‘offending’ behaviour are used separately to account for this distinction, whereby antisocial behaviour denotes deviant behaviour more generally and non-criminal forms of ‘delinquency’. From an ontological standpoint, all crime is normal to the extent that “it can be understood in relation to the same psychosocial processes that affect us all” (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007, p. 2). However, contributing to the complexity of understanding crime and criminality is the dynamic and continuously shifting nature of crime, as well as the heterogeneity of those who offend. What differentiates ‘offenders’ from ‘non-offenders’ is not clearly discernible and antisocial/offending behaviour is best conceptualised on a continuum, which takes the form of a normal distribution (Wortley, 2011). Examination of the distribution reveals a strong relationship between age and crime, which remains stable over time and across societies (M. L. Sullivan, 1996). Commonly, this bell shaped relationship is referred to as ‘the age crime curve’ and represents the proportion of persons who offend at certain age groups. The general pattern of the curve shows that the prevalence of offending peaks in adolescence and subsequently decreases in adulthood (see Figure 1). This happens rapidly at first and then slows before reaching a baseline around the age of about 40 (Farrington, 1986).

![Graph showing age crime curve](image)

**Figure 1.** Victoria Police crime statistics of alleged offenders processed by age in 2012/13 and 2013/14 shows the bell shaped relationship referred to as the age crime curve, which represents the proportion of persons who offend at certain age groups (Victoria Police, 2014).

Statistics from 2005-2006 show that about 20 per cent of Victorian young people are aged 10-24 years, yet for this period this age group represented more than 46 per cent of processed offenders (Victoria Police, 2006). The age crime curve is further evidenced by Australian crime
statistics that show the rate of offending for young people has generally been twice as high as adults, with the highest rates of offending among young people aged 15 to 19 years and the lowest among those 25 years and older (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009, 2010). Additionally, in 2012, 92 per cent of the Australian juvenile prison population (aged 10-17) were male and across all age groups the rate of imprisonment has consistently been significantly higher for males (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2013). Such figures show that males are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, as well as the strong relationship between age and crime, affirming the belief “that something important happens that leads serious adolescent offenders to change their behaviour during the transition to early adulthood” (Mulvey et al., 2004, p. 216). Despite this age/crime relationship being one of the most consistently documented findings in criminology, the processes that underlie the curve remain only partially understood (Mulvey et al., 2004). Additionally, most research has failed to integrate knowledge of crime with agegraded transitions in the life course, particularly the critical transition from adolescence to adulthood (Barry, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1992).

The emerging movement away from static theories of crime toward dynamic theories reflects the greater utility of conceptualising offending as a process of developmental change over time, as people progress through stages of the life course (Sampson & Laub, 1992). From a developmental life course (DLC) perspective, offending trajectories are inextricably linked to dynamic biological, psychological and social processes (Bushway, Thornberry & Krohn, 2003; Casey & Day, 2009; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1997). Casey and Day (2009) argue that dynamic theories of crime overcome the limitations of static theories, which provide insufficient explanation of the processes that lead most adolescents to cease offending behaviour in early adulthood, while only a small proportion continue to offend throughout their adult life. They state, “non-developmental approaches fail to identify and offer explanations for many important aspects of crime, including prevalence; age of onset; duration of offending career; escalation and de-escalation in terms of frequency and serious criminal involvement; and, finally, desistance from crime” (p. 6-7).

Predominantly epidemiological research that is quantitative in nature has been undertaken to identify offending trajectories and causal factors in the prevention of criminal behaviour. These analyses have led to the robust finding that most adolescents ‘age out’ of crime by adulthood and the identification of a profusion of factors considered to influence the onset and severity of offending pathways. Despite the strong relationship between age and crime, little attention has been given to the role of developmental transitions in offending behaviour and not much is understood about the factors that contribute to continuity in offending or the desistance process. In
particular, it is not clear from existing knowledge in the field how young people experience, interpret and make sense of their personal context of risk as they forge their path in life. For the most part, the voice of young people is missing from current research. Consequently, it is not apparent how young people manage to escape the risk process eventually or altogether; and conversely, how a small few become entrenched in the system, seemingly stuck in a revolving cycle of judicial system involvement. More needs to be done to integrate knowledge of crime with age-graded transitions in the life course and therefore, to understand and approach the complexity of offending behaviour as a process of change over time. This represents a gap in the knowledge required for effective policy and practice development.

It is against this backdrop that the research seeks to examine the subjective meanings young men attach to life events and circumstances that reflect key transitions, times of decision and turning points, which they view to have shaped their life direction. The broad aim of the project is to explore young men’s narrative accounts of movement toward and/or away from offending. More specifically, this is explored with reference to multiple life transitions, such as involvements with educational, justice and/or welfare institutions and the corresponding transitions (i.e., into and out of) relating to such institutions. Further, young men’s negotiation of these institutional transitions is explored with reference to the overarching developmental task of moving from adolescent dependency to adult self-sufficiency. A central feature of the transition to adulthood is the active search for a sense of self. Moreover, the self is a created narrative – “a being-and-becoming through language and storytelling as we continually attempt to make sense of the world and of ourselves” (Anderson, 1997, p. 216). Thus, implicit within the ambit of the research is the illumination of the narrative self, which prompts the question of how the dialogical self is related to the construction of life pathways and in particular, enmeshment in and/or escape from the risk process.

1.1 Summary

This introductory chapter situated the research topic within the broad area of the sociological and psychological study of criminality that necessitates a cross-disciplinary approach to advance knowledge in the field. Attention was given to the definition of antisocial/offending behaviour and its statistical representation, which reveals a strong relationship between age and crime. It was put forward that dynamic developmental theories of crime, as opposed to static theories, more sufficiently explain the processes that lead most adolescents to cease offending behaviour in early adulthood, while only a small proportion continue to offend throughout their adult life. An important observation was that most research in this area has been quantitative in nature and has failed to integrate knowledge of crime with age-graded transitions in the life course.
The purpose of the research was articulated in the aim to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring young men’s narrative accounts of the phenomenological experience of moving toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions, using an innovative methodology.
Chapter 2: A dynamic approach to crime

In Chapter 1 it was argued that purely sociological or psychological approaches to the study of crime are limited in their explanatory power. In this chapter a cross-disciplinary psychosocial approach is presented that explicates the life course paradigm that underpins a developmental theoretical approach to crime. Following this, specific attention is given to the transition to adulthood, which is a critical developmental period within the life course that offers a normative window of opportunity for redirecting maladaptive life trajectories onto more adaptive paths. Finally, the framework for conceptualising offending as a developmental process linked to risk and protective factors is examined.

2.1 The life course paradigm

Developmental approaches are inextricably tied to concerns of a dynamic nature and the biological, psychological and social processes that unfold over time. Developmental criminology acknowledges that over time there is both continuity and within-individual variation, such that the developmental course of offending may be mediated by life transitions and developmental covariates (Sampson & Laub, 1997). From this perspective, criminal behaviour can be conceptualised as a socially emergent process that is contextually shaped and neither reducible to the person nor the environment (Sampson & Laub, 2005). Ulmer and Spencer (1999) argue that within developmental/life course theories, interpretive and interactive processes are assumed or inferred and are the focus of interactionist work. They state, symbolic interactionism “posits that social constraints and opportunities, socialization, and even biology may influence, but never totally determine the contingencies and choices involved in criminal activity throughout the life course” (p. 96).

Developmental theories consider human development in terms of four interrelated and combined dimensions. These are: (a) the potential for systematic change to occur at any time point across the life course (i.e., relative plasticity); (b) the bases for change are found in the relationships that exist within multiple environmental levels (biological, individual/psychological, social relational and socio-cultural) of organisation that comprise the ecology of human development; (c) these environmental levels of organisation do not function in isolation and instead involve mutually influential (i.e., bidirectional and reciprocal) relations that mean change at any level will effect continuity or discontinuity at another level; and (d) due to the dynamic nature of the interaction between changing context and environment, development is embedded in historical cultural conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Casey & Day, 2009). Therefore, developmental change is an ‘emergent’ process because the development of the (reciprocating) self continuously occurs and
thus, becomes qualitatively different from what it was previously. Furthermore, as developmental growth includes changes in personality, goals, attitudes and so forth that occur within a person-environment system, human development reflects successive differentiated change that must also be considered qualitatively and not simply quantitatively (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

From this perspective, social change, life pathways and individual development are modes of behavioural continuity and change (Elder, 1998). The life course of an individual can be understood as a pathway that unfolds over time. It is the product of social and cultural expectations and available opportunities. Such environmental forces influence decision processes and the course of events that shape life stages, transitions and turning points along a pathway. Individuals direct attention, time and energy into ‘the project that is my life’ in order to live out their own DIY biographies (Wyn, 2005). However, one does not simply get to choose or create opportunities within a social vacuum; instead choices are made between and within ongoing structural constraints (Elder, 1998; Halsey, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 2005).

When viewed holistically, a pathway can provide a sense of continuity, which describes long-term patterns of behaviour (Elder, 1985; Lawrence, 2006). Transitions are discontinuities with previous life experiences. They take place over shorter periods of time and are embedded within trajectories. In some instances, transitions are age-graded (e.g., beginning school), while others are not (e.g., travelling overseas). The timing and order of significant life events is important because trajectories and transitions are interlocked; thus, they have the potential to produce turning points in the life course. Turning points may be positive or negative because they represent times of decision or opportunity when life trajectories may be directed on to more adaptive or maladaptive paths. In other words, pathways can be re-directed when the same life event or transition is followed by different adaptations (Brammer, 2006; Elder, 1985; Hogan, 1980, Sampson & Laub, 1992). Casey and Day (2009) pinpoint the focus of the DLC perspective on “the life experiences that mould the individual and send him or her along a particular trajectory or pathway” (p. 6). In the next section the discussion moves from the broader level of the life course, to the particularities of the transition from adolescence to adulthood and pathways through this developmental period.

2.2 The transition to adulthood

Broad bands of large-scale developmental changes are delineated within the life course and reflect the social structures that typically mark progression through these bands. Late adolescence and early adulthood is an elastic developmental period in the life course (Lawrence, 2006), in which the overarching developmental task is to “take hold of some kind of life” (Schulenberg, Bryant & O’Malley, 2004, p. 1119). The period between adolescence and early adulthood (i.e., emerging
adulthood) is typically bound by the late teenage years and the mid-twenties (Arnett, 2000; Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Steinberg, Chung & Little, 2004). Arnett (2004) defines the distinguishing features of emerging adulthood as:

(a) ‘the age of identity explorations’ – the most central feature of emerging adulthood in which young people explore possibilities for their lives in a range of areas;

(b) ‘the age of instability’ – a time reflecting the shifting of choices and continual revision of life plans as a natural consequence of their exploration;

(c) ‘the most self-focused age’ – a normal, healthy and temporary focus with the goal of becoming self-sufficient before committing to enduring relationships with others;

(d) ‘the age of feeling in-between’ – the state of being in-between the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood;

(e) and ‘the age of possibilities’ – an age of high hopes and great expectations, when the pursuit of different futures remains open and little of life’s direction has been decided for certain.

As indicated by Arnett, identity exploration is the central feature of emerging adulthood. McAdams (2008) expands on this key psychosocial notion by emphasising the narrative nature of identity formation. He asserts that emerging adults progressively make sense of their lives by assembling reconstructions of the past into a full story, positioning them to purposively move toward an uncertain future. He claims that society and young people are prepared for experiments in narrative identity. This is because modern societies demand that young people “examine the occupational, interpersonal and ideological offerings of society” and pursue personalised niches in the transition to adulthood (McAdams, 2008, p. 252). Additionally, McAdams contends that from the perspective of narrative theory and life course research, the struggle to find a genuine identity is not a project limited to adolescence, as Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial stage model of development would suggest. Rather, he states that:

*Once narrative identity enters the developmental scene, it remains a project to be worked on for much of the rest of the life course.* Into and through the midlife years, adults continue to refashion their narrative understandings of themselves, incorporating into their ongoing, self-defining life stories, developmentally on-time and off-time events, expected and unexpected life transitions, gains and losses, and their changing perspectives on who they were, are and may be (McAdams, 2008, p. 252, emphasis in the original).
The defining features of the transition to adulthood indicate that this life stage often provides the basis for transforming personal conceptions about the past and future (Sampson & Laub, 2005); and additionally, serves to either consolidate previous successes and difficulties with adaptation or precipitate a turning point in life’s direction. Discontinuity in functioning and adjustment before, during and after the transition to adulthood may reflect increased wellbeing; however, often such discontinuity relates to reversals among young people who either had difficulties during adolescence or in contrast, were functioning well (Schulenberg et al., 2004). Therefore, this developmental period is considered a critical juncture in shaping life pathways.

According to Steinberg and colleagues (2004), the process of maturation reflects the development of psychosocial capacities that enable adolescents to successfully transition to adulthood. Such capacities are considered a component of human capital or more specifically psychosocial capital, as they provide resources for young people to create and actualise opportunities. It is argued that successful adjustment to adult roles and responsibilities requires ‘mastery and competence’, whereby one acquires knowledge and skills through education and vocational training that enables meaningful engagement with societal modes of production, leisure and culture. The development of ‘interpersonal relationships and social functioning’ is also required for fostering appropriate interaction with others, forming intimate and fulfilling relationships and gaining a sense of responsibility toward the wider community. Finally, ‘self-definition and self-governance’ is needed for establishing a positive view of self, the ability to regulate oneself in the absence of externally imposed controls, and the capability to set and work toward meaningful goals.

The concept of psychosocial maturity is synonymous with the idea of the successful attainment of developmental tasks, which are viewed to constitute specific social markers that are culturally defined and symbolise adult status. In modern Western society, completion of education, full time employment, independent living, marriage and family formation are commonly recognised as key developmental tasks (Lawrence, 2006; Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs & Barber, 2005; Shanahan, 2000; Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006). Based on the notion of developmental tasks, the research of Osgood, Ruth and colleagues (2005) identified six pathways through the transition to adulthood, which reflected variation in entering adult role domains, “at least viewed through one snapshot in time” (p. 321). These pathways are illustrative of the possible directions taken in reaching adulthood and included: fast starters (i.e., those who had made the most transitions to adult roles at age 24, albeit at the expense of investment in education), parents without careers, educated partners, educated singles, working singles, and slow starters (i.e., those who had made the least commitment to adult roles by age 24, although some had become parents).
Interestingly, the rate of criminal activity was highest among those categorised to the slow starters’ pathway.

The concept of developmental tasks emerged from the human development work of Havighurst in the 1930s and 1940s (Merriam & Mullins, 1981). Although the theory has been accepted to reflect the developmental transition to adulthood, the ‘time sensitive’ nature of tasks has received some criticism. It was asserted by Havighurst (1952) that failure to accomplish time sensitive developmental tasks is likely to result in personal unhappiness, social disapproval and future developmental difficulties. Therefore, the criticism surrounds the belief that developmental tasks must be accomplished during critical developmental periods, otherwise accomplishment of both present and subsequent tasks is complicated and development may be compromised (Merriam & Mullins, 1981). The assumption that offending young people are behind their non-offending peers in terms of development is grounded in this view. Often the development of offending young people is characterised by the accumulation of disadvantage; and thus, these young people are seen to face additional challenges during the transition to adulthood. For instance, many young people enter the justice system with a combination of problems, such as mental health and substance use issues, poor educational attainment and truancy, degraded family relationships, poverty, and community disorganisation. Therefore, it follows that many offending young people present with a collection of problems across most domains of adult adjustment (Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi & Cothern, 2000; Sampson & Laub, 1997; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). Thus, it is frequently accepted that offending young people have not reached age-graded transitions or achieved time sensitive developmental tasks associated with adulthood (Altshuler & Brash, 2004; Elder, 1985; Uggen & Wakefiend, 2005). The findings of qualitative research discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.7.1) counters this logic, offering a more complex understanding of the transition to adulthood for offending young people.

Being off time in the life course, whether on an accelerated path or a delayed path to adulthood, is assumed to carry considerable risk of adaptive difficulties. However, research suggests that recovery (i.e., positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity) is possible for young people who cross onto maladaptive paths, and provides corroboration that the transition to adulthood is a normative window of opportunity for such positive changes (Masten, Burt, Roisman, Obradovic, Long & Tellegen, 2004). Additionally, Sampson and Laub (2005) stress the role of human agency in the construction of life pathways within a context of ongoing constraints. Thus, people are not permanently ‘locked’ into certain trajectories and are active participants in escaping the risk process. This concept is expanded upon in the next section.
2.3 Offending from a developmental framework

Casey and Day (2009) define the essence of developmental theories of crime in terms of three primary issues: the development of antisocial and offending behaviour, age-graded risk and protective factors, and the impact of life events on the course of development. Accordingly, Casey and Day emphasise that DLC theorists endeavour to understand continuity and change in offending behaviour over the life course through an exploration of transactions between individual characteristics and developmental contexts. This has enabled DLC theorists to conceptualise offending as a developmental process linked to risk factors that precede or co-occur with crime pathways. While risk factors may not ‘cause’ offending behaviour, it is considered that they are implicated directly or indirectly in the underlying causes. Thus, risk factors may operate as interlinked chains of causation; or to a lesser extent, they may serve as ‘symptoms’ or ‘markers’ of problem behaviour (Casey & Day, 2009). Such factors are considered to increase the risk of onset, frequency, maintenance and duration of offending; however, few studies have examined risk factors for maintenance and duration, with most focused on risk factors in childhood that predict the onset or prevalence of offending (Farrington, 2007).

Theoretical attention has also been given to influences that protect against the onset of offending; however, the definition of such protective factors is controversial. For instance, if risk factors predict an increased probability of offending, and protective factors predict a decreased probability, then arguably risk and protective factors are different terms for the same underlying construct (Farrington, 2007). An alternative definition is that protective factors interact with risk factors and serve as a ‘buffer’ that moderates or mediates outcomes, and this results in a reduced incidence of problem behaviour. Although knowledge of protective factors is limited, it appears they may moderate risk by: (a) preventing risk factors from occurring; (b) interacting with risk factors and attenuating their effects and/or (c) intervening and breaking the chain by which risk factors lead to problem behaviour (Casey & Day, 2009; Farrington, 2007).

Understanding the process of risk/protective factors is problematic due to the complex ways they relate to one another. Such factors have been identified to come from many sources, which include: individual attributes (e.g., skills and personality traits); genetic and biological characteristics; characteristics of the family system, school context, and community; as well as the life events of the individual (Gilmore, 1999; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth, 2005). Disentangling the influence of these factors on life pathways is particularly complex because many of these factors tend to co-occur and be interrelated. In addition to this, what may be critical is the interaction or combination of factors. They may also act cumulatively over time or amalgamate, such that some factors may influence pathways through their impact on other factors (Farrington, 2000; Gilmore, 1999).
The widely accepted view that pathways follow a trajectory of unfolding inevitability has come from the concept of risk factors. The artefact approach to risk considers pathways as linear, pre-determined and defined by risk markers that can be measured quantitatively to predict the onset and persistence of offending behaviour (Kemshall, Marsland, Boeck & Dunkerton, 2007). However, in developing a continuum of epistemological positions of pathways, Kemshall and colleagues (2007) argue that the artefact approach to risk may be enhanced by insights gleaned from adopting a constructionist perspective to reconceptualise the way traditional risk factors operate for young people. This perspective encompasses a number of positions that range on a continuum from weak to strong constructionism. Weak constructionism holds that pathways are social processes with multiple causes and prioritises agency in the interaction between the individual and social mechanisms that influence the life course. Moderate constructionism considers pathways as a negotiated process and emphasises continuous interaction between agency and structure. Further along the continuum, strong constructionism views risk as an entirely social product contingent on historical, social and political framings of risk. In essence, a constructionist lens views pathways as social processes with multiple causes and therefore, it is argued that risk factors are not merely predictive of the life course of an individual. Rather, risk factors are highly complex, and situational agency and the meanings individuals attribute to personal experiences of risk can produce diverse outcomes (Kemshall et al., 2007).

A DLC approach offers a more robust theoretical stance to the study of crime, as it contains the flexibility to account for the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of crime that is typically the downfall of static, non-developmental theories. However, Barry (2006) argues that developmental theories as they currently stand “have possibly deflected attention away from the social and political construction of age and youth transitions” (p.15). She asserts that young people experience marginalisation, disempowerment and isolation in society because of their liminal status and that this is central to understanding youth offending as a ‘search for social recognition’ (see section 3.7.1). Additionally, Barry points out that developmental theories are yet to adequately and specifically address the process of offending in parallel with the transitional process of moving from childhood, through youth, to adulthood. She further identifies the failure of existing theory to integrate the phases of offending (i.e., onset, maintenance and desistance) in any sort of logical progression that accounts for the process of offending as change over the life course. Thus, it would seem that developmental theories of crime are still to reach their full potential and an evolution of theory is needed to fill this explanatory gap.
2.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter and the chapter that follows is to provide the background to the research conducted for this thesis. This chapter established the context for studying crime from a dynamic developmental perspective that is grounded in the life course paradigm. The primary concepts of the life course paradigm were presented and form the basis for the research approach, which seeks to expand knowledge in the field by integrating crime with age-graded transitions in the life course. Such an approach called for specifying the distinguishing features of emerging adulthood in order to contextualise the study of processes of offending in parallel with the developmental process of the transition to adulthood. Finally, conceptualising offending as a developmental process linked to risk factors that determine crime pathways was discussed. It was argued that a constructionist lens more adequately attends to the complexity of risk factors by framing pathways as social processes with multiple causes and unlimited directions because there is interaction between agency and structure. The chapter concluded by suggesting that developmental theories of crime are yet to reach their full potential, particularly since they have neglected to consider the socio-legal position of young people in transition and the concomitant disparities of power in social life. A selected overview of the relevant existing theory and research is presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Conceptualising the risk process for offending

This chapter aims to conceptualise the risk process for offending in a review of existing theory and research that explicates: (a) divergent offending trajectories (i.e., abstainers, adolescent limited and life-course persistent offenders); (b) the impact of life events and disruptions on patterns of offending over the life course; and thus, (c) the phases of offending (i.e., onset, maintenance and desistance). The complexities and intricacies of the subject matter do not lend themselves easily to a succinct and structured presentation. Hence, the identified areas of focus are regarded as overarching themes of this chapter more so than discrete topics for discussion. Toward the end of the chapter, specific attention is given to the contribution of qualitative research that shifts the focus from the background correlates of offending to the phenomenological foreground.

3.1 The developmental taxonomy of antisocial behaviour

Moffitt’s (1993) developmental taxonomy of antisocial behaviour advanced explanations of crime by proposing two primary hypothetical prototypes of offenders on the basis of the origin of antisocial behaviour in either early neurodevelopmental processes or later social processes. As such, pathological ‘life-course persistent’ (LCP) offenders are characterised by continuity in offending that begins with antisocial behaviour in childhood. Conversely, ‘adolescence-limited’ (AL) offenders are characterised by a normative pattern of offending that begins in adolescence and ceases in early adulthood.

From this perspective, LCP offenders develop as a result of interaction between inherited or acquired neuropsychological variation (i.e., cognitive deficits, difficult temperament or hyperactivity) and a high-risk social environment (i.e., inadequate parenting, disrupted family bonds and poverty) that exacerbates difficult behaviour of a high-risk child (Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington & Milne, 2002; Piquero, Brame, Mazerolle & Haapanen, 2002). Inherent to this view is the developmental principle of cumulative continuity which has its basis in the original contention of labelling theory that responses to primary deviance may produce adjustment difficulties that produce further offending behaviour (Sampson & Laub, 1992).

Cumulative continuity more specifically refers to the maintenance of maladaptive behaviours in interactional styles by the progressive accumulation of their consequences. This process occurs in combination with interactional continuity; that is, the reactions from others during reciprocal social interaction (Sampson & Laub, 1992). Moffitt (1993) developed the notion of cumulative continuity in theorising that social reactions to antisocial behaviour in childhood generate consequences that diminish the probabilities of success; and thus, lead to early onset of
offending. Two sources of continuity are believed to narrow opportunities for change. First, and often a neglected source of continuity in antisocial behaviour, is ‘a restricted behavioural repertoire’ or in other words, simply a lack of alternative options. The LCP offender is, therefore, considered devoid of opportunities to gain and practice prosocial alternatives at each developmental stage. In essence, it is more difficult to later recover lost opportunities if social and academic skills have not been mastered in childhood. The second source of continuity involves ‘becoming ensnared by consequences of antisocial behaviour’ that limit life chances by eliminating opportunities for breaking the chain of cumulative continuity (Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1992; 1997).

In contrast, the antisocial behaviour of AL offenders is considered normative for young people who are in a ‘maturity gap’ between their biological age and social age. In effect, the mismatch between biological maturation and access to mature privileges and responsibilities (e.g., alcohol, driving, sex and financial and social independence) is viewed to motivate AL offenders to mimic the antisocial behaviour of their LCP counterparts. By doing so, AL offenders demonstrate autonomy from parents, secure affiliation with peers, and hasten social maturation. Thus, AL offenders engage in offending behaviour when it is advantageous for them to do so. As the maturity gap lessens, prosocial styles become more rewarding and the consequences of offending behaviour are increasingly negative, rather than profitable. Therefore, AL offenders abandon their antisocial ways upon reaching adult status (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al., 2002).

Subsequent to the development of a dual taxonomy, a third type of ‘offender’ has been uncovered and labelled ‘low-level-chronic’. In previous research, such individuals were optimistically labelled ‘recoveries’, as they failed to meet the criterion for LCP group membership when their persistent, extreme and pervasive antisocial behaviour in childhood decreased to low/moderate delinquency in adolescence. However, follow-up in later years revealed that true recoveries are extremely rare and instead these individuals offend persistently at a low intermittent rate from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood. Evidence suggests that this group experience internalising forms of psychopathology and exhibit life impairment (Moffitt et al., 2002).

Another group of interest has been labelled ‘abstainers’ and represent a small few that have virtually avoided antisocial behaviour throughout childhood and adolescence. Abstainers are viewed to have undesirable characteristics (e.g. being overcontrolled, fearful, interpersonally timid and socially inept) that preclude them from forming social relationships, which is thought to ‘protect’ them from engaging in normative antisocial behaviour. They have also been described as unusually good students and latecomers to sexual relationships. In addition to, or perhaps independent of this, it has been further theorised that abstainers may be adolescents who either enter puberty late or
enter adult roles early; therefore, they miss the maturity gap and lack the motivation to experiment with crime. Furthermore, abstainers may be young people who have limited opportunity to mimic LCP delinquent models. In follow up studies, abstainers are well adjusted and their personality profile of self-constraint seems to have been successful in adulthood (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al., 2002).

The taxonomy of antisocial behaviour proposed by Moffitt (1993) moves beyond a static general theory of crime by conceptualising engagement in crime as a developmental process and providing the basis for exploring divergent offending and non-offending trajectories. Often the maintenance of offending is not differentiated from initial onset of offending within the criminological literature (Barry, 2006); however, such continuity in offending trajectories may be largely attributed to a separate, but related process of ‘cumulative disadvantage’. Sampson and Laub (1997) propose a life course theory of cumulative disadvantage, which stems from an ongoing project analysing data from the classic work of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950). More specifically, the data comes from longitudinal research of delinquent and non-delinquent males born between 1924 and 1935.

3.2 Cumulative disadvantage

Cumulative disadvantage refers to the role of prior delinquency in furthering criminal involvement in adulthood. That is to say, whether directly or indirectly, committing crime has a genuine behavioural influence that modifies the probability of engaging in future crime. It is described more specifically as a developmental process through which antisocial behaviour in childhood and delinquency in adolescence fosters crime in adulthood by systematically attenuating social and institutional bonds (e.g., employment attachment, marital cohesion) linking adults to society. For example, delinquency in adolescence may precipitate early school leaving and incarceration; thus, weakening bonds to the workforce, ultimately leading to recursive criminality in adulthood. Therefore, cumulative disadvantage is not only a consequence of stable individual differences in criminal propensity (Sampson & Laub, 1997).

Central to the theory of cumulative disadvantage is a ‘snowball’ effect, whereby the negative structural consequences of adolescent delinquency (e.g., arrest, official labelling, incarceration) increasingly mortgage future life chances, particularly those that are shaped by education and employment (Sampson & Laub, 1997). For instance, arrest, conviction and most notably the length of imprisonment can be deeply discrediting. On the basis of such behavioural outcomes, society discriminates against these persons and limits their life chances, often by precluding them from gaining employment (LeBel, 2008; Sampson & Laub, 1997).
This form of stigma is typically associated with high levels of public avoidance, punishment and social rejection, and low levels of sympathy. Additionally, the negative attitude of the community towards such stigmatised persons is deeply entrenched and resistant to change. Individuals with offending histories may be simultaneously members of multiple stigmatised groups. For example, formally incarcerated persons may have mental illness, a history of substance use, communicable diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C) and/or may be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. However, more in-depth research is needed to examine the additive or interaction effects of several stigmas on the lives of affected persons. Perceptions of stigma and discrimination have been found to impact negatively on self-esteem, life satisfaction and quality of life and also are a strong predictor of rearrest and reconviction for new crimes (LeBel, 2008). Thus, it is clear that an offence history is stigmatising and poses serious structural impediments to establishing conventional lines of adult life (Sampson & Laub, 1997). However, in their age graded theory of informal social control, which also stems from analysis of the Glueck and Glueck research data, Sampson and Laub (1990) posit that childhood pathways to crime can be considerably altered over the life course by strengthening social bonds in adulthood.

3.3 Age-graded theory of informal social control

Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) postulates that changes, which strengthen social bonds to society lead to a reduction in criminal activity, while changes that weaken social bonds lead to an increase in criminal activity. This is linked to the process of cumulative disadvantage that undermines bonds of social control; and therefore, enhances the likelihood of continuity in offending (Sampson & Laub, 1997). A point of difference with most life course research is that the quality or strength of social ties is emphasised more than the occurrence or timing of specific life events (e.g., employment per se does not increase social control, rather it is employment coupled with job stability and job commitment). Hence, it is the social investment or social capital in the institutional relationship that determines the salience of informal social control (Sampson & Laub, 1990). The theory further considers that important institutions of both formal and informal social control vary across the life course. Social bonds in childhood and adolescence (e.g., to family, peers and school), young adulthood (higher education/vocational training, work and marriage) and later adulthood (e.g., work, marriage, parenthood and investment in the community) explain criminal behaviour – specifically, that age-graded changes in social bonds explain changes in crime. Such changes in offending behaviour are connected to ‘triggering’ events that occur by chance and produce turning points that redirect offending trajectories in more positive or negative ways.

In later work, Sampson and Laub (2005) identify the need to expand upon their quantitative findings using qualitative narratives to “delve deeper into a person-based exploration of the life
course” (p. 16). They argue life history narratives in combination with quantitative approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of divergent offending trajectories. From their exploration of life history narratives, the role of human agency emerged as a vital feature of the desistance process; thus, their life course view was adjusted to emphasise human agency. From this revised position, change in offending behaviour (characterised by either maintenance or desistance) is more than just the weakening or strengthening of social bonds. It is coupled with purposeful human agency, such that individuals are active participants in constructing their lives (including turning points) within the context of ongoing structural constraints. Therefore, this perspective interprets pathways into and out of crime from a standpoint of continuous social reproduction, rather than unfolding inevitability (Sampson & Laub, 2005). The section below explores this notion further in a review of research examining the individual/subjective changes and social/structure changes that contribute to pathways toward and away from crime.

3.4 Untangling subjective and social factors

The research of LeBel, Burnett, Maruna and Bushway (2008) investigated the differential impact and complex interaction of subjective-agency factors and social-environmental factors on the recidivism/desistance process. They define subjective factors as relating to changes in the way people experience, understand, interpret and make sense of the world in which they live. Additionally, this term may also refer to ‘agentic’ changes, which are related to choices, values, goals and motivations. Although an area underdeveloped in the desistance literature, the following four highly interrelated themes have been identified and are argued to reflect differences in thinking patterns of actively offending individuals and those who have ceased offending. First, ‘hope and self-efficacy’ – refers to perceptions of successful agency and the availability of pathways related to goals. Thus, it consists of both the desire for a certain outcome, as well as the perceived capacity and means of achievement. There is a tendency for actively offending individuals to lack this sense of agency and thus, experience life as largely determined in a fatalistic manner. Alternatively, individuals considered to be desisting from crime have an optimistic sense of ascendency over future trajectories and strong internal beliefs about their self-worth and personal fate. Second, ‘shame and remorse’ – refers to cognitive changes in desisting individuals related to moral beliefs and tolerance, as well as the reconsideration and regret of past offending behaviour. Third, ‘internalising stigma’ – refers to the likelihood that individuals who view themselves as ‘discredited among an unaccepting world’ will not be susceptible to deterrent or rehabilitative efforts. And the fourth theme, ‘alternative identities’ – refers to the deflection of stigma by prosocial identity construction that is fundamentally incompatible with continued offending and commonly takes the form of ‘good parent, ‘provider’ or ‘family man’. On the other hand, dynamic social factors refer to the structural
challenges faced by individuals in contact with the justice system.

On this basis, three models are proposed as possibilities for explaining the recidivism/desistance process. A ‘strong subjective’ model argues that the desistance process is mind over matter (i.e., agency driven). In contrast, the ‘strong social’ model claims social circumstances matter most in the desistance process (i.e., structurally driven). The ‘subjective-social’ model conceptualises both subjective and social factors as having an impact on life outcomes. This model asserts that the subjective mindset is an essential condition, although not entirely adequate for successful desistance, as social events need to take place that support and encourage the redirection of pathways out of crime. The research of LeBel and colleagues, in which the subjective states of incarcerated individuals were found to have a direct effect on recidivism, whilst also an indirect effect through their impact on social circumstances that were experienced post release supports the subjective-social model.

Accordingly, it is useful to consider the risk process in relation to the institutional structures that are conceived to generate risk; that is, “the apparatuses of surveillance and discipline... routinely produce the risks they assess and manage” (Crook, 1999, p. 171; Kemshall et al., 2007). A pertinent example of this is the goal of incarceration to simultaneously punish and rehabilitate offending persons (not to mention subsequently reintegrate them following their custodial experiences), which is a fundamental structural contradiction (Halsey, 2007). Part of the force of incarceration is the production of incapacitation and deterrent effects that are thought to disrupt an offending pathway and provide an opportunity for re-direction away from crime. However, it is unclear from current theory and research what impact incarceration has on the desistance process (Maruna & Toch, 2005). In the next section, attention is turned to the experience of incarceration, which is a re-entry cycle involving both the removal of a person from the community and in many instances their return, often repeatedly (Clear, 2007).

3.5 Psychosocial adjustment in a context of risk

Steinberg and colleagues (2004) maintain that the ideal of ‘rehabilitation’ is often undermined by the ‘punishment’ aims of imprisonment, such that restrictive settings can disrupt developmental processes. More specifically, the experience of incarceration can hasten the end of adolescence by precipitating school leaving and movement away from the family home. In this way, incarceration accelerates detachment from parents, as well as prosocial peers, while creating the need for an independent income (M. L. Sullivan, 2004). According to Halsey (2007), custodial life lends itself to (involuntarily) taking on a mode of subjectification characterised by learned helplessness. Despite this, he asserts that incarcerated young people are resourceful, possess skills and knowledge and make considered and reflexive comments about their own life pathways, as well
as the factors that have contributed to their current circumstance. He further suggests, however, that custody does not draw on these generally desired qualities in a worthwhile or socially productive way. Steinberg and colleagues (2004) acknowledge that rehabilitative efforts are made within secure and restrictive settings, although without regular support from significant adults and the opportunity to exercise autonomy, the process of psychosocial maturation may be disrupted. Added to this, correctional intervention efforts do not adequately address the social, economic and cultural aspects of pathways into and out of crime (Halsey, 2008).

Incarcerated individuals arguably learn how to cope with the challenges of custodial life, rather than how to deal with the complexities of being in the community (Halsey, 2007). The adaptation that imprisonment necessitates is invariably difficult and can produce habitual ways of thinking and acting that can be dysfunctional in periods of adjustment post release (Haney, 2001); thus, people transition from confinement to community generally unprepared psychologically and socially to make the most of post release life (Halsey, 2008). Although the psychological effects of prison experience are considered reversible, it is undeniable that people suffer long-term consequences from being subjected to pain, deprivation and exceptionally atypical patterns and norms of being and interacting. Additionally, the adaptive challenges presented by the prison environment may have a lasting impact on one’s sense of self and personal identity (Haney, 2001; Maruna & Toch, 2005).

The term ‘prisonisation’ refers to the process by which incarcerated individuals are shaped and transformed by the correctional setting (Clemmer, 1940). Individuals are compelled to incorporate the norms of prison life, to take on the mores, customs and culture of the prison into their habits of thinking feeling and acting, all of which are premised upon the conflict between inmate and institutional authority (Haney, 2001; White & Perrone, 2005). Haney (2001) emphasises that such adaptations are normal responses to the unnatural and abnormal conditions of prison life. Although dysfunctional out of context, these adaptations are not ‘pathological’ in nature and instead are viewed as typical reactions to a set of pathological conditions. Sykes (1965) “saw much of prison behaviour reflecting an effort by inmates to retain their self-esteem in the face of custodial assaults” (Maruna & Toch, 2005, p.154-155). Thus, it is the contention of deprivation theorists that incarcerated persons are constrained to a particular behavioural repertoire that promotes survival in custodial settings (Maruna & Toch, 2005). However, adaptations to the prison context become particularly problematic when they are taken to the extreme or become chronic and deeply internalised such that they persist and are maladaptive post release. Sykes (1965) defines the ‘pains of imprisonment’ as deprivations and frustrations that profoundly threaten an individual’s personality and sense of self-worth, as well as violate numerous psychological and social principles.
of development. More specifically the pains of imprisonment can be summarised as deprivations of: liberty; goods and services; ordinary, loving, sexual relationships; autonomy; security; and power (White & Perrone, 2005).

Adaptation to the ‘pains’ of imprisonment is regarded to have unintended criminogenic effects, as it promotes norms and practices that further future deviance (Maruna & Toch, 2005; White & Perrone, 2005). It is suggested that such adaptations may have a lasting impact on the capacity of individuals to adjust post release (Maruna & Toch, 2005) and thus, “prison produces that which it is supposedly designed to pull apart (namely, reoffending)” (Halsey, 2007, p. 1249). The significance of this is even more apparent when considered in relation to the comprehensive life change that is involved in the process of desistance, which is discussed in the following section.

3.6 The process of desistance

Maruna and Toch (2005) argue that defining desistance as the ‘voluntary termination of offending behaviour’ and the like, is problematic and has come under scrutiny because the termination of offending is conceived to happen all the time, since days, months, and even years go past between offences in a so-called ‘criminal career’. Instead, they propose two distinct phases in the desistance process. Namely, ‘primary desistance’, which refers to the pauses or gaps in the course of an offending trajectory, and ‘secondary desistance’, which is of greater theoretical interest and refers to “the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of the role or identity of a “changed person”” (Maruna & Toch, 2005, p. 144). Accordingly, it is useful to conceptualise desistance as a dynamic developmental process that unfolds over the life course – a transition from offending to non-offending, rather than a static state of non-offending that is achieved (Bushway et al., 2003). The critical movement to secondary desistance where the “offender and the ex-offender overlap and a transition occurs” (Serin & Lloyd, 2009, p. 347) has received insufficient attention in the literature. Theories which are considered to be most useful are those that are intricate and conceptualise desistance as a process of change connected to internal processes, which directly link changes in offending behaviour to psychological mechanisms (Serin & Lloyd, 2009).

Counterintuitive to such theories, the criminal justice system does not allow for a process of desistance that is gradual and cyclical. Instead, one is expected to arrive at a state of non-offending instantaneously. In general, the response of the criminal justice system can operate cumulatively; and therefore, lead to harsher consequences for subsequent infractions to deter repeat offending. Thus, it does not respond to qualitative changes in offending that may reflect an offending person in transition to non-offending. Serin and Lloyd (2009) state that empirically observable changes in
offending persons present a complex interaction of psychological, biological and social factors that indicate desistance from crime is a progressive process of improving life adjustment. Thus, it is a process that involves considerable effort over time to break a pattern of offending behaviour and to achieve wide-reaching changes in multiple life domains, which encompass changes in internal beliefs, interpersonal relationships and environmental circumstance. They further explain that such changes are specific to the context and life stage of the individual, for example, parenthood may promote the desistance process in an adult, while exacerbate an adolescent’s propensity to commit crime.

In his model of ‘good lives’, Ward (2002) also connects the process of desistance to an overall improvement in wellbeing. The Good Lives Model (GLM) is a positive psychological approach to the rehabilitation of offending persons that promotes wellbeing through goal attainment (i.e., approach goals) and the management of recidivism risk (avoidance-related goals) (Whitehead, Ward & Collie, 2007; Ward & Stewart, 2003). An underlying assumption of the GLM is that by nature humans are active, goal seeking beings that are constantly involved in constructive processes, which provide a sense of life purpose and meaning. Essentially, humans value certain actions, sets of circumstances, personal characteristics, experiences and mind states. These are sought for their own purpose because they are intrinsically beneficial and in the GLM they are defined as primary human goods, of which 11 classes of primary goods have been proposed (Ward, 2002; Ward & Gannon, 2006). Although it is assumed that all primary goods are fundamental to the life pursuits of all humans, there are individual differences in the weightings or priorities given to specific primary goods, which reflect individual values and preferences among people (Willis, Yates, Gannon & Ward, 2012). The concrete ways individuals strive to achieve primary goods represent instrumental or secondary goods. In other words, they are the activities in which people engage in order to obtain primary goods. For example, in the pursuit of inner peace (primary good), one may employ such strategies as exercise, meditation, relaxation or substance use (secondary goods). Furthermore, human needs represent a form of deprivation and thus, individuals are motivated to pursue particular outcomes or experiences (goods) in order to fulfil their unmet needs. For example, an individual experiencing loneliness has a need for intimacy and connectedness (good of relatedness); and thus, they are motivated to seek interactions with others by way of social activities (secondary goods) (Barnao, Robertson & Ward, 2010).

The aim of the GLM approach is to equip offending persons with the skills, values, attitudes and resources required for them to re-direct their life away from offending and live in a healthy, safe, meaningful and satisfying way. This involves leading a life in pursuit of primary goods and being able to secure them effectively and appropriately. The aetiological assumptions underpinning the
GLM are that individuals directly seek primary goods through the act of offending or offend as a result of the indirect effects of pursuing primary goods (Whitehead et al., 2007). Thus, criminogenic needs (i.e., dynamic risk factors) arise from internal or external obstacles that obstruct human needs being met in an optimal manner. Additionally, they include the procurement of proxy goals and needs and their attached dysfunctional beliefs and behavioural strategies. Therefore, various classes of criminogenic needs reflect difficulties in the pursuit of primary human goods (Ward, 2002a; Ward & Stewart, 2003). It is theorised then, that offending behaviour is a response to not having the capability to fulfil valued outcomes in a personally satisfying and socially acceptable way. Thus, offending results from problems that reside in the means employed to obtain goods, lack of scope within the good life plan or conflict between goals (Ward, 2002a). From this perspective, desistance is the process of reconstructing a personal identity that rests on conceptualising a good life. From such conceptualisation, what is most important to an offending individual is identified and ways of living differently and more meaningfully are defined (Ward, 2002).

3.7 Exploring the lifeworld and narratives of offending

Criminological research has been preoccupied with positivistic methods of enquiry that focus on ‘prediction’ of crime from interacting variables, rather than ‘understanding’ the subjectivity of the offending person (Maruna & Butler, 2005). Most research and theoretical models overlook the importance of the subjective experience in understanding how people construct life pathways within a context of ongoing constraints. Therefore, quantitative research methods can only provide one part of the story (Sampson & Laub, 2005). Few studies have given a voice to offending persons (France & Homel, 2006; Inderbitzin, 2009) and consequently, the offending person is often reduced to and portrayed as “unfortunate, passive, over-determined products of their circumstances” (Maruna & Butler, 2005, p.52). It is argued that a shift of focus from the background correlates of offending to the phenomenological foreground is regarded as likely to explain more variation in criminality (Katz, 1988). Although qualitative data can be used to confirm quantitative findings, it may also advance knowledge of offending as a process of change over time (France & Homel, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1992). The insights gleaned from qualitative research are the focus of the next section.

3.7.1 The subjectivity of the offending lifeworld

Offending young people are often described as lagging behind developmentally; however, a small body of literature suggests otherwise and indicates these young people have demonstrated early accomplishment of developmental tasks; and thus, are on an accelerated path to adulthood. Altschuler and Brash (2004) recognise that offending young people who earn an income from illegal
enterprise tend to start working earlier than their non-offending peers who enter legitimate work. In a study by Parkman (2009) young men post release from prison reported living independently as adolescents and providing for themselves and family through illegitimate sources of income prior to incarceration. These young men initially became involved in illegal activities to support their families and were responsible for paying household bills, providing food and ensuring the family had housing. They reported moving out of home in order to hide their illegal involvement from family members. Additionally, using ethnographic data and sociological analysis of the experiences of young men incarcerated as adolescents and released as legal adults, Inderbitzin (2009) observed that these young men “came of age surrounded by poverty and violence in their neighbourhoods and families, sacrificing much of their childhood in the quest for survival” (p. 454). Prior to incarceration, the young men had been on their own for some time, they had learned to live independently and to take care of themselves and their families, working from a young age to meet basic needs and acquire small luxuries with the proceeds from drug dealing. Thus, a partial transition to adulthood occurred early for the young men in this study; however, upon incarceration, this accelerated path to adulthood was interrupted and came to an abrupt halt (Inderbitzin, 2005; 2009).

Inderbitzin (2005) examined the struggles, survival strategies and institutional adaptation of adolescent young men growing up in a correctional facility. The research found that central to survival behind institutional walls is to quickly learn to follow and understand the unwritten code of criminal/inmate culture and conduct, as has been suggested by Haney (2001). Inderbitzin’s findings are also consistent with Steinberg and colleagues’ (2004) argument that incarceration may disrupt psychosocial maturation. The young men in this study did not expect to gain much from their term of imprisonment and were aware of ‘growing up’ without learning or maturing as they might have in the community. Inderbitzin found that they adapted to life inside the institution by enduring their time and attempting to experience as little suffering and the most comfort as possible. Additionally, young men who were incarcerated for relatively short periods found their sentences extended because they received further sanctions while serving their time. The young men, “troubled to begin with, often became more isolated and desperate, and less functional the longer they spent in the juvenile prison” (Inderbitzin, 2005, p. 18).

In a follow up study of these young men post release, Inderbitzin (2009) found conformity was an ever-present struggle. In the immediate post release period, the best resources to achieve a conventional life were in criminal capital, such as friends offering illegal opportunities until the young men reached a certain amount of financial stability that would allow them to go “legit”. The narratives of these young men reflect frustration at having limited options and resources post release. The young men confronted greater obstacles to reintegration because they were not
integrated in mainstream society to begin with. These findings suggest emerging adults re-entering the community from confinement will have a particularly hard time re-directing life pathways (Inderbitzin, 2009).

Similarly, research by Halsey (2007) suggests that the high rate of recidivism is not solely attributable to risky or dangerous individuals. Instead, repeat offending was found to occur within a context of the risky (poor, neglectful, disrespectful) systems of post release rules and administration to which the participant young men were subjected. Thus, he considers that the young men returned to custody not as an independent result of their behaviour, but rather because of their responses to systems and procedures that assembled the conditions for recidivism, steering people (back) into offending pathways and towards repeat incarceration.

Halsey details the narrative accounts of young men aged 15 to 20 years who have experienced recurrent cycling of imprisonment and release. He suggests that re-conviction in some cases was not due to an innate risk within the person, but rather was as an outcome of being forced to confront unsafe, strained and tenuous living environments. He makes the argument that the young men had to negotiate unreasonably hazardous circumstances manufactured by a system that should instead ensure the implementation of as many protective factors as possible and as soon as the young person is released. Additionally, he observes that friendships have long since replaced family members in the lives of these young men; and furthermore, to have virtually displaced the figures of authority society traditionally expects young people to trust, defer to, and learn from. He found that despite the young men emphasising the importance of staying away from troublesome friends, letting go of such friendships was an incredibly difficult task no matter how conflicted these relationships were at times. Likewise, Halsey asserts that it is probable that young people will commence or resume a relationship with drugs and alcohol at some stage post release. This was because, in one form or another, such substances were the currency through which the young men solved their problems, albeit only temporarily. Thus, he argues that only when practices and pathways are formulated that can substitute for substances, as well as socialising with (problematic) peers, may it be more appropriate to expect them to refrain from such activities.

Halsey found that the young men used many different currencies including respect, trust, honour, threats, displays of masculinity and drugs to conduct their affairs. However, for these young men, money was the currency that was almost impossible to obtain legitimately and for a prolonged period. Not to mention, that incarceration only solidified their financial problems, as many young people are released with debilitating financial burden accumulated in relation to their crime/s (i.e., unpaid fines, victim levies). Thus, Halsey contends that increasing the amount of financial assistance would greatly contribute to reducing the pains of release, although young people also “must have
suitable proximity to conventional cycles of consumption and knowledge of how to function as a “legitimate” consumer in late capitalist society” (p. 1240-1241, emphasis in the original).

The role of ‘conditional release’ and what precisely constitutes its breach has also been found by Halsey to perplex young men returning to the community. Such systematic factors are considered by Halsey to contribute to the subsequent drift back into offending, as administrative shortcomings have detrimental consequences and represent the various ways and to different degrees that the systems of management have failed those released from custody (Halsey, 2006; 2007). Further to this, unforeseeable tragic events were seen to impact pathways out of crime in profoundly negative ways, for example, by acting as an accelerant towards doing more crime. Halsey (2007) makes it clear that it is not his intention to undermine the agency of such young men by emphasising that it is intuitively and empirically important to recognise that free will, choice and one’s own volition unfold within contexts that are also embedded within events and circumstances that are beyond the immediate control of the individual. In view of this, it is disconcerting that incarcerated young men are so willing to regard themselves as the (sole) author of their position (Halsey, 2008). Such findings may reflect the power of discourse that demands ‘offenders’ take absolute responsibility for their actions.

Barry (2006) studied offending as a process of change from the perspective of the wider social context within which youth transitions are embedded, thereby addressing the power-related and political implications of this developmental period that have been largely neglected in criminological research. More specifically, Barry emphasises the vulnerability of youth in transition resulting from age related power-imbances and marginal status that can be experienced as isolating and disempowering. She asserts “powerlessness is perhaps most acutely felt by young people in transition, and offending is often an escape from such disempowerment” (p. 33). The research explored the narratives of 40 young people who had been heavily involved in offending; the sample included an equal gender distribution, as well as persons self-identified as either persisting to offend or desisting from crime.

The analysis of the young people’s narratives in Barry’s study illuminated the reasons and explanations for the onset, maintenance and desistance of offending behaviour, which were subsumed under four categories: relational, monetary, practical and personal. More specifically, antisocial behaviour was found to emerge in situations where such responses seemed profitable; and by and large, offending offered possible status and identity. The onset of offending occurred for the most part prior to 15 years of age and was primarily a means of social integration through the acquisition of consumables or friends. Between the onset and maintenance phase of offending, Barry found the frequency and sophistication of criminal pursuits increased, as well as the
Justifications for such behaviour; and in essence, offending continued out of necessity, resignation and addiction. The reasons for desisting from crime revolved around the risks of being incarcerated and of losing close others. Criminal justice fatigue surrounding being apprehended, feeling disillusioned or having a criminal record or reputation was also a factor influencing desistance. Desistance was further associated with an emerging realisation that offending was incompatible with one’s greater desire to achieve conventional goals.

While the categories (i.e., relational, monetary, practical and personal) identified by Barry “emerged naturally from the primary analysis, it was found subsequently that these categories closely matched the concepts of capital espoused by Bourdieu” (p. 42, see section 7.1.2 for an articulation of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice). Barry asserts that Bourdieu’s concepts of social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital are particularly useful in an examination of the age- and status- determined power imbalances experienced during the transition to adulthood. She argues that there is a “seeming convergence of the two pathways of offending and youth transitions, and the accounts by young people of their offending over time strongly suggest that such behaviour is a personal means (capital accumulation) to a social end (capital expenditure)” (p. 6). Her argument follows that the liminal status and relative powerlessness of youth means that some young people more than others have limited opportunity for the accumulation and expenditure of legitimate and durable capital. However, offending during the transition to adulthood offers temporarily a mode of capital accumulation through which one can reach a point of acceptance, integration and belonging within society. It is therefore suggested by Barry that desistance in the transition to adulthood does not come with age per se, but with increased opportunity for what she terms ‘social recognition’ – that is, opportunities to accumulate and spend capital that is both legitimate and durable through, for example, acts of generativity and responsibility.

In contrast, research by C. Murray (2011) explored how young people “maintain their non-offending status” (p. 25) from the perspective of those with and without an offending history. These findings suggest that young people desisting from crime are analogous to young people who have not offended. This research is unique to the extent that often non-offending persons are of subsidiary examination, constituting the control or comparison group in quantitative analyses, while those who offend are given primacy in studies. Broadening the research scope to include non-offending individuals is a novel point of enquiry into understanding how young people refrain from offending, which becomes of particular interest when considered amidst the wide recognition that adolescent offending is normative. C. Murray (2010, 2011) argues that focusing attention purely on offending persons underestimates the effort required by those who resist offending. Similarly, the literature portrays non-offending persons as ‘conformists’ and ‘innocents’, which implies passivity;
and thus, fails to acknowledge individual agency in the construction of non-offending pathways. Affording agency to young people challenges the notion that the mere presence of protective factors results in more positive outcomes within a context of adversity. Rather, it suggests that resilience is an active negotiation with protective processes and requires use of available resources (C. Murray, 2010).

C. Murray’s research identified four key strategies in the resistance of offending, which are summarised as follows: ‘Managing offending peers’ was a strategy employed to resist offending by those who for the most part were in contact with offending friends, acquaintances or peers. Some young people avoided offending others altogether; however, limiting involvement with offending peers was more common practice and limits were either self-imposed or set by parents. For those that mixed with offending peers, managing these relationships involved retaining and enhancing their non-offending identity and exerting influence over their peers to resist offending. Conversely, other non-offending young people socialised with offending friends and thus, they did not avoid or limit their involvement with them; however, they did not try to influence their behaviour either. Another strategy used to resist offending is ‘taking temporal leaps’, which refers to having a focus on one’s future life. This was reflected in the narratives of non-offending young people as a goal or a passion, which they were aspiring to realise. ‘Othering offenders’ was the third strategy identified to resist offending. Othering was the process by which non-offending young people were able to “maintain a distinct and unequivocal divide – at least in discourse – between themselves and offenders” (C. Murray, 2010, p. 126). Accentuating their difference, and also ascribing negative characteristics to them (for example by way of making derogatory and sympathetic remarks) achieved this. The final strategy is ‘telling atrocity stories’ which serve to differentiate those who offend from those who do not. These stories create a distinct boundary between opposites and remind non-offending persons to avoid criminality. C. Murray argues that non-offending young people engage in ‘active resilience’ to resist offending.

C. Murray further asserts that although those who desist from crime share a history with persistent offending persons, their current experience has more in common with their non-offending counterparts. Thus, a shift toward reconceptualising those who cease offending as ‘non-offenders’ is made by considering them in parallel to those who have not offended. The research findings suggest that encounters with police, a sense of guilt and punishment by parents provided the young people with the impetus to desist from crime. However, largely reflected in their accounts were the challenges to sustaining desistance. Thus, the experiences of those desisting from crime and those without an offending history converged in their effort to maintain a non-offending trajectory and resembled a shared experience in the following ways. Some young people in the
study reflected upon offending as ‘fun’, ‘thrilling’, ‘exciting’ and a ‘buzz’; and thus, non-offending
was viewed by them as ‘giving up’ or ‘missing out’ on the pleasures associated with offending. The
temptation to offend was recounted by both those with and without an offending history; and thus,
for both groups the maintenance of resistance was a struggle. Furthermore, the findings suggest a
link between bullying and non-offending and thus, bullying presents as another challenge young
people are confronted with when they reject participating in criminal activity. Also, feeling deficit, a
misfit and having lower social status was strongly attributed to refraining from offending (C. Murray,
2011).

3.7.2 Self-narratives of offending

Narrative is both a method and phenomenon of study (see section 4.5 for an overview of
narrative theory). In brief, narrative as a theoretical framework guiding research, views personal
accounts of the self as constructed in and through language; thus, conceptualisation of the self is a
linguistic construction that is determined by both self- and other-stories. The storying of life
episodes enables participation in conversations in which identity is shaped through the participation
of an audience that moulds the narrative according to particular social (group) values. Consequently,
we are only one of multiple authors in our constantly changing narrative making, which is embedded
within historical and social-cultural-political contexts. This constitutive conceptualisation of narrative
is informed by social constructionism and argues that persons are actively shaped by life stories

Presser (2010) notes, “the view of narrative as a shaper of experience is least common in our
discipline but discernible in the work of psychologically oriented criminologists” (p. 435). For
instance, in the book Seductions of Crime, Katz (1988) explores the seductive qualities of the lived
experience of criminality embedded in the narrativity of the lifeworld “that make its various forms
sensible, even sensually compelling, ways of being” (p. 3). Toch (1993) discusses narrative
reconstructions of violence and the self-presentation therein that shape the meanings of violent
behaviour (as good or bad) for certain audiences, such “self-portraits also aim at the aggressor’s
view of himself” (p. 194). The following review of narrative oriented research details studies by
O’Connor (2000), Presser (2008) and Maruna (2001). It makes apparent the critical significance of
understanding the talk of offending persons, as “the way people identify themselves makes harmful
action (like all action) possible; in changing how they identify themselves, people are less likely to do
harm” (Presser, 2008, p. 1).

O’Conner (2000) emphasises the importance of telling the life story in her book Speaking of
Crime: Narratives of Prisoners. The research, informed by sociolinguistics, theories of social
constructionism, and narratology, was a linguistic and cognitive enquiry into how incarcerated men speak of their lives and more specifically, how they speak of crime. The postmodern methodology of discourse analysis was utilised in the deconstruction of 19 in-depth interviews with African American men imprisoned within a United States maximum security institution. This methodology allowed for examination of the connections between language and identity formation and showed how these men agentively present themselves in discourse about life experiences. Attention was given to the various ways speakers position themselves in their criminal pasts, while narratively constructing past selves and possible alternative selves.

O’Conner’s findings indicate that distancing is a feature in narrative that is achieved in some predicate structures in orality that reveal through junctures of evaluative speech agentive possibilities. Accordingly, O’Conner refines the definition of personal agency as:

The positioning of the self in an act or in the reflection on an action indexed to that person. This self-positioning exists along a continuum of responsibility shown through a grammar of agency with which we can chart the sense of a responsible self, taking into account that speakers are simultaneously presenting and re-presenting selves on several planes of discourse (p. 154).

More specifically, the utterances collected showed that agency, revealed in statements about criminal acts, fall along a continuum of agentive possibilities that range from deflecting agency to claiming agency and in the middle problematising agency (see Table 1). Claiming agency was revealed in statements where the speaker’s self-positioning placed him as one who does, and is personally responsible for, an action. In instances of claiming agency, simple first-person indexed utterances in active voice were regarded as most agentive (e.g., “I shot him”). Least agentive phrases included passivising or necessitating structures (e.g., “we ended up getting caught”; “we had to exchange gunfire”), or where the speaker’s stance was uninvolved (e.g., “I caught a charge”). Such statements seen as deflecting agency “shift the focus from the speaker’s agentive act (robbing, shooting, etc.) to his position as being acted upon” (O’Conner, 2000, p. 50). In contrast, problematising agency was revealed in statements where the speaker grappled with the moral stance connected to the criminal act, shifting the positioning of the self from the action to contemplation of moral responsibility (e.g., “I don’t know whether instincts had me shoot him”). O’Conner suggests that such moments are akin to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development; and thus, offer therapeutic potential, since a listener (or another speaker) can be an audience for a new self-concept to be shaped when one is attempting to figure out their agency.
Table 1

**Continuum and Examples of Agency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deflecting</th>
<th>Problematising</th>
<th>Claiming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We ended up getting caught</td>
<td>On occasion, I participated in a lot of shooting</td>
<td>I broke the antenna off a car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had to exchange gunfire</td>
<td>I don’t know whether I thought “Shoot him” or not</td>
<td>I’ve always did what I wanted to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I caught my first charge</td>
<td>I don’t know whether instincts had me shoot him</td>
<td>I went from running numbers to using the pistol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


O’Conner extends the analysis of imprisoned men’s narratives beyond an exploration of presentations of the (agentive) self by arguing that reflexive language cues sites for productive introspection and moral development. She views such sites as ‘anticipations of change’ wherein ways of seeing the self can be located and could potentially lead to constructing a more responsible self through collaboration and the co-construction of a self-awareness. This is because life narratives create opportunities for self-reflection and the potential to imagine and enact change in one’s life. Narrative opens a window into cognition; and thus, can be utilised to facilitate speakers to make their positioning of behaviour discernible for personal and public inspection. Thus, O’Conner proposes that sociolinguistic analysis of discourse, with a specific focus on narrative accounts of criminal acts and the evaluative language about such acts, would enhance rehabilitative efforts within the correctional setting.

Research by Presser (2008) examined the life stories of 27 men in the United States with a history of violent offending. In her book, *Been a Heavy Life: Stories of Violent Men*, she describes the research approach as informed by ethnomethodology with a two-fold focus. First, Presser explores the substance of the men’s narratives to discern patterns in their stories; second, she considers the “situated-ness of the narratives in the interview” (p. 14) and through reflexive and critical engagement with the data she shows the collaborative construction of narrated identities. Two key themes were apparent from Presser’s analysis of the men’s narratives – moral decency and heroic struggle. The way in which morally decent and heroic selves were claimed in talk varied within the self-stories and was seen to follow two basic structures, namely reform and stability.

Presser identified key features of the reform narrative told by five of the men. The plotline was one of “moral transformation” (p. 64), which followed a “trajectory from essential goodness to
moral decline and back to goodness” (p. 70). Hence, the narrator spoke of a protagonist who had reverted back to his essentially good self through overcoming criminogenic forces and carrying out concrete plans for desistance from crime. In doing so, distance was emphasised in the narrative between the narrator and the past criminal self.

In contrast, seven men told stability narratives. Claiming consistent moral decency regardless of past criminal behaviour was a more complex task. The protagonist in such stories was “steady in his propensity to act according to moral principles, either because he has been mostly decent or because he follows subcultural moral codes, or both” (p. 62). The distance created in reform talk between the narrator and the protagonist was marginal in stability narratives. This was because continuity in the moral self over time negated emphasis on the narrator’s difference from the past self, as well as the need for desistance strategies. Presser identified four related and interchangeable tactics that characterised stability talk. First, the men used justifying devices to frame their offending behaviour in a positive light by appealing to the honourable ethics of “mythic male non-conformists” (p. 73), patriarchal culture to cast masculine violence as decent, and the pleasures of crime to present “deviance as sport” (p. 77). Second, moral decency was maintained through the narrator’s bemusement with a protagonist who had a brief moral lapse whereby the self was ‘taken out of character’; and thus, was not his true self for the short-lived duration of the crime. Third, a shift in the focus of stories fashioned the plot along non-deviant lines. Stability talk tended to emphasise the goodness of the protagonist in the commission of the crime; imbue the protagonist with personas of a good victim or fool, which mitigated criminal intent; bring sanctions rather than criminal acts to the narrative foreground; and, reference more deviant others to frame the protagonist as good by comparison. Finally, stability narratives included ‘bad seed critiques’ within which the narrator “plays with the idea of a basically deviant self, only to finally dismiss the idea from the narrative” (p. 95).

A third hybrid or elastic narrative was described by Presser, which combined the structures of reform and stability. The majority of men, 15 in total, told an elastic narrative. Stability talk was more prominent than reform talk in this narrative; in particular, reform talk was not clearly expressed or defined, such that it was not the point or plot of the narrative. As a result, the plotline was not well integrated. Causal links between criminogenic factors were weak and strategies for desistance from crime were insubstantial. Presser remarks, “elastic narrators rejected the criminal experience rather than criminal identity”, the indeterminacy of elastic narratives leaves the meaning open for interpretation allowing the “narrator to hedge his bets on what the audience truly wants to hear” (105).
Heroic struggle was the second major theme Presser found in the men’s narratives that was constituent of their storied identity. The two themes, moral decency and heroic struggle, were interlinked to the extent that heroic struggle in stories preserved a morally intact self by bolstering one’s claim of reform or stability. Internal and external social forces that were often central to explaining one’s offending trajectory are termed ‘foes’ by Presser in recognition of the adversarial dynamic that was characterised by narrators as existing between the self and society. Internal foes were antisocial attitudes, mental illness and addiction. External foes, which featured more often in the men’s talk, were the environment, other people and criminal justice authority.

Presser’s approach to the research takes into account what she calls the ‘co-production’ of narrated identities. While her examination of the research data is concerned with how the men spoke of who they are, her words and actions are considered in analysis for their influence on the narratives that emerged in the interview process. In articulating the mechanisms for such co-production, Presser identified that “the men used the very fact of the interview, various constructions of who I am, and my supposed confirmation of their self-claims to shape and support their narratives” (p. 143). In essence, her research calls for reflexivity not just in methodology, but more broadly in deconstructing the way in which ‘crime’ and ‘offenders’ are produced by criminologists and the like who shape such discourses. Presser’s findings emphasise the narrated experience of stigmatisation, and in particular the way “narratives of powerlessness and difference conduce to harmful action” (p. 149) – narratives that are actively promoted in criminological and other related fields.

Maruna (2001) examined the “phenomenological or sociocognitive aspects of desistance” (p. 38) in a systematic comparison between the self-stories of men and women identified as either desisting from – or persistently – committing property crime in England. A matched sample of participants formed two groups with the underlying assumption that they “represent similar individuals” (p. 74) at varying stages in the process of change. Inductive and deductive analysis of the data resulted in two composite identity narratives that emphasised the commonalities in a phenomenology of desistance (entitled a ‘redemption script’) set against a phenomenology of persistence (entitled a ‘condemnation script’).

The condemnation script was characterised by “a coherent sense of oneself as a victim of society” (p. 77) that renders the subjectivity of the actively offending person as one who is powerless to change their life of crime and criminal justice system involvement. Accordingly, narrators interpreted and defined their lives as beyond their control, determined by chance and circumstance. Most notably, differentiating the condemnation script of actively offending persons
from the redemption script of desisting persons was a lack of narrative meaning making and agentic claim.

The redemption script illuminates how persons desist from crime in a criminogenic setting by making sense of their lives in the form of a redeeming self-story. Maruna argues that desistance from crime necessitates intentional and gradual shifts in one’s sense of self to construct a reformed identity. However, rather than creating a new self that is detached from the past, desisting persons re-established a past prosocial self (i.e., the ‘core’ or ‘true’ self) in the present that is distinct from a version of self that committed crime. Empowerment from some external source was often attributed to the change that occurred within. The reformed identity was constructed through “a coherent and credible self-story” (p. 7) that “allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life” (p. 87). In essence, themes of productivity and agentic control were key to desisting narratives and resembled “tragic optimism” (p. 98). Maruna described this as a cognitive distortion of ‘making good’, whereby “to make good is to find reason and purpose in the bleakest of life histories” (p. 9). Maruna calls into question a fundamental tenet of correctional intervention discourse and practice that typically regards such self-stories of reform as ‘denial’ and evidence of ‘criminogenic thinking’. Instead, Maruna’s narrative data highlighted neutralisations, self-enhancing distortions and selective storying as a constituent component of the desistance process; and thus, maintaining behavioural change.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has sought to provide some degree of organisation to existing theory and research by pulling together various threads in a conceptualisation of the risk process. In particular, the chapter has considered the resistance of offending, as well as variation in offending trajectories on the basis of early neurological processes or later normative social processes. It has detailed sources of continuity in antisocial behaviour that narrow opportunities for change and attention has been given to age-graded changes in social bonds that account for changes in offending behaviour over the life course. Furthermore, desistance from crime was argued to be a progressive process of improving wellbeing that involves changes in multiple life domains. Finally, a focus on the subjective experience of offending elucidated offending trajectories as an accelerated path to adulthood and a socially emergent process, contextually shaped and neither reducible to the person nor the environment (i.e., suggesting a subjective-social model of the recidivism/desistance process). Additionally, recognition was given to the importance of self-narratives in understanding the movement toward or away from offending. Due to the proliferation of literature in the area the review in this chapter is far from exhaustive, although is illustrative of the background against which
the current study is situated. Chapters 4 and 5, which follow, detail the methodology and methods for fulfilling the research purpose.
Chapter 4: Methodology and methods

This chapter returns to the aim of the research and outlines the qualitative design adopted for fulfilling the research purpose. It explicates the philosophical assumptions underpinning the theoretical perspective and elaborates the rationale for a narrative-phenomenological approach to enquiry. This chapter describes how the methodology was translated into the specific methods undertaken. Additionally, how these procedures meet criteria for methodological rigour and demonstrate the validity of the findings is discussed.

4.1 Research aim and purpose

The research is concerned with the subjective meanings young men attach to life events and circumstances that reflect key transitions, times of decision and turning points, which the young men view to have shaped their life direction. The broad aim of the project is to explore young men’s narrative accounts of the movement toward offending and/or away from offending. More specifically, this is explored with reference to multiple life transitions, such as involvements with educational, justice and/or welfare institutions and the corresponding transitions (i.e., into and out of) relating to such institutions. Further, young men’s negotiation of these institutional transitions is explored with reference to the overarching developmental task of moving from adolescent dependency to adult self-sufficiency. A central feature of the transition to adulthood is the active search for a sense of self. The self is a created narrative – “a being-and-becoming through language and storytelling as we continually attempt to make sense of the world and of ourselves” (Anderson, 1997, p. 216). Thus, implicit within the ambit of the research is the illumination of the narrative self, which prompts the question of how the dialogical self is related to the construction of life pathways and in particular, emmeshment in and/or escape from the risk process.

4.2 Qualitative psychology

Qualitative research is sensitive to the unique inter-subjective experience of persons and the subtle, interacting effects of context and time, which generate new understandings and avenues to explore (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Yardley, 2008). Despite such possibilities, the potential of narrative accounts to theorise the aetiology of crime has been for the most part overlooked in research (Presser, 2009). Nee (2004) points out that while forensic practice involves engaging and conversing with the person, research is typically not invested in the perspective of (offending) persons; and thus, is undertaken “without much reference to the ‘raw material’ of our subject” (p. 3). Further, Nee warns, “surely a grounded approach to research, using the offender as expert, is a method we ignore at our peril” (p. 4). Therefore, this research adopts a qualitative framework, giving a voice to the marginalised, in an exploration of young men’s narrative accounts of the phenomenological
experience of moving toward and/or away from offending, with reference to multiple life transitions. The following section will outline the epistemological position taken, which is inherent in the theoretical perspective of the research and implicated in the qualitative methodological approach chosen.

4.3 Foundations and philosophical underpinnings

The paradigmatic set of beliefs that define the nature of the social world (ontology) and how knowledge of it is formed (epistemology) provide the organising principles of social science research. Ontological and epistemological concerns often unfold together; and therefore, tend to merge conceptually. Additionally, obfuscation of the elements of ontologies, epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods has lead to confusion resulting in research being variously described, sometimes in contradictory ways. Thus, it is necessary to make transparent the assumptions made about reality that are embedded in the theoretical perspective adopted. This provides a context for the research and grounds the methodology and methods in logic and criteria (Crotty, 1998).

This research diverges from the predominantly modernist assumptions of mainstream psychology, which is aligned within the framework of positivistic empirical science (Langdrige, 2007). Positivism is premised on the belief in a knowable world that is reducible to fixed, universal properties (Gergen, 1990). However, most within social science research have adopted a more liberal approach, which reflects the movement from positivism to post-positivism. Post-positivism is still grounded in the belief that an objective reality exists; however, a critical position is espoused, which considers knowledge of the real world to be incomplete and only an approximation (Langdrige, 2007; Hammersley, 2013).

In contrast to mainstream psychology, this research endorses a postmodern perspective and thus, considers reality a subjective construction. The postmodern movement reflects a shift in thinking that is “not a simple rejection of modernism but rather a refusal to treat what it stands for as privileged as against what it opposes” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 39). More specifically, the postmodern paradigm denies the existence of a knowable world (realism) and the belief that people possess a given set of universal characteristics (essentialism). Rather, a central tenet of postmodernism is that language constitutes the human world, thus reality is a composite of texts, whereby meaning is socially constructed through language/discourse and inter-subjective practices (Ashworth, 2008; Langdridge, 2007). The objective order reduces human experience to a meaningless sphere of natural reality abstracted from its life context; and thus, denies the totality of the subjective personal experience (Mølbak, 2012). It is argued that the social world cannot be
extracted in the same way as the physical world, as people are self-interpreting beings, immersed in
language, culture and history (Hammersley, 2013). It is within this framework that the current
research is situated; and thus, has epistemological basis in interpretivism, hermeneutics and social
constructionism.

Interpretive understanding is the complex process by which the meaning of human action is
understood. It involves empathic identification, which requires grasping an actor’s subjective
consciousness or intent from the ‘inside’. Phenomenologically speaking, it is the process of
understanding how social reality (i.e., the inter-subjective, lifeworld) is constituted. It is considered a
linguistic and linguistically determined process, as human action is meaningful because it belongs to
a system of meanings (institutional, cultural, political etc.). Also, in one sense, there is a hermeneutic
element to the tradition of interpretivism (Schwandt, 2003). This is because hermeneutics is the
interpretation of human expression.

In the tradition of interpretivism, the act of understanding is a procedural technique
whereby meaning is determinable and discovered by the interpreter. Conversely, philosophical
hermeneutics considers understanding to be a basic condition of human experience in which
meaning is mutually negotiated in the process of interpretation (Schwandt, 2003). Within this
concept is the notion of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ – that is the “process by which a particular
interpretation is derived from a series of instances, which then serves to unify those instances as
parts of a larger whole” (Tappan, 2001, p. 49). This view holds that understanding is positional, and
entailed in interpretation is the interface between the historical and psychological world of the
interpreter and the agent whose expression of lived experience is being interpreted (Tappan, 2001)
Therefore, shaping such understanding is the interpreter’s historical and socio-cultural moulded
conception of the world, along with all its expectations, biases, prejudices and assumptions.
However, rather than being set aside, escaped from, controlled, managed or tracked, hermeneutics
argues that reaching an understanding requires the engagement of such preconceptions and biases.
The meaning sought in participatory sense making interactions is “temporal and processive and
always coming into being in the specific occasion of understanding” (Schwandt, 2003 p. 195).

While philosophical hermeneutics views meaning as negotiated through interactions,
constructivism considers meaning to be a production of the social world. From a constructivist
perspective, interpretation is constructed through engagement with the realities of the world.
Hence, objects of knowledge and the appraisal of such occur within a conceptual framework through
which the social world is organised and understood. Social constructionism elaborates on the
constructivist position and takes a more sceptical attitude to ontology of the real (Crotty, 1998;
Schwandt, 2003). That is to say that from the perspective of social constructionism, “our conceptions
do not touch the world, but all is construction or *all is text*” (Ashworth, 2008, p. 21, emphasis in the original). Therefore, the only meaningful existence of ‘truth’ is in the form of our representations of it (C. Sullivan; 2010). Accordingly, there is recognition and acceptance of radical diversity in perspectives, as multiple, contradictory and incommensurable interpretations exist simultaneously and circulate in shared contexts (Hammersley, 2013). Also, emphasised in this view is a construction of social reality that is largely embedded within discursive practices. This means that interpretation takes places in a shared system of codes and symbols, lifeworlds, understandings and practices with reference to historical and socio-cultural dimensions (Schwandt, 2003; Guzzini, 2013). Moreover, it is claimed that language has the power to shape and produce lived experience such that “discourse forms us, and in a sense even speaks through us” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 42). So, ‘totalising discourses’ are opposed, not only on the basis of ontology and epistemology, but also on political and ethical grounds (Hammersley, 2013).

An extreme relativist view that abandons any notion of a reality bearing some resemblance to our constructions is arguably problematic. This is because ultimate truth, as the foundation upon which arguments are usually made, is lost. Likewise, the notion that the self is constructed in discourse and in this sense ‘forms us’, undermines individual agency, since the capacity for persons to reconstruct themselves and their world is removed (Burr, 1998). While relativism provides no direction on how to traverse the plurality of discourse, what has been made clear by Potter (1998) is that this does not mean social constructionists contend that ‘anything goes’. This “realist slur on relativism” is without foundation because “for the relativist, what ‘goes’ is at stake for people; it is what is constructed and argued over” (Potter, 1998, p.34). So, the issue is less about the status of reality, but rather how to deal with ontological insecurity. Social constructionists do make judgements and defend them. But, it is acknowledged that such judgements must (and can only) be made from within our own system of values and beliefs, which are culturally and historically positioned and constructed (Burr, 1998). Similarly, Gergen (1985) states “the degree to which any given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric)” (p. 268). Therefore, from this view, individuals are imbued with agentic capabilities, as they make value judgements, which guide their choices and actions (Burr, 1998).

This section has outlined the epistemological basis of the research in the philosophies of interpretivism, philosophical hermeneutics and social constructionism. These philosophies emphasise the culturally and historically situated nature of understanding and consider such understanding central to human existence. Additionally, language is viewed as the means through
which understanding of the social world is gained. A research interest in subjective meanings involves interpretive understanding of expressions of lived experience. Therefore, the following section will discuss the phenomenological focus on experience.

4.4 Phenomenological psychology

Phenomenology in application to psychology is, in the words of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a ‘return to the things themselves’ as experienced. Thus, the aim of phenomenological psychology is to focus on the world as it appears to people - that is, people’s perspectives and perceptions of lived experience, and the meanings this has for them (Ashworth, 2008; C. Sullivan, 2010). Phenomenological psychology is diverse; and hence, is regarded as the “label for a family of approaches”, which are all informed by phenomenology, but vary in terms of the particular phenomenological philosophy that underpin the methodology (Langridge, 2007, p. 4).

The phenomenological philosophy established by Husserl introduced the concept of the ‘lifeworld’, as the foundation of all phenomenological psychological study. The lifeworld is the experiential subjective world of the individual in which meaning is given primacy (Langridge, 2007; Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). Husserl gave priority to the rich description of the lifeworld and considered it possible to transcend human subjectivity and bracket off preconceptions to reveal the essence(s) of experience. However, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) departed from this transcendental position and proposed a more existential position, in which interpretation is primary and the role of language is recognised (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). This marks the distinction between descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, and it is this latter version of phenomenology to which this research adheres.

Heidegger reformed phenomenology by building on the philosophical hermeneutic tradition. Interpretive phenomenology does not investigate the lifeworld from a neutral or detached stance. The attribution of meaning to phenomena is an interpretive act that is relational and grounded in the socio-historical context (Langridge, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). However, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach adopted in this research draws more specifically on the later philosophical contributions of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). While the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur differs in theme or accent, there are also similarities in their hermeneutic stance. The focus for Gadamer is on language, and the way in which it can be used through conversation to reveal the world, leading towards shared understanding (Langridge, 2007).

Ricoeur, following Gadamer, offers an elaborate theory of text interpretation, rather than conversation. Importantly, Ricoeur differentiates spoken discourse from discourse fixed in writing (i.e., text). This means that text is detached from dialogical discourse; and hence, there is no other
speaker with which to engage in conversation and reach a shared understanding through communication. Consequently, the text transcends the historical and socio-cultural conditions of its own production. It enters into relation with other texts and has reference to a symbolic world. Accordingly, the ‘appropriation’ of discursive meaning is lost when speech is inscribed and any appropriation of meaning at this point must be an approximation. This creates the potential for critical distance in interpretation. Appropriation is the means by which the reader strives to grasp the meanings expressed by a text through ‘play’ or ‘dance’, that is, the ‘to-and-fro’ that occurs through engagement, which necessitates losing oneself in the action of play for it to fulfil its purpose (Langdridge, 2004; Langdridge, 2007).

For Ricoeur, the appropriation of meaning also entails a hermeneutic of suspicion, whereby we seek to identify the meaning concealed beneath the surface that is in need of being uncovered. Ricoeur recognises the potential for appropriation to be misunderstood as a form of subjectivism where the reader’s subjectivity is projected onto the text. While this should be avoided, it is acknowledged that it is not possible to detach from the ideological position we occupy (Langdridge, 2004; Langdridge, 2007). Therefore, “the mechanism through which this error is corrected involves subjecting the subject itself to a hermeneutic critique” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 50). Essentially, this takes place through reflexive engagement that acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge; and therefore, how particular subject positions may impact on the production of knowledge (Langdridge, 2007).

Ricoeur turns to narrative discourse in his later work to examine the temporal character of human existence. His philosophy of metaphor and narrative are complementary works and these two forms of discourse share in common ‘productive invention’, which represents a form of ordering the world by the imagination in an interpretive manner. Hence, both require hermeneutic participation; and therefore, it is through metaphor and narrative that new meaning is created. Metaphor expands meaning by understanding one thing by way of another; and thus, for Ricoeur phenomenological truth is reached through a process of ‘seeing as’. However, narrative produces meaning by ordering actions into an integrated and coherent unity of causal connections (Simms, 2003; Langdridge, 2007). Thus, the interpretation of human action brings about narrative, and “life understood as narrative constitutes self understanding” (Simms, 2003, p. 80).

Importantly, human experience has a mixed temporality of cosmological time (i.e., time of the natural world) and phenomenological time (i.e., our experience of time), and narratives are exemplary of the lived experience of phenomenological time (Atkins, 2008). More specifically, for Ricoeur a three-stage mimesis is involved in the translation of experience to narrative: prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, of which no one stage makes sense without the other two.
Essentially, prefiguration is the preliminary knowledge of what human action consists of, which we bring to a narrative in order to understand the plot. Configuration (or emplotment) is where disparate elements form an entity to produce a meaningful and coherent whole. Refiguration is tied to appropriation whereby the application of textual meaning broadens the reader’s understanding of the world (Simms, 2003; Sandino, 2010).

This section has described phenomenological psychology and has given attention to the various approaches, along with their divergent philosophical stances and differing emphases. Fundamentally, phenomenological psychology aims to understand the immediate lifeworld of persons and generate knowledge of the quality and texture of (subjective) experience (Willig, 2013). Phenomenological approaches most faithful to Husserl seek to “understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task” (Giorgi, 2012, p. 6). However, this research primarily draws on the philosophy of Gadamer and Ricoeur. This is because hermeneutics expands the phenomenological task of description by involving an interpretive dimension of meaning making, which produces a more sophisticated understanding (Mair, 2010). Furthermore, Ricoeur connects the hermeneutic activity of interpretation to narrative discourse, explicating narrative as a mode of understanding that is vital to the human project. Therefore, the following section will detail narrative theory, as it is central to the phenomenological understanding of lived experience and how people make meaning of experiences.

4.5 Narrative theory

The recent ascendancy of narrative in psychological and sociological theories of social life is not surprising (Presser, 2009; Ward, 2012). Narrative theory is multifacetated and spans diverse theoretical perspectives. It encompasses an array of overlapping terms and is often imprecisely delineated. Ward (2012) offers the following definition: “at best, it seems that the concept of narrative is a metaphor for individuals’ conceptions of their and other peoples’ lives that depicts what really matters to them, and outlines the way their lives temporally unfold in relation to these priorities” (p. 252). Alternatively, narrative is not merely a metaphor for storytelling, but a reflexive bidirectional discursive process through which experience is constructed, and in turn understood (Anderson, 1997).

The realist notion that the “self is distinct from the narratives or self-conceptions people construct to explain their internal life and external actions” (Ward, 2012, p. 253) is not the view espoused here. From a postmodern perspective, the self is an ever-evolving expression of our narratives that is formed, informed and re-formed through language and storytelling, as we strive to make sense of the world and ourselves. Hence, the self is engaged in a process of conversational
becoming, constructed and re-constructed in interactional exchanges, whereby identity is based on
the constancy of a continuous narrative. As such, narrative identity is a reflection of the coherence
and continuity in the telling and re-telling of stories (Anderson, 1997).

While narrative theory is varied in character, McAdams (2008) identifies the following
common principles, which represent broad themes across the literature. These principles assert
that: (a) the self is comprised of selective and strategic storied recollections of the past, which (b)
provide diachronic integration of life experiences, are (c) told in social relationships, (d) change over
time, are (e) cultural texts and (f) suggest a moral perspective. A further clarifying remark relates to
the distinction between narrative products and narrative processes. Narrative products are concrete
and integrated life accounts that are constructed by persons and bound in time and context.
Narrative processes (or autobiographical reasoning) are the self-reflective cognitions about the
personal past that involve forming connections between aspects of one’s life and the self in order to
narrative we forge a sense of coherence that experience lacks” (p. 180), and by way of narrative
coherence, meaning is attributed to what would otherwise be an array of indiscriminate and
haphazard collection of events. In other words, narrative brings meaning and order to disorder (M.
Murray, 2008).

Gergen and Gergen (1988) suggest that through the structural organisation of narrative
elements that generate coherence, a sense of directionality in one’s life is also established. Thus, the
plotline takes a linear form reflecting evaluative shifts from which they identify three basic narrative
types: stability, progressive and regressive. In a stability narrative, the sequencing of events are
linked “in such a way that the individual remains essentially unchanged with respect to evaluative
position” (p. 24). In contrast, a pattern of movement along the evaluative dimension may be
characterised by increments (progressive narrative) or decrements (regressive narrative).

Habermas and Bluck (2000) identify distinct categories of coherence in narrative
constructions – namely, temporal, cultural concept of biography, causal and thematic coherence.
They assert that the overall ‘global coherence’ of any given life narrative is determined by the
degree to which these four types of coherence are present. Temporal coherence and the cultural
concept of biography provide the fundamental form of coherence, which consists of the sequential
ordering of culturally normative events that define conventional life phases. Causal and thematic
coherence refer to the individual interpretive stance of the person. Causal coherence is central to
life narratives because meaning is produced by integrating past events through the formation of
causal links between the elements of one’s life. It gives the temporal ordering of events plausibility
and is crucial for making connections between the self and life episodes. Thematic coherence is
established by integrating the various aspects of life through the identification of an overarching theme, value or principle, which conveys the essence of the person and the life they have lived.

The capacity to produce causal and thematic coherence in life narratives is considered to develop throughout adolescence and substantially increase during the transition to adulthood (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2008). Accordingly, coherent life narratives rely on emotional and cognitive competencies, such as the capacity to monitor and attend to internal and external experiences (Ward, 2012). Thus, not all life narratives are coherent in the four ways defined; and therefore, life narratives are not necessarily globally coherent. However, Habermas and Bluck suggest that causal and thematic coherence is a precondition for recognising life narratives as legitimate and acceptable.

Strawson (2004) argues that experiencing life narratively ought not be the privileged mode of self-representation and an essential condition of a properly moral existence. He rejects the narrativity thesis on the basis that some persons are ‘episodic’ in their temporal style of being; and thus, are less inclined to consider their life in narrative terms because they do not experience long-term diachronic continuity of self. Rather, the episodic self-experience is oriented to the ‘now’ and so, the self is not considered to have existed in the past or to persist into the future (Battersby, 2006; Strawson, 2004). However, counter to Strawson’s view, Battersby (2006) puts forward an alternate perspective, which is a hybrid position that unifies the episodic-diachronic dichotomy. Following the pluralist tradition, along with Battersby, there are many paths to conceptualising the self and self-representation that are narrative and/or non-narrative and in various combinations with episodic and/or diachronic being, of which none needs to be privileged above any other, or given greater moral value. Likewise, Eakin’s (2006) states, “self is a name I’d give to reflexive awareness of processes unfolding in many registers. Narrative identity, then, is only one, albeit extremely important, mode of self-experience” (p. 181).

A postmodern view also conceptualises narrative more broadly as a discursive schema. In other words, “selfhood is the product of public discourse rather than of internal psychic processes” (K. D. Murray, 1995, p. 181). Hence, the world is actively constructed through narrative and it is through the creation and exchange of narratives that we live. That is to say, narratives have ontological status (M. Murray, 2008). From this perspective, narrative is situated within, and is in interaction with, local individual and broader cultural contexts. The culturally circumscribed conventions of storytelling, which govern the telling of self-narratives, is critical in the types of life choices a person makes. Hence, the locus of action no longer resides internally with the individual, but is shifted into the external and social world (Anderson, 1997; K. D. Murray, 1995). As a result, “perspectives and interpretations about the self” are the product of “those selves the social order
and culture make available” (Presser, 2009, p. 185). Mattingly (2010) elaborates on this by arguing that culturally specific narratives are:

Politically charged dramas that shape the rhythms of activity and the experiences and expectations of participants. They fill the social landscape with friends and enemies, with authorized desires and commitments, with identifiable members of one’s community and outsiders. They people the landscape with social hierarchies. They are very often conflict driven, providing an anticipatory understanding of who has power and legitimacy to act in certain ways and under what circumstances, who are the keepers of truth, knowledge, and expertise, where risks lie, what is worth taking risks for, where trouble is likely to occur, and a number of other dramatic concerns (p. 43).

Langdridge (2007) refers to this as the ‘social imaginary’, that is the world of stories within which we live that both permits and constrains possible ways of being in the world and the construction of identity. Thus, the study of narratives offers insight into how people make sense of their experiences within social-cultural-political contexts, as well as how the stories people generate determine the self and affect human action (McAdams, 2008).

While postmodernism has been criticised for its potential to relegate the psychological subject to mere positions in discourse, which are socially determined and fragmented, Kirkman (2002) suggests that narrative can overcome this issue. First, the narrative self is dialogical in nature, “a conversation between voices in the person, and between those voices and others in the outside world; at the same time, the dialogical self is also the histories and stories behind those voices” (Raggatt, 2007, p. 356). Second, narratives are provisional and undergo continuous reinterpretation in relation to the present (Kirkman, 2002; M. Murray, 2008). Thus, it is our capacity for self-reflection and narrative re-interpretation, revision and even re-invention in light of the present that stands in the face of social determinism. As noted by Ward and Marshall (2007), “the view that human beings are agents who construct narrative identities and engage in personal projects based on these identities indicates that they have some degree of plasticity and ability to shape their lives and circumstances” (p. 280).

Therefore, it is argued that we possess “individuality outside and in tension with its social constructions” (M. Murray, 2008, p. 182). Similarly, Ricoeur (1987) expresses that narrating our individual story is not commensurate with completely authoring our life. Mair (2010) elaborates on this, suggesting that such revision of life narratives is not easily done. This is because narrative revision undermines our sense of self, place and trajectory, and conflict can arise when hegemonic identity narratives are challenged. He emphasises the rising potential for clashes of narrative, particularly in the context of growing globalisation and associated cultural discordance, arguing that
fractures of identity are the result of narratives colliding and intruding into one another. However, he considers that like weaving threads together, the narratives in which we are enmeshed may be skilfully crafted to create our identity. But, not all narratives available to the individual can be interwoven; and thus, “the fabric of our identity may even threaten to tear” (Mair, 2010, p. 158).

A narrative theoretical framework to understanding the phenomenological experience of the self is fundamentally suited to this research. Life narratives illuminate the subjective meaning of experience in ways that create possibilities for a multilayered analysis that concerns the phenomenological and structural in relationship. Encompassed within this approach is the scope to explore how subjectivity, narrative self and social action are shaped in stories, which are embedded within broader discourses. A narrative-phenomenological approach is sensitive to the subjective meaning, selective recounting and causal sequencing of life events that allows participant young men to express the self that has undergone life-course continuity and change – especially in relation to offending behaviour, and particularly in the context of multiple life transitions.

Presser (2009) states that the constitutive view “is not the appreciative stance toward narrative taken by many critical criminologists, which casts the narrative of the marginalised subject as true, or at least truer than the culturally dominant stories” (p. 185). She speculates that perhaps conceptualising narrative as constitutive of human action has been predominantly avoided in forensic psychology “due to a reluctance to grant the offender-narrator his/her moral authority – the capacity to weigh in on the logic of their lives in a way that we cannot” (p. 192). This section has summarised the pertinent aspects of the expansive theory on narrative and has provided the rationale for a narrative-phenomenological approach to this research. The next section will detail this methodological approach and the related methods and procedures undertaken.

4.6 A narrative-phenomenology research design

Narrative-phenomenology is the methodological approach adopted in this research. It is an emerging and developing set of methods that has been variously applied and delineated, most notably by Langdridge (2007) and Mattingly (2010). In particular, Langdridge has outlined the stages involved in undertaking a form of narrative-phenomenology that he has devised, namely ‘critical narrative analysis’ (CNA). There is considerable complexity involved in CNA and Langdridge advises that the stages are not intended to be discrete, since the synthesis of a variety of analytical devices is key to the method. Several of these stages have guided the approach undertaken in this study and are discernible in the research design detailed below; although, in a modified form that has merged various components of narrative and phenomenological enquiry in the fashioning of method most appropriate for fulfilling the research purpose.
4.6.1 Reflexive engagement

Critical reflexivity is crucial to the analytical task as it serves to explore and make explicit the way in which the subjectivity and discursive positioning of the researcher impinges on the particular framing of a narrative (van Stapele, 2014). An articulation of the researcher’s positioning is presented in Chapter 6. Wilkinson (1988) distinguishes between various types of reflexivity, although it is considered that these are inextricably linked. First, ‘personal’ reflexivity refers to aspects of the researcher, including life experience, identity and historical socio-cultural context. Related to this is the view that the researcher’s personal values and interests are often reflected in the research; and thus, the focus of study and approach to enquiry are likely to stem from personal concerns.

Second, ‘functional’ reflexivity “entails continuous critical examination of the practice/process of research to reveal its assumptions, values and biases” (p. 495). Related to this is the continuous engagement of the researcher and researched in dialogical knowledge construction and the inherent power differentials, which exist therein. It is acknowledged that the researcher exerts the primary influence over the research domain; however, participants exert their power through the selective telling of their self-story, which includes decisions about how and what to share with the researcher, their use of words, silence and body language. Participants also ascribe subject positions to the researcher because of the researcher’s placement within dominant discourse (Wilkinson, 1988; van Stapele, 2014).

Third, ‘epistemic’ reflexivity (White, 1997) involves critical awareness of the way the interpretive power of the researcher (and by extension scientific discourse in general) serves to position the researcher as expert and the production of knowledge as truth (Langdrudge, 2007). Similarly, Wilkinson (1988) refers to ‘disciplinary’ reflexivity, which also involves a critical awareness of academic discourse; for instance, the way in which the positivist/empirical science approach to knowledge operates and is supported as the dominant paradigm in psychology.

4.6.2 Narrative content and form

Key to the approach is a search for “distinct and identifiable stories in the text” (Langdrudge, 2007 p. 137). Langdrudge explains that this may include the identification of one master narrative, as well as clusters of narratives within an account. Presser (2010) suggests creating a running summary of each participant’s account as events across time to identify elements of the narrative. Where a constitutive view of narrative is adopted, Presser emphasises the importance of attending to both narrative content and form. This involves examining the tone of a narrative, which may reveal the meanings being expressed and information about the story that is not discernible from the content alone. This may include identifying rhetorical features of the text, such as justifying devices,
deflecting or passivising structures, delaying tactics, repetitions, inconsistencies or missing parts, and awkward or unusual phrasing. Additionally, it is necessary to identify the function(s) of a narrative (Langdridge, 2007; O’Conner, 2000; Presser 2010). This is because the dialogical nature of talk means that it is always a response to other talk. Therefore, it is important to consider how the rhetorical function of a narrative works to position the speaker in relation to the wider stories in which we are embedded (Langdridge, 2007).

4.6.3 Narrative identity

Narrative is viewed to constitute the self and provide a sense of permanence over time that forms and integrates aspects of the self into a coherent and continuous identity. Therefore, the analysis of narrative accounts involves inspection of the way in which the self is brought into being through dialogical narrative construction. The rhetorical function and tone of the narrative(s) is likely to provide further insight into the way a particular sense of self is brought into being (Langdridge, 2007).

4.6.4 Thematic priorities and relationships

The thematic analysis undertaken is grounded within a social constructionism framework; and thus, seeks to conceptualise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that forms the backdrop against and within which individual narrative accounts are produced. It is much like ‘thematic decomposition analysis’, which identifies patterns in the form of themes and stories within the data, “and theorizes language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Langdridge argues that the meaning of talk must be understood within the conversational context of its production, as well as the wider context of discourse. In employing thematic decomposition analysis, Gurevich, Bower, Mathieson and Dhayanandhan (2007) view ‘themes’ as also constituted by various discourses. They implement a Foucauldian sense of discourse to extend the definition of discourse beyond the domain of language and into regulated social practices. This view emphasises discourse as fundamentally productive of objects, social institutions, personal subjectivities and subjects, and considers discourse to have real effects. Although narrative and discourse both relate to language, they should be distinguished. This is because narrative tends to focus on individual actors across time (Kirkman, 2002) and has structural form, whereas discourse is open-ended (M. Murray, 2008) and “refers to the way in which language categorises the social world” (Kirkman, 2002, p.33); and thus, constructs subject positions. This approach to the thematic analysis of narrative accounts considers the reciprocal influence of discursive practices and social action; and thus, the way in which narratives are shaped by broader discourses (Presser, 2010). It
allows for examination of the psychology of the individual within the social context; and therefore, is particularly suited to the qualitative study of crime from a psychosocial orientation.

4.6.5 Synthesis of findings

A synthesis of the findings is produced in the final stage. First, the identified themes comprised within narrative accounts are presented to illuminate the subjectivity of participants. Second, the predominant stories in the text are organised into master narratives and are presented with reference to the narrative content and form, including attention to narrative tone, rhetorical function and the construction of self in stories. The master narratives are viewed to enhance understanding and interpretation of the themes by contextualising their meaning and delineating central thematic associations.

4.7 Summary

This chapter returned to the aim of the research and outlined the qualitative design adopted for undertaking a narrative-phenomenological analysis of accounts of moving toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions. This method was chosen to give a voice to marginalised young men, who have been largely neglected in studies of offending behaviour, let alone the study of offending as a process of change during the transition to adulthood. The postmodern conceptualisation of narrative as constitutive of experience informed the method, which too has been a less common approach to narrative studies of offending. A narrative-phenomenological approach to the research that has epistemological basis in interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructionism was discussed. This is an emerging and developing methodology, and thus, specific attention was given to how the methodology was translated from narrative and phenomenology approaches into the methods undertaken.
Chapter 5: Research protocol

This chapter describes the specific procedures and strategies used in the selection and recruitment of participants; data collection and analysis; and for enhancing the validity of the research.

5.1 Participant selection and recruitment

Approval to undertake the research project was obtained from: (a) the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A); (b) the Justice Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix B); (c) the Corrections Victoria Research Committee (Appendix C); and (d) the Department of Human Services (DHS) Research Coordinating Committee (Appendix D). These committees permitted the recruitment of participants from the general public, community organisations, Youth Justice Units and Corrections Victoria (i.e., Community Correctional Services and the adult prison system).

The method of purposive sampling was used for the research; and thus, participants and sites were selected in a deliberate manner to obtain relevant and rich information about the topic of enquiry (Yin, 2010). The composition of the sample sought to capture a continuum of antisocial-offending behaviour ranging from no formal contact with the justice system to repeat offending and incarceration. This was necessary for the causal analysis of data in which inferences are made on the basis of participants’ selective narrative sequencing of events. Here, ‘causal relations’ refers to “what leads to or influences what, and/or in what are the consequences of particular practices or institutional arrangements” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 49). However, more importantly, such purposive sampling was required for cross-case analysis in which the data are examined for similarities among cases where certain outcomes or processes (i.e., offending) occurred and/or differences between these cases and those where such outcomes and processes did not occur. Such comparisons enable inferences about possible causal relationships to be made and the role of combinations of causal factors to be explored. This expands upon quantitative research, which simply measures the causal contribution of each factor individually (Hammersley, 2013).

Participants were also selected on the basis of gender, as the research was concerned with the experience of males specifically because they are over represented in the justice system. Age was a selection criterion, as the research was particularly interested in understanding processes of change in the transition to adulthood. Therefore, eligible participants were aged between 15 and 25 years. Participation was dependent upon the ability to provide a life narrative account and so, fluency in English was also a requirement of selection. Additionally, young men with a history of sexual offending were excluded from participating in the research, as sexual offending is considered
a unique phenomenon, which differs conceptually from other kinds of offending behaviour (Smallbone, 2006).

Yin (2010) states that there is “no formula for defining the desired number of instances for each broader or narrower unit of data collection in a qualitative study” (p.89). However, he advises that larger numbers (i.e., multiple sites at the broader level and many cases at the narrower level) can produce greater confidence in the research findings and are generally preferable. He indicates 25 – 50 units (i.e., interviewees, practices, actions etc.) to be the typical range at the narrower level, but suggests that the complexity of the research topic and the depth of data analysis guide the number of data collection units to be included in any study. Additionally, Yin suggests that creating confidence in the study’s findings is not just built upon large numbers, but also the composition of the sample. Therefore, a total of 70 participants was sought and considered to be an appropriate sample size to generate confidence in the findings because the number of data collection units was large at both the broader level (multiple sites) and narrower level (interviews), and the sample was diverse in composition.

Various community organisations that work with the population of interest were contacted and invited to assist in the research process. They were provided with a plain language statement presenting an overview of the research (Appendix E). Following this, the researcher met with the manager/s of organisations to discuss the project in more detail. Written informed consent (Appendix F) was obtained from organisations willing to assist with the research. Organisations expressed that their willingness to assist with the research was based on a shared ethos and recognition of the value of the project in terms of the young men’s immediate experience of participation, as well as the anticipated research outcomes. Organisations unwilling to assist with the research process expressed similar sentiments; however, stated that they either did not have the resources to assist or did not have suitable access to the population of interest. Toward the completion of data collection, interest from organisations in assisting the research exceeded the need.

Participants were recruited from numerous sites across Victoria, Australia. In instances where participants were recruited from community organisations or the justice system, a liaison person from each site was nominated to facilitate the recruitment of participants into the research. In consultation with the liaison person, a flyer (Appendix G) was placed at the site to advertise the project. The liaison person facilitated the process of participant recruitment by:

(a) identifying young men suitable/eligible to participate, including
(b) identifying young men with the capacity to provide consent (based on an informal
assessment of their maturity, intelligence and capacity to understand what participation involved),
(c) providing potential participants with initial information as to the nature of the project and,
(d) arranging a meeting to introduce the researcher to young men interested in participating in the research.

Thus, via the liaison person, the young men were able to express their interest in participating in the project and arrange a meeting time with the researcher to discuss the project.

It was recognised that a dependent or unequal relationship may exist between the liaison person and the young men eligible for recruitment into the research. Therefore, the liaison person’s role in the recruitment of participants was kept to the bare minimum. Accordingly, the researcher was responsible for the process of obtaining informed voluntary consent from prospective participants.

Participants were also recruited from the general public. Such participants responded to flyers (Appendix H) advertising the research, which were distributed at a Melbourne based university campus, as well as a north-western city council location. Additionally, potential participants in contact with the city council’s community facilities were invited by the researcher to participate in the project.

The procedure for obtaining informed voluntary consent from prospective participants is described as follows. The researcher provided the young man with a plain language statement of the research (Appendix I and Appendix J: for Corrections Victoria clients). The young man was fully informed in writing and verbally about the purpose of the project, what participation involved, the expected duration of each interview, and the possible risks and benefits associated with the research. The researcher emphasised in clear and concise language that participation would be voluntary, that participation could be withdrawn prior to information being de-identified without negative consequence, and (where applicable) that the decision whether or not to participate would not affect their relationship with the organisation/justice system in any way. After all information about the research was presented, the researcher asked the young man to explain his understanding of the research project and participation therein. Competency to give consent was determined by the young man’s capacity to communicate with the researcher, ask questions and demonstrate his comprehension of the project. If the young man was willing to participate in the research after being fully informed, their voluntary written consent (Appendix K) was obtained and the interview proceeded. Following completion of the interview, participants were offered limited remuneration
in the form of a movie voucher or gift card. Corrections Victoria clients were excluded from receiving such remuneration in accordance with Corrections Victoria practices.

5.2 Description of the data collection sites

Data were collected across multiple organisations, which comprised of 11 metropolitan sites in Victoria. More specifically, the organisations and sites were as follows:

Corrections Victoria (Department of Justice)

Data was collected from four sites managed by Corrections Victoria. The sites included the Youth Unit of a maximum-security adult prison, as well as three community corrections offices. The prison Youth Unit houses young adult men aged between 18 and 25 years. Interviews were conducted on the unit with 15 young men in a meeting/program room. Eight interviews were conducted at Community Correctional Services (CCS) in a meeting room.

Youth Justice Units (Department of Human Services)

Youth Justice Teams are responsible for providing supervision to young people on statutory orders in the community. Twelve participants recruited from Youth Justice Units were interviewed in meeting rooms across two sites.

Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)

YSAS is a Victorian youth health not-for-profit agency that provides a range of integrated services to young people affected by alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems, mental health issues and social disconnection. A total of 10 participants were recruited from YSAS across two sites, which included the Day Program and Residential Withdrawal Program. These two sites provide support to young people between 12 and 21 years of age experiencing AOD problems. Interviews were conducted in a meeting room.

The Bridge Project

The Bridge Project is an initiative of the YMCA designed to improve the life outcomes of young people in contact with the criminal justice system by providing supported training and employment opportunities. The site of data collection was a YMCA office. Five young men were recruited from The Bridge Project and interviewed in a meeting room.

Deakin University

Five participants were recruited from Deakin University. The site of data collection was a Melbourne based campus. Interviews were conducted in a room within the School of Psychology building.
Brimbank City Council

A further site of data collection was a community Neighbourhood House located in the north-western metropolitan area and managed by the Brimbank City Council. The Neighbourhood House is a multifunctional community space, which provides activities for all ages. Sixteen participants in contact with the community facilities were interviewed at the Neighbourhood House in a consulting room.

5.3 Data collection

Narrative-phenomenology is an interpretive and idiographic approach to understanding lived experience. Thus, there is a strong emphasis on understanding the life story of emerging adult men, bounded by the research focus on the processes that influence the movement toward offending and/or away from offending. Goodley (2011) recognises the unique power of narrative to examine two key concepts – the ‘private troubles’ of individuals that occur in interpersonal interactions, usually when values are threatened; and the ‘public issues’ of organisations and institutions that are likely to arise as a crisis of institutional arrangements. Therefore, he argues that narrative enquiry provides insight into psychological and social worlds.

Narrative (conversational) interviews were the method used to enter the psychological and social world of participants. This is because interviews are a “powerful way of gaining access to an individual’s interpretations of their personal experiences” (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick, 1998, p. 64). In the narrative interview, primacy is given to the telling of the participant’s story (Esin, 2011). The following ‘open-ended invitation’ was used to initiate a narrative account from participants – *Tell me about your life in a story that includes the most significant experiences that have shaped your life direction and brought you to this point today.* Additionally, participants were asked during the interview to generate a written timeline of their significant life experiences in the form of a graph (Appendix L). This involved briefly recording events across time (x-axis) in relation to their sense of satisfaction with life (y-axis). Some participants completed comprehensive timelines and the exercise enriched the interview process. However, in most cases, generating the timeline placed additional demands on participants and interrupted the narrative flow of the interview. Obtaining a quality narrative account was prioritised over the completion of the timeline; and thus, often the timeline was superficially completed or not completed at all.

Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick (1998) argue that power differentials are inherent in social relationships and influence the distribution of power between the researcher and participant. Power differentials were especially apparent when interviewing marginalised young men, specifically within the justice system. While it is acknowledged that the researcher holds the power in the
research setting, conversational interviews are considered to relatively empower participants. This is because in this model of interviewing the researcher-participant relationship is a partnership and collaboration in the co-construction of knowledge (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Thus, the researcher is responsive to the participant and is “a reflexive learner listening to stories, reconstructing them, embellishing them, censoring them and conveying them to others” (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998, p. 64). Attention was given to the dynamics of power between researcher and participant in the collection of data. Accordingly, it was emphasised to the young men that their participation was voluntary, that they were free to share their story in their own way, decline to answer any questions if they wished, could take breaks when needed, and end the interview at any time.

The interview agenda was established interactively and in a recursive manner, whereby interview questions built on responses to previous questions, the participant’s story, as well as the stories of previous participants. Therefore, the particular conversational context of each interview produced a unique agenda, which allowed the research to be grounded in the experiences of the young men (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Participant responses were supported by non-suggestive facilitators, such as head nodding, “uh huh”, repeating back the last few words spoken, and silence. Additionally, open-ended prompts were used to expand upon the detail in the sequence of the account (e.g., what happened then?) or elaborate a pre-disclosed detail (e.g., tell me more about the part where...?). These prompts are concise and are designed to limit the researcher’s influence on participants’ articulation of the narrative by encouraging spontaneous storytelling before actively eliciting stories (Presser, 2010). At times it was necessary to provide participants with greater structure in the interview in order to elicit narration rich in detail or on the topic of interest. In such instances, participants were guided to focus their account on developmental periods in the life-course (i.e., the early years, pre-primary and primary school years, early adolescence and secondary school years, late adolescence and early adulthood), as well as transition experiences, turning points and antisocial/offending behaviour.

According to Presser (2010), participants with a formal history of justice system involvement are likely to talk about their offending because stories are an explanatory device and people are more inclined to explain themselves when they have been sanctioned. M. Murray (2008) states, “when we explain our disruptions to another, we are particularly keen to emphasize our reasonableness” (p. 115); hence narratives indicate a moral stance. In Presser’s (2010) experience, it has been harder to obtain stories about offending behaviour from persons who do not feel labelled as ‘criminal’. As such, when interviewing young men with no formal contact with the justice system, more direct questioning about the experience of moving toward and/or away from crime was
necessary to elicit a narrative account.

While interviews are a widely accepted method of data collection in qualitative research, crucial questions about their value and use have been raised, particularly surrounding issues of reliability (Hammersley, 2013). A specific concern is that not all aspects of life are eligible for storytelling, as (self-)narratives “rely for their success on shared conventions about language, tellability and the hearing of stories” (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008, p. 213). McAdams (2008) suggests that some stories cannot be told to others and possibly even to the self because they may be too traumatic or shameful. Furthermore, narrative is always a selective and strategic storied recollection of lived experience. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the narrative interview data collected in this research is a contextually bound story that is further limited to the ‘taleworld’ (Young, 1989), that is the domain of life deemed eligible and able to be brought into being through narrative telling (K. D. Murray, 1995).

A related issue is the authenticity of narrative accounts. Presser (2010) argues that the methodological issues involved in collecting narrative interview data from persons in the criminal justice system are unique. In particular, the trustworthiness of such narratives is often questioned. ‘Offender’ discourses typically operate to invalidate the subjectivity of criminally labelled persons by portraying them as liars and discursively positioning them as socially motivated to distort their actions and/or resist being identified as deviant (Presser, 2009, 2010). To consider the narratives of offending persons as inauthentic, “belie a view of stories as social artifacts for some, when they are social artifacts for all” (Presser, 2009, p. 181). Additionally, taking a postmodern standpoint means recognising that the voices and experiences of people labelled ‘offender’ are denied, distorted and masked by stigmatising discourse. Hence, a less distorted perspective may arise by attempting to view the world through the eyes of participants. Particularly, by attending to the narrative accounts of young men with a history of justice system involvement (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000).

Presser (2009) suggests that a mistrust of the narrative accounts of offending persons should be contextualised within the broader criminological concern about the accuracy of all data on crime and criminals. She argues that problems of truth, interest and perspective arise when narrative is conceptualised as record or interpretation; and thus, is considered representational of ‘actual’ circumstances. However, reconceptualising narrative as constitutive of reality and identity “blurs the distinction between narrative and experience by suggesting that experience is always known and acted upon as it has been interpreted symbolically” (p. 184). Such a conceptualisation of narrative bypasses realism, and thus, circumvents the issue of whether stories are fully believed by offending persons or only told to self and others to enable harmful actions. Therefore, the ‘truthfulness’ of events recounted in participants’ narratives was not central to the data collection because narrative
constructions are viewed as influencing human action independent of the degree to which ‘reality’ is obscured (Presser, 2009).

The majority of narrative interviews were audio-recorded. However, interviews with participants supervised by CCS or serving a sentence of imprisonment were not audio-recorded, as stipulated by Corrections Victoria. As much as possible, these accounts were transcribed verbatim during the interview process using word processing software on a notebook computer. All other interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings. In accordance with standard phenomenological research procedure, the spoken word of participants was transcribed without the finer level of detail (i.e., precisely timed pauses, intonation, pitch) necessary for analysis at the micro-level of discourse or conversation (Langdridge, 2007).

The following procedures were adopted to ensure confidentiality. Research documentation, including collected data, field notes, transcripts and audio recordings were reviewed in a secure environment and when not in immediate use, the research documentation was stored in a locked file cabinet on university grounds; specifically, in the School of Psychology department. The interview data collected was de-identified; hence, participants can only be identified by a pseudonym and interview content that could potentially identify participants was substituted with a fictitious or nondescript alternative. Participants were assigned a code for the purpose of keeping track of the data.

5.4 Participant characteristics

A total of 71 young men were interviewed for this research. However, two participant narrative accounts were withdrawn from analysis on the following basis. One was misidentified as a suitable participant by Corrections Victoria staff and was withdrawn because he did not meet selection criteria due to a sex offence conviction. The other was withdrawn because he did not produce a coherent narrative account that was oriented to time, place and person and amenable to meaningful analysis. Therefore, 69 participants formed the sample for analysis. Participants were aged between 15 and 25 years (\(M = 19.9, SD = 2.5\)). They represented a diverse cultural background and used 36 qualitative descriptors to indicate their ethnicity, which included African, Asian, European, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, Polynesian and South American heritage. A few young men (\(N = 5\)) perceived their economic status to be ‘above average’. The remainder of the sample were fairly equally divided in their perception of economic status as either ‘average’ (\(N = 31\)) or ‘below average’ (\(N = 33\)). Participants varied in terms of their justice system involvement, as the sampling process sought to capture a continuum of engagement in antisocial/offending behaviour. About one third of participants (\(N = 20\)) reported having no formal contact with the justice system and for the
most part disclosed relatively minor or no antisocial behaviour. Participant experiences of justice system involvement varied in terms of frequency, duration and severity of sanctions. About one third of participants (N = 23) reported receiving community penalties, such as a good behaviour bond or a community correction order, and the remaining third of participants (N = 26) reported experiencing a term of incarceration. Offences disclosed by participants included offences against persons (e.g., assault), economic offences (e.g., robbery and larceny), drug offences (e.g., possession, use and trafficking of prohibited substances), driving offences (e.g., dangerous driving causing death or serious injury) and public order offences (e.g., disorderly conduct).

5.5 Data analysis

The narrative-phenomenological approach undertaken in this research is detailed in section 4.6. Hence, this section will describe more specifically the analytical procedure of the method, which represents a synthesis of various approaches described in the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gurevich et al., 2007; Langdrudge, 2007; M. Murray, 2008; O’Conner, 2000; Presser, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Woollett, Marshall & Stenner, 1998; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000; Yardley, 2008).

The aim of this analysis was to “explore the multiple layers of meaning that are constructed and presented in narratives” (Esin, 2011, p. 112-113). Data analysis involved reading through the text and delineating the structure and content of narratives. A running summary of each participant’s account as events across time was made and cross-referenced with the timeline participants created during the interview. Subplots/stories within the broader narrative were identified along with narrative linkages between parts to explore the process of change from one condition to another. The form of narratives was also examined for tone and rhetorical function. Additionally, the text was inspected for the narrative self that was constructed in the story telling.

Patterns were identified across the narrative elements identified, separating the text into coherent stories and themes. This involved working through the text systematically in order to identify the key themes; however, without overly breaking down the text so as not to lose the overall sense of the narrative. The term ‘themes’ is used to specifically refer to the patterns identified in participant’s stories, various subject positions and the idea that themes comprise particular discourses. Units of meaning were identified in the text first, these were then organised into clusters that were examined and categorised into subthemes and overarching themes. Furthermore, the relationship between themes and different levels of themes were explored. What constituted a theme within the data was based on several factors including prevalence, the richness of the passage, and the illumination of meaning. Themes of interest were generated on intuition, as well as with reference to the theoretical literature. Thematic categories and relationships were
examined, re-examined and refined in a cyclical process. This process included seeking ‘disconfirming instances’; and thus, a systematic search was undertaken for data that did not fit the identified themes. The software package *QSR-NVivo* was used to facilitate the analysis of data.

Drawing upon the words of Goodley (2011) to make a parallel claim in the field of forensic psychology, a narrative-phenomenological method of analysis is crucial to the development of the field because a certain exercise of power is necessary for writing the (offending/non-offending) subject into the ongoing discourse. It behoves any researcher to construct that subject in some form, that gives them shape and life in ways that may previously have been unknown.

### 5.6 Demonstrating validity

Those firmly attached to the hegemonic rationalistic (quantitative) paradigm typically dismiss the naturalistic (qualitative) paradigm as radical, non-rigorous and subjective. Hence, there is the tendency for qualitative research to be drawn into the positivist mode of scientific thought; and thus, vie for scientific acceptance within and against the dominant quantitative language of research. However, in the process, the integrity of naturalistic methodological positions is undermined (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

A consensus has not been reached on the criteria for assessing the quality and robustness of qualitative research; and thus, such criteria remains to be elucidated. An issue central to the debate is the “inconsistency of developing criteria that are parallel to positivist criteria, while rejecting the positivist paradigm” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). In recognition of the limits of the (emerging) criteria and the necessity of placing the scientific notion of rigour within the epistemological foundations of the research, the following discussion pertains only to that criteria deemed applicable to this research.

This chapter has already given attention to some of the ways this research has demonstrated validity (i.e., the size and composition of the sample); and thus, such aspects will not be re-visited. Yardley (2008) defines validity in the following way – “the validity of research corresponds to the degree to which it is accepted as sound, legitimate and authoritative by people with an interest in research findings” (p. 235). Discussed below are the four core principles for evaluating validity, as identified by Yardley: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; coherence and transparency; and, impact and importance.

#### 5.6.1 Sensitivity to context

Sensitivity to context encompasses several aspects of the qualitative research process. First, there is a need to be sensitive to the existing theoretical and empirical context of the research. As
detailed in the introductory chapters to this thesis, the research has a strong theoretical and empirical basis spanning across various academic fields. Additionally, narrative-phenomenology is deeply grounded in philosophy and theory, as detailed above. The research must also be sensitive to the perspective and socio-cultural context of participants. This is inherent in the research methodology employed, which gives primacy to the participants’ telling of stories in the context of broader discourses, seeks to empower participants in the interview process and emphasises the research activity as a process of intersubjective knowledge production. Further, analysis must be sensitive to the data. This is achieved by showing that participants’ accounts correspond with the researcher’s representation of them; and thus, categories or meaning have not been imposed by the researcher on to the data.

5.6.2 Commitment and rigour

This principle refers to the need for thoroughness in data collection, completeness of analysis and the skilful application of research methods. Thus, obtaining rigour demands considerable commitment to the research process, attaining methodological skills and developing theoretical depth. While there is a minimum threshold for quality, research will excel in some forms of rigour more than others.

5.6.3 Coherence and transparency

In essence, coherence and transparency relate to the presentation of the research thesis, which necessitates a good fit between the research aims, theoretical approach, methods used and interpretation of data. Crotty (1998) distinguishes between four research elements (epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods), which inform one another and provide a context for the research that grounds the process in logic and criteria. These elements have provided the framework for delineating the manner in which the qualitative design adopted fulfils the research purpose. This has been undertaken in detail in this chapter and the preceding chapter, which contributes to the transparency of the research. Reflexivity is also an important aspect of transparency and is addressed in Chapters 4 and 6.

5.6.4 Impact and importance

This final principle emphasises the validity of research in terms of its practical utility, value and implications. This research aims to expand current understanding in the field by studying offending as a process of change during the transition to adulthood. An innovative methodological approach is adopted, giving a voice to marginalised young men in an exploration of the phenomenological experience of moving toward and/or away from offending in narrative accounts of significant life
events, experiences, turning points and transitions. An outcome of the research was a re-conceptualisation of the risk process, which formed the basis for the development of a positioning theory of crime. The constructionist model proposed advances existing knowledge by conceptualising offending as a constructed, negotiated and resisted process that explains more comprehensively the causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted – the implications of the research findings for policy and practice and discussed in chapter 8.

5.7 Summary

The focus of this chapter was to detail the procedures that were used to access, gather and analyse the data. Approval was granted from several research committees that permitted the recruitment of participants from 11 sites across metropolitan Victoria, Australia. These data collection sites were described along with the recruitment procedures and the characteristics of 69 participants that formed the sample for analysis. The rationale for using purposive sampling to capture a continuum of antisocial-offending behaviour was given. The narrative interview method was discussed as a rich resource for gaining access to the lifeworld of participants such that it is naturally suited to inquiry into phenomenological experience. Additionally, the analytical procedure of the method was presented. The procedures undertaken are considered to meet criteria for methodological rigour and to demonstrate the validity of the findings presented in Chapter 7, which follows a reflexive account of the researcher’s positioning that is presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 6: Researcher positioning

A narrative-phenomenological approach to the research involves what Langdrige (2007) refers to as a ‘critique of the illusions of the subject’ and in essence requires disciplined self-reflection (Wilkinson, 1988). The researcher is one referent against which the self is expressed in narrative dialogue; and thus, the interview setting and my participation in the interview is viewed to have shaped the young men’s narrative construction of self and experience. The narrative product – that is, the data collected by interview – was a collaborative effort and a contextually bound story (O’Conner, 2000; Presser, 2008).

At the time of completing the interviews, I was aged 26 years. While I was a number of years older than most participants, some may have regarded me as a peer based on my appearance, since often I am mistakenly thought to be younger than my years. The young men expressed curiosity about my age and were direct in asking me as a way of exploring the participant-researcher relation. The young men also showed curiosity in my cultural background, which was a point of difference for some and sameness for others. I am a second generation Australian and was brought up in a family with Northern European and Asian cultural influences. Additionally, I was raised to value education and social justice, and coming from a family within which my grandfather, mother and father were lawyers has undoubtedly influenced my own interest in forensic psychology.

For me, postmodernism is a worldview that represents an ethical stance - a concern for human dignity, equality, and self-determination (Besley, 2002). Participating in the research interview positioned the young men as either ‘offender’ or ‘non-offender’, as indicated by sample selection and categorisation. However, I take the perspective that “if words form and shape the world and form and shape us as people, then speaking and writing become ethical actions” (Crocket, 2013, p. 461). Thus, I have resisted in this thesis, as much as possible, the force of the dominant discourse that reifies ‘offenders’ by interpellation. Like Presser (2008), I present the young men’s stories “as something of a political act” (p. 32) that counters dehumanising constructions of persons who commit crime. I don’t ascribe to the belief that there is an ‘us’ and a ‘them’, and that somehow we are essentially different. It seems to me, that ‘we’ are just as much ‘them’ as they are ‘us’, and it is from this standpoint that I take an interest in exploring narrative accounts of the phenomenological experience of moving toward and/or away from offending.

My position in the interview as the researcher, as well as my level of education and the specific focus of study cast me as a female with ‘status’ and ‘expert’ knowledge. Some young men were explicit in exposing this power differential. Their comments revealed feelings of relative inadequacy, as well as anxiety or intrigue about what insights I presumably had into their psyche. I
negotiated a counter-position, reflecting an ‘unknowing’ stance, and sought to re-position the young men in dialogue as the expert in their own life in an attempt to shift the power dynamic. Some young men sought to empower themselves in the interview, and took up a position of support by offering me encouragement to complete my education and communicating their willingness to help me in this process by participating in the research project.

In deference to my role within the institution and/or my academic and female status the young men were particularly courteous and conscious of their use of language, apologising for using coarse language and sometimes asking permission to use profanity. One young man in particular made it clear to me that he could not speak frankly about his mother because I was female. Within the prison context, some young men sought to position me as vulnerable and placed themselves in a protective role. Through conversation, at times my positioning as a quasi-insider in the institution of corrections was made apparent as someone who has experience working with persons in both the community and prison settings. In negotiating participant-researcher positions in dialogue, the co-constructed narratives produced in the interview process were detailed and candid accounts of lived experience. The importance of having one’s voice heard and of telling the life story was often evident by the end of the interview. Some young men lingered and prolonged the interview despite reaching the end of the story. Others expressed gratitude and were uplifted through the process of organising and explaining life events, and making sense of experiences in a coherent self-narrative.
Chapter 7: Presentation of findings

This chapter describes the central research findings, which pertain to the young men’s narrative accounts of movement toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions. It is divided into three main sections. The first section (7.1) details key theoretical constructs for making sense of participant accounts. The second section (7.2) provides a detailed description of the five interconnecting superordinate themes and their associated constituent themes. While these themes are considered to be related and mutually influencing, they have been organised into meaningful clusters that highlight their distinctive qualities. The third section (7.3) refers more specifically to the narrative content and form and examines the young men’s narrative construction of the self, as brought into being through the interview process. Presented in this section are the predominant stories in the text, which have been organised into six master ‘offending’ narratives and three master ‘non-offending’ narratives. The master narratives enhance understanding and interpretation of the themes by contextualising their meaning and delineating central thematic associations.

7.1 Key theoretical constructs for making sense of participant accounts

First, however, the presentation of findings from this research necessitates a brief overview of positioning theory and Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, which offer useful theoretical frameworks for making sense of the young men’s narrative accounts.

7.1.1 Positioning theory

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has influenced contemporary understandings of subjectivity in his view that subjects are always subjected and the product of positioning in discourse and practices of power. Positioning theory has developed from such concerns and has its basis in the notion that individuals stand in various positions in relation to discourse (Harre’ & van Langenhove, 1991; Winslade, 2005). Davies and Hunt (1994) contend that certain kinds of meaning are negotiated through discursive practices and operate to produce binary oppositions that are difficult to escape. Being positioned or positioning oneself in one way – one category – one discourse – or another, results in power or powerlessness and determines who’s voice is heard and what is said. In particular, they argue that:

Binary logic constitutes the world in hierarchical ways through its privileging of one term or category within the binary, and depriving the opposite term of sense in its own right. The privileged term defines the meaning of the subordinate or dependent term as other to itself (p. 389).

Thus, repeated patterns of powerlessness are produced when one is positioned as belonging to, or
defined by, the subordinate category or term (Davies and Hunt, 1994).

Positioning theory has been variously described across the literature. Raggatt (2007) suggests that “positioning is emergent in the dialogical self” (p. 358, emphasis in the original); and therefore, argues that the two concepts are interlinked. On this basis, Raggatt proposes a system of classification that is a step toward a framework for a more comprehensive theory of positioning. More specifically, forms of positioning in the dialogical self are classified into expressive, personal and social domains (see Table 2).

Table 2

**Forms of Positioning in the Dialogical Self**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Modes of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative/Discursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative/Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Personal positioning: Dynamic conflict in the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Social positioning: Social and cultural constructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational/Discursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional roles/Rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/Hierarchical positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expressive forms for positioning include the narrative/discursive mode of language and storytelling, the self as a performed character playing a role, and embodiment (i.e., bodily endowments, dress and body image). Personal forms of positioning “reflect how people construct and narrate their own lives in a moral framework” (p. 359) that involves dynamic conflict between the voices of the dialogical self. In other words, the dialogical self is constituted by stories in opposing relationships. Social positioning relates to relational and cultural constructions in social space. This includes the conversational/discursive form, that is, the discursive micro encounters of daily social interaction (Harre’ & van Langenhove, 1991). Additionally, positioning stemming from institutional roles, encompassing “(powerful) forces that bear down on the subject from the ‘outside’, so much so that power – for example, institutional power – has the capacity to shape the dialogical self” (p. 366). Finally, Raggatt specifies positioning arising from power imbalances in social dichotomies that reflect various social-cultural-political hierarchies (Foucault, 1979).

7.1.2 Bourdieu’s theory of social practice

Parallels can be drawn between positioning theory and a theory of social practice in that they both are concerned with relational social space, the negotiation of social interactions, positioning and structures of power. In his theory of social practice, Bourdieu brings together social (objective) and agency (subjective) structures, such that the objective structure inculcates the subjectivity of individual lives, which in turn reproduces and under certain conditions transforms structures (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007; Stich, 2012). However, Bourdieu (1989) suggests, “this construction is not carried out in a social vacuum but subjected to structural constraints” (p. 18). Interpretation of these processes rests upon a series of concepts defined by Bourdieu, specifically capital, field, habitus and practice.

Capital

Forms of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) are resources, of which the sum available and known to agents facilitates social action and functions as social relations of power dependent upon the structure of the field within which it is activated (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). Forms of capital are interconnected and translatable such that previously established capital can enhance future acquisition of capital, while limited capital can bring about further deficiency in capital (Kei-Ho Pih, De La Rosa, Rugh & Mao, 2008). Thus, within the social space agents are distributed with respect to the overall volume of the capital they possess, and the structure of their capital in terms of the relative weight of the forms of capital in the total volume of assets (Bourdieu, 1989).

Barry (2006) details the forms of capital as utilised by Bourdieu and considers the ways in
which they are accessible and able to be accumulated by young people in transition. Economic capital includes income, inheritances and assets. It is not a readily accessible form of capital to young people who are confined to full-time education, and consequently, are limited in their participation in the workforce. However, some young people more so than others may have indirect access to economic capital and other forms of capital through their family. Cultural capital exists in three forms: an embodied state of cultivated dispositions of mind and body (i.e., styles, tastes, modes of presentation and properties of self); an objectified state, as in esteemed cultural goods; and an institutionalised state that manifests as academic and other credentials or status. Through institutionalised or objectified means, cultural capital gains legitimacy over time and is a form of capital that is accrued to varying degrees during the transition to adulthood. Social capital is generated through durable networks of relationships from which resources can be mobilised. For young people in transition, social capital derived from the peer group presents as a crucial source of support and recognition. Symbolic capital is an overarching resource that is gained when the other forms of capital are collectively recognised as legitimate. Legitimisation is the mechanism in the conversion of power and social recognition. While the forms of capital offer potential power for young people, “for many young people in transition, they are not durable, not least because they are not recognized as legitimate by the wider society as a result of the paucity of opportunities available at this stage of their life” (Barry, 2006, p. 39, emphasis in the original).

Field, habitus and practice

The field should be viewed as “as an open fluid space constituted by a mixture of loosely connected symbolic practices occupying different and changing positions within the particular social space but with reference to a larger field of power as well as other fields” (Madsen & Dezalay, 2002, p. 194). In other words, the field is a network of relations and an arena in which agents contest over what constitutes capital (power), how it is to be distributed within that field, struggle for positions within the structured system and act strategically to advance their relational positioning. The struggle is what gives the field its dynamism, which gives rise to an unequal distribution of power within fields that determines which agents have influence on the functioning of the field (Madsen & Dezalay, 2002; Mowbray, 2012; Thorpe, 2013).

Bourdieu (1989) describes the habitus as the durable and transposable dispositions of agents: “their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world” (p. 18). Habitus is the habitual and patterned ways through which agents perceive, judge and act that arise from one’s particular positioning in one or more fields and their trajectory in the social structure (Bourdieu,
1987). It is an internalisation of social conditions that guides social action, the habitus both produces and is produced by the social world, it is a structuring structure and a structured structure (Kei-Ho Pih et al., 2008; Madsen & Dezalay, 2002)

Bourdieu (1989) argues that objective structures (fields) within the social world independent of the consciousness and will of agents (habitus) are capable of guiding and constraining practices of their representations. Moreover, the interplay between the habitus and the field is practice and “results in a congruence between the individual and his/her social world that makes the latter seem self-evident and acceptable to the individual” (Barry, 2006, p. 38).

7.2 Superordinate themes and their constituent themes

The first theme entitled ‘critical positions’ relates to the key subject positions narrated by the young men and is discussed with reference to the progression of antisocial and offending behaviour. The second theme, ‘inherent risk’, details the young men’s sense of proximity and exposure to risk through place, culture and relationships. The third theme, ‘detachment’, explores the young men’s experience of emotional and institutional disconnection in relation to alienation, distress and derailment from one’s intended life course. The fourth theme, ‘dynamics of antisocial behaviour’, elaborates on the onset and maintenance phases of offending behaviour as narrated by the young men with respect to the experience of playing a game, place and belonging, and club membership. The fifth theme, ‘a successful project’, considers the divergent pathways followed by the young men and explores personal limits, resistance and discontinuity in relation to offending behaviour and the construction of a successful life project. The superordinate themes and their constituent themes are outlined in Table 3 below.

7.2.1 Critical positions

Participants were variously positioned within their own stories. The young men narrated numerous social exchanges in which they were positioned in dialogue, by institutional roles and through social-cultural-political relationships. Such social positions constituted binary oppositions whereby the privileged condition relegated its dichotomous other as subordinate. Participant accounts were also examined for personal positioning, reflecting the dynamic construction and reconstruction of the self. A close reading of the young men’s narratives illuminated the way in which social and personal positions shaped identity and life trajectories. The following details the critical social and personal positions that were reflected in the young men’s stories.
Table 3

**Superordinate Themes and their Constituent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Constituent Themes</th>
<th>Described in Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical positions</td>
<td>Institutional competence</td>
<td>7.2.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funnelled down and out</td>
<td>7.2.1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social connection</td>
<td>7.2.1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherent risk</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>7.2.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>7.2.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>7.2.2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>7.2.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>7.2.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derailment</td>
<td>7.2.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dynamics of antisocial</td>
<td>The game</td>
<td>7.2.4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviour</td>
<td>Place and belonging</td>
<td>7.2.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The club</td>
<td>7.2.4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A successful project</td>
<td>Wrong is right</td>
<td>7.2.5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limits and resistance</td>
<td>7.2.5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desistance</td>
<td>7.2.5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7.2.1.1 Institutional competence**

There were a multitude of references to the young men’s competence in social institutions within their narrative accounts. The good/bad student binary was a predominant theme reflected in their stories and included subject positions such as smart, nerd, class clown, menace, misfit, school reject, and school dropout. The young men detailed a range of ways in which they came to be defined and limited by their social positioning as an incompetent and bad student.

Many of the young men spoke of not being engaged by teaching practices and class content. Often they attributed this to either a lack of interest in the subject matter or difficulty completing tasks, which resulted in frustration on the part of the young men and the teacher.
Thomas (aged 18) spoke of not being easily engaged in the classroom. He described how being positioned by his teacher as an incompetent and bad student was also analogous to being criminal.

I’ve never been able to learn about stuff I wasn't interested in...[Teachers] I guess just couldn’t be bothered with me and just thought I was like a little shit and just like one of my teachers she used to tell me “oh you’re just going straight to prison when you get out of here”.

Conversely, Thomas took up the competent and good student position in the subject Physical Education (P.E.), where the teacher and content engaged him in class.

[P.E.] was the one thing that I enjoyed and I got along with my P.E. teacher pretty well. He was probably the only one I did get along with...I behaved well in his class and he could tell that I was interested. Yeah it was the one class I never mucked up in or anything like that.

Thomas was positioned as the binary other in interactions with most of his teachers and he eventually decided to leave school. For many of the young men in this research, leaving school contributed to the progression of antisocial and offending behaviour. However, Thomas’ competent and good student positioning in P.E. empowered him to become a qualified personal trainer (P.T.).

I dropped out of school when I started doing the [P.T.] course just because I wanted to put all my focus into that and I didn’t really see any value in anything I was getting taught at school.

Bradley (aged 15) described himself as inattentive and disruptive in class. In relation to students positioned as competent and good, Bradley took up the opposing position, which stemmed from his struggle with class work and associated frustrations.

I didn’t know how to get the work done...then the teacher would have a go at me and I’d get angry...[then] I’d have a go at them back. I don’t know why, I just did it, and then it was always me getting angry and I’d just walk out.

Bradley’s positioning as the binary other prompted him to detach from school and also to seek out relationships with others similarly positioned, which furthered his antisocial behaviour.

I just thought that they were like me so I was just like “oh yeah I’ll follow along”...I didn’t do good in school...I used to distract a lot of people and do stupid stuff, so I never paid attention to the work or the teacher. So, that’s probably why I went with the bad people because there was no point [in school].

Alek (aged 20) immigrated to Australia from Samoa. For Alek, class material was not only difficult, but certain subjects also disinterested him. He experienced abuse at home and school was a place in which he sought to position himself as powerful and competent. However, this was often in tension with subordinate positions assigned to him by his peers who ridiculed him, and teachers who exposed his shortcomings in the classroom.
I was getting suspended a lot for fighting...School is where I’d go not to feel stupid because at home my parents...would put me down. In such ways school is where I went so I don’t feel like that and everyone would look at me and see that I’m tough...except for when the teachers tried to help me...if I didn’t know how to do something I wouldn’t do it because I didn’t want to look stupid. Or I would act aggressive to find a way out of it...I didn’t really have much talent except for fighting and being a dickhead. It was good because everyone would egg me on. It made me feel like someone important. The attention was on me and everyone would be looking at me and know not to fuck with me.

Being the target of bullying and responding by either ‘joining’ the bullies or conversely ‘fighting back’ was another way in which the young men were assigned to the incompetent and bad student position. This was most evident when efforts to stop the bullying were made by way of counter-attacks that often culminated in expulsion. Frequently, the young men were motivated to join a group of bullies or fight back against bullying because they perceived the school as powerless or disinclined to intervene and stop the bullying.

Bradley’s (aged 15) positioning as the binary other was not only connected to his obstreperous behaviour in the classroom. He described the first of many suspensions occurring after he was no longer able to tolerate the bullying to which he was subjected by his peers.

None of the kids liked me so I just kept my mouth shut and my head down. And this particular kid used to pick on me and I eventually got older and I just got sick of this and I hurt him and then I just got suspended and I just keep getting suspended after that.

Jarra (aged 22) learnt how to fight in order to stand up to those who repeatedly bullied him at school.

[The bullies] used to catch me in the toilets and chuck all my lunch in the piss trough and all that and then they tried to do it the next day...and I just fought back and yeah even though I got in trouble for it from the teachers...it was a good thing I reckon.

Jarra felt his teachers had left him open to attacks from his peers by neglecting to use their authority to protect him. Additionally, he had experienced their authority as punitive after he had chosen to defend himself. This caused him to become defiant in interactions with his teachers.

I changed my attitude towards them [teachers] because they, you know, never did nothing to stop it [bullying], so I just even talked back to them and that.

For many of the young men, the incompetent and bad student position was the only one made available to them. This is because stories located in discourses surrounding juvenile delinquency are replete with judgments based on family associations or acts, which are synonymous with being a ‘bad egg’.
Michael (aged 21) positioned himself as a competent and good student in relation to his brother who was positioned as the binary other. However, in order to escape the diffusion of his brother’s positioning, Michael had to attend a different secondary school.

[My brother] got, you know, the record amount of suspensions in one term at his high school, so yeah, I’m like I don’t want to go down that path, like, I don’t want to be looked at as bad because I had that in primary school because my brother was bad, you know, it’s a typical typical thing and because he’s not smart, you’re not smart and blah-blah-blah. So yeah I eventually went to a different high school.

For Fraser (aged 20), becoming involved in a fight in year eight brought about a significant shift in his social positioning at school that was difficult to escape.

My coordinator comes in and says, "you won't stay at the school past one year and you'll be a drop kick [lowlife]."

Because of that particular incident [fight] I always got dragged into trouble because then teachers would be like, “yeah yeah yeah, two years ago he did this, did that. What makes you think he wouldn’t do it again?” So anything that happened would come back to me.

Fraser belonged to a prosocial group; however, being positioned as the binary other led him to form stronger bonds with antisocial peers.

I had a group of [prosocial] people that I wanted to hang out with, but always being, you know, looked at and being considered as guilty kind of made me want to be with these [antisocial] guys...[because] I didn’t want to get these [prosocial] guys in trouble.

In certain ways Fraser’s social positioning as the binary other was seen to promote antisocial behaviour, however, his account also showed his determination to push back against the positioning assigned to him and negotiate a competent and good student position.

[I was] kind of swerving my way through punishments and just proving them wrong.

He [coordinator] said, "no one expected to see you here" [Year 12 camp]. I said, "we’ll make a deal. If my ENTER score is more than 80 you have to apologise to me for all the stuff that you did to me for no reason, like how many times I got suspended”.

Then year 12 graduation he’s [coordinator] doing this massive speech saying how he was wrong in front of everyone.

Nate (aged 21) was exposed to gang activity by his cousins. Nate spoke of being positioned through embodiment and the way in which his positioning at school was constitutive of his identity as a gang member.

All these kids are coming to school and I’m the only one with tattoos. With ‘Bloods’ written all over my arms. It just wasn’t normal seeing a 14-year-old kid coming to school all tatted up. People look at me and you have the stereotype
that he’s a gangster and some of the kids back then would be scared and the
teachers judge you and think, "I wonder what his parents do", and that’s just a
negative thing. That had a big impact because I had this image. I don’t know. I
just rolled with that. I thought people think I’m a gangster I may as well be a
gangster.

7.2.1.2 Funnelled down and out

Participants’ accounts showed a pattern of institutional funnelling, which was based upon
the good/bad student binary. Young men positioned as incompetent and bad students were
funnelled down and out of the educational system via a process of rejection.

Tim (aged 21) described this process when he reflected on his progression through school
and observed increased stability and less fighting amongst his peers over time.

Towards like the middle of school that group of [incompetent and bad] people
got moved on so for example at the start when I was in Year 7 there was like
quite a lot a fights between our year level. And then towards the end of year
12...there was no issues ...and it wasn’t violent at all.

Darren (aged 19) spoke about the opposing experience of being ‘moved on’ due to being assigned
the subordinate position in the good/bad student binary.

I got kicked out of Year 11 because I was out of [the school] zone and I turned
17 so they didn’t legally have to take me anymore. And I had a big ass file of
being a dumb cunt drop kick. You know what I mean?

Initially, Darren was a conscientious student who was eager to be part of the ‘top class’. However,
within his narrative, losing the privileged position was connected to re-positioning himself as a “cool
kid”, which was causal in the sequencing of events that led to the progression of antisocial
behaviour.

[In] Year 7 I was pretty focused just trying to get my education...just pressure
from my parents and just wanting to – like all my friends were in the top classes
and I wanted to be up there too, so yeah...It was a struggle. It was good, but I
got to the top classes...But then, in Year 8 they dropped me down again...I felt
good but it was just too stressful, so I kicked back, yeah...I wanted to be a cool
kid.

Darren recognised the meaning of the privileged position and although he positioned himself as
competent, he was aware of his subordinate social positioning.

I wish I didn’t fuck up my schooling...I feel smart as I am, but like, there is a
difference between dropouts and people who finish. You can tell...I don’t know
how to put it, but you can see it. Yeah, I’ve just always wanted to finish school
and I can. My dad would be pretty fucking proud.

Likewise, Hugh (aged 17) noticed the effects of his subordinate social positioning after leaving
school. Although, he attempted to re-negotiate his positioning, multiple schools rejected him from
returning.
I dropped out of school and then I realised that I don’t want to stay out of school all the time because people were already viewing me differently and I didn’t like that...And when I tried going back to other schools no other school would accept me...It is a bad feeling because I am like shit...if I want to go for a job they are going to reject me like this too and I don’t want that.

Within the pedagogical storyline, ‘non-academic’ students are typically defined as ‘more hands on’. This theme played out in the accounts of the young men who were often diverted away from completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and re-directed toward the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The VCAL is commonly offered at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes.

Charlie (aged 19) did not choose to leave school and undertake the VCAL program. Although he later decided this option was a good fit for him, he recognised that it also limited his future prospects.

It wasn’t my choice to leave. I got asked to do this course [VCAL], like to go and do it, because school wasn’t my thing. I was more hands-on and...the school pushed me to do something with my hands...I could’ve been a doctor or something like that...[but] I don’t think I’m that smart to be a doctor.

Despite Jake (aged 21) showing up for school with a rejuvenated interest, his positioning as the binary other prevented him from pursuing the change and goals he sought to achieve.

I was at home for a week because I was sick and because I had a history of wagging [truancy] they thought I was just wagging and they cancelled my enrolment. When I got back to school I took my medical certificates and...they were like, "your enrolment got cancelled and if you want to re-enrol you have to wait until next semester". I went to re-enrol next semester and they were like "no we don't want you back"...I was pretty pissed off because I actually wanted to finish Year 12 as much as I hated school. They were like “do TAFE”. I tried TAFE once and threw a chair at someone. I was like if I’m going to do Year 12 I want to do it the right way...I was starting to enjoy it. I actually wanted to have the high school experience.

The young men experienced being funnelled down and out of the educational system in various ways. The following excerpts capture how they experienced this process and what it meant to them to be positioned as the binary other by educational institutions.

Charlie, Aaron and Liam’s experience of being positioned as the binary other was one of abnormality through attending schools, which they characterised as being for students with problems.

Halfway through Year 10 I got kicked out of school. Got told to go do this TAFE program at a place...for troubled teens (Charlie, aged 19).

I didn’t go to a normal high school... It is [a school] for people who can’t cope in mainstream (Aaron, aged 18).
They sent me to a disabled school. Seeing people there they’re not normal. Everyday getting sent home...I wanted to be sent home because I didn’t like the school (Liam, aged 17).

For Kyle (aged 18), being positioned as the binary other and directed further away from mainstream school moved him closer toward a criminal identity.

I didn’t finish Year 9, but then I did a Year 10 pass at...a dodgy school like the teachers weren’t really qualified. It was like a tradies school sort of thing and there was like a few bad people there, like it was a school for people that couldn’t get into actual – a proper school. Of course this was after [custody at a youth justice centre] and stuff so if I went to a normal school and said, "can I get in?" Like, they obviously wouldn't say "yes". So it was pretty much like a last chance school and yeah, you just learnt stuff from them and when you learnt stuff from other people you do it yourself. You know what I mean? Like, you just become more knowledgeable – criminal – you know what I mean?

For Matthew (aged 16), being positioned as the binary other meant that his education was not worth caring about by him or others.

I was in...a school for duds. ‘Cause everybody just fucks around. Nobody does work. Everybody just does their own thing...’cause no one cared.

Within Ryan’s (aged 22) story of moving schools after being expelled for fighting, a multiplicity of positions in the dialogical self was expressed. For example Ryan as the hero fighting against the odds alongside like others, Ryan as alone and neglected, but seeking to be notorious, powerful and intimidating. His negotiation of positions made available to him by the social order is seen to have shaped his progression to drug use and furthered his violent actions.

[The] school was a lot more violent...it was more of a school that accepts all the violent people. I liked it because it was a lot smaller – more people like me, people who had experienced hardship, had gotten to where they are on their own, shit families, no support, people that feel like they’re on their own. They sort of resorted to drugs to experience like a warmth feeling to bury all that pain, neglect and some just to fit in. That’s when I started sort of getting into drugs...[I] started getting a hell of a lot more violent trying to make a name for myself. I wanted to be known by everyone, I wanted to be feared, I wanted to be liked by everyone, not the right kind of like I suppose...the wrong kind of people I would hope feared me. People that tried to do the same sort of thing that I was trying to do. People who thought they were tougher than I was.

Conversely, some young men told stories of being re-positioned as the competent and good student once they had been moved on from mainstream education. Both George and Sean spoke of aligning with an antisocial group as a method of inoculation against bullying. In a different teaching environment, the young men were able to negotiate an alternative social position.

It wasn’t mainstream mainstream school...there was all the bad kids there like with drug issues and stuff. But the teachers seen me and told me to go back to
a mainstream school...[they] thought I could go to uni[versity] and stuff like that (George, aged 18).

I got sent to anger management school...for kids who have problems at school. I went there, no one knew who I was. I didn’t have any problems with getting bullied or anything and the principal pulled me into her office and said, “I don’t know why you are here. There is nothing wrong with you”. My attitude changed there. I had nothing to prove there. [The principal said], “compared to all the students here you are the most quiet one. You put your head down and you just do your work” and she started asking me why...I didn’t want to talk. I was worried about it [bullying] getting out. I didn’t like talking about it and that whole thing. I just cruised all the way through. Never had any problems with anyone. Never got into an argument (Sean, aged 20).

Many of the young men experienced a void once funneled out of the educational system, as for most young people school is an important social institution central to the organisation of their lives.

Simon (aged 18) felt aimless without school to give his life structure and a sense of direction.

Yeah, it’s just like what am I doing with my life? And doing nothing, just sitting at home...I was in a good course. Well not a good course, but I was in a course doing something. Then I just left and I’ve been doing nothing ever since.

Without school, others structured their lives around socialising and substance use, which was connected to the progression of an offending trajectory.

I do the same thing every day. I smoke weed [cannabis]...I go to mates’ houses every day. At home, drink every Friday, Saturday. So, just the same every day, just different day...It’s boring, like it’s shit (Matthew, aged 16).

I left school. That’s when I went – got even worse. No school and a lot of free time...I didn’t have a plan, but I had friends that were trafficking [drugs]...I thought “you’re not going to use drugs for free forever, you’ve got to do something. A job at Coles is not going to pay for my drugs”. I’ve never had a real job before, never had a pay cheque...At that time it was easy. I knew I had a risky job, but at that time I knew there were a lot of young people going around to houses doing burglaries and they had to get their hands really dirty (Tuan, aged 24).

Some young men attempted to fill the void after school by gaining employment. However, binary logic continued to define the young men in terms of their institutional competency. The positions made available to them by the social order furthered their powerlessness and they struggled to find work and maintain employment.

At the end of Year 9, Daniel (aged 18) was asked to leave school. He saw this as a way out and an opportunity to commence working. However, gaining employment proved difficult due to being off time in the life course, and his level of motivation.

I wanted a job...I didn’t have to go the one step further and do something stupid to get expelled so they [school] done it for me...I started to try and find a job
and I couldn’t find a job...Partly because I was lazy and partly because no one
would take a 15 year old at the time...[I] thought anyone could just get a
job...wing it with sweet talk and it didn’t really work.

Employed young men typically obtained work in low paid and unskilled positions. Their work
histories were characterised by instability, which they attributed to a number of factors such as a
lack of fulfilment and poor working conditions, minimal job security, constraints (i.e., homelessness,
transport), substance use issues, and justice system involvement.

After becoming involved in the justice system, Matthew (aged 16) decided to obtain
legitimate work and purchase the items he wanted rather than steal them. However, he found the
work unrewarding.

I was working for an installation [company]...did that for about three [or] four
months. Then the guy pissed off with like $1,000 of my money. So he took off.
Did a job in a truck wash. Did that for about two months, got over it...It’s boring.
Just doing the same thing every day.

Matak (aged 23) spoke about the difficulties he faced working in the construction industry, which
contributed to him leaving two jobs.

The job was dodgy. He wasn’t paying me the right wages...He didn’t put me on
books and was paying me cash in hand. The problem was travelling. He was
just travelling everywhere and I couldn’t do that because I wasn’t driving back
then. Then I got another job with a different builder. It was a good job. I wanted
to stay, but some of his friends were bullies and I don’t tolerate bullying. Then
one day I got pretty angry and left the work site and quit.

Ryan (aged 22) felt considerable pressure to support himself and his family while caring for
his terminally ill father. Although he sought gainful employment, he found illegitimate means of
obtaining an income more worthwhile.

Well, things got a lot more harder back then. I barely ate because I couldn’t
afford to. I had to organise doctor’s appointments, going shopping, making sure
the bills got paid. I found it really hard and I smoked a lot of weed and that was
how I dealt with things. So, I started selling [drugs] and I’d work. I had plenty of
jobs, but I would only stay for about two [or] three months and then give up. [I]
didn’t like it – found no interest. It just bored me. So went back to selling
[drugs]. Easier way to make money with half the effort.

7.2.1.3 Social connection

The young men’s narratives also included stories, which reflected the insider/outsider binary
as a core theme. Many of the young men were allocated to or took up subject positions as a social
outsider. Frequently, antisocial/offending behaviour was a response to being positioned as an
outsider by the social order. Being assigned to the subordinate position in the good/bad student
binary and funnelled down and out of the system is representative of one way in which the young
men were positioned as outsiders by the educational system. The following further explores the
insider/outside binary and the meaning this had for the young men.

The young men spoke about feeling different from their peers, being a social misfit of sorts, which they often related to possessing certain attributes that, either real or imagined, were undesirable to their peers.

For Paul (aged 20), since his early primary school years, the subordinate position in the insider/outside binary was the only one made available to him. He spoke of the damaging effects this has had on his sense of self and his desire for social recognition.

I felt like a little feral piece of scum...Kids are judgmental and cruel...they're not conscious of the effect their words will have on other people.... it eats away at ya...there's not much I like about myself...I was short, skinny, and felt like a loser. I was always skin and bone, a good head shorter than most people. I felt insignificant...most people on the planet look for acceptance or recognition of some sort. I guess I never got it.

For Darren (aged 19), feeling different and taking up--being positioned as a social outsider was related to a physical condition that prevented him from playing sport, as well as being raised by parents who followed an alternative lifestyle.

I’ve always had feet problems. I love sport, but I just couldn’t do it because my feet were fucked up...basically I walk around like a penguin. Yeah, so yeah, I love sport, but I was always too self-conscious to play.

I was just raised weird – like, my parents were alternative. Like I was raised vegetarian [and] all my mates were eating meat. I don’t know – other things. I’d be off at the markets fucking selling shit with mum...she’d make them craft things – mosaics and, I don’t know, just weird things.

He described spending much of his life trying to fit in with his peers. In attempting to negotiate his position as an insider, he prioritised social acceptance over academic performance.

I was a smart little kid, but I always loved giving the teacher cheek, so I always ended up getting my ass in trouble...My peers laughed...[and] it made me feel good, accepted, fit in, yeah...sort of sacrificed education for the social group.

It was not uncommon for the young men to position themselves as the ‘class clown’ as a strategy to increase their social desirability and acceptance amongst their peers. Being the class clown was often associated with being disruptive and unruly in class. Steven (aged 24) described this process and how his positioning shaped his identity and actions as a ‘class clown and a ‘menace’.

Later Steven discovered that social desirability and acceptance could be gained through negotiating alternative social positions available to him.

I used to be a fat kid getting teased...I was the class clown, a menace. I was always called the class clown and the menace and I never really learnt very well. Had to do catch up sort of things...and I got bullied a bit and then I became the
bully...it got me in a little bit of trouble...I, sort of sometimes, was the class clown...I just liked the popularity, the fun, getting – like thriving on people loving me and I thought that was the way in school. You had to do something like that. I lived off their energy and it wasn’t until much later that I found out you didn’t have to do things like that to get people’s energy like that.

Some of the young men acknowledged that being the class clown was not always an effective strategy for gaining peer acceptance. James (aged 19) spoke from the position of being a competent and good student and from this view he described his experience of the class clown.

There was always that kid in the class who’d always be a dick. I always found him, you know, everyone would laugh at him because he’s the class clown. But he was quite stupid at the same time. And he was annoying, but I mean I had nothing to do with him...’cause he’s an idiot...So I had nothing to do with those guys. Those were the guys, you know, the guys who were trying to show off and stuff.

While some young men used antisocial behaviour as a method of connecting with peers, others used it to lash out at teachers and peers in response to being positioned as an outsider. Lachlan (aged 21) related his experience of being bullied to the onset of his antisocial behaviour. For him, being rebellious was for his amusement and furthered his social isolation. However, he came to realise that it was not advantageous in the long run.

I’d rebel in class and cause issues with teachers and other students as well. It was like I had a chip off my shoulder. I didn’t enjoy the social niche of high school because I didn’t feel like I belonged so I would do my own thing and keep to myself...Because I couldn’t fit in I turned rebellious. It was short-term entertainment and laughter, but in the long term it didn’t benefit me in any way. I’ve only worked that out now. At the time...it made me feel better.

Often the young men negotiated an insider position amongst their peers through their positioning as an incompetent and bad student. This was commonly related to the progression of antisocial and offending behaviour, particularly when a shift in positioning from outsider to insider occurred. Sean (aged 20) re-positioned himself as a troublemaker and aligned with an antisocial group, which was associated with the privileged position in the insider/outsider binary. His new positioning provided him with a form of protection against bullying.

I kept getting myself into trouble and getting suspended and I started hanging around with the wrong people. They were the people that basically didn’t care what they did. They were the cool kids, the kids that start problems and that continually keep doing it. They’re the ones that weren’t getting picked on. They were the cool group. For me it was a big thing because in primary school I wasn’t so popular. So to become the cool person was something big for me. You start trouble and you’re in the cool group. Because you’re the troublemakers no one will pick on you because you will put up a fight and you won’t take shit from anyone.
Craig (aged 22) related his outsider positioning to being different from his peers on the basis of economic means. He also aligned with an antisocial group to bring about a shift in his social positioning.

I was the quiet one [and] everyone picked on me. I wasn’t the biggest. I thought I was cool and I wasn’t cool. I got bullied because I didn’t have the best clothes or the cool shoes, I done my own haircuts...I had to hang around the bad guys so then I got respect...The bad group was the black sheeps like I was because we were smoking and drinking in high school...I thought it was cool back then I thought I was a sick cunt because the girls like the bad boys. Just heroes trying to be cool, trying to fit in with everyone else.

George (aged 18) described in the following way that his positioning as the incompetent and bad student elevated his insider positioning amongst his peers and progressed his antisocial behaviour.

I see myself as a cool kid. Then I did...It was, I’ve been suspended – holy crap!...everyone knew what had happened...I liked the excitement, the attention, all that. I like the feeling of all that stuff, but being at home by myself, bored, I didn’t know that everyone was talking about me ‘til I got back to school. And they see suspended as being cool as, “man that was awesome”...I was the leader and it would end up me getting suspended once again ‘cause I’m the leader, I’m the clown, I’m going to be the outstanding one.

Not all of the young men who were assigned to the subordinate position in the insider/outside binary progressed onto antisocial pathways. These young men showed a pattern of accepting their social positioning; hence, they did not attempt to negotiate a new position for themselves as insiders.

Tim (aged 21) devalued the privileged position in the insider/outside binary. Thus, he was not inclined to push back against his positioning as an outsider.

They did pick on me a little bit in like, Year 7 and 8, but I just didn’t take it to heart. I was just like “yeah whatever you’re an idiot. You’re in the cool crew. I don’t really care”.

Similarly, Philip (aged 18) devalued the social insider position by associating such positioning with superficial interpersonal relationships.

I see them as sort of like their friendship with one another is, sort of, fake. And you know, they stab each other behind the back and things like that. And like me and my friends, the relationship is really strong and we do like anything for each other.

For Cody and John, performing antisocial acts in response to bullying was not considered by them to be productive; and therefore, was avoided.
If I got in trouble with the law, then I’m not solving my bullying problem. I’m not moving anywhere away from it. I’m only becoming the problem in order to avoid it (Cody, aged 20).

I am different from people. Some would say a little strange...I'm just odd. I think about things that people don’t often think about. My manner is a bit different, but that's just often worked to my advantage...I can just be very assertive. I can stand up for myself...[but] if they wanted to fight then it's obviously an issue that they have, so I will try and walk away because that would be the smart thing to do...I see that violence wouldn’t really achieve anything (John, aged 16).

While insider positioning was often associated with antisocial behaviour, some young men described this privileged position in relation to other socially desirable attributes. Such attributes included academic attainment, sporting achievements and other talents, material wealth and physical and personality characteristics.

Steven (aged 24) enjoyed being positioned as an insider after he began motor racing.

When I turned 15 I joined a race team and then started racing and pit crewing and then I was a popular kid because people thought I was Mark Skaife²...They put me in the [school] newsletter because I was meant to be the next best thing.

From Tim’s (aged 21) perspective, peers with the following attributes were allocated to the insider position by the social order.

All the traditionally good-looking guys and all the good-looking girls would hang out together and then you’d have like the nerdy group and then you’d have, I don’t know, the sporty people.

Sean (aged 20) described the privileged position being assigned to high academic achieving peers.

The other cool group were the smart kids that put their head down and didn’t say anything. They were cool because that’s the group that bullies spoke to, but never bullied. Don’t know what made them untouchable. They were likeable.

7.2.2 Inherent risk

Examination of the text indicated that all the young men were exposed to risk at some time in their lives and to various degrees. The majority of young men told stories in which they experienced being in close proximity to risk; and thus, the potential to follow an offending trajectory existed for them. Other young men spoke of being surrounded by risk and described the risk process as virtually inescapable. For few of the young men, the subjective experience of risk was a distant phenomenon that they perceived as barely relevant in their lives.

---

¹ Australian touring motor racing driver.
² The version of the flyer placed at organisations and Youth Justice Units included a statement offering limited remuneration for participation in the research.
7.2.2.1 Place

Located in the stories told by the young men were references to geographic places, which were characterised as risky, and the nexus of criminal activity. The young men spoke of growing up, moving to, or attending schools in such areas, and what it meant for them to be in close proximity to risk.

For Levon (aged 22), the place he was born was significant in defining his life trajectory. In an expression of this, he marked the beginning of his life down the bottom on the timeline he completed during the interview.

I don’t remember much according to when I was young. Just that I was born in [X] and then moved to [Y]...[It’s] down the bottom because that is how my life started off – [X] isn’t the best suburb.

Oscar (aged 20) related the progression of his antisocial behaviour to moving locations.

It got worse when I moved to...[X]...just [a] more rough area I guess...there’s more, like, drugs and crime on the streets than in...[Y].

Nate (aged 21) was affiliated with a gang in New Zealand. However, moving to Australia had severed his gang connections. It was not until the loss of a family member that Nate sought out his Australian gang affiliates, which gave him a sense of family and place.

I used to seek it out and ask “where were all the Islanders? What suburb could I find the Islanders?” because...there weren’t any Islanders where I was. So I jumped on the train and I went to...[X] and I felt I was back home when I got off the train. As soon as I seen boys in groups with red bandannas I just smiled. Probably the first time I had smiled in like, you know, and I thought I was home – this is home.

For Nate, the relationship between place and the gang was so deeply connected that desisting from crime meant he could no longer return to that area, despite forming an identity independent from the gang.

After coming out [of prison] the boys will want me. I’ll try and move away from it. I’m not moving to...[X] when I get out...if I go back there to...[X] I will get too carried away with it even though I have become this independent person.

Nick (aged 18) spoke about the relationship between certain locations and substance use. In particular, he highlighted the skate park as the place where he was first exposed to drugs. He further linked the progression of his offending behaviour to another location, which within his narrative was imbued with criminality; and thus, greater risk.

I used to ride bikes [and] I rode around...[X]...and sometimes to...the next suburb. And yeah, I’d always see these guys at the skate park and I always knew that they smoked choof [cannabis] and stuff...And plus, I wasn’t just smoking I was around...[Y] it’s a really dodgy area for a lot of crime and stuff and because I
was on the Ice [methamphetamine] it was like a whole different level...And I would just run and go all around the streets at night pretty much and just do my [drug] deals. And a few times I almost got robbed and that's when I started carrying around a knife and that was my first charge when I pulled a knife out on someone when they tried to bash me.

Similarly, other young men connected risk to specific sites. For Simon and Liam, criminal activity revolved around public transport locations.

Yeah, I know a fair few [antisocial] people because I live in...[X] and there's all these kids like 13 – 14 all the way to 16 – 17 [and] they just wag school, hang out at the bus station all day, and just smoke, drink, just do stupid stuff. And then the cops are down there every single day and they have police dogs and all that down there to search for drugs and all that. And it's just bad (Simon, aged 18).

So I was with them [gang] when I left [school]...I was kicking back like every single day at...[X train] station...people that were walking past they would be getting scared...they were scared of the gang. Like, wherever you go, there's a gang...every station there's a gang (Liam, aged 17).

Within the young men's stories, binary logic also defined certain schools as either competent or incompetent. Schools positioned as the binary other in accounts were connected to the progression of antisocial and offending behaviour.

Philip (aged 18) spoke about the prevalence of violence at his school and how this contributed to his involvement in gang like activities.

[It] was a really scummy school. Like gang things there – a lot of violence. Like always on the news. People coming in and hitting people with bats and like machetes and stuff. And that's when I started getting into like, I wouldn't say [a] gang group, you know, but just the things that gangs would do. Like I started wagging and they were into drugs and things like that and I don't know why I got into that.

Within Philip's story, the school and its teachers were assigned to the subordinate position, which is central to his description of the risk process. He attributed teaching practices to his disengagement from school and subsequent association with an antisocial peer group.

They were going wagging and I just started wagging as well...Something better to do I guess. Just sick of schooling all day...I never listened because I was just bored...I reckon a class is boring or its fun...the teacher determines that for sure...you get a good teacher [and] you do learn more...And some [teachers], you'd think that they were just out to get you...I always thought that there were too many students to the teacher, and yeah, that's the problem I think...You put your hand up [and] he can't come to all of yous at once...I'd just be like, I'll just wait...and then I'd do something like muck around in the meantime.

Other young men spoke of racial violence at school. This was especially significant for Sean (aged 20) who spoke of racism in his area permeating the school environment.
Most of the time the school that I was in – because of the area – it was racism. It was basically half the school against the other half of the school. Wogs versus Aussies. Wogs hated Aussies [and] Aussies hated Wogs. You’d be having an argument with the other person, and then it would involve his mates and your mates.

Sean described being the target of racial bullying after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in 2001. Sean connected his experience of bullying to his eventual involvement in the criminal justice system. In particular, he attributed social exclusion and a lack of support to ‘turning bad’.

When I was younger I used to get picked on. I was bullied by the whole school – literally the whole school. I’m from Iraq and that is when the 9/11 happened. That was the worst time of my life. I never was happy to go to school. It used to burn me because I had no one helping. That’s how I turned out to be bad, because of that.

Matak (aged 23) moved to Australia from Sudan. After a number of years, his family bought a home in the outer suburbs of Melbourne where he described experiencing serious racial violence. He banded with a group of African young men in the area to increase his sense of safety.

I didn’t feel safe when I first moved here. There are a couple of gangs here. They go out hunting, attacking people…I felt like I was a target. When I first moved here there weren’t many Africans…I spoke to the leader of the gang and asked, “why are you attacking us?” And he said, “because I thought you were coming here to take over the town”…I laughed at him. That’s just stupid how can someone come here and try to take over?…I didn’t like it. I didn’t want to get involved…I started getting closer to Africans because I needed a crowd to be around to keep me safe…We stood up for ourselves, we had to show them that we’re not going to take this anymore…The police are supposed to protect the citizens, the locals, but they’re not doing their job right…I moved to…[X] and it was just one sort of race…I felt threatened. I believe my life was in danger…I would spend time with them [Africans]. It gave me protection.

7.2.2.2 Culture

Some of the young men emphasised within their narrative accounts the role that culture played in exposing them to risk and moving them toward offending.

Warren (aged 21) was an Indigenous Australian. For him, the loss of his culture was highly pertinent and was a repeated theme throughout his narrative. He spoke of being drawn back to his origin, despite an awareness of the risks and recognition of the harm caused by the loss of culture in his community.

I don’t really know anything about my culture because where I come from our culture’s just gone…I can’t learn that culture because it’s all forgotten…We don’t know anything about culture…I grew up not even knowing my family. I only met them when I got out of foster care because my foster parents used to keep me away from Aboriginal people…That felt different when I got out of foster care…it’s like different living both sides…like one side’s, say, like normal and then when I go to my Aboriginal side it’s, like, just hectic…Like arguments, like
family wars and stuff like that...because there’s no culture up there...When I first got out of foster care I joined in with them...[I] started to think what my foster parents used to tell me because they used to say you’ll end up in the snake pit the way you’re going if you go back to living with them fellas. And I could see it as soon as I went back to them, I could see it...because the snake pit is like for alcoholics and as soon as I got out of [AOD] rehab and went to my cousins I like just went off tap [substance use].

For Luis (aged 18) growing up in South America meant being immersed in a culture of gangs. He described his attraction to the gang lifestyle and how this was linked to everyday survival.

South America’s real popular with gangs and all that, so I started getting in a bit of trouble. I mean I enjoyed it...so I got involved with the gangs and bad people while I was young...In South America there’s not that many good people there because there’s lots of poverty...it just kind of started escalating from there...got into a bit of a thieving mentality when we were young...people walk around with weapons every day...in places like South America it’s like I need to be with these people to survive.

Dylan (aged 21) lost control of the motor vehicle he was driving while intoxicated and killed his friend who was the passenger. For Dylan, the use of alcohol and drugs was a culture he experienced from a young age. This is indicated in the following excerpts from his narrative, which relate to physical recreation, work and social life domains respectively.

I was with people who were a lot older when I was playing footy...I could go to the pub, no worries. So we used to go out every night and it was never an issue...because the footy club too, the culture there was always drinking and that, and they wouldn’t mind because you were young.

When I was nearly 17 I was struggling to get work and then I got a job in Queensland in the mines...we were living on a camp all with older guys. Just went to work and drank after work ‘cause they were doing drug tests...I had been there for six months, drinking every day... All the jobs I’ve had there’s always drinking involved in some way or another.

Once I was made redundant I...made the stupid decision to not work for a while so that’s when I started using drugs and that...going out partying and meeting people who are off their heads. And then you think you might have a crack [try] – marijuana, ecstasy, speed...trying different things – acid...ice and cocaine, mushrooms. It kind of would just come about. You’d have some ecstasy and there would be acid sitting there so you would have that too.

Daniel (aged 18) attributed school culture to the onset of his antisocial behaviour. He described a causal link between moving to a less restrictive school environment and the erosion of school attachment.

[The school] turned me bad...I was like good and stuff and then I went to a public school...Like [there were] people that didn’t care. People wearing runners instead of school shoes. People who weren’t wearing school uniform at all... Because they’re more relaxed than I am and I want to be relaxed...I didn’t really do my work. Never paid attention to it. I started wagging school...Like if I went
to [Catholic secondary school] I knew I would’ve done really well... people smoking on the oval, stuff like that I was like “whoa!”...I was just so overwhelmed about the whole thing – that everyone was so relaxed...I didn’t really grasp the fact that I’m supposed to be learning.

7.2.2.3 Relationships

The narrative accounts of the young men included countless references to peer and family interactions as the point of exposure to risk. Since the young men’s negotiation of such interactions within social systems is largely related to the themes and master narratives presented throughout this chapter, this section deals more specifically with the young men’s experience of proximity to risk with regard to social relationships.

Few young men described risk as a distant phenomenon. These young men had an awareness of their potential to be exposed to risk predominantly by their peers; however, they actively avoided this potential. They had a tendency to be more cautious, were risk averse and attached to school. Most of the young men detailed disruption in their lives through the causal sequencing of significant events. Conversely, a pattern of stability was evident within the stories of young men who experienced distance from risk. These young men often began their narrative account by describing it as uneventful, as indicated below by Reggie and Duane.

I haven’t really had any significant events that have happened to me to be honest...nothing’s really changed in my family since I’ve been alive (Reggie, aged 20).

What’s next? Well in terms of my boring and conventional life, we’ll talk about...[university] (Duane, aged 20).

Exposure to risk barely featured within Duane’s (aged 20) narrative. His distant proximity to risk was further illuminated by his vague knowledge of antisocial peers at his school. In his stories, he described himself as disquieted by risk and promptly removed himself from such settings.

I mean there probably were [antisocial peers], but they weren’t my friends to begin with, so I wouldn’t know about it...I took myself out of it...I have no interest...and I’m not going to push the rules...that’s how you avoid risk and trouble...it’s just that the way my life has been I never had much experience of it [risk] in the first place.

John (aged 16) spoke about growing up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. He was attuned to the potential risks in his environment and was selective in forming his social group based on an evaluation of his peers’ moral character. John was offered a scholarship to a private school and in his narrative he contrasted his public and private school experience. For John, attending a private school moved him further away from risk.

The [private] school environment’s really nice. Like even the most dangerous kids there, aren’t actually that dangerous at all.
John was active in escaping the risk process and spoke of his proximity to risk as being attached to his previous public school as part of the broader peer network within which his social group continued to be embedded.

Like if I contrast where I am now, like people that go to schools in the [X] area and stuff, are more likely to you know drink...my friends now like the ones I hang out with...continued down the [public school] path...[and] they would have more brushes with people who were, you know, a bit more morally loose. But they still maintained their integrity and the goodness that I first became friends with.

For the young men who experienced risk as distant, the progression toward more adult forms of socialising was considered to carry a certain degree of risk, which was avoided. This had the effect of preserving the youth of these men in comparison to their peers.

People that have drugs and that have alcohol and then they wake up the next morning...[and] they've ruined their whole life and that happens at parties...At this age, having parties and all that stuff,...that's like what the rebels do. That's what the bad students do...I don't want to go to parties...I'm not ready to do that at this age...Last month, or something, these Year 8's at my school got pregnant (Kennedy, aged 15).

For Kennedy (aged 15), there was a direct link between the erosion of school attachment and exposure to risk.

I think people that go to parties, people that do drugs and stuff like that, they're not happy in school...they're not happy with their education or with their learning...but to me I fit into this category of learning...and then having fun with my friends to substitute from sex until I'm old enough.

James’ (aged 19) story of playing a school game with antisocial peers highlighted the way in which the young men set boundaries around their exposure to risk in order to maintain their distance.

Everyone [from], like completely different backgrounds and stuff, all just got along ’cause we all just want to play this game...and you’ve got like some other people as well...[who] would take drugs and stuff but...I was never with them when they did...we had nothing to do with that. And I was never interested in doing that.

Boundaries around exposure to risk were also set by significant others in the young men’s lives, such that even when there was family criminality, the young men still maintained a sense of distance from risk.

My dad was into drugs and he got in trouble with the law...mum’s done a good job of keeping me away from it...that's why they [parents] split – because she wanted to keep me away from that side...I don't really know about it [father’s criminality] (Tim, aged 21).
Despite these young men experiencing risk as distant from them, all of them experienced the potential to be exposed to risk. While the risk in these young men’s lives was bounded off and/or actively avoided, most of the young men in this study were enticed by the risk process.

Tuan (aged 24) described his life in ordinary terms up until secondary school when he was first exposed to risk through his peers. Within his narrative, smoking cigarettes was the currency, which afforded him a privileged position amongst his peers. However, swiftly the stakes were raised and group membership became associated with smoking a new substance – heroin. Although Tuan was uncertain about the nature of this drug, he was open to the experience in order to remain in the group. This was the beginning of Tuan’s offending trajectory, which ultimately led to his incarceration.

When you’re at a new school you’re at the bottom of the food chain...I was just getting to know friends...first it was smoking...just to be part of the group...couple of months down the track they brought in heroin. Straight to the big game, no pot, no bloody acid, none of that shit...At the start I didn’t know what it was...I took it and I didn’t feel really good...I just threw up everywhere, but then I still came back and had more with them just to be popular...everyone was smoking in the toilets, but being different is, like, popular. Not everyone was smoking heroin in the toilets. It was only us group.

Likewise, Emmerson (aged 18) narrated his life along positive lines until he commenced secondary school and came into close proximity with risk. For Emmerson, associating with his cousins at school contributed to the progression of his offending behaviour.

It was just a big mess. I was hanging around with the wrong people. Like my cousins are into the wrong kind of things and I went to school with them. And that’s what got me in to it and I became good at bad things. Like I could steal like any car.

Although Levon (aged 22) resisted the risk process throughout school, his close proximity to risk was ongoing. Whilst at home, his girlfriend’s brother exposed him to methamphetamine use. In this different context and life stage, Levon was less guarded against risk because he felt safe in his home and more responsible as an emerging adult. Keen to ingratiate himself within this social group, he allowed himself to experience methamphetamine when otherwise he would not have. This was the beginning of Levon’s drug dependency.

I didn’t [use drugs] because of the environment, because [of] young adults going out partying and having disaster nights. I don’t know why that thought didn’t come up again, but it was because of just being at home and not out in that [party]ing environment...I sort of wanted to fit in because they were all doing it and I would look uncool, stupid or nerdy...leaving home [and living with my girlfriend, working [and] being independent, it sort of changed the thought process of all of that. I thought I’m older I’m more of an adult...It wasn’t having
it and then going to work and operating heavy machinery...but it was still in the back of my mind what happens if something goes drastically wrong.

The stories of some young men revolved around instability and chaos. These young men described being surrounded by risk and were frequently exposed to risk through their families, as well as their peers.

Oscar’s (aged 20) narrative followed a pattern of regression that was tied to being surrounded by risk. Transience was a central theme in his stories, which he connected to his parents’ substance use and struggle to provide basic needs for the family. He attended more than 10 schools, which interrupted his school attachment and social connections. For Oscar, early school leaving was a natural consequence of his disinterest and instability. His narrative detailed the divergence from his childhood aspiration to be a policeman or fireman and his eventual involvement in the criminal justice system.

[Mum] just jumps from house to house...can’t even look after herself...she used to be a heroin addict...I went [to school] for like half a term. Didn’t go for the rest of the year...[because] just like when I was living with my dad this one little bit, well area or whatever you want to call it, we didn’t have real stable accommodation. We were pretty much just kicking it in a tent...I just seen it like camping out for a long while...he sort of got into drugs and that, but he managed to pull himself out of it...[I] got to do whatever I want...I thought it was good, but [it] turned out bad...just ended up doing crime and that...mum tried stopping me, but, well not really, she just told me not to hang round with those people. I was like, “no”.

Aiden (aged 23) also spoke of the risk process as virtually inescapable. He described being surrounded by risk, as criminality was inherent in his family.

My family has been in and out of gaol – my uncles, my mum, my dad...I know right from wrong, but it was sort of in our lifestyle. Hopefully I can say this is the last time [incarcerated], but it is easy to get in trouble and once you’ve been to gaol it is so easy to come back.

Leaving home was a common response by the young men to being surrounded by risk within the family. In many cases, parental separation moderated the risk of leaving home by providing a second residence for the young men that reduced the likelihood of them becoming homeless. Often the young men would move back and forth between family homes as they felt they needed. Although such transience created instability in their lives, it allowed them to manage the risk they were exposed to by their family.

I used to fight with my parents a lot, like all the time. Like I would always be in and out of my dad’s house or me mum’s house or like a mate’s house or another family member’s house. It was always back and forth, and then that stressed me out...but it's always been the same anywhere I've gone...they're all alcoholics (Henry, aged 21).
Nick (aged 18) left home in response to family violence. For Nick, leaving his family home at 12 years of age resulted in homelessness, which increased his exposure to risk. Concerned with the task of fending for himself, he left school and became reliant on crime to become self-sufficient.

There was pretty much family violence...there was no one else to stand up for my mum besides me...I pulled a knife on him [dad] and he...told me either leave or like, “I’m calling the police”, so I just packed my stuff and left...I was couch-surfing for a bit. I went to my mate’s house...and started smoking bongs and shit...when you’re on the street, like you got to – it’s like kill or be killed pretty much. You know what I mean? Like, it’s either you go out [and] steal to eat, or you die starving.

Times of transition within the life course, like leaving the family home or moving schools, was a point at which change could potentially be brought about in the degree of exposure to risk. For some young men, transitions distanced them from risk; however, often as the young men were funnelled down and out of the educational system and/or progressed through the criminal justice system, they were exposed to greater risk.

George (aged 18) completed a high ropes course after receiving a caution for repeat offending. This program was a point of transition for George that exposed him to greater risk through his peers, which prompted him to consider his identity in relation to the participants in the program. If George were to view himself as akin to program participants, this may have increased his own criminal propensity. However, George sought to re-position himself and resisted taking on the criminal position that had been assigned to him through his mandatory participation in the program.

They [program participants] were lost causes basically...[one] was like 15 and he had a kid on the way and he was addicted to methamphetamine. And that was probably the biggest thing, just seeing them, how bad it was...they all smoke weed. One of them brought a joint to the thing...[I] kind of reflected on myself thinking I’m not this bad am I? And then I realised I certainly wasn’t that bad. But, it just woke me up a bit.

An overwhelming theme in the narratives of the young men was the ever-present sense of risk in their lives, which required their continual negotiation. Some young men were able to distance themselves from exposure to risk; however, for the most part this was an active resistance. For the rest of the young men, risk was often nearby or surrounded them such that it was almost impossible to avoid.

Honestly there is opportunities everywhere for you to get into trouble, especially now in this area as well. Anyone can get into any type of trouble whenever they want, just like that. And yeah that’s how people or kids, if they are not smart, they are going to get caught up in the wrong things (Hugh, aged 17)
I wouldn’t say that it is easy to stay out of trouble. For someone to never be faced with a kind of trouble would be pretty blessed...it depends how you cope with whatever you have been faced with. [I] haven’t coped very well because I’m here [prison]. It sounds bad, but the worse case scenario is the difference between being dead or alive (Levon, aged 22).

### 7.2.3 Detachment

In the young men’s narratives, the themes discussed in the above sections critical positions (7.2.1) and inherent risk (7.2.2) frequently culminated in institutional and emotional detachment. The young men described taking on a mode of carelessness in response to their disconnection from social institutions and emotions. This was often associated with avoidance, substance use and reckless/risky behaviour, and was further linked to the escalation of offending behaviour.

#### 7.2.3.1 Alienation

Emotional and institutional detachment was often connected in the young men’s stories to the experience of alienation. Detachment from school was typically described by the young men in terms of unruly and avoidant behaviour that was not only a response to feelings of alienation, but also as contributing to furthering this experience.

Dylan (aged 21) experienced alienation through his positioning as an incompetent and bad student in secondary school. He detailed his detachment from school as a gradual process that began in primary school with feeling frustrated and unsupported in the classroom. His positioning as the binary other shaped his antisocial behaviour as a response to being excluded from school in classroom practices. He described orchestrating his removal from class through performing antisocial acts as a strategy to avoid frustration and battles in the classroom. For Dylan, emotional detachment was closely associated to institutional detachment by making it possible for him to be truant from school through taking on a mode of carelessness toward his education.

[I was] disruptive in class and started to wag classes because I didn’t want to be there and it was just easier...I would do whatever I could to get kicked out of class or I would just not go at all...[I] didn’t care...I had no feelings...If they [teachers] had been supportive rather than always battling me it would have been different.

Dylan elaborated on his emotional detachment, further connecting it to feelings of alienation related to his sense of helplessness, shame and limited self-efficacy to bring about change in his life. He described being immobilised by a mode of carelessness toward the self that is produced and reproduced in a social system of uncaring others whom he perceived to have disappointed along with himself.
I just don’t care what happens to me. I think sometimes I can’t change myself and I will always be like this. Sometimes I feel like…there is no one else to help me because they are so disappointed in me.

Like Dylan, Henry (aged 21) took on a mode of carelessness after feeling rejected and alienated in response to being sent away by his parents to live with his aunt, which was a consequence of his behaviour. In his narrative, Henry connected feelings of alienation to emotional detachment, which precipitated his cannabis use.

Just not caring as much as what I did. I just stopped [caring] and then I started smoking pot and then just started not giving a fuck...I just started thinking, “I’m living with me aunty…I can’t really be that bad to be here am I?”...You know, like, “why am I here? My parents don’t want me or what?” Like I knew I was a bad kid, but if, like, if I stuffed up, I never really got a chance to redeem myself.

After moving to his aunt’s home and changing schools, Henry was positioned as an outsider by his peers. In addition to his emotional detachment, Henry’s detachment from school was also brought about by a combination of itinerant schooling and his sense of alienation at school.

I was like a social pariah. It was bad actually...they didn’t really talk to me. You know?...they just thought I was a dickhead...I only lasted two months at that school...and when I did go to school I wagged. I just wagged because of the people. I just didn’t want to be around them.

Similarly, Joey (aged 21) was also positioned as an outsider by his peers and experienced alienation at school. Like others, he described being the target of bullying, which contributed to his detachment from school.

School sucked...everyday was just getting bullied...during class I was alright. When the lunch breaks came out, not so much. I tended to disappear from the school...because then I’m by myself and there’s no one to try and bash me up.

After a series of placements in residential units (out of home care), Mark (aged 18) experienced himself as a ‘lost child’. In his narrative, being a lost child was closely tied to his sense of alienation from home and emotional detachment, which produced the conditions for him to offend. This is how Mark made sense of his offending behaviour.

[Custody at a youth justice centre] made me think not to do anything [crime] again. But then after a while I just started doing it again...’cause I had to go back to ressie [residential unit]...I was just a lost child...I just didn’t care about anything. I wasn’t home. Yeah, I just lost sense of care.

Trent (aged 15) spoke regretfully of his detachment from family in response to conflict at home. In his account, it is through his actions of being disrespectful to family and leaving home that he felt alienated. He described himself as ‘missing’, which resonates with Mark’s account of being a lost child. However, there is a subtle difference between a missing child and a lost child. A lost child
invokes a greater sense of isolation; and thus, in Trent’s story there is a sense that his ties to family remain partially intact.

I was losing pretty much my family and all that...because, like, I never went home. I was fighting with them all the time. I'd always go missing...I pretty much had nowhere to stay...just streets pretty much...[I'd] just go with friends. Well so-called friends back then. Get drunk, get stoned, and all that...I was really stupid back then...not going home [and] treating everyone with disrespect.

Failure was a defining theme in Darren’s (aged 19) narrative. He described using cannabis to detach emotionally and account for his sense of underachievement. While he felt his positioning as a drug user shielded him from the full effect of his shortcomings, he also spoke of it alienating him from his community and family.

Just the numbness when you don’t have to focus on anything...When first doing bad I could blame it on being stoned so it was, kind of, it was just my excuse for everything really...I never really succeeded too much at anything, so I now had something to blame it on. So I started really smoking pretty fucking heavy and, you know, got known as the ‘stoner’ in my town, and I started selling weed and pills and shit. Dad kicked me out.

7.2.3.2 Distress

A relational pattern of exposure to risk in combination with the experience of psychological distress was evident within the narratives of the young men. Usually, it was the young men who were surrounded by risk that delineated the most chaotic sequencing of life events and told stories centred on their experience of trauma. Emotional and institutional detachment was a common response to the depletion of the young men’s resources to cope adaptively with distress.

In addition to his sense of alienation from family and peers, Henry (aged 21) also connected emotional detachment to feelings of distress in relation to his indiscretions and family environment. In particular, he described his family environment as out of control and characterised by serious conflict. In his narrative, emotional detachment in response to distress was further linked to his cannabis use.

Smoking bongs and all that just [because of] all the fighting at home. Before that all the stress I'd go through, everything, all the mistakes that I'd made. Like, I used to think about it — used to really get to me. So when it [family conflict] really started I just didn't care. Just, like, fuck it. Why not [use cannabis]?

Sam (aged 19) moved to Australia from Sudan. He related emotional and institutional detachment to ruminations about his traumatic past and described using alcohol and drugs as a method of coping with distress. He detailed his emotional detachment as a point of similarity that formed the basis of social connections with other young people who also used alcohol and drugs.
I keep thinking about the stuff that's happened. Just go back to that. It's like an automatic thing...and just usually go back to drinking to forget it...just to cope with it...that made me just drift out of school and didn't care. Find new friends too...we just drink together, smoke, and just didn't give a shit.

Like Sam, Nick (aged 18) also used drugs to forget his past. Distress in Nick’s stories was related to the experience of family violence, institutional detachment, and not reaching his potential as an elite sportsman. For Nick, the relationship between feelings of distress, emotional detachment and substance use was experienced in the following way.

To block my emotions pretty much. I had to forget what would happen at home, to forget all the stuff that I've seen my mum go through, to forget all the friends I've lost, [and] all the opportunities.

Michael (aged 21) attributed the development of substance use dependency to drinking with his father from 10 years of age. Alcohol featured in his childhood stories as a reward given by his father and was central to their bond as father and son. For Michael, alcohol and cannabis use later became associated with emotional detachment, which he related to distress stemming from physical health conditions, family conflict, and pressure to meet high expectations.

[Dad] was saying, “I’ll get you off those antidepressants and just have a drink with me”...I just sort of yeah started drinking every day and every morning and...I was just over stuff, over everything...I guess wanting to escape again...and eventually the same thing happened [I] couldn’t get drunk...and so started smoking pot again.

For Aiden (aged 23), emotional detachment in response to distress pertaining to grief and loss was causal in redirecting him onto the ‘bumpy road’. In his narrative, Aiden repeatedly used the expression ‘bumpy road’ with reference to his life, and more specifically following an offending trajectory, which in many ways was his means of escaping or not facing up to the struggles of the ‘bumpy road’ he had to travel.

When I got out [of prison] the first time I went back down the bumpy road. I just lost my best mate, [and] my sister hung herself and I just ran myself down. Wouldn’t listen to no one. I had the family support, but me and my mate we just went down the bumpy road and partied and run amok. Just done whatever we wanted and didn’t care less.

Nate (aged 21) described distress in relation to family violence and DHS involvement, which led to his emotional and institutional detachment. Following this, his sense of rejection and alienation from family precipitated his gang membership.

He [step-father] started drinking and stuff and he became real violent...I started not going to school. I didn’t give a fuck about anything. I knew he [step-father] was staying, so I thought, “fuck this”...and I tried to commit suicide...life was too hard back then. Then DHS got involved and they tried to take me away from my mum and I kept fighting it...I had a few cousins that were in gangs. One of my
cousins told me you know, “just leave them be and come with us”...I felt like I wasn’t loved anymore, that my mum didn’t care about me...So I decided to go with the boys [gang].

7.2.3.3 Derailment

Emotional and institutional detachment were also associated with experiencing a sense of derailment from one’s intended life course. Such derailment was often overwhelming for the young men and was accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty about recovery. Typically, the young men expressed this in terms of becoming careless and giving up on their ambitions.

For Henry (aged 21), emotional detachment featured in his narrative not only in relation to alienation and distress, but also his derailment from a more gratifying life path. He described feelings of dejection as a result of his exposure to family violence, and he connected this to emotional detachment. Being in a detached emotional state enabled Henry to offend, which in turn brought about more pleasurable emotions.

I just wasn’t happy. Just everything I’d seen, everything I’d heard with my parents especially, just made me not care. Didn’t really give a fuck. Didn’t really care...just go in and get [steal] something and run off and go down the beach or something and be happy as.

Reflections expressed within Nate’s (aged 21) narrative revealed dissonance between his sense of self and his offending behaviour. Such dissonance suggested derailment from a preferred trajectory. Hence, emotional detachment played an important role for Nate in enabling him to become a member of a gang. Additionally, he described his positioning as a criminal (through being sentenced to a term of custody) as influential in shaping his identity as a ‘gangster’.

[Custody at a youth justice centre] was harmful because I reflected back on my life from boys’ homes [to] now I’m in juvi...I would look in the mirror and sometimes I would laugh, thinking, “what the fuck am I doing here?”...and then I think, “this is it – this is who you are”...I would think about all the things I could have been and start reflecting on my life and the last thing you see – this is it, you’re a gangster and once this is battered into your head you think you have nothing to lose and I didn’t give a fuck...in gaol it’s like automatically you’re a gangster. You’ve got no choice.

Sam (aged 19) primarily moved to Australia to improve his educational prospects. However, becoming homeless represented derailment in his narrative and was experienced as a loss of life purpose and direction. This was associated with emotional and institutional detachment, which increased his susceptibility to the risk to which he was exposed while homeless.

The bad people really just put me up to, like, drinking like drugs and just pulled me out of school pretty much. Like, this fucked up my life, you know?...It started when I was homeless because I didn’t care who I met. I didn’t care what I
did...like the drugs and drinking, just girls and just going from places to places, like doing some crime...I didn’t care because I had nothing else to do.

Trevor (aged 24) aspired to be a lawyer, expressed a strong moral stance and indicated a firm attachment to school. However, a series of events in Trevor’s life such as family violence, homelessness and job loss resulted in derailment from his intended trajectory. Trevor described emotional detachment as a consequence of this, which was further associated with his legal transgressions, including substance use.

My whole life turned to shit at the time. As I said, I got kicked out of home, lost my job...my life wasn’t really going anywhere so I didn’t really care. I just didn’t give a shit [and] thought, “why not?” So me and my mates used to do it [drive illegally] and stuff like that...At the time, ‘cause I was smoking [cannabis] I didn’t really care.

Paul’s (aged 20) narrative followed a pattern of regression that was characterised by ongoing instability. For Paul, homelessness was a further point of derailment that led to him using methamphetamine intravenously. Along with other offending behaviour, Paul associated substance use with emotional detachment, which he described as an active and conscious process.

We decided to be homeless...[I] went through a pretty bad period of my life there. Injected [methamphetamine] for the first time...I hate needles, always have, always will. It was only just ‘cause I was in such a down damn shit spot in my life...I’m very good at for the specific point in time switching off certain morals that I have. Like for instance stealing from my best mate. It makes me sick, but I can switch off that feeling for a certain period of time if I need to.

7.2.4 The dynamics of antisocial behaviour

From a close reading of the young men’s narrative accounts, the intricacies of antisocial and offending behaviour became more apparent in patterns in the form of themes and stories that illuminated certain dynamics. This section considers in more depth the processes that the young men described as instrumental in the onset and maintenance of their offending behaviour. The processes related to the young men’s negotiation of risk and desistance from offending are discussed in greater detail in the following section (7.2.5), a successful project.

7.2.4.1 The game

For some young men offending behaviour was experienced as a game. This was typical in instances where the onset of antisocial and offending behaviour occurred in early adolescence. In many ways the young men likened offending to a game, competition, or sport, which was experienced as entertaining, exciting, fun, and an adventure.

For Daniel (aged 18) antisocial behaviour was a point of difference that gave him a sense of uniqueness amongst his peers. Within his version of the game, one of the
rules was to be defiant and oppositional. He enjoyed the shock value of his actions and continuously pushed the limits for his own entertainment and the entertainment of others.

The private school had never seen anyone like me before...the things I did and...it sounds so stupid, but they were just so shocked at how much I just didn’t give a fuck about anything...they didn’t know what to do with me...There was me and two other mates in the end and we ended up getting kicked out together. But yeah, we had fun...entertaining ourselves and entertaining everyone else in the process.

Similarly, Oscar (aged 20) also spoke of finding enjoyment in pushing the limits and provoking a reaction in others. He further experienced the game as a battle amongst the seven children in his family in which he was competing for attention.

I was just like the class clown...[and] disobedient at home...I just like seeing peoples’ reactions...I got enjoyment out of it...seeing people pissed off...I was like just a real big smartass...Just being in a house with lots of kids I guess...we’re always battling it out with each other...it’s like a competition really...[to] just try and get attention.

Oscar described offending as a game with the aim being to steal increasingly more difficult items. He expressed playing out of boredom on his own as a game of personal challenge or as a competition amongst friends. However, like any game that is played too often, Oscar felt the game that was designed to alleviate boredom was becoming boring in itself.

I was going through, like, this really bad stage...just every minute of the day just shoplifting...I think it’s the adrenalin rush...PlayStation that just gets boring...[shoplifting] it’s starting to [get boring], but yeah, just back in the day I used to like challenge myself to try and get bigger and harder things...me and mates and that...[would] see who can get the most clothes in one store...I more so shoplift by myself just out of pure boredom.

For George, (aged 18) antisocial and offending behaviour was experienced as an excitement filled adventure. He described his experience much like a ‘cat-and-mouse’ game that involved pursuit by authority, evading capture and continuous attempts to escape.

You could sneak into the movies...go out and just do stuff instead of being stuck at school...the feeling of maybe getting caught...”oh we’ve got to run”. You know what I mean? “Oh there’s the teacher quick hide!” It’s fun...the feeling that you could get in trouble for it or you can evade it...It was definitely a rush...so much excitement, but fear at the same time.

A repeated theme in Frankie’s (aged 20) narrative was his desire for accomplishment. However, his frequent positioning as the binary other by the social order precluded him from gaining a sense of success through prosocial endeavours. Thus, Frankie framed antisocial behaviour as a game in which he could compete and gain a sense of accomplishment.
I wish I was like them [competent and good student positioning]. They were always going to classes, they were always learning something, passing exams and all that. They were on top of the class in a good way and I was on top of the class in a bad way.

For Frankie, the movement toward offending was experienced as a staged process, which represented different levels in the game and marked his antisocial progression and advancement.

I thought, “oh this is cool. Let’s wag school today”...I knew it was the wrong thing to do, but at the time it was something different. It was like I reached another level of being bad and I was like “oh yeah, this is cool” and continued to do it.

Frankie made a causal link between completing a term of custody at a youth justice centre and the escalation of his offending behaviour. For Frankie, his experience of being surrounded by offending young men while in custody incited a greater interest in competing in the criminal arena.

I never thought I would be in gaol. Everything just changed...because the people I met there were even worse...they done worse crimes than what I could even imagine doing myself...I thought, “I’ve been to gaol now”, so I felt like I wanted to compete. That sounds stupid, but that’s how I felt – “let’s see who can get the most gaols, who can come to gaol the most times, who can do more crimes, who does the longest times here”.

During emerging adulthood, Frankie’s offending behaviour became ingrained and what once was experienced as a competitive game, became a way of life that enabled him to be self-sufficient. In Frankie’s narrative, this progression represented the process of moving from the onset phase of offending to the maintenance phase.

The crimes got worse and then we started doing more crimes, like burglary...I done my first one and I thought, “this is a good way to make money”...so I started doing it regularly...We loved it because it paid for everything – bills...pay for our drugs, alcohol, food...All I was thinking of was supporting my habit and buying stuff that I liked...that’s why I loved doing it.

A corollary effect of conceptualising offending as a game was that antisocial actions and consequences were treated by the young men with levity; and thus, were not taken seriously. Accordingly, these young men were not easily deterred from offending as long as it continued to be experienced through the lens of the game.

George (aged 18) minimised the consequences of his offending. For him, taking on a criminal subject position after receiving a police caution for graffiti vandalism only increased the excitement of the game.

I tagged [graffiti] this wall and the police got me for that and I got a caution. It was nothing...“Holy crap, I’m a criminal!” That’s how I seen it...It was a rush.

Likewise, Oscar (aged 20) experienced contact with the criminal justice system as inconsequential and part and parcel of playing the game.
I got busted once stealing five skateboards. Just got a cautionary, and I thought, “oh is this what’s going to happen every time?”

A further corresponding element of the game was its ‘blinding effect’ on the young men. The game captivated their attention so much so that they became swept up or caught up in the fun and thrill of play, consequently narrowing their viewpoint and capacity to judiciously evaluate their actions.

Logan’s (aged 15) account of aspiring to be a gangster was a story of risk and adventure, which revolved around the theme of the game. He spoke of his experience blinding him to all else other than the rewards and successes of the gangster lifestyle.

You don’t really think about what’s going to happen to you bad. You think about all the good things, like all the crimes that succeed, all the money you make, all that type of thing. You don’t really think about what’s going to happen, like when it’s you on the receiving end...obviously gaol, death, well getting robbed, bashed...I was just so caught up in the whole idea of ‘I wanted to be a gangster’, basically, that I didn’t really care about anything else.

Henry (aged 21) was engrossed by the excitement of the game and through play he experienced himself as a powerful figure. As a result, he was blinded to the seriousness of the risks and consequences of his offending.

It was fun at the time. I didn’t think I’d get caught. I thought I was invincible...when you’d get caught...it really wasn’t anything. It was just a rush or a thrill.

For Dylan (aged 21) the blinding effect of the game was experienced as a ‘bubble’ that perpetuated his offending trajectory. This metaphor is suggestive of the passive position Dylan assigned to himself. However, his agency was expressed in the description of his release from the bubble and corresponding desistance from crime.

I tried to stop [offending] but it just didn’t work. I liked it. It was fun. I liked getting chased by the cops and drinking. It’s like a game, trying to hide shit from your parents. That’s just how it was...I was in my bubble [and] just kept going...It’s different now that I’m doing 15 months [in prison]. Game over. I lost. Just pop the bubble [and] it just stops if I want it to.

7.2.4.2 Place and belonging

Very few of the young men described the onset of their offending behaviour occurring independently of others. For most young men, finding a place in, and belonging to, an antisocial group was central to their movement along an offending trajectory. Typically the beginning of this process occurred during the transition from primary school to secondary school when the young men were establishing new peer connections and negotiating their position as either a social insider or outsider.
For the most part, the young men described the same types of archetypal social groups across schools. These types of social groups were typically categorised by them using terms such as ‘nerd/smart’, ‘misfit’, ‘sporty’ and ‘cool/popular’. Commonly, the young men expressed popularity and acceptance in terms of being ‘cool’, which was essentially a reference to the privileged position in the social insider/outsider binary. This is reflected in Conner’s (aged 25) explanation of cool, in which he additionally associated social insider positioning with the state or condition of being older.

Cool is doing whatever the older kids were doing. Because they were all doing it and having fun it was the popular thing to do. It is being accepted, [and] being amongst the popular people made me feel accepted. And other people wanted to be popular, so they liked me.

Frequently within the young men’s stories, social insider positioning was associated with performing antisocial acts. As a result of this association, young men like George (aged 18) with an interest in negotiating a social insider position found themselves in an antisocial group.

The people I made friends with were bad people, [they] got into a lot of trouble...they were funny – comedians. I don’t know. Everyone looked up to them...they were popular. I got to be with the popular people. Not get bullied. Have fun. Didn’t think of getting in trouble though.

Hence, references made by the young men to socialising with the ‘wrong crowd’ were suggestive of their misjudgement about the nature of the social group and their retrospective pairing of the social insider position with antisocial behaviour.

I kind of got in with a bit of a wrong crowd...at the time I just thought “oh yeah, sick, I’m popular now, so this seems good” (Thomas, aged 18).

The reverse was true for Todd (aged 22) who derived great pleasure from stealing as a result of being allocated to the social insider position, which in turn encouraged his offending behaviour. However, the reference to himself as a ‘loser’ in his account is suggestive of the tension he experienced between his offending behaviour and moral stance.

As soon as I started nicking [stealing] stuff I became popular as shit...They thought, “oh he’s awesome”. Everyone thinks you’re cool because there is a chance you could get caught. It was a lot of fun...I didn’t want to be a loser [but] I had to do things that losers do to become popular - things that society would say was wrong. People were telling me to do it. Everyone was saying, “that’s so cool” and I was loving it...it’s so exciting!

This relationship between social insider positioning and antisocial behaviour was particularly relevant to understanding divergence among the young men’s trajectories. The relevance of this is explained with regard to the young men’s sense of self as either relational or individuated, as this frequently differentiated those who sought to negotiate a social insider position from others who accepted the subordinate position. Young men who expressed a relational self (or a self that
included the group) experienced greater discordance with being assigned to and/or taking up a social outsider position compared to those who expressed an individuated self (or a self that excluded the group). Hence, a relational self was expressed in stories that emphasised being a follower, eagerness for acceptance and to fit in (i.e. sameness), and pushing back against being positioned as a social outsider. This was readily identifiable in Aiden’s (aged 23) account in which he repeatedly used the expression ‘monkey see, monkey do’, indicating his tendency to follow the actions of others. For Aiden, his discordance with being positioned as a social outsider was particularly instrumental in the onset of his antisocial behaviour and closely tied to his negotiation of a social insider position.

I started hanging out with a friend’s older brothers…they weren’t in school so I wasn’t at school either. Monkey see, monkey do… I seen the older kids smoking and drinking…so I started smoking and drinking and going out to parties and I was like 13 - 14… At the time it seemed good to me. I don’t know, I thought it was cool. They were popular and stuff like that and…I wanted to fit in. Didn’t want to be alone and standing over there by yourself.

For some young men like Simon (aged 18), the value of the social insider position and feeling a sense of ‘sameness’ amongst his peers meant engaging in activities, like substance use, in which he would not usually partake. In particular, his unease with being assigned to the social outsider position is apparent in his expressed sensitivity to derogatory remarks that were directed toward non-conformists.

I’m not a big fan of drugs. I just did it to be cool basically… just like because everyone was doing it. I just wanted to fit in…[otherwise] you’re a pussy blah blah blah all that kind of stupid stuff… I’m that kind of person that takes words to heart.

‘Peer pressure’ is typically the term given to explain actions such as Simon’s substance use as described above. However, the experience of such pressure may be further understood as the product of a relational self in combination with the negotiation of a social insider position. Hence, as expressed by Craig (aged 22), often engaging in antisocial actions was the outcome of internal pressure from the self to conform to the group, rather than the experience of external pressure from peers.

At 15 [I] had my first crack pipe…It got offered to me by an older guy and I took it just to fit in sort of thing – as well to fit in with that group. I could have said “no” but I took it.

Craig spoke of becoming known by his peers as the ‘Basher’ because of his violent behaviour. Although he described his social identity as the Basher in tension with his moral stance, the pressure he experienced to maintain a social insider position perpetuated his violent behaviour.
I was doing the wrong thing...it [violence] was a way that people revered me. People did try to punch on with me, but I knocked them out and I felt sorry for them when I did. I still do because I was out with mates, drunk and showing off... just to be cool...[and] listening to the person who says, “he’s going to call you a dog”.

Conversely, young men who expressed an individuated self were less prone to negotiate social insider positioning through engaging in antisocial acts. As exemplified by Xavier (aged 16), the narratives of these young men emphasised individuality and the importance of being oneself even if that meant taking up a social outsider position.

I like people to be themselves. Like, that’s why I hate, I guess, my generation of people who are a lot like, “I’m just going to go follow that crowd”...I don’t like seeing people that follow things that they don’t like just because their friends do it and all that stuff. It’s not the way to go.

Additionally, as expressed by Harvey (aged 23), the absence (or lesser degree) of internal pressure to conform to the group and experience sameness and inclusion amongst their peers meant that they were less susceptible to risk and tended to avoid an antisocial trajectory.

I know what I need...and I know what I don’t need to do...I’m not a bandwagoner or something I guess. I’m not really easily swayed to do something bad.

7.2.4.3 The club

The antisocial group was depicted in the young men’s stories as a ‘club’ of sorts in which membership was associated with a sense of exclusivity, solidarity, power and notoriety. Additionally, belonging to the club was causally linked in narrative accounts to the escalation of offending behaviour through expanding antisocial networks, greater exposure to risk, the elevation of risk taking, and ensnarement in the form of increasing disconnection from prosocial pathways.

While some young men became members of the club through their negotiation of a social insider position, others were brought into the club because they possessed certain attributes. For instance, young men who had a history of suspensions and expulsions from school, criminogenic families and/or were known to have physical skills in fighting/martial arts tended to attract the attention of the club. Thomas (aged 18) described being brought into the club because of his boxing prowess and although this was compatible with the club’s interest in gang violence, it was in tension with Thomas’ moral stance.

They gang-bash people...I just thought it was wrong and just never wanted to be a part of it. Like they tried to get me to fight someone once and like they were really egging me on to do it...because I’d had a few amateur fights in boxing...and they just thought...[I’d] bash him good...that’s the main reason why they wanted me in the group and respected me.
Additionally, Blair (aged 20) spoke about such attributes desired by the club as carrying expectations that pulled him toward and deeper into the club.

I think a lot of it was [and] can be expectation, like from myself and from other people...people want to bring that [antisocial behaviour] out of you I think. Blair’s narrative reflected an opposing mix of condemnation and reverence of his father’s criminal acts. While Blair teetered on the edge of an antisocial group, each introduction made through the club increased his exposure to risk and eventually Blair became connected to persons who were associated with his incarcerated father. Having a criminal father served to bolster Blair’s place in the club and it brought him into higher regard with club members. In particular, the attention he received, resulting from the glorification of crime, was highly enticing for Blair.

The worst thing was I would meet people that knew my dad and they all saw him as like [makes sound indicating veneration]...and I loved it! I got to be honest with you, like, it’s like attention and I never really had that...but when it’s glorified like that it really – it’s appealing. Like it is appealing, yeah, like I really just fell into it.

Like Blair, the young men were frequently exposed to ever increasing risk through the expansion of antisocial networks as they became further involved in the club. As described by Frankie (aged 20), this was causally linked in accounts to the progression of offending behaviour and was further driven by a sense of collective solidarity with the group.

The crime just got worse and worse because I kept meeting people that were worse than I was and I met people that liked to rob people and do criminal damage. I just met a lot of bad people. I liked doing it. I just liked that everyone else was doing it, so I wanted to be part of what they do.

For Frankie, the unifying power of the club meant that institutional involvement exacerbated his offending behaviour by connecting him to other club members who lived with him in a residential unit.

It just got worse from there because the people who were already living there [residential unit], they were just as bad or worse, and then that was my new group – my house mates. When I met them we had everything in common. They done drugs, they done alcohol, they done crime, and have been arrested and I thought, “cool, let’s do it together because we’re all living together and we see each other every day”.

Club membership was also associated with exclusivity and prominence. This aspect of the club was especially alluring to the young men. It often secured their membership and encouraged their involvement in antisocial and criminal acts. Through club membership, the young men were enacting a type of fantasy of eminence in which they were assigned privileged positioning within their personal world that stood in opposition to being positioned as the binary other by the social order. This was typically conveyed in the narratives of the young men through the association of the
club and its harmful activities with feeling important, special, powerful and revered.

No one ever messed with us – never ever. People would always respect us and all that...[I] felt important, if that makes sense...Just got a good rush out of it and like I had a big head. Just thought I was superior to everyone...I was hanging around with like the tough group in the whole area too, like the whole area...Everyone looked up to me (Emmerson, aged 18).

Daniel (aged 18) elaborated on this idea, describing how enacting the fantasy of eminence was connected to the maintenance of offending behaviour because of the value the young men attached to such privileged positioning. Hence, to disband from the club and move away from an offending lifestyle meant experiencing the self as the binary other. For these young men, the acceptance of subordinate positioning was highly confronting.

I don’t really want to go back to normal...Like it’s the shittiest feeling...but I know that’s what you got to do to get back on track I guess... I’m back to what I was before...It’s like people who have been in gaol for ages, like they come out and... then, like, they’re at the bottom of society when in gaol they were like – they might be a kingpin, you know? So they just want to go back in there, so they have that respect.

As indicated by Dylan (aged 21), continuing the notoriety of the club and the prominence of its members was contingent upon the escalation of risk in order to rouse and sustain interest and hype. However, at a certain point such risk created social distance that isolated the young men from prosocial others, and limited potential life pathways.

We were the popular group...everyone wanted to be with us. We got too hectic for that group and we got higher, higher...we keep stepping it up [risk]. But then it goes too far, and people start falling away because they don’t want to get involved [in crime].

For Trent (aged 15) such social distance in response to his substance use and affiliation with the club brought about the end of supportive and prosocial relationships in his life.

They lost a fair bit of respect for me...they just offered, like, help and support and all that and, like, I ended up losing that mate ‘cause I did shord [methamphetamine]...Like, ‘cause some of my proper old mates, like, they just didn’t like drugs or didn’t like people that stole or anything and, like, after they found out that I stole and did drugs, like, they just didn’t want me round them.

James (aged 19) offered the opposing perspective. For him, ending a relationship with a friend who used cannabis was necessary for him to maintain his sense of self as wholesome, dutiful and sensible.

He took marijuana and I was like,...”oh I can’t be your friend anymore”...it surprised me...I thought he was smarter than that...it’s not a good thing to take drugs...don’t disobey the rules...be a good kid.

In many ways the club and its ensnaring power maintained offending behaviour through the
escalation of risk and the process of cumulative disadvantage. In particular, the young men who expressed the greatest involvement with the club experienced persistent struggle with social isolation, substance use issues, unemployment, homelessness, violence and repeat justice system involvement, which further distanced them from a prosocial trajectory. Ryan’s (aged 22) story encapsulates this process of ensnarement by connecting the club to escalating violence, which propelled him further along an offending trajectory.

My attitude led me to a certain group of friends, a certain lifestyle, a certain reputation. Things got a lot harder and things got a lot bigger...I had this reputation that I worked so hard to get and then it was about maintaining it and as years went on it was fist on fist and then weapons came out of nowhere, so guns were being pulled...you get the odd few people that try to rob you, then people who try to take over my kind of business [drug trafficking]. Guns were a necessity.

7.2.5 A successful project

From examination of the narrative accounts, it was clear that all the young men sought success in the transition to adulthood. However, the pathway these young men followed toward adulthood varied in relation to their positioning, needs, values, goals and motivations that influence life choices and opportunities. Hence, the young men who followed an offending trajectory perceived a criminal lifestyle to be advantageous to and/or normative for them – at least for a limited period of time. Conversely, others did not associate offending behaviour with upward social mobility and these young men avoided risk and resisted an offending trajectory. Almost all the young men who had followed an offending trajectory recognised to some degree that their actions had adversely affected them and/or others. For many of these young men, this prompted them to re-direct their lives away from crime. The process of desistance shared a resemblance with the active resistance of antisocial and offending behaviour.

7.2.5.1 Wrong is right

A recurrent theme in the narratives of offending young men was that following the ‘wrong’ path in the transition to adulthood was the ‘right’ path toward constructing a successful life project. With respect to prospective narratives, there was minimal difference in the thematic content between offending and non-offending young men. For the most part, the young men’s prospective narratives conveyed the shared desire to be successful (which was often defined by them in material terms) and achieve conventional goals (i.e., developmental tasks) that symbolise adult status. Typically, prospective narratives were characterised by thin description, which reflected the young men’s uncertainty about their plans and future direction.
I want a nice, high paying, decent job, so I can have my own house, a car, family...I’d like the Australian dream (Trevor, aged 24).

Young men who told stories of stability tended to generate thick description in prospective narratives, detailing their plans and future direction with greater forethought and assurance. Conversely, thin description was most apparent in the prospective narratives of young men whose stories showed a pervasive pattern of instability and institutional involvement. The experience of such persistent life disruption meant that these young men were hesitant about their future direction. They often regarded the actualisation of plans as improbable and had little concern for the future because immediate life pressures and experiences demanded their attention.

Logan (aged 15) was focused on the near future and was gradually revising his life plan after previously exploring the potential of an offending trajectory. His immediate focus was on laying a stable foundation upon which he could build.

I haven’t really planned that far ahead in the future yet...that’s really my main goal, like getting an apprenticeship and then getting the job. And then I suppose just figuring my life out from here. Once I got like that foundation, just build on that.

Likewise, central to Darren’s (aged 19) prospective narrative was his desire to accomplish a single goal as the starting point of re-directing his life away from offending.

I need to complete something. I’ve dropped out of everything. Expelled or kicked out or dropped out. I just want to complete something for once.

Others like Todd and Warren had no sense of future direction or plans.

I’m headed nowhere. I don’t have any future plans (Todd, aged 21).

I don’t know. I just take it in my stride. Whatever just comes my way, I just go with the flow (Warren, aged 21).

While all young men desired success in adulthood, the way in which this was sought was a process of trial and error. Young men positioned as the binary other by the social order (especially with respect to institutional competence) felt that prosocial attainment of success was not available to them; and thus, beyond their reach. As described by Logan (aged 15), these young men were pushed toward an offending trajectory because their social positioning limited the pathways available to them in the transition to adulthood.

If they don’t want to be criminals what’s the only other way to succeed?...Go through school, go through university, get a job and all that...either you’re a normal person or you’re a criminal or you’re someone famous. They’re, I suppose, the three [possibilities].

These young men discriminated morally between right and wrong when speaking about their actions. However, frequently the wrong path was considered the right path toward success because
they experienced exclusion from establishing conventional lines of adult life. As described by Roy (aged 23), the wrong path was deemed better than any alternative.

I knew right from wrong. Half the time I just choose to do the wrong thing...It’s better.

Like Logan (aged 15), the young men disregarded the warnings of others, believing there was more to gain from a criminal lifestyle.

Everyone says, you know, “crime doesn’t pay” things like that. Like that had been instilled in my head...But I just didn’t really believe it, I suppose. I just thought, “yeah, crime is the right – like the right way”.

For many of the young men, once they had commenced down this path, they felt committed to and locked into following an offending trajectory.

This is pretty much the lifestyle that I’m going down and it’s pretty much too late. I’ve already started [it’s] too late to stop...if I get locked up, I'm just going to make sure it’s for something worthwhile. You know what I mean? Not for petty shit. I'm just going to make sure I do what I do best and do it good and do it better than everyone else (Nick, aged 18).

Frankie (aged 20) elaborated on the notion that ‘wrong is right’ when he connected offending behaviour with the objective of accelerating the transition to adulthood. This was a key theme expressed throughout the young men’s narratives.

I knew I was going downhill, but for some reason I liked it. I liked the way it was going. I just thought, “this is better than school...I get to do what I want”. I thought, “this is the life I want to live”...I was happy when I was young and I was doing what older people do. People would look at me differently and then that would make me think, “yeah this is good – trying to be older is a good thing”.

The young men who followed an offending trajectory spoke not only of socialising with older peers, but also of feeling older than their same-aged counterparts. Accordingly, being on an accelerated path to adulthood was desirable and/or a response to exposure to risk that compelled them to move rapidly from adolescent dependency to adult self-sufficiency. For these young men, being developmentally on-time in the life course did not suit their needs and life circumstances. This was most apparent when the young men experienced school exclusion and homelessness.

Sam (aged 19) spoke of being excited to leave his family in Sudan at nine years of age and immigrate to Australia with his older stepsister. For him, feeling older beyond his years prepared him for this life transition. However, it also made him eager to bypass school and enter the workforce at an early age.

Some kids get scared when they leave their parents behind or something, but yeah, [I] didn’t care. I was grown up quicker...I had some old friends too. I just, yeah, I was living the old life when I was young...I was confident to leave. You
know? Young, but with an old mind...[School] it's just not my thing. I just want to work and make money.

For Nick (aged 18), becoming homeless at 12 years of age was connected to the construction of an older sense of self, which had the effect of disconnecting him socially from same-aged peers.

I just feel like I couldn't hang around with people my age because they were just two immature...I was already pretty much surviving by myself at 12 years old and they were still getting their mum to drop them off to soccer training and all the rest of it. I pretty much looked down on them.

Aiden (aged 23) described completing education to primary school level and subsequently following an accelerated path to adulthood after joining an older social group. For Aiden, leaving school prematurely was a critical point in the development of an older sense of self.

[I] started hanging around the older kids and that is when the bumpy road started. That's when I started the drugs, drinking, fighting, stealing. I guess I was trying to fit in with the older boys...I forgot about my age I guess. I grew up too fast. There were things I wanted to do as a kid [but] I just ran out of time...When school stopped, my childhood just stopped as well.

Within Craig’s (aged 22) narrative, his mother’s gambling addiction was central to the process by which he became a parentified child. Craig made a direct causal link between such construction of an older sense of self and following an offending trajectory.

If I didn’t act older I wouldn’t be in here [prison] right now. When I was younger I always stepped up to the plate to be like the older ones and it either brought me in trouble or pain or something else.

Within the young men’s narratives, the interweaving of an offending trajectory and an accelerated path to adulthood was primarily associated with seeking greater freedom and independence. Matthew (aged 16) viewed himself as a ‘succeeder’, rather than an ‘offender’ because profiting from crime enabled him to be financially self-sufficient. He regarded this as a noble act, since it alleviated his parents of the financial burden of taking care of him and meant that he wasn’t using his parents’ income to support his substance use.

I got things my own way. And never got my parents to buy me anything...I think of myself as a succeeder...’cause I succeeded every day. Like I’m making money... I just did my own thing...’cause they [parents] work for their cash...I don’t want to use their money to go pay for my weed habit...I care about my family...they work hard as...[I’d] rather get in trouble than ask my parents for money.

As further described by Eamon (aged 15), the need to be autonomous was commonly expressed within the stories of these young men.

We could do our own thing. I could drive around and go wherever I like....I’d rather support myself. Do whatever I like. Do what I want...then I don’t need to wait on people. Don’t need to get told what to do.
Accordingly, these young men were eager to experience the privileges of adulthood from a young age. They felt constrained by the restrictions associated with their youthful status and pushed back against the boundaries. Consequently, the young men spoke of driving unlicensed/unsupervised, drinking underage and substance use, supporting themselves financially (through crime and/or legitimate employment), leaving the family home, and engaging in sexual activity from early adolescence. For Wesley (aged 20) in particular, disobedience was about proving he could manage the freedom, independence and privileges associated with adulthood.

I wanted to grow up quickly [because] you, as a child, as a kid, you are nothing...Breaking the rules showed that you can be trusted – that nothing bad was going to happen...I had girlfriends since prep [school year: around age 5] and at 14 I was having sex. I just figure start life earlier...I was never into the whole Peter Pan thing.

Hence, as expressed by Nick (aged 18), the normative path of educational completion and achievement to attain success in adulthood was incompatible with the pathway followed by these young men.

I never really hated school...[but] I had better things to do. I had money to make on a school day. You know what I mean? Like, you’re learning your maths, while I’m making, like, 100 dollars.

For Nick, and likeminded others, offending was experienced as advantageous and the rewards validated their sense of success and accomplishment.

I was earning that much money...I was 15 years old selling Ice and they [peers] were pretty much looking up to me like, “fuck you’re doing pretty good for, like, a 15 year old”, and I grew a big head...I just thought I was the best and no one could stop me...I actually was pretty good. Like, I was doing good, like, when I got raided...it was pretty much the biggest bust for a 16-year-old...and they [police] couldn’t believe it.

However, for most of these young men, the notion that wrong is right was discarded at some point, as they came to realise the unwavering adversity associated with an offending lifestyle. Frankie (aged 20) spoke of the difficulty of coming to terms with this misconception, as the revision of his life narrative undermined his sense of self, place and trajectory.

I have been on the wrong path for a long time...It has always been hard for me to stay out of trouble...I just thought getting in trouble...would make me feel comfortable, that I’m with the right people, that I’m getting the right help. But obviously it wasn’t.

7.2.5.2 Limits and resistance

From a close reading of the text, it was evident that dissonance about, and/or resisting, antisocial and offending behaviour varied along a continuum of personal limits. These limits were particularly complex, as they were often variable and subject to change depending on time and the
specifics of the context. This was most apparent in the narratives of the offending young men who tended to be more open to experience, exhibited a relational sense of self, and displayed flexibility in contemplating violations of law and knowingly acting wrongfully. Conversely, those who altogether resisted and avoided offending behaviour tended to be more cautious, exhibited an individuated sense of self, were rigid in thinking about legal transgressions, and set behavioural limits based on a more moral absolutist stance. Harvey’s (aged 23) account exemplified the latter standpoint.

I’d rather be alone than, like, be in the bad crowd or something, you know?...it’s just – I guess it’s the law or morally wrong or something...There’s no joy in, I guess, committing a crime or there’s no, I don’t know, happiness for me for doing crimes...[because] it’s wrong.

The young men expressed dissonance about their offending behaviour and in some ways, their thinking processes about violations of law resembled those of the young men who altogether resisted and avoided offending. This was because offending young men also set behavioural limits for themselves and while they engaged in certain illegal activity, they resisted and avoided other types of offending. Paul (aged 20) described struggling with significant substance dependency. His narrative followed a pattern of regression and he spoke of stealing out of necessity during a period of homelessness. Paul was willing to steal under certain circumstances; however, violence was a firm limit that he would not cross because of his experience of violence victimisation.

I mean, if you have to do something like that [steal] to survive – for a reason – fair enough. I don’t see the point in stealing for the sake of it...Stealing’s stealing. Lying’s lying. Hitting someone is a different matter...I’ve been surrounded with violence and violence against women my entire life and I hate it. I can’t stand it...so violence and derogatism disgust me. I hate it.

Iman (aged 20) described the limits he set for himself, which varied from Paul’s. While Iman was willing to act violently at times, he attributed greater risk to substance use; and thus, he resisted using illicit drugs to some degree because he associated substance use with life failure.

I was never a heavy drug user ever...like even though I know what I’m doing is wrong, like I said, I always had limits...[I’m] smart enough to know where is my limit...like I’d get into fights, stuff like that...if I get too deep – if I mess with the wrong drug then it’s gone...you’re setting yourself up to fail.

Similarly, Emmerson (aged 18) derived a great sense of excitement and accomplishment from stealing cars and spoke of robbing a shop once. However, his cousins, who brought him into the antisocial group, warned him against the dangers of substance use. After observing the effects of substance use on others with whom he associated, Emmerson resolved not to engage in such behaviour.
I never did drugs...my cousins they would never let me touch drugs...[for them] to say that it must be pretty bad...you get addicted, waste your money. Everything, everything about it's bad. Stuff's you up mentally, causes family problems. It's not good...I saw it first-hand...so just learn from other's mistakes.

Attitudes toward substance use varied considerably. Duane (aged 20) described being highly averse to risk. He actively avoided and resisted all antisocial and offending behaviour, including substance use.

I was never interested...I don’t see a need for it...I’m not a person who takes risks deeply...all the various risks that you know – physical harm or mental harm or humiliation...that it's illegal.

Oscar (aged 20) managed the risks of substance use differently and set a broader limit. For him, using methamphetamine, amongst other drugs, was considered a treat and substance use within moderation was acceptable. Thus, rather than perceiving substance use as a risk in its entirety, he only associated substance use dependency with risk because of the related expense, escalation in offending behaviour, increased chance of incarceration, and physical health effects.

I’ve taken Ice. Was only using that, but never really, like, got on [regular use]. I enjoy them, but I just treat myself to them and that...I just don’t want to become like addicted...because then I would need money and I would have to start doing even more crime...it just gets you nowhere...I’ll probably get locked up...’cause when I was in there [prison] that’s what most people were on – Ice...It fries your brain.

Joey (aged 21) also considered substance use within moderation acceptable. However, where Joey limited himself was the point at which he was willing to sell his belongings or harm others in order to maintain his use.

I use it every now and then...but I've already decided once I start selling my personal stuff to get the drugs or I start hurting other people to get the drugs then I know there's a problem. But until then I'm fine with it.

The young men expressed dissonance about following an offending trajectory. Within Blair’s (aged 20) narrative, opposition between his positioning as ‘legitimate’ and ‘criminal’ was a repeated theme. Blair spoke of being at a crossroad the more he became involved in an antisocial group. In his later stories, he emphasised tension between his offending behaviour and moral stance, which was a source of further dissonance.

My friends would be like doing drugs and smoking weed and all that stuff and I was always out of place. Like I would be there, but at the same time I was like, “what am I doing here?”...I put myself in two directions...it's like a real crossroads and like being like drinking, and being on drugs and stuff is where I sort of made some bad decisions to throw myself in one direction.

Resistance and avoidance of antisocial and offending behaviour required persistence and fortitude. Thus, for some young men who were consistently exposed to risk, moving toward
offending was a gradual transition from legitimate to criminal positioning that was accompanied by feelings of dissonance. As described by Philip (aged 18), offending was inevitable after exposure to a certain amount of risk.

You can only hold off for so long you know. You can only say no for so long.

Nick (aged 18) lamented on this process of transition, as he reflected on his changed sense of self and how this was causally linked in his self-story to following an offending trajectory.

I just wish I’d stuck at school and yeah just hang around the people that I was actually mates with, the people that were actually like me before I changed because I didn’t realise that...I thought they were different to me, but then I realised later on that I was the one that actually changed. I was the one that was actually on drugs. I was the one that didn’t enjoy going to school any more. Like I was the one that changed completely in the head.

As described by Daniel (aged 18), prosocial friendships also generated dissonance in the young men by encouraging them to move away from offending behaviour.

They accepted that I was like a troubled [person], like I wanted to break the rules and they kind of put me in the right direction...I met this other guy down the road...and I dealt [drugs] with him. He’s in gaol now...no one else really puts a bad influence on me. Everyone tries to put a good influence on me if anything.

Additionally, exposure to risk simultaneously pushed the young men toward and/or away from an offending trajectory. For some young men, being exposed to risk created dissonance in them by increasing their awareness of harmful consequences. Matthew (aged 16) spoke about this in relation to his social group using free-base cocaine. Although his exposure to the substance prompted him to experience it on one occasion, he spoke of such use also being incompatible with his interests after witnessing the effect it had on his friends.

Everybody started moving to crack. Like I touched crack once – never again...It’s not for me...I just seen people sitting in a circle twirling a pipe. Seen people fucken, being off their nut, looking on the ground for shards. I’ve had heaps of mates look on the ground for it 24 hours on the ground looking for shard...they’re always chasing that next rock... just waste of cash, waste of time.

The young men expressed consequential thinking processes, being attuned to potential risks and gains, and sensitivity to the effect of their choices on themselves and others. These factors, amongst many, influenced their personal limits with respect to engaging in antisocial and offending behaviour. However, in addition to what has been aforementioned, there were three identifiably distinct differences in cognition that differentiated those who followed an offending trajectory from those who managed to escape the risk process.

First, devaluation of antisocial behaviour and persons was a central theme in the narratives of the young men who to the greatest extent resisted and avoided such behaviour. Philip’s (aged 18)
narrative helps to elucidate divergent trajectories by highlighting the way in which devaluation was tied to an individuated sense of self. This is significant because devaluation moderated any felt discordance with being positioned as a social outsider; and consequently, curtailed the young men’s interest in negotiating a social insider position through engaging in antisocial and offending behaviour.

I just hated, like, the druggies I guess – that type of group. Just from the get go I just dislike them extremely...they're the type that get in trouble and what I hate as well is they became the popular ones as well, and I think they didn’t deserve that. You know?...Because they just – people shouldn't look up to people like that. You know? It should be the opposite way around.

Simon’s (aged 18) narrative showed a pattern of early reversal from antisocial behaviour. After belonging to an antisocial group for a limited period, Simon realised that negotiating a social insider position was not worth compromising his sense of self. A key element in Simon’s process of change was the devaluation of antisocial and offending others.

There were a lot of people that thought they were tough or thought they were cool. Just being smart arses and all that...You know? The popular kids and stupid kids...I felt like I wanted to be popular and cool as well. Then I just thought it’s not worth it...just like being someone who you're not.

Second, the young men who resisted and avoided progressing toward an offending trajectory described being more open to seeking and/or accepting support from others. Hugh (aged 17) reacted with physical aggression to being the target of bullying. He spoke of being afraid of his potential to physically harm others and because of this he was willing to engage in intervention efforts to assist him with managing his anger and aggressive behaviour.

It is a scary feeling because...I get that angry I can actually hurt someone really bad...[the intervention program] was a good experience. I liked it as well. It wasn’t something I was dreading to go to. It was something that I was actually looking forward to because I knew it was trying to benefit me in some way.

Conversely, the young men who followed an offending trajectory were more reluctant to accept and/or seek support from others. While some young men believed that it was not possible to intervene in their trajectory, others were mistrustful and concerned that intervention efforts would be harmful to themselves or others (i.e., family). Additionally, they perceived that support was not available to them, or felt that they were managing effectively on their own. In particular, the young men were concerned that they would lose their autonomy if they were to accept or seek help from others, especially formal services. This was consistent with possessing an older sense of self, which was connected to valuing independence and control over one’s life direction. For instance, Trevor (aged 24) was surrounded by risk and his narrative followed a pattern of regression, which was in part linked to his determination to manage adversity on his own. In the context of experiencing
significant transience from a young age, severe family violence and bouts of homelessness, Trevor
only sought and accepted minimal assistance when he was absolutely in need.

It’s no one’s problem but my own...To me that’s just someone else trying to tell
me how to live my life...I don’t like help from other people if that makes sense...I
get satisfaction in doing it myself.

Third, the young men emphasised different forms of capital within their narratives, which
corresponded with their divergent trajectories. Young men who followed an offending trajectory
tended to be more materialistic and money oriented. A focus on financial wealth was related to
being on an accelerated path to adulthood, as it provided the young men with greater autonomy. As
Nick and Daniel, both of whom derived an income from trafficking drugs said, economic capital was
prioritised above all else.

I was addicted to money and like no job could give me the amount of money
that I was making...Yeah I love it. It was good. I used to iron my money...I swear I
used to always like ‘get rich or die trying’. I used to sit there watching it, ironing
it and shit (Nick, aged 18).

‘Cause I stopped [school]. Like dealing was like 24/7 all day, every day. Like
nothing ever was the same. If I went to sleep I’d wake up and I’m like shit why
did I sleep you know? I could’ve lost so much money. So it was never ending
(Daniel, aged 18).

Although those who largely resisted and avoided antisocial and offending behaviour also valued
economic capital, they were more cognisant of the value of (institutionalised) cultural capital and
this knowledge guided their decisions and behaviour. In particular, they associated educational
attainment with upward social mobility, recognising that cultural capital has potential to be
translated into economic capital via career advancement. Thus, these young men remained
attached to school, even if only tenuously in the context of risk. Accordingly, they were more
attuned to the way social positions, with specific reference to institutional competency, defined and
limited persons’ life trajectories. Consequently, antisocial and offending behaviour was resisted and
avoided on the basis that it was incompatible with their goals. Reggie (aged 20) spoke of his
determination to escape the mediocrity that he felt characterised his parents’ lives. For Reggie,
gaining autonomy in his life was connected to investing in cultural capital, as opposed to the young
men who found a sense of autonomy through engaging in antisocial and offending behaviour.

I don’t go out too much and, like, I’m really focused on, like, creating a
career...and working and study and all that kind of stuff...if I wasn’t doing that
I’d probably be doing what a lot of people my age are doing and just, like, going
out every single weekend doing party drugs and just, like, not really caring
about much else...I don’t want to be average...I want to be able to have the
money and the power to be able to control my life and do whatever I want
pretty much.
Hugh’s (aged 17) narrative showed a pattern of early reversal from antisocial behaviour. After leaving school prematurely, Hugh managed to forge a path back toward completing his education. Although he described his continuous struggle to resist and avoid progressing toward an offending trajectory, realising the value of cultural capital was central to his decision making and the positive re-direction of his life.

I know one day we’ll stop going out and shit’s going to stop and when that stops I want to be somewhere in my life not somewhere stupid like on Centrelink [welfare]...I am going back now into...[school] and I am glad I have that opportunity...to do well in life to get somewhere...having my own house, having a job that will pay for the rest of my life. That’s when I know I have done something good in my life.

A related sentiment expressed by the young men was that resisting and avoiding antisocial and offending behaviour made for an easier and better life. Charlie (aged 19) reflected on the life pathways of others who had engaged in antisocial and offending behaviour. He determined comparatively that he was progressing toward success in adulthood, while their trajectory was marked by stagnation or regression.

Just seeing all my friends that went down the drug path, it was just like they got nowhere. They've got no money and they've got no lives. They've all got, like, two kids and it's just like, “well look at you. Then look where I'm at – there's a big difference”...I'm on a track to where I want to be...it's a lot easier to go on the path that I'm on than it is to go the other way.

7.2.5.3 Desistance

After detailing their movement toward offending, almost all young men ended their narrative account at a turning point reflecting their movement away from offending. This process of change was expressed in terms of the natural aging out of crime, regret for the past, recovery from pain and adversity, and the revision of one’s life direction. The young men were at various points along the path to desistance, progressing at their own pace as they tackled the structural challenges of their lives. Those who expressed the least conviction about the process of change were the young men most entrenched in the justice system.

The role of a father was a theme related to both the progression of, and desistance from, offending. Repeatedly the absence of a father was highlighted as a significant experience by the young men in the sequencing of life events that led to offending behaviour. In particular, the young men associated the loss of such a relationship with feelings of inadequacy and anger. Further, they attributed their unruly behaviour to the lack of a strong regulating figure in their life who could guide them in a positive direction. Thus, for these young men, having a bond with their father specifically was critical for adaptive development. Craig (aged 22) emphasised how crucial this
relationship was to him in shaping his life direction. In his story, the presence of a father was imbued with the power to intercept his offending trajectory and send him along an alternative path.

It would have put me on the other path if my dad was there to guide me which way to go...if I had a father figure I probably would have been better because I would have someone there to guide me through my life. Because she’s a female my mum couldn’t do stuff – well she could have, but just not the father thing.

In an analogous manner, becoming a father had the reverse effect of promoting desistance from crime. Fatherhood validated the young men’s older sense of self by being a key social marker of adult status, which diminished the value of offending for some. Additionally, it prompted the young men to adjust their priorities and reconfigure their life according to the meaning and purpose ascribed to the role and responsibility of being a father. However, most of the young men were not prepared for fatherhood and were ill-equipped to meet the primary needs of their children. Consequently, they spoke of playing a limited part in their children’s life or losing contact completely. Nonetheless, fatherhood remained a catalyst for change that spurred offending young men to seek an alternative path toward success in adulthood in order to reclaim a consistent place in their children’s life. Henry (aged 21) experienced himself as a failure, which was connected to his social positioning as the binary other and offending behaviour. However, becoming a father altered Henry’s sense of self and enabled him to take up a competent personal position. Such personal positioning was associated with increased self-efficacy that made it possible for Henry to act on his motivation to re-direct his life away from crime and be present in his daughter’s life.

When she was born...I didn’t get in trouble. I stopped hanging out with those friends...She’s the biggest motivation I’ve got and she’s probably one of the only motivations I’ve got...since she [girlfriend] fell pregnant...I felt, I dunno, like more of a somebody...I didn’t really think I was much when I was doing all that sort of stuff. You know? I was always in trouble, smoking bongs, thought everyone hated me, parents didn’t talk to me much.

For Todd (aged 22), the role and responsibility of fatherhood was a prospective turning point in the life course, reflecting the revision of life plans to counteract reproduction of the risk process.

The only reason I’d ever try to become successful is if I had a kid. It’s because I have to, otherwise that kid is going to have a shitty life like me. You need to provide education and a future for the kid. You want to make sure they have more opportunities than what you had.

Desistance from crime was also related to experiences of trauma and pain that were recounted in the young men’s stories of offending and associated consequences. Trent (aged 15) expressed trauma in response to encountering harmful acts in the context of being surrounded by offending others and escalating risk.
The majority of everyone, probably 80% of them, were bad...they stole, they did
drugs, they’d bash people, roll people, like, for anything they had...it’s affected
me...it pretty much just scarred me, like some of the things I’ve seen and all
that, like I just still have flashbacks of them.

Often trauma and pain were accompanied by the young men’s realisation of the gravity of
their offending and related losses. At this point many of the young men connected the continuation
of offending to prolonged adversity and set forth to revise their life direction. In particular,
experiences of pain and trauma had a high deterrent impact on the young men who engaged in
antisocial and offending behaviour for entertainment. For these young men, registering the
seriousness of their actions and their consequences detracted from the enjoyment of playing the
game. As a result, the increasing pains of criminal justice system involvement were experienced as a
loss that represented the end of play and ‘game over’. Nick (aged 18) had high criminal aspirations
and gained a sense of accomplishment from the financial rewards and admiration he associated with
his illegal enterprise. For Nick, following an offending trajectory led to pain in the form of betrayal,
punishment and the realisation that what he had sacrificed to play the game was not worth the
overall loss endured. Although he found it especially difficult to give up the financial gains of
offending, Nick desired to reconfigure his life according to the social conventions of emerging
adulthood.

That was about three or four years of hell I went through. Almost being stabbed,
almost being robbed, sleeping on the streets, sleeping at like dealers’ houses.
Now it's all gone, like that, and that's when I got sent to...[youth justice centre].
That was probably the worst time...I’d turned my back on everyone for, like, the
[criminal] lifestyle, but then the lifestyle turned its back on me...so I pretty much
said, “what’s the point?...I don’t need to be here”. So, I pretty much just wanted
to get a job and be like an ordinary kid.

Examination of the young men’s subjective experience and meaning attributed to
incarceration highlighted the differential impacts of confinement that pushed the young men toward
and away from offending. Incarceration was experienced as a physical and psychical holding
environment that offered space for rejuvenation and re-evaluation of the self. This was
accompanied by recognition of incarceration as a transitional time that presented a bifurcation of
life directions, representing either behavioural continuity or change. Steven (aged 24) used the
metaphor of a roundabout to convey the way in which incarceration presented various turning
points in an offending trajectory. In his account, entering the roundabout was a significant time of
decision that prompted the young men to question their path and consider whether the ‘wrong’
path remained the ‘right’ path toward constructing a successful life project. In this way,
incarceration created the potential for agentic changes promoting desistance from crime to
germinate and possibly be acted upon.
You’re at a roundabout. You’ve got three different ways you can go. You can turn left and take the protection road, or you can go straight into the mainstream [general population] road and get caught up in the drugs, the schemes, the fraud, everything wrong in a gaol, or you can go all the way around so you have almost done a U turn and take the right road which will be education, or programs and make something positive out of a negative.

While the experience of incarceration had the potential to stimulate behavioural change, tensions produced by oppositions in the custodial environment disrupted desistance processes. Ryan (aged 22) expressed agentic change reflecting his readiness to move away from offending. However, emphasised within his account of incarceration were opposing forces, which detracted from the formation of a coherent and continuous narrative identity reflecting such change. In particular, Ryan’s positioning in interactional exchanges embedded within the prison culture and code had the effect of constructing and re-constructing the criminal self.

Lots of fights is sure to come my way...I can’t change with this going on...There is a big prison code and if you’re changing it is hard to abide by...It sort of influences me sometimes not to change. I still feel like I need to maintain a certain respect and a certain image...I’m trying to change as much as possible, but at the same time I still need to stand up for myself...there is a lot of standing over that goes on in gaol...it is easy to get taken advantage of...you are always juggling both sides of the fence. Wanting to change, sometimes it’s not enough...I need to fight other people’s battles sometimes and they fight mine...it is easy to get influenced and pulled into the wrong crowd.

For the most part, the young men described adapting easily to incarceration out of force of circumstance or by assimilating the experience with previous educational and/or welfare institutional involvement. This parallel at the surface level of structural organisation, routine action and social interaction is straightforward. However, the deeper meaning conveyed by the young men is that their experience of the educational and welfare systems was similarly depriving, oppressive, regulating, scrutinising, and as punitive as the criminal justice system. Thus, such awareness of the young men’s subjective experience of institutional involvement further contributes to understanding detachment from school and welfare services. Toby (aged 22) was one young man who made this link between incarceration and school when speaking of the ease with which he adjusted to confinement. For him, common to both forms of institutional involvement was the loss of individual power and the related subjugation.

You kind of find your way pretty quick...you adjust to it [incarceration]...it’s kind of like being at school again...just being told what to do kind of thing. It really is. That’s what I thought when I first came here. It was just like being at school.

Likewise, for Warren (aged 21), the experience of incarceration and foster care shared the familiarity of being home, reflecting the extent to which he had become institutionalised. In particular, he related such to the amount of control exercised over him and the routine of regular meals.
[Incarceration] was like I was back in foster care actually...it was just like being at home...the screws [correctional officers] boss me around and stuff, yeah. Three meals a day, yeah. That was like my old foster home.

The young men’s ease of adjustment to incarceration was, however, inversely connected to their transition from custody back into the community. Stories of re-entry were replete with adaptive difficulties, which had the effect of undermining desistance processes. Dylan (aged 21) expressed an awareness of the way in which his experience of incarceration had altered his sense of self. For him, adjustment to the custodial setting was interconnected with developing a hostile attribution bias and a propensity for interpersonal aggression and violence. Consequently, he spoke of being especially prone to conflict post-release, and while he realised that this interactional style was harmful, he struggled to revert back to his previous sense of self once returned to the community.

When you go into a place like that [prison], you come out a different person. People always want to fight...sometimes you can’t walk away. It’s just a different environment...you take that outside with you into the community...you take it all with you. It is easier to adjust to prison, but harder to let it go when in the community.

Roy’s (aged 23) experience of incarceration also highlighted the damaging effects of the adversarial dynamic of relationships in the custodial environment. Roy spoke of the importance of negotiating a position of power and control within social exchanges in order to have his needs met and avert exploitation and victimisation in prison. However, the maintenance of such was not functional post-release and resulted in Roy being unable to sustain employment. In particular, his adjustment to prison was counterproductive to operating within the hierarchical social structure of the workforce.

Getting the job isn’t that hard, [but] keeping it is...’cause after you go to gaol you get like the mentality not to let people tell you what to do. And then you get out and then you got to...let someone tell you what to do.

For Nick (aged 18), the experience of incarceration re-enforced his sense of being isolated, neglected and unprotected. This perpetuated his mistrust of institutions and increased his reluctance to seek and/or accept support. Accordingly, Nick was unwilling to engage in intervention efforts, cooperate with youth justice personnel and comply with court orders post release.

I didn’t open up to any of the DHS workers and stuff that I had to see for my court order...I wasn’t really telling them the truth...because I was really paranoid. I didn’t trust no one really...[after] I pretty much got jumped and beat up in... [youth justice centre] and I remember I looked at the guard and he...like didn’t really care and that’s when I realised, like, fuck like you can’t really trust no one...you’re here by yourself. You’ve got to take care of yourself.

Exploration of processes of change in the narratives of the young men showed a pattern of desistance for some that was connected to a natural process of aging out of crime. Within the
stories of these young men various meaning was attached to the transition from adolescence to adulthood that corresponded with the movement from offending to non-offending. Hence, for some young men, youth was associated with being irresponsible and having foolhardy fun. Consequently, as expressed by Jake (aged 21), desistance from crime was a process of maturation and related to the construction of a successful life project.

I just want to get a job. Have my own place. Grow up and be an adult. Stop all the childish bullshit.

Other young men considered antisocial and offending behaviour to be normative and time limited. For such young men like Sam (aged 19), there was a sense of inevitability about following an offending trajectory. Thus, succumbing to this fate during the transition to adulthood, rather than at a later stage in the life course, was regarded as a sort of safeguard that enabled the pursuit of success in adulthood.

Like, I’m happy I did it [offending] earlier so later on in life I don’t have to do it...like there’s two ways – there’s a good way and there’s a bad way and it depends which way you choose to go...I figured out you have to go both ways. I’m happy I got done all the bad stuff when I’m young and now I don’t have to worry about it.

Along similar lines, some young men regarded their youthful status as a form of immunity from the negative structural consequences of offending, which were associated with reaching adult status. Accordingly, the transition to adulthood was deemed a window of opportunity to engage in antisocial and offending behaviour with minimal impact on the construction of a successful life project. As described by Todd (aged 22), adulthood marked the natural end of an offending trajectory.

I didn’t care about what could happen. I was 14, so I knew nothing would happen. [But], as soon as I got older I knew I couldn’t get away with it...Because you are untouchable when you’re a kid I would have done more stuff that people said that I shouldn’t...As soon as you hit 18 it’s not fun anymore because the cops are going to come down on you. You can’t do anything.

Additionally, such behavioural change upon reaching the age of majority was specifically related to the transition from custody at a youth justice centre to custody at an adult prison. For Mark (aged 18), this combination of developmental and institutional transitions represented the end of the immunity period, which in turn had a deterrent effect that promoted desistance from crime.

‘Cause I’m 18 now [I] don’t want to go to adult gool...that’s a big thing...because like in little boys [youth justice centre] you only get months. In adult gool you get years. So I’d be away from home for years. So no! Stuff that! I’d rather my freedom.
In contrast, others experienced their youthful status as constraining, particularly those on an accelerated path to adulthood. For these young men, reaching the age of majority (or in some instances an earlier age whereby they could access adult privileges) eliminated the need to offend. In considering his life project, Mark (aged 16) revised his plan to begin offending at age 16 and began offending earlier after associating this age with desistance from crime. This is because he recognised that he could start a legitimate lifestyle at age 16.

I was meant to wait ‘till I was 16 to start getting in trouble, but then I found out that 16’s like the start of your life. Like you can actually do something, you can get your licence, you can do an apprenticeship, you can get a job and all that. And that’s why I was stealing ‘cause I had no money – no income. I had nothing coming in so I was just like, “fuck it, I’ll make my own income”. And I was making money every day. I was making more money than anybody a day, just from stealing.

Likewise, reaching the age of majority for Liam (aged 17) represented a turning point reflecting his movement away from offending. Within Liam’s narrative, assuming legal control over his life was connected to increased agency, allowing him to overcome his felt experience of oppression, which was central to his process of desistance.

I’m trying to change my life...It’s all based on when I’m 18 years old. When I’m 18 everything’s going to change...Because you feel like an adult. When you’re 18 you don’t need permission from no one. It’s all up to you.

Young men, whose process of desistance reflected the aging out of crime, redirected their focus and energy into the construction of a successful life project through the accomplishment of developmental tasks. For Logan (aged 15), the accomplishment of developmental tasks was central to his process of desistance. It gave him a sense of normalcy and the prospect of jeopardising the construction and success of his life project deterred him from continuing an offending trajectory.

Getting a job and working would probably be the best thing to stay out of all that [crime] ‘cause it gives you an incentive to not do it again ‘cause you’ve got a lot – like a life basically...normal life – kind of, you don’t want to ruin that by going to gaol...So you just stay out of trouble...you’ve gained something, you don’t want to lose it.

For many of the young men the process of desistance coincided with a shift in thinking whereby the construction of a successful life project was no longer realised through offending and instead was achieved through the accomplishment of developmental tasks. This change was accompanied by recognition of the value of cultural capital and in this way, the process of desistance began to resemble the pathway of the young men who largely resisted and avoided following an offending trajectory. Ryan (aged 22) spoke with lament about his past disregard for education after connecting upward social mobility with acquiring cultural capital and associating offending with stagnation and regression.
I didn’t really care about learning. Didn’t see the importance of it...I think it is all fucking stupid now, but back then we didn’t I suppose. It has sort of led me down to where I am now. I could have potentially been something different to what I am now. I see the importance of school and how it can help me in various different ways. Sort of help me with getting better jobs...all my drug experiences, criminal experiences, they have always led me down the same path, and it is always a dead end and I am sick of hitting that dead end.

Within the narratives of the young men, recognition of the value of cultural capital was often accompanied by strong feelings of regret for the past, as they registered missed opportunities for following an alternative pathway in the transition to adulthood. For Nick (aged 18), desistance was a process of regret, reflection and the revision of life plans. Nick’s feelings of regret were connected to contemplating lost possibilities that took the form of a regressive narrative. However, his curiosity about the potential of the past created an opening for the construction of a preferred self and the development of a progressive narrative, as he moved away from offending.

If I could do it all over again I’d do it completely different...I wish I stayed in school. School was good... it’s a bit weird, like once you change paths...you’re sort of curious to see, like, what would have happened if I went that way? Could I be a doctor right now instead of being in detox? I just want shit to move on and I just wish I’d never fucked up...pretty much the whole storyline.

Similarly, Frankie (aged 20) also spoke of his regret for the past in relation to realising the value of cultural capital and following an accelerated path to adulthood. In retrospect, he lamented his lost childhood and wished for the chance to make different choices, especially with regard to educational attainment.

When I was a kid I always wanted to be an older person or someone else and now [that] I’ve done that and I’m an older person, now I just regret it and I want to be a kid again....like actually learning something in class and passing grades and stuff...if you don’t want to learn you’re going to struggle in the future. Yeah, I know that now. It is just common sense really.

Almost all young men identified belonging to an antisocial group in the causal sequencing of significant events that led to offending behaviour. Accordingly, the process of desistance necessitated change in the young men’s social interactions. Such change tended to occur in the following ways. For some young men, a rupture with antisocial friends prompted the process of desistance and brought about composition change in the young men’s social group. Trent (aged 15), valued the social connection derived from belonging to an antisocial group. However, he came to feel violated by the group, taken advantage of, and manipulated. This sentiment was shared by many of the young men. It led to their detachment from the group and the subsequent formation of new social connections.
I had to stop hanging around with the wrong crowd...It was fairly hard ‘cause I considered them pretty good mates...like I could pretty much trust them with anything. But now I don’t trust them at all ‘cause I’ve had stuff stolen from my house...Like they pretty much just used me just to get stuff. They’d use me as a way to get out of trouble.

Young men following a pathway of desistance often described their need to change the composition of their social group. This was a more difficult experience when a rupture with the antisocial group had not occurred. Logan (aged 15) attributed greater risk for offending to socialising with his older aged friends because he considered their criminal trajectory fixed. Thus, changing the composition of his social group meant associating with same aged peers. However, this process of change created dissonance, as Logan’s movement away from offending was incompatible with his social ties.

A lot of my older mates are the ones I’ve stopped seeing because...they’re more I suppose a bad influence to be around. Like it’s more likely for things to happen when you’re around them than like younger people...[because] they’re not going to go back...they’ve probably figured out their path in life...you kind of feel bad in a way. Like they’re still your mates even though, like,...you know you don’t want to see them. I can’t see them ‘cause of what would happen.

Change in the composition of the young men’s social group similarly reflected change in the quality of romantic/intimate relationships that facilitated the movement away from offending. Within George’s (aged 18) narrative, his girlfriend was a source of informal social control that supported his process of desistance. In particular, their relationship provided a stable foundation from which George was able to re-organise his social life.

I have a girlfriend...she helped me keep stable...keeps me in line...she goes to uni[versity]. She works. She lives with me...She took spare time away from me, so if I didn’t have her I had a lot of time on my hands...my mates were still around then...it was almost over but there was still a chance of me hanging out with them and screwing up...she kind of helped me realise that there’s a lot better things in life than hanging out with them.

Not all young men associated desistance from crime with changing the composition of their social group. Although less common, some young men felt that re-defining their place within the antisocial group was sufficient for moving away from offending. Matthew (aged 16) maintained ties with the antisocial group to which he belonged. However, his process of desistance involved broadening his social connections and also taking up a position as a follower within the group, rather than a leader, as he associated such positioning with less ‘responsibility’ for offending.

I still kick with the same crowd but I mix my crowd up a little bit. Like I don’t stay with the one crowd. I, like, move around...like you’ve got the followers and then you’ve got the people that want to lead. I wanted to lead, but I’d
rather be a follower...the leaders are the ones that have to do everything...like stealing anything for anybody.

While also less commonly expressed, some young men spoke of desistance as a mutual process of change that occurred with the antisocial group or in response to observing significant others re-direct their life away from crime. Blair (aged 20) spoke of maintaining social connections with friends who simultaneously followed a pathway of desistance. For Blair, the shared experience of moving toward and away from offending was a salient aspect of social connection, as well as transitioning to adulthood alongside his friends.

Like, I did hold on to good mates that are like me at the same time. It was part of growing up that we went through them things.

Nick (aged 18) spoke about how his older brothers modelled the process of desistance. For him, observing the re-direction of his brothers’ lives away from crime promoted change in his offending behaviour.

I didn't really look up to them [brothers] like, until a few years ago, like, when they actually started to change because like I said, they've gone through a bit of the stuff that I have with cops and all the rest of it, fights and all that. And then they've changed and like switched and gone to school, finished school after a few years of not going and all that.

Like the young men who avoided and resisted following an offending trajectory, the devaluation of offending behaviour and persons was a repeated theme in the young men’s stories of desistance from crime. Craig (aged 22) spoke critically about his past offending behaviour and social group with respect to re-directing his life away from crime.

I didn’t like being a bully...back then I thought I was cool, but now I think it was idiotic of me...The gang felt like family sort of thing...now I think what we did was stupid...I've looked at my past and thought, “fuck that was stupid”...I was too mixed up with fucking idiots. I got myself caught up with hanging with the cool people, but really they were fuck heads.

The expression of devaluation in stories of desistance was also connected to re-defining the meaning of ‘cool’. For Aleki, being cool was once about dominating others; however, now he feels it is about being open, genuine, valuing difference and treating others with acceptance.

What I think is cool now is to say what you think and feel. Treating others how you like to be treated. Basic values and beliefs and things like that. Back then cool was showing no love, showing no mercy,...demanding things...Now it is laid back, relaxed. Everyone has their own views, everyone is not right, but not wrong. Allow someone to speak their mind.

Additionally, change in the young men’s social interactions, and the devaluation of offending behaviour and persons, was further associated with the young men’s change from a relational self to an individuated self. Nate (aged 21) spoke of developing an individuated self while completing a
term of imprisonment. He was proud of such change, which was central to the re-direction of his life pathway.

Since being in this unit I’ve found that independent thing. I’m not getting into trouble...now I’m that independent person...I’ve gone six months incident free and I’m proud...the time I’ve spent in here in this unit now it’s my time – time for me to do me. I want to get back out there and find a job, a stable job and settle down and use this experience as a lesson. This is a big lesson that I have learnt.

Change reflecting the young men’s willingness to accept and/or seek support was further related to desistance processes. Trevor’s (aged 24) determination to manage adversity on his own was connected in his narrative to the progression of offending behaviour. However, Trevor’s story of moving away from offending emphasised the importance of engaging with services and accepting the support he needed to overcome the structural barriers that pushed him toward a criminal lifestyle.

Just trying to get as much help as you can I guess. I would’ve obviously appreciated it a lot back then, but I didn’t want it myself, which is sort of, I guess, a big part – even if you don’t want the help you’ve got to go and ask for it otherwise you’re not going to get anywhere...I wouldn’t have this job if I didn’t, you know, sort of ask...[case manager] to help me...I’m putting my foot forward these days instead of putting it back.

Taking up or being allocated to the privileged position, specifically with respect to competency in social institutions, was strongly connected in narrative accounts to the process of desistance and the construction of a successful life project. Accordingly, as expressed by Iman (age 20), achievement and gaining a sense of accomplishment was a central aspect of stories that reflected change in relation to re-positioning of the self.

I’ve had certain things I wanted to do but back then I thought well I couldn’t do them. [I] got my licence, got a car. So much stuff in the space of a year...it seems to be a chain reaction...I was setting those goals and I was achieving them. So once you do that once, it’s an addictive feeling. And then now I’m going to get my diploma...I want to achieve!

Similarly, for Frankie (aged 20), the cathartic release and sense of achievement he derived from participating in intervention programs in prison was connected in his narrative to beginning the process of desistance.

We were just getting engaged in programs...I never knew what it felt like to do good things. So yeah, I loved the programs because I was good at something and I could open up.

Further, the experience of achievement and related re-positioning of the self was particularly evident in narratives that showed a pattern of early reversal from antisocial behaviour. Bradley (aged 15) also spoke of the chain reaction of achievement and ‘doing good’ that
corresponded with a shift in his trajectory, representing his new position as a competent and good student.

I was just like really naughty. I used to swear. I stopped doing that and my parents...are happy and I felt happy because they were happy. And then I got suspended...then...[at school] we made like a couple of goals and an aim and I started doing them and then it felt really good to be good and get good compliments from the teachers, so I just kept doing it. I'm still doing it now, so it's pretty good.

The young men most entrenched in the justice system expressed the greatest ambivalence about change. For these young men, the revision of one’s life narrative in the process of desistance undermined their definition of self, experience and trajectory. Although Aleki (aged 20) expressed that his trajectory was yet to be determined, continuity or change in his offending behaviour was contingent upon which pathway gave him the greatest sense of accomplishment.

I see me probably going back to the old ways, but then I have a strong feeling that I won’t go back to those ways...I can’t choose between which one yet because I’m not sure which one I do best.

Tuan’s (aged 24) narrative followed a pattern of repeated cycling in and out of custody, such that his experience of life in the community felt remote in comparison to his experience of confinement. For Tuan, the revision of his narrative in the process of desistance was inconceivable, since his substance use and institutional involvement shaped his experience and definition of self, which limited him to an offending trajectory.

I don’t know about no job, like,...I’ve never had a real job. For me I just know about drugs and coming in and out of gaol and that’s all I know because I’m always in and out, so I’m never out there...I have been in and out so many times...I’m used to the routine.

7.3 Master offending and non-offending narratives

The master offending and non-offending narratives are presented in order of prevalence. This categorisation is not mutually exclusive; however, it reflects the predominant narrative content and form of an account. Illuminated in these narratives are the meanings that the young men ascribed to their lives in the form of stories that are constitutive of experience; and thus, are suggestive of the construction of (non-)offending pathways. The master narratives further ground and elucidate themes detailed in section 7.2 (superordinate themes and their constituent themes). Hence, pertinent themes are presented with reference to section 7.2 of the chapter and are elaborated on where applicable. Although stories are detailed in this section from a range of young men, at times multiple exemplary excerpts from an individual account are presented as the focus of examination to more comprehensively illustrate the overall narrative structure.
The six master offending narratives are as follows. The ‘oppression’ narrative emphasised antisocial and offending behaviour as a response to the experience of systematic oppression, and to a lesser degree, the subjectivity of maintaining power and control over others. The ‘sidetracked’ narrative comprised of stories in which the episodic self was highly susceptible to divergence from a prosocial pathway by an inadequate social milieu. The ‘criminal’ narrative elucidated offending behaviour as the narrative construction of the criminal self in stories of identity exploration influenced by representations of crime in popular culture. Within the ‘pressure’ narrative, the coerced self was constructed in stories of derailment from the ‘right’ path by one or more destabilising events that produced the conditions for offending. The ‘dissonance’ narrative comprised of stories in which the ambivalent self grappled with the moral stance of following an offending trajectory. The inadequate self was embodied within the ‘failure’ narrative in which offending was connected to a destructive pattern of self-limiting beliefs, self-doubt and self-sabotage.

In contrast, the three non-offending narratives are as follows. The ‘control’ narrative comprised of stories in which a conservative protagonist followed societal expectations of acceptable behaviour and delayed the transition to adulthood. The ‘holding on’ narrative followed the heroic plotline of triumph over adversity and contained stories of marginally averting possible derailment in the life course. Finally, the ‘reversal’ narrative showed a redeemed self that was constructed in stories of re-directing one’s life path away from offending. The master offending and non-offending narratives are outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master Offending and Non-offending Narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offending narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidetracked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-offending narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reversal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3.1 Offending narrative one: Oppression

The oppression narrative was the most prevalent amongst the participant young men and also the most complex and manifold in content and form. This master narrative embodied two distinct experiences of oppression representing the condition of being oppressed; or conversely, the action of oppressing others. With respect to the former and more common storyline, the oppressed self reflected a social identity of subordination constructed in stories of unjust treatment and related social barriers. While oppressive forces were experienced within the family, school and custodial environments, these stories were predominantly composed of interconnected themes surrounding age, socio-economic status, the peer group and race. The rhetorical function of the oppression narrative worked to position the protagonist as rightfully elevating their state of inequality within the social order through acts of empowerment that violated law and the rights of others. Hence, encompassed within this master narrative was a strong moral stance and considerable use of justifying devices to neutralise the offending behaviour, deeming it appropriate and necessary in the circumstances. Accordingly, the tone of the oppression narrative was often indignant, self-righteous and impassioned.

The oppressed self was tied to various social conditions within the young men’s stories. In these stories the inequality of youth status was a prevalent theme. As previously detailed, being on an accelerated path to adulthood gave rise to antisocial and offending behaviour in the pursuit of greater freedom and autonomy. This was a key aspect of the oppression narrative, in which the protagonist experienced their youth status as precluding them from accessing mature privileges and responsibilities commensurate with the subjectivity of their social age. For Daniel, attending school was symbolic of youth status and the educational system was experienced as highly constraining. Thus, Daniel spoke with enthusiasm as he recollected leaving school prematurely, entering the workforce early, wearing a work uniform and drinking (underage) at a pub with friends from work. Within Daniel’s narrative, such action was experienced as liberating and empowering, it was symbolic of adult status and emphasised his agency in the construction of self.

I fell in love with working...Like I was earning money and I wasn’t earning money at school. I got to go to the pub, like, once a week with my mates even though I was underage...I was in my work uniform. I looked...the part, yeah. And so I felt like a mature adult, you know? Like, I felt like what I was wanting to feel like there.

Moreover, the experience of disadvantage was a central theme in stories comprised within the oppression narrative. Use of rhetorical features in such stories legitimised offending by framing the oppressed self as entitled to meet wants and needs through the redistribution of wealth and the demystification of power. Hence, offending behaviour was not only symbolic of the narrator’s
resourcefulness under the pressure of oppressive forces, but also of combating economic inequality. Such patterns of expression showed strong agentive claim for the criminal acts, which were frequently property offences. Within these stories an adversarial relationship was constructed between the oppressed self and the privileged other. This relationship resembled a justifying device in Todd’s (aged 21) stories of disadvantage, which were influenced by the traditional outlaw narrative of Robin Hood. For Todd, the capitalist system itself was not oppressive; rather, oppression was the result of the inequitable distribution of wealth in society. This was the crux of Todd’s narrative, which functioned to justify his offending behaviour as fair in the redistribution of economic capital.

As soon as I saw people in big houses I thought, “I want to steal from them”. Like Robin Hood – steal from the rich and give to the poor, but sell at a reasonable price because I’m poor too. I’ve got to support myself too, I can’t be that generous.

Through emphatic repetition, Matthew (aged 16) narrated a past self that did not want to offend but did anyway, and that both cared and did not care at the time of the offence. Such inconsistencies reflect conflict in the dialogical self and the narrator’s struggle to integrate the moral positioning of the oppressed self with the criminal positioning of the bad self into a coherent self-story. Additionally, such repetitions are suggestive of Mathew working to shape his own self-perceptions, as much as the perceptions of the researcher.

It’s pretty – pretty shit. It’s like, yeah, I didn’t want to do it, but I did it anyway...I did care at the time, but I didn’t care. It’s ‘cause I knew what they had and I was like, “I’m getting that I don’t care”. I was brought up good as. I wasn’t brought up as a bad kid. Just I wanted to be the bad kid. I choose to be the bad kid.

Sam (aged 19) also grappled with the moral stance of the oppressed self and justified his offending on the basis of need and survival (e.g., “it wasn’t wrong for me. I did it really to eat, you know?”). His use of the phrase “you got to survive somehow” is an example of a necessitating device that deflected agentive claim for the criminal act. Sam further neutralised his offending behaviour by comparing the relative harms of a shop steal offence to robbery, which functioned to preserve his moral decency.

It wasn’t wrong for me. I did it really to eat, you know? I was hungry...like, you got to survive somehow and the way I thought of it, like, I can go and hurt someone and steal his wallet or something and get his money and go and eat, which I often thought about it, you know? Or I can just go and steal from someone’s shop and eat whatever in there and just, you know? Feel bad about it, but I just damaged the shop, I didn’t damage the owner of the shop.
The oppressed self was also constructed in narrator’s stories of peer rejection. School was typically the setting of these stories, which contained themes of severe social exclusion and persistent bullying. Such stories illuminated the subjectivity of violence, as the narrator spoke of the protagonist’s anger and aggressive retaliation as a demonstration of active resistance to the experience of oppressive forces. As detailed earlier, this form of adaptation to peer group oppression was significant in the young men’s narrative sequencing of life events that contributed to the onset of offending behaviour. Wesley (aged 20) described being the target of unrelenting bullying. Characteristic of the oppression narrative, a firm moral stance was taken up in the stories he told, which was supported through use of emphatic repetition and justifications. In particular, Wesley used a pattern of repetition to frame the protagonist’s violent behaviour in terms of provocation, which showed deflected agentive positioning. Such self-positioning places Wesley as the victim, which provided the basis upon which he justified his actions as active resistance. Further, Wesley often referred to his violence and the violence of others indirectly and without substantial detail, which distanced him from the act and minimised the seriousness of the violence.

I never gave it out, but I’d give it back if it was given.
I don’t start it, but I’m the one who gets in trouble.
Someone would have an issue with me and I would stand my ground.

Wesley spoke of (adult) others frequently imposing rules and punishment to maintain control and personal conceptions of social order that invalidated his use of violence as a justifiable response to the experience of peer group oppression. Consequently, Wesley felt that many rules in his environment did not have a legitimate purpose. This was a further layer of coercion within Wesley’s stories through which the oppressed self was constructed. As a result, Wesley’s experience of oppression and social exclusion was broader than the peer group, the impact of which on the self was defiance, confusion and dehumanisation.

My life has always been angry...you break a rule, you get disciplined, but no one took the time to understand why the rule was broken. My voice has never been heard...the punishment doesn’t matter...unless they bring up the underlying reason – it’s not going to change me. No one is ever going to understand. I feel not part of society – more animal – I feel not intelligent. I don’t understand the rules.

Finally, the oppressed self was constructed in stories whereby race was symbolic of a subordinate social identity that was subjected to unjust treatment, especially by formal authority figures (i.e., law enforcement). In a similar fashion to the experience of peer group oppression, stories of racial oppression were infused with anger and aggressive retaliation. This further illuminated the subjectivity of violence as a demonstration of active resistance to the arbitrary and prejudicial exercise of power. Hassan’s (aged 22) narrative followed a tragic plotline, beginning with
the protagonist immigrating to Australia and overcoming forced displacement from war-torn Sudan.

Wesley’s narration of the oppressed self was further constructed in stories of racial discrimination by formal authority figures. In particular, the protagonist in such stories was regularly targeted by police on the way home from studying at the library and was searched without reasonable suspicion. Thus, a personal position of a competent and good student was taken up in such stories, which stood in opposition to the criminal position that was socially assigned to the protagonist. Additionally, these stories emphasised the experience of disempowerment.

[The police] they were being abusive and racist on countless occasions [and] it just continued to happen...the police would see me walking home and they would pull me over and search me and ask me for my identification...They’d search and find my books and pens and nothing else...it was very stressful.

Hassan narrated the persistence of such racial oppression and the ensuing anger of the protagonist. Through the selective and causal sequencing of events, the protagonist became unusually intoxicated with other African youth, with whom a bond was quickly formed over the shared experience of oppression. The spontaneity of this event in the narrative framed the protagonist’s behaviour and subsequent offending as out of character, such that the self was not its true moral self for the time of the offence. This, in addition to the protagonist’s state of intoxication, worked to reduce culpability in the offence.

I never drink, but at that time I was drinking like crazy and intoxicated out of my head...I drank because I was angry...about what happened with the police. I ran into a couple of people and they had alcohol. I could relate to what they were talking about.

Hassan narrated how the preceding events led up to the protagonist offending in the course of catching the bus home at which time the protagonist forcibly threatened the driver and unsuccessfully attempted to drive the bus. The narrative framing of the offence rendered the actions of the protagonist as an expression of violent retaliation fuelled by anger.

I was just angry and wanting to get back at them...I had a butter knife in my hand and she [bus driver] thought I wanted the money...I just wanted her to get out...She called the police.

Deflecting structures in Hassan’s account such as “I was made into [an offender]”, “trying to get it out of me”, “they pushed me to the edge” revealed deflected agentive claim for the criminal act. The protagonist ‘offender’ in Hassan’s narrative is shaped by, and succumbs to, the oppressive force of racial prejudice and corresponding criminal social identity.

It was just a matter of time before I was made into one [offender]. It looks like they [police] were trying to get it out of me and sadly enough they did. They pushed me to the edge and they pretty much got what they want.
Within the oppression narrative, the dominant self was the inverse and less prevalent position taken up in stories pertaining to the exercise of power and control to oppress others and claim special status. In these stories, the oppressed other was often female, reflecting the theme of gender inequality, as well as the nature of the offending, which was commonly interpersonal partner violence. Zane (aged 24) spoke with a superior tone in the narration of self. Accordingly, the dominant self was positioned as unique and supreme in Zane’s narrative, thus giving the protagonist the authority to dominate and violate the rights of others.

I think I’m better than other people. My physical attributes and mental abilities...made me feel like I had a special status...I was always treated like I wasn’t like anyone else – always singled out and handled differently.

Criticism was used in Zane’s narrative to preserve the special status of the protagonist and disregard others and relationships.

I have a tendency to discard people when they don’t stimulate me anymore...I couldn’t hold onto any genuine friend...I couldn’t hold a conversation with anyone that actually stimulated me...I’m too critical of people. I’m convinced of my immeasurable strength.

Zane constructed the dominant self in stories comprised of themes relating to masculinity and patriarchal discourse. However, his narrative was also influenced by counter-discourses, such as feminist discourse, which was reflected in lost enthusiasm for romantic relationships in the present era.

I expect people to stay down there and if they don’t then we start clashing. It stimulates your masculinity.

Dominance – it establishes stature, it creates order, the most important thing it does is establish masculinity.

I’m not interested in relationships anymore. I don’t think I’m born in the right time to be in a relationship.

The protagonist in Zane’s narrative was insecure and jealous in romantic relationships, which revealed a vulnerable version of self that when threatened, gave rise to the dominant self and violent actions. The phrase “I meant to” was a reflexive comment that revealed Zane’s intention to “burn a chair” which was interjected before the defecting structure “but ended up”, a less agentive claim for setting his girlfriend’s house on fire. Zane’s verbiage also delayed the telling of the criminal acts and he further concealed the violent self through omissions in the telling of the offending.

Additionally, the expression “I’m not violent” and equivalent variations of this phrase were repeated throughout his narrative. Such features worked to overcome the inconsistencies within his stories in the construction of a coherent and continuous identity that stood in opposition to the self as violent.
I sort of made it my ambition to get him out of the equation. So I thought I would have to scare this guy off. I made a Molotov cocktail. I was having bad dreams about her being with him. I couldn’t understand it and that just compelled me to act more...I wanted to kill him at one point.

I set her house on fire. I meant to burn a chair I bought for her, but ended up setting her house on fire too.

Awkward/unusual phrasing within Zane’s narrative was further indicative of his attempt to integrate clashes of narrative reflecting the disparity between constructions of the dominant self and non-violent self. In an unagentic claim, Zane attempted to evade accountability for acts of violence in the present by attributing such acts to the overpowering authority of his Ego that dominated the past self. In this way, Zane’s narrative was constructed to reduce fractures of identity.

My Ego was so significant and had a lot of power over me...I’m not violent. I want to get along with people and I like to treat everyone with respect. And I am sympathetic toward people that don’t have as much as me, or are lesser than me. I have those qualities but my Ego takes me over sometimes. My Ego only demands that I think about myself and don’t worry about anyone else. When I want someone to stick around I feel obligated and even be forceful if I have to.

7.3.2 Offending narrative two: Sidetracked

The sidetracked narrative was the most distinct of the master narratives due to a lack of emplotment that suggested an episodic temporal style of being. Hence, the sidetracked narrative reflected the temporal assemblage of recollected events (temporal coherence), although without the same degree of narrative processing (causal and thematic coherence) found when there is long-term diachronic continuity of the self. Accordingly, the young men did not easily produce a narrative account, with some young men commenting that the research interview was the first time they had organised life events and experiences into an integrated whole in an attempt to make sense of them. They tended to require more time to answer questions and frequent prompts to produce greater narrative coherence. Reflected within the sidetracked narrative were weak causal links between aspects of one’s life and the self in relating the past and present. Often the young men expressed ‘not knowing’ when considering how certain events in their life were meaningfully connected. Their stories were characteristic of the episodic self-experience that is temporally oriented to the ‘now’ (i.e., the present moment). The episodic self was constructed in stories that emphasised the protagonist’s suggestibility to external forces and susceptibility to the risk process. In other words, the episodic self was easily sidetracked from one’s intended life course by their social milieu. The rhetorical function of the sidetracked narrative worked to position the protagonist as unwittingly engaging in offending behaviour. This was also related to the passive role the young men assigned to themselves, which was reflected in the hopeless tone of this master narrative.
The episodic self that was embodied within the sidetracked narrative was highly malleable to social forces. This was evident in Steven’s (aged 24) story of a protagonist who began using drugs in the context of work, which was framed as “a work thing to do”. Without a strong sense of self that existed in the past and persisted into the future, the self was continuously shaped in the present moment. Thus, central to the sidetracked narrative was passive receptivity to the world and inconsistent intentionality. In particular, agents’ causation was diminished in Steven’s narrative by the absence of the subject pronoun ‘I’ when speaking of agents’ acts. In contrast, ‘I’ was inserted before passifying structures, such as “I just fell into the drinking” to the same effect. Additionally, his use of the idiom “domino effect” represented a weak causal link in accounting for how smoking, drinking and drug use precipitated one another.

Then pretty much got in the drug scene there because people at work were selling drugs and doing drugs before or after work. It felt like a work thing to do...I just fell into the drinking and that sort of thing. And I just fell into another hole. Domino effect – drinking came involved with the smoking and then became the drinking, smoking and drugs.

The theme of the game was comprised within the sidetracked narrative. In particular, protagonists were susceptible to the blinding effect of the game; and thus, were easily sidetracked by being swept up or caught up in the fun and thrill of play. Within Oscar’s (aged 20) narrative, the episodic self was constructed in stories of ‘not seeing the bigger picture’, which was central to the maintenance of offending behaviour after being released from custody at a youth justice centre. Like Steven, Oscar also revealed deflected agency by his tendency to drop the subject pronoun ‘I’ in his narrative account.

Just, like, got back into shoplifting again...I don’t know. Just started enjoying it again...just got sidetracked...didn’t see the bigger picture...what’s best for me and if I don’t do what I’m supposed to – just breach parole, get locked back up...I don’t know. I suppose that is part of the bigger picture. Seeing, like, what’s going to happen in the future.

A pattern of repeat offending and incarceration was another theme within the sidetracked narrative. Accordingly, the episodic self was constructed in stories of being sidetracked from following a pathway of desistance. In Tyler’s (aged 24) narrative the early protagonist is determined to move away from offending during a period of incarceration. However, without a strong sense of self that existed in the past and persisted into the future, the later protagonist maintained offending behaviour as soon as he was released from prison. Weak causal links representing missing parts in Tyler’s narrative left much to be inferred from the text. Such as, how a visit from a friend led the protagonist to substance use and what precipitated selling the stolen copper. The lack of causal coherence in his narrative positioned the protagonist as operating indiscriminately amongst a collection of haphazard events. This highlighted the potency of being temporally oriented to the
'now' and acting on a whim, rather than in accordance with a continuous sense of self and the fulfilment of aims.

I was going to start fresh and not do anything wrong, so I didn’t come back [to prison]. But, the day I got out a friend came around and I used again. I just got out and I was really happy so I used. Then the next week I went and stole more copper. And then I sold it all for about $10,000. And then about two weeks later the police came around and questioned me...I came to gaol again...when you get out you fully forget about your whole sentence.

### 7.3.3 Offending narrative three: Criminal

A defining feature of the criminal narrative was the expression of desire to be criminal, or pleasure derived from performing criminal acts at minimum. This master narrative followed a pattern of regression and change in tone from enthusiasm to regret. The criminal self was constructed in stories of school exclusion and seeking power that was often associated with enhancing social connection within the context of school. Thus, stories were comprised of themes pertaining to negotiating a social insider position, becoming a bully to avoid bullying and finding a sense of place and belonging. Additional themes previously outlined in section 7.2.4 (the dynamics of antisocial behaviour) were also emphasised in this master narrative, along with reversal of the logic wrong is right. Themes exclusive to this master narrative were the influence of popular culture on the construction of a criminal identity, as well as experiencing the criminal self as a legitimate identity for exploration during the transition to adulthood. The rhetorical function of the criminal narrative worked to position the protagonist as in control or out of control, sometimes simultaneously, which highlighted shifts in agentive positioning.

The criminal self was constructed in stories that emphasised criminality as an explored and selected mode of being that was an agentive act. The protagonist in Logan’s (aged 15) narrative aspired to be a gangster in primary school, an aspiration that was later developed in conversations with likeminded friends throughout early secondary school.

In primary school I always said, "I want to be a gangster one day"...[we were] establishing the foundations to do it...Year 7-8 was kind of like, for all of us, was a bit like building up to like actually doing it...like crime you’d want to do...like things that, like, crime can lead on to. Like cars, houses, like all that type of stuff.

A common theme within such stories was the attribution of powerful status to criminality, which was associated with gaining control in and of one's life. In Frankie’s narrative, the protagonist gained powerful status and control over his environment of peers through being ‘bad’ at school. Such stories legitimised the criminal self through juxtaposition with stories in which the protagonist was rejected and socially excluded when ‘good’.
Like swearing, listening to, like, explicit music, bullying people, all sorts of stuff that I felt like it gave me power and respect and all that. And it made me feel, like, that I was part of a group, or made me feel respected.

I thought being wrong was right because when I was good, when I had my good days there, it just got boring and heaps of things changed – like I didn’t have much friends. I was just always with myself. I was always just keeping to myself when I was good.

Similarly, Logan described the appeal of criminality in terms of powerful status, which for him symbolised distinction, reverence and intimidation, as evidenced by the following excerpts.

Like being someone who’s not normal like someone - like you know? Bikies have the 1% on their patch. Being like the 1% of society that’s, like, not normal.

[Wanting] to stand out. Like be someone different. Not just like everyone else out there.

Fear – like that people have of you – respect – power.

Within this master offending narrative, the meanings given to the criminal mode of being were frequently derived from representations of crime in popular culture. Viewing such representations as stories glorifying crime, rather than cautionary tales, was central to the construction of the criminal self. Within Logan’s narrative, crime stories in popular culture were tightly bound to the selection and enactment of a criminal identity.

I just liked crime – not doing crime, but like on TV – like documentaries. Just I was fascinated by that stuff. Whereas when I got older it actually led into me doing it myself...I’ve seen things on there...and I’ve wanted to, like, be similar...they just glorify the whole crime – the scene of it all – the money, girls, drugs, all that stuff.

In contrast to the strong agentic claim present in stories of the provisional exploration and selection of a criminal identity, losing control was a theme within stories of enacting the criminal self and the progression (i.e., expansion and escalation) of offending, suggesting deflected agency. Within Logan’s narrative, the protagonist’s decision to be criminal was described in agentic terms; however, the protagonist’s “fall into” the criminal realm conversely framed enactment of the criminal self as a passive act. Logan’s self-positioning placed him in stories as simultaneously in control and not in control of his criminality. Additionally, his shift from indexing the self with the pronoun ‘I’ to use of the intrapersonal ‘you’ was a comment on his past self in relation to his present self. This points to the narrator’s bemusement with the protagonist’s progression of offending behaviour.

You just kind of fall into it. You made the decision yourself, but like you don’t really know how you get there.

The criminal self was further constructed in stories of getting worse and worse, which was an interconnected theme with losing control. The offending behaviour of the protagonist within
Logan’s narrative escalated from theft to armed robbery. In making narrative sense of such escalation, the armed robbery was framed as a moment of “lost control” and an act that the protagonist was “led into” by another. Within Logan’s story of the offence, the criminal self was imbued with agency and yet such deflecting structures conveyed passivity. In integrating this inconsistency in agentive positioning, Logan ascribed the will to commit the offence to the protagonist’s “darker side”, which the (moral) self failed to control. These rhetorical features had the effect of distancing the narrator from the criminal act. Additionally, the phrase “I think it’s in everyone” ascribed the darker side as an innate feature to all people. This worked within Logan’s narrative to normalise the criminal self and neutralise the offending behaviour. Further reflected in his narrative was a tentative moral stance that was emphasised by repeated expressions such as “I suppose” and “I’d say” in proximity to agentive structures.

It was just a moment where I, kind of, lost control of what was going on. Got led into something, I suppose, [that] I shouldn’t have done...I suppose there’s a bit in me that wanted to do it as well, I’d say...I suppose that would be my darker side then, I’d say...I think it’s in everyone. You’ve got to control it and at that time I didn’t...As the years went on I just got worse and worse, I suppose.

Within the criminal narrative, reversal of the logic wrong is right was also associated with the attribution of new meaning to representations of crime in popular culture. As such representations came to replicate experience they became cautionary tales, rather than stories glorifying crime. Logan spoke of identifying with a story told within a rap song after being charged with the armed robbery. This story resonated with Logan because of shared themes within the song and his narrative construction of the criminal self (e.g., themes of losing control and getting worse and worse). Just as crime stories in popular culture were central within Logan’s narrative to taking on a criminal identity, they were also connected to the process of desistance from crime.

[The song] is just about some kid that goes from being a wannabe criminal to — he ends up raping his own mum and not realising it. And so, he ends up killing himself...Stories like that kind of turn you off it...I listen to those type of things a bit more...I really made the decision to stop. Like figure out – like sort my life out. And music helped to do that as well.

The criminal narrative reflected the process of selecting, enacting and, for most young men, revising one’s identity after exploration of the criminal self. The protagonist within Logan’s narrative returned to school and applied himself academically, thus reflecting a revision of self. This corresponded with the protagonist taking on and being assigned to the competent and good student position, which in turn promoted desistance processes.
I’m happy for it – that people actually do notice that I’m not like the same person...it helps, I suppose, in a way noticing people look at you differently – like more positive...kind of encourages me to keep going.

Similarly, the repetition of “it’s not (for) me” within Blair’s (aged 20) narrative emphasised the revision of identity after a period of exploration of the criminal self.

It’s not me to be honest. I know that now...it’s been like eight months since I really have been involved in any of that sort of shit. And, like yeah, so it’s not me to be honest. I tried it, and yeah, I know it’s not for me.

7.3.4 Offending narrative four: Pressure

The Pressure narrative followed a plotline of coercion by external forces within which derailment from one’s intended life course was a central theme. The rhetorical function of this master narrative worked to position the protagonist as having had a ‘good’ life or following the ‘right’ path if it were not for some calamitous event or series of destabilising events that sent them along an alternative trajectory. The narrative tone was despair for what had been lost, as well as anger and resentment toward their misfortune. The coerced self was constructed in stories of emotional and institutional detachment. This corresponded with taking on a mode of carelessness toward one’s life, and thus, the escalation of risk and the progression of offending behaviour.

Within Aaron’s (aged 18) narrative, the coerced self was constructed in stories concentrated on a single life-altering event. In particular, Aaron narrated a protagonist whose life was re-directed onto an offending trajectory at age 10 after his sister’s death from illness. In contrast, Trevor’s (aged 24) narrative construction of the coerced self was reflected in the causal sequencing of a series of disruptive events and reverberations, which corresponded with a cyclical pattern of regression and progression. Common to both these narratives, and a key aspect of the Pressure narrative, was that the self underwent critical change as a result of experiencing adversity. Such change brought about a shift in positioning from legitimate to bad/criminal. Often the legitimate positioning of the past self was set in stories of being a competent and good student, comprised of themes of strong school attachment, academic achievement and valuing cultural capital. Such stories also emphasised what was lost by the derailing event/s.

I got along with the teachers really well. I was one of the best students in the class...I used to love going to school when I was younger...[I] did all my work – every bit of homework. I would always ask for extra work to do because I liked doing it...I was always the teacher’s pet before my sister passed away (Aaron, aged 18).

I was a straight A student. I sort of fought through everything to keep going to school and doing the right thing...I wanted to actually become a lawyer when I was at school (Trevor, aged 24).
The narrative construction of the coerced self was a process of making sense of one’s past experience of adversity in relation to the present experience of derailment. In Aaron’s narrative, the protagonist was derailed from a position of normality. The inference of such was the re-positioning of the self as the binary other, which was elucidated by the remark “I just kind of went downhill from there”, indicating the protagonist’s movement toward crime. The metaphor of going downhill is suggestive of a further comment on agentive positioning. In the context of his narrative, the expression revealed a deflected position toward offending, since within the metaphor the momentum driving the action of the protagonist is generated externally by the gradient of the hill, more than from internal forces.

[Life] was normal to be honest...just a normal kid. It was really good up until about 10. That is when...[my sister] passed away, and we were really close together. I just kind of went downhill from there.

Emotional suppression was a theme within Aaron’s stories of derailment, which was conveyed through emphatic repetition of the expression ‘bottling it up’. Through this metaphor, Aaron made sense of the progression toward offending as the manifestation of misdirected and uncontrolled emotional release brought about by suppressing feelings of grief and loss.

I just bottled it up – didn’t do the work at school...so from there I started picking on other students, getting angry towards them because I think I bottled it all up...so I think I was taking it all out on the teachers and my classmates. I started back answering the teachers, and that, and from there on I didn’t really do much work.

In Aaron’s narrative, the loss of his sister was interconnected with a loss of self. Such discontinuity of self was expressed in remarks such as “I totally changed”, “I would have been a completely different person” and “my life feels like it has gone”. Thus, the sudden and unexpected loss of self within Aaron’s narrative was also a statement about the coerced reconstruction of self and re-direction of his life resulting in a sense of derailment.

I totally changed when that happened...I would have been a completely different person...my life feels like it has gone, like [snaps fingers]. Like, it has just gone. Ever since...[my sister] died everything has just gone downhill.

Conversely, within Trevor’s stories of derailment, actively resisting the force of cumulative risk in the face of persistent structural challenges was a key theme. The narrative construction of the coerced self was a story of battling to defy the odds in which the protagonist was tragically defeated. Trevor began his narrative account by detailing his attendance at nine different primary schools and one secondary school. This marked the transient lifestyle he lived with his mother who he described as uprooting him from place to place as she moved from one romantic relationship to another. While Trevor spoke critically of his mother and expressed resentment toward her, such
instability was only loosely connected in the causal sequencing of events that brought about his eventual derailment. Thus, despite the experience of itinerant schooling and a volatile home life, the protagonist in Trevor’s stories of school was thriving socially, academically and athletically.

I was good at sport and all that kind of stuff...it wasn’t too hard to make friends and I was a straight A student up until Year 10 when I left.

Trevor recounted that at about age nine his mother settled down into a relationship and married. Within his narrative, this life event represented the end of the preceding period of transience; however, it was the beginning of a violent relationship with his stepfather in which he endured years of maltreatment. Irony is detected in Trevor’s account of the violence in the form of understatement, such as “I didn’t like him very much” and “it wasn’t the most fun”. His use of irony intensified the telling of the severity of the violent acts. On the written timeline of significant experiences generated during the interview, Trevor indicated that this period was one of the lowest points in his life by placing it at the bottom of the page. The following excerpt is his response to being asked about such placement on the timeline.

‘Cause he bashed me for a good six to eight years...so I didn’t like him very much...it wasn’t the most fun...it got a lot worse. Yeah, like being handcuffed to my own bed...he decided to try and hit me with a weapon and I pulled out his baton and fractured his knee. So that was my fun that I had with him. But, my head’s gone through quite a few pieces of glass.

Trevor spoke of the family violence culminating at age 16 in an episode that involved him assaulting his mother and resulted in him no longer living in the home. This was a highly salient event in Trevor’s narrative, since the theme of derailment first emerged in the telling of this story. The coerced self was constructed in such stories of wrongdoing that conflicted with Trevor’s moral stance and was accounted for by reference to pressure from the external environment. Awkward interjections within his account of the violence, such as “not a very nice part of my life”, “my mum my stepdad and me fought” and “I ended up sort of not bashing her” delayed the telling of the story and suggested avoidance by skirting around details. Additionally, phrases such as “not a very nice part of my life” and “I’m not very proud” showed a reflective stance toward the act, indicative of moral processing. The last comment “we got over it” worked to neutralise the violence by positioning Trevor as absolved from the act through resolution.

I actually flipped it one time...not a very nice part of my life – but my mum my stepdad and me fought. He took off in his car, my mum jumped in the way and then I ended up, sort of, not bashing her. But, taking my violence out and hitting her a couple of times, which as I said, I’m not very proud of. But, we got over it.

The proceeding stories within Trevor’s narrative followed the heroic plotline of fighting
against the odds to do what is right. A firm moral position was taken up in such stories that were
centred on themes of determination and persistence, especially to complete his education. Trevor
spoke of attending school during the day and working night shift full time at a fast food restaurant in
order to support himself financially. However, he justified eventually leaving school on the basis that
the situation became untenable. The following are exemplary excerpts.

I sort of fought through everything to keep going to school and doing
the right thing.

At that time I still had the mentality of being a good person, and yeah, I
was still just trying to do the right thing.

I was happy going to school. I even tried when I left home at 16 to go
back to school while I was working full-time...I didn’t obviously finish it
because it was a bit too much for me only getting four hours sleep a
day...I was happy to actually give it a shot.

In a brief summation of the causal sequencing of events, Trevor emphasised leaving the
family home as the critical derailing event that produced a ripple effect, which shaped his offending
trajectory. In particular, Trevor spoke of the consequent loss of practical family support, which he
regarded as a significant barrier to obtaining his driver’s licence. He connected this experience to the
accumulation of multiple driving offences, which resulted in his incarceration. Moreover, within
Trevor’s narrative, not obtaining his driver’s licence was a highly significant event that would
otherwise have averted his derailment altogether.

My step-dad maybe – ‘cause that was how I got kicked out of home.
And that was how I started driving my car without a licence. And that’s
how I got locked up. And how all this started happening...It wasn’t until
I was 16 and got kicked out of home and everything changed.

Probably wouldn’t have even taken drugs in my entire life because I
would’ve had a job, I would’ve had a car, would’ve had a licence,
would’ve had everything I needed.

For Trevor, the narrative construction of the coerced self reflected a shift in the thematic
content of stories from ‘doing right’ to ‘doing wrong’. Passivising structures within these stories
positioned Trevor as having no choice under the pressure of social constraints and framed the
wrongdoing as necessary in the circumstances. The meaning implicit in the following exemplary
excerpt is that unemployment made Trevor criminal. Use of the deflecting verb “made”, particularly
in combination with the phrasing “that’s when my criminal history, sort of, started” is an unagentive
claim that distanced Trevor from the act of offending.

I was without a job for two and a half years, or something, which made
me do some pretty stupid stuff. That’s when my criminal history, sort
of, started.

This shift in the thematic content of stories also represented the discontinuity of self; and thus,
created an opening for the gradual reconstruction of self that took the form of ‘turning bad’. The juxtaposition between the past self and the coerced self within Trevor’s narrative emphasised his experience of derailment. This was further exacerbated by his subsequent emotional detachment that gave rise to reckless and offending behaviour (see section 7.2.3). The following are exemplary excerpts.

I used to be a very friendly, as I said, energetic person that used to get along with everybody until all the shit, sort of, happened. And then I turned into a mean bastard basically.

I ended up moving into a rooming house with five or six ex-convicts, which was great for someone that was, sort of, starting to turn bad at the time.

### 7.3.5 Offending narrative five: Dissonance

The dissonance narrative reflected a thinking stance toward actions in conflict with one’s sense of self and moral stance. Within this master narrative, the ambivalent self was constructed in stories of being pulled in opposing directions. This tension often represented a clash of narratives between what the protagonist felt they ought to be doing and what antisocial group membership entailed. Also emphasised within this master narrative were themes of enhancing social connection through negotiating a social insider position, becoming a bully to avoid bullying and finding a sense of place and belonging. In particular, these young men grappled with bending the self in order to conform to the antisocial group. Shifts in the self from individuated to relational and back to individuated reflected movement through the phases of offending. Consistent with the ambivalent self, the tone of the dissonance narrative was a mixture of regret and yet appreciation for the experience. The rhetorical function of this master narrative worked to position the protagonist as competent and moral; however, gradually weakened over time by ‘bad’ others that pushed them to act inconsistently with their values and goals.

A defining feature of the dissonance narrative was that the self – embodied within the young men’s stories – was different from the bad others in the social group. This difference was variously described in the narrative construction of the ambivalent self. For George (aged 18), his intelligence, stable family life, school life, and mental state, as well as his moral stance, characterised such difference.

I’m smart. I had made wise decisions until then. I don’t know. I think I was mentally more stable than they were...I know what to do, what not to do. I had everything sweet – these kids might not have...and they just didn’t seem like they were happy.
George viewed these qualities as providing him with a form of immunity or a buffer against the influence of the antisocial group. He expressed an individuated sense of self that enabled him to socialise with the group, whilst feeling impervious to the risks that the group presented.

I got to be with the popular people. Not get bullied. Have fun. Didn’t think of getting in trouble though…I knew they would, but I didn’t think I would…I just wouldn’t do the stupid stuff they do.

However, George spoke of his struggle to maintain a sense of separateness from the group over time. Within the dissonance narrative, the protagonist was positioned in stories as a ‘follower’ of bad others. This positioning emphasised reservation toward wrongdoing and also deflected from agentive claim for the acts. Within George’s narrative, the ambivalent self was constructed in early stories of being distracted by the antisocial group. In particular, George spoke of the way in which socialising outside of school with the group gave rise to conversations during class about the group’s activities that conflicted with his desire to be an attentive and productive student. George’s repetition of the word “distraction” throughout his narrative represented a deflective device that revealed a less agentive stance toward following an offending trajectory.

I started hanging out with them after school – out of school…then you always start talking. And then that’s a big distraction when you’re in class – “hey man what are you doing after school? You want go do this? You want to do that?”

Additionally, George spoke of socialising with the group after school as diverting him from his usual routine of going home and abiding by limits set by his parents. The phrase “I was disciplined still then” was a comment on initial resistance to conforming to the antisocial group that also pointed to the later experience of self discontinuity once he formed a sense of place and belonging within the group.

Mum said, “it was okay” at the time – “just don’t go out too late”. Like, “yeah alright”. And I was disciplined still then. And then we just kept doing it after school every day. Mum started getting a bit worried – “where are you? It’s past six” and like, “oh okay I’ll come home”.

In George’s narrative, the protagonist deviated from obedience, and competent and good student positioning. In the excerpt below, George described himself prior to becoming part of an antisocial group. His use of expressions such as “mummy’s boy” and “nerd” cast criticism on the past self by suggesting weakness and an immature bond with his mother. Such criticisms functioned in his narrative to justify the reconstruction of the self as the defiance of a socially unacceptable identity amongst his peers.

A mummy’s boy. A nerd. I don’t know. A good kid
Maintaining a stance of reservation toward antisocial and criminal activities was a pertinent theme within the dissonance narrative. Within George’s narrative, the ambivalent self was often constructed in stories that emphasised such reservation by way of comparison with friends that relatively positioned him as less bad or criminal. George created distance from acts of offending though use of phrases such as “mucking up” that minimised the behaviour, which was also normalised through identification of such with being an “average adolescent teenager”. The phrase “just doing what they do” is vague and the concluding remark, “yeah that’s it” inhibits a more in-depth account, suggesting avoidance of telling of the offending.

I wasn’t as bad as the others ’cause I still didn’t do it every night. But, I was still mucking up...I’d say [I was] just the average adolescent teenager. Just doing what they do. Hang out, see mates, and yeah that’s it.

Within George’s narrative of his progression toward offending, the ambivalent self was constructed in key stories of grappling with the decision to be truant from school, smoke cigarettes and bully others. Reservation was a theme evident within these stories, which highlighted colliding narratives of being a ‘good kid’ and being a ‘bad kid’. George spoke of his struggle to ward off insistences from his friends to miss school, wary of the repercussions of being re-positioned as an incompetent and bad student. However, eventually his desire to be part of the group won out and his attachment to school was further eroded.

I just was scared that I’d get in trouble...it was just I didn’t want to still lose school and everything.

I thought on it for like – they were talking to me at the front 30 minutes before school started, “just come, just come”. And I was saying, “no I’m not coming ‘til the end”. And then like, “I’m coming. I’m going to come with yous. Only this time though”. And only this time – that didn’t happen. I had so much fun!

George also spoke about going to the back of the school grounds with antisocial peers, which was a popular place to smoke cigarettes. His reservation toward this progression in his offending trajectory was evident in his expressions of being “iffy”, denial of being an “initiator”, and “tagging along”.

I lost interest in school. My mates started hanging out with other... the worst kids – like down the back all the kids that smoke and stuff. And I hang out with my mates of course, so I went down there...A bit iffy on it. I was definitely not the initiator. Just tagging along really.

He described an initial period of resistance; however, he eventually conceded, justifying his decision to smoke cigarettes by disregarding the harms and highlighting the social rewards. Such justifications worked to minimise George’s experience of dissonance.
For at least six months I could – I felt like I could just say, “no”...I didn’t want to smoke, but it was kind of meh [nothing], it won’t hurt. The popular kids were doing it – you do it – you’re going to be friends with them.

Within George’s narrative a firm moral stance against bullying was expressed, which was incompatible with antisocial group membership. To reduce this dissonant relationship, George initially took up a passive position in which he was an observer of the bullying. This enabled him to be part of the group, while keeping a degree of distance from the act.

My mates start bullying kids...Previously it was like name teasing...It was like, yeah that’s your thing to do, I’ll just sit here, and just stand with yous, and act cool...I wasn’t saying, “stop it” otherwise I wouldn’t have been with them...Just I’ll let yous do this while I just watch.

However, as the bullying escalated from verbal insults to physical assaults, George re-positioned himself in the bullying interaction as an “aggressor” who verbally provoked the violence. Consequently, there was an increase in his use of passivising structures relative to the magnitude of the dissonant relationship. In the following excerpt, his use of the idiom “in the wrong place at the wrong time” framed his participation in the bullying as incidental through his position as a bystander, which worked to excuse his actions. Additionally, the statement “I get in trouble with them ‘cause I’m not telling them to stop” further suggests a denial of responsibility for his part in promoting the violence.

Kids that stood up for themselves, they’d start punching and hitting them and stuff like that. And then I’d hang around with them while they’re still doing that. But, it’s kind of in the wrong place at the wrong time. I get in trouble with them ‘cause I’m not telling them to stop.

George’s self-positioning places him on the sidelines of the bullying, and thus within his narrative he is less bad relative to others who are physically violent. Through such comparison, George maintained a stance of reservation that functioned to minimise his responsibility for the bullying. Additionally, structures such as “they just keep getting worse and I follow” suggested deflected agency and “so I have to get a bit worse” makes the harmful act seem necessary and appropriate in the context of ‘keeping up’ with the group – which serves to justify his actions.

I was an aggressor I’d say...Just, I wouldn’t hit them or anything like that. Just say, “yeah, keep going” and stuff like that. ‘Cause they just keep getting worse and I follow. So, I have to get a bit worse each time to keep up.

A contemplative position is evident in the following excerpt in which George grapples with the moral stance of bullying others. He does not assign to himself the agency of bully; however, an awareness that agency is being deflected is apparent in the phrase “I’m not in the wrong, but I am in the wrong”.
I don’t know. I just kept getting worse...I wouldn’t verbally abuse them. I’d just provoke it...Yeah, so it’s kind of like, I’m not in the wrong, but I am in the wrong.

In a moment of self-reflection George commented on his progression toward offending as the process of the self merging with the antisocial group. The phrase “turning into” shows a quasi-passivity for the bad or criminal position.

I was turning into my mates really.

Moments of self-reflection were common within the dissonance narrative. For Iman (aged 20), the ambivalent self was constructed in stories of being angry for not living up to one’s potential, and expectations of being “better”. Strong self-reflection was evident in Iman’s account, in which a questioning stance was taken toward his actions that placed him on an offending trajectory. The inconsistency between such cognitions and his actions was a source of dissonance for Iman. The following are exemplary excerpts.

I started to get angry with myself – the way I was going...Just angry when you know you could do better. And I always knew that too. And I was always angry. Like, I would always have talks with mates saying, “what the hell?” You know? “What am I doing?” Stuff like that.

I always knew I could do better. It’s like, I never lost it, I always say, “what am I doing?” You know? Then I come to my senses. Then I’ll lose it.

So I’d have these conversations. Then my actions would speak otherwise.

Regarding offending behaviour as time-limited was a pertinent theme within Iman’s narrative. Thus, the ambivalent self was also constructed in stories of reservation toward antisocial and criminal activities in order to safeguard against the complete loss of one’s life project. Hence, Iman spoke about his attachment to school, despite many of his friends leaving prematurely.

I was still smart enough to not fully drop out...A lot of my mates dropped out – didn’t get the [high school] certificate. But, I still knew somewhere in me that that would be the dumbest thing that I could do...Like, just in case – ‘cause I know I’m going to improve.

Within Iman’s narrative, heart was a theme that differentiated him from his antisocial peers. Heart was a symbol that represented his moral stance and revealed strong agentic claim (i.e., “I know what I’m doing is wrong”). Iman connected the theme of heart to feelings of guilt, which was a further expression of dissonance. For Iman, the loss of heart meant little chance of recovery; and thus, the permanency of an offending trajectory.

I got a heart...’cause even when I was misbehaving, I always knew what I was, always. [I knew] when I was wrong...I never lost that...I’ve met people that when they do things wrong, they actually lose the feeling.
You know the feeling?...of the guilt...some people lose that. And once you lose that I reckon it’s downhill from there.

I was always good to people. Even when I was rude, I’d go apologise. That’s the heart...I know what I’m doing is wrong. That’s what I mean, like, always knew what’s right and what’s wrong.

Both George and Iman expressed that they would alter their past if it were possible and follow a non-offending pathway in the transition to adulthood. However, the meaning derived from their experience in the form of lessons was also important to them.

It’s just how it is – you learn from your mistakes (George, aged 18)

If you told me to go back and change everything I would say I would. Yeah, from the start if I could I would. But I’ve learnt so much...I wouldn’t want to lose the experience (Iman, aged 20).

**7.3.6 Offending narrative six: Failure**

The tone of the failure narrative was hopeless and dejected, which corresponded with experiencing a deep sense of failure in one or more life domains. Thus, the inadequate self was constructed in stories of not functioning well academically, socially, physically and psychologically. Comprised within such stories were several themes that have been previously outlined in section 7.2 (superordinate themes and their constituent themes), especially those illuminating the experience of school and social exclusion. The inadequate self was immobilised by the experience of disempowerment and low self-efficacy, which was often associated with emotional and institutional detachment. This master narrative followed a pattern of regression that was interconnected with themes of substance use as a coping strategy and repeat drug and alcohol related offending. The rhetorical function of the failure narrative worked to position the protagonist as inexorably fixed in a destructive pattern of self-limiting beliefs, self-doubt and self-sabotage.

Some of the following excerpts from Darren’s (aged 19) account have appeared in section 7.2 to illustrate pertinent themes in the text. They are revisited in this section to exemplify the failure narrative. Within the failure narrative, the inadequate self was constructed in stories of being a social outcast. For Darren, being a social outcast was connected to sharing an alternative social identity with his parents. Comparative structures between himself and his friends and the repetition of the expression “weird” throughout his narrative emphasised his felt sense of difference and the inadequate self.

I was just raised weird – like, my parents were alternative. Like I was raised vegetarian [and] all my mates were eating meat. I don’t know – other things. I’d be off at the markets fucking selling shit with mum...she’d make them craft things – mosaics and, I don’t know, just weird things.

Additionally, Darren spoke critically of attending an alternative primary school. His desire to fit in
with the mainstream was evident in his rejection of the school; and thus, his rejection of the alternative social identity that was imposed upon him by his parents’ lifestyle choices.

I didn’t like the school and I lied to mum about some stuff that the teachers did, so it would get me out of there. ‘Cause I didn’t like it...it was too alternative...it was a Sathya Sai School...it’s like an Indian fucking – Sathya Sai is like some Indian preacher.

Darren’s reference to the rebellion of his peers who similarly rejected an alternative social identity was also a comment on his own rebellion, which worked to justify his progression toward an offending trajectory as the normative response to feeling constrained.

It was a good place to send a kid. But, as I noticed, all the kids that went to that [Sathya Sai] school all rebelled after because they wanted to see what the rest of the world was like. They're being – they’re being raised a certain way and they wanted to just fuck around and rebel yeah.

For Darren, the inadequate self was further constructed in stories of physical health problems that were also connected within his narrative to being a social outcast. Darren described his school life as characterised by trying to fit in and he identified being too self-conscious of problems with his feet as a barrier to playing sport with his peers. Such limiting beliefs placed him outside the social mainstream.

Trying to fit in – like, I’ve always had feet problems. I love sport, but I just couldn’t do it because my feet were fucked up...I’m pigeon-toed, pronated, flat footed...I love sport, but I was always too self-conscious to play ‘cause I ran like a fucking penguin.

In his effort to counteract being positioned as a social outcast in primary school, Darren took up a position of being the class clown; however, this mode of being contributed to his academic failure. The phrase “I always ended up getting my ass in trouble” revealed a quasi-passivity in terms of his agentive positioning when speaking of antisocial acts. Additionally, the expression “sort of scarified education for the social group” is a moment of self-reflection that suggested unease about the priorities of the past self.

I was a bit of a clown, a bit of a dickhead...I was a smart little kid, but I always loved giving the teacher cheek, so I always ended up getting my ass in trouble...My peers laughed...[and] it made me feel good, accepted, fit in, yeah...sort of sacrificed education for the social group.

Academic failure was a pertinent theme within the narrative construction of the inadequate self. Darren spoke of attending a Catholic secondary school in which academic achievement was highly valued within the school culture and sought by his peers. In this new environment Darren described his striving to be in the ‘top classes’ in Year 7; however, he struggled to perform and was eventually ‘dropped down’ in the following year. The excuse “it was just too stressful” worked to
defend his failure and justify the relaxed stance he subsequently took toward his education.

[In] Year 7 I was pretty focused just trying to get my education...just pressure from my parents and just wanting to – like all my friends were in the top classes and I wanted to be up there too, so yeah...It was a struggle. It was good, but I got to the top classes...But then, in Year 8 they dropped me down again...it was just too stressful, so I kicked back, yeah...I wanted to be a cool kid.

Darren’s desire to be a “cool kid” represented the rejection of academic achievement, which no longer felt attainable to him. It also represented his need for social acceptance. Within his narrative, such rejection was expressed in acts of rebellion. Structures such as “you gotta” and “just what you do” were interjected to justify his antisocial behaviour as necessary for gaining acceptance amongst his peers. However, the phrase “dumb shit” is a critical comment on the actions of the past self, which emphasised his sense of (academic) failure.

I just wanted to be accepted. I wanted to be looked up to. I don't know. I wanted people to want to be like me...what I thought was, “you go do dumb shit. You gotta fucking rebel against teachers. You gotta”, I don't know, “get in fights and win ‘em”. I don’t know, just dumb shit...it’s just what you do as a kid trying to be accepted.

Within Darren’s narrative, the inadequate self was constructed in stories of self-doubt. He spoke of being uncertain about the possibilities for his life and what direction to follow in the transition to adulthood. Such uncertainty suggested that he was grappling with the moral stance of his antisocial and criminal acts. In particular, repetition of the phrase “I don’t know what I was doing” was a reflective comment that revealed his struggle to integrate and make sense of the actions of his past self.

I didn’t know what I was doing. I didn't know whether I wanted to go somewhere and be someone. Or just do nothing and be a dropkick. Or be cool. Or – I don’t know what I was doing honestly.

Darren spoke of being expelled from the Catholic school and moving to a public school. This event represented a shift in school culture that within his narrative was causally connected to the onset of his substance use, which perpetuated and exacerbated his experience of academic failure.

I went to a public school from there... that’s when I started smoking weed, taking drugs...my education went downhill in the public school...I started going to school real fucking stoned every day.

Additionally, Darren spoke of his substance use as an excuse that concealed the inadequate self, since he could blame his lack of success on being substance affected/dependent. While such action is suggestive of self-sabotage, attributing his failure to an external cause may be suggestive of Darren justifying his substance use as the protection of self.
When first doing bad I could blame it on being stoned so it was, kind of, it was just my excuse for everything really...I never really succeeded too much at anything so I now had something to blame it on.

Darren told a story of his older brother committing suicide at age 25 (when Darren was aged 10) that was linked to drug induced psychosis. Thus, the ramification of Darren’s involvement in drugs escalating from personal use to trafficking was connected to the highly salient experience of having failed his father. Darren’s self-positioning placed him within this story as the person “accused” of killing his brother before a break in the telling and a shift in his positioning that placed him as being like those whom his father holds accountable for his brother’s death. This positioning had the effect of intensifying Darren’s experience of failing as a son, which was also made apparent in his telling of being excluded from home, and thereby being excluded from the family.

So I started really smoking pretty fucking heavy and, you know, got known as the ‘stoner’ in my town and I started selling weed, and pills, and shit...Dad kicked me out for selling and he accused – he told me it's people like me that killed my brother...He disowned me for a while there, and yeah, that was pretty hard for me...I was fucking shattered...I just hit the drugs hard.

Darren’s narrative followed a pattern of regression in which the inadequate self was constructed in stories of exacerbating problems that were connected to his substance use, as well as mental and physical illness.

Within the last 12 months it's [substance use] fucking driven me to psychosis and paranoia and fucking schizophrenia.

Because of my debilitating stomach, when I dropped out of school, everything was going pretty bad. I was just really lonely. I was pretty fucking depressed. I was taking drugs every fucking day. I went up on the roof and I was gonna jump...I ended up in the psychiatric ward. And I’ve been there three times now.

Such stories paralleled stories of his brother’s experience of drug induced psychosis and suicide. This represented another shift in Darren’s positioning from being like those who killed his brother to being like his brother and ‘at risk’. Thus, these stories functioned to show Darren as a victim, which deflected from his wrongdoing and sense of failure. Darren spoke of generating an interest in drugs after being told stories about his father and brother’s drug use. Hence, these stories further worked to justify Darren’s substance use as an explorative act in seeking to make sense of his father and brother’s experiences of drugs.

My dad told me plenty of stories about all his drug problems and all this stuff. And my half brother had some serious drug problems. He had severe schizophrenia and I’ve always been interested – I’ve always just wanted to know what he was going through. And what do you know? Now I’m going through a similar fucking thing.
The narrative construction of the inadequate self was also emphasised in stories of struggling to recover from one’s state of failure. Darren’s stomach problems were a key theme in his narrative of failure and inability to recover. In his narrative, the protagonist was immobilised and dehumanised by health problems, which were connected to school failure and mental illness. The prominence of his stomach problems within his narrative was suggestive of Darren’s desire to excuse his underachievement and deflect agency for his actions that led to his circumstances. Additionally, self-sabotage was also evident in his story in the form of not following the diet prescribed to improve his health and functioning.

I’ve had stomach problems my whole life and it’s been holding me back from a lot of things... For example, last year I dropped out of school because I was just too sick to go.

I’ve been trying to get out and get my life going again, but I just haven’t been able to. I’ve just been sick as fuck...

Just my stomach, I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t leave the house. I just felt like I wasn’t even human anymore. I felt less than a person... I just had some severe fucking depression for a while there just ‘cause I couldn’t do anything.

But I got here [Melbourne] and started eating junk food as soon as I got off the plane and that just fucked me up.

Darren’s immense sense of failure is especially evident in his critical and hopeless stance toward himself. In the following excerpt, he lists several endeavours that he wanted to do well. His use of the conjunction ‘if’ to introduce each item in the list (i.e., “if I had stayed in the top class”) sets up a conditional clause that is typically followed by a consequence. However, Darren cuts the conditional sentence short of telling what the outcome would have been for him if he were to achieve the items in his list. In effect, the inadequate self is located in the foreground and the inference of what is not told in his story is that he remained uncertain of the possibilities for his life and of his direction.

I felt disappointed in myself... If I’d succeeded, if I’d done well in sport, if I had stayed in the top class, if I could have skated, if I could have — if I could have done things well. I never really did anything well... I just felt like a failure, a fuck off, yeah.

7.3.7 Non-offending narrative one: Control

A central aspect of the control narrative was a conservative and cautious stance, underpinned by a rigid moral position that guided social action. The controlled self was constructed in stories of following societal expectations of acceptable behaviour. Thus, the devaluation of antisocial behaviour and persons was a central theme of this master narrative that corresponded with the expression of an individuated sense of self. The control narrative comprised of stories in which strong school attachment, actively resisting antisocial and offending behaviour and delaying
the transition to adulthood were central themes. This master narrative followed a pattern of progression and the overall tone was optimistic. The rhetorical function of the control narrative worked to position the protagonist as sensible and content with their youthful status.

For the most part, the control narrative reflected distance from risk and showed relative stability within the life course. However, Dale’s (aged 18) narrative diverged from this pattern in his characterisation of a protagonist surrounded by risk in a volatile environment. For this reason his account was selected to exemplify the control narrative, as it illuminates the potency of the narrative construction of self in shaping one’s life direction toward or away from offending in the context of risk. For Dale, the controlled self was constructed in stories of his mother’s fragility, instability and violent interpersonal style and relationships that represented an inadequate social milieu. Such stories provided the backdrop that presented Dale as responsible and in control through his self-positioning, which placed him as a parentified child.

This new boyfriend seems okay for a couple of days and then it becomes apparent he is not such a good guy...they were all sorts of very physical towards one another. There were many mornings when I would wake up, clean the glass off the floor, pick all the shit up – getting ready for school. Go in give mum a hug and tell her it’s going to be okay.

I guess I had to grow up. I had to look after my sisters for a long time. I was kind of their mum and dad for quite some time and I took care of them...I brought up two girls – I’m done...Yeah, I was definitely a parent for some time there.

Apparent in Dale’s stories was his effort to make sense of his anger, which represented a clash of narratives between the uncontrolled self and the controlled self. In resolving this incongruence, the controlled self was constructed in stories of developing emotional control over his anger and taking responsibility for his aggressive and violent actions. In the following excerpt, Dale’s self-positioning placed him as the target of persistent bullying at school and he spoke of reacting to such bullying with violence. Structures such as “I was very agitated quite easily” and “very quick [to] temper” showed agentive claim for his violent reaction. Distancing structures (i.e., “I sort of lost my cool”) and missing parts (i.e., “I would rather not go into it”) in Dale’s telling of the violence were suggestive of avoidance due to shame, as indicated by the explanatory remark “it makes me feel terrible”. A firm moral stance and strong agentive claim was revealed through the telling of actions that attempted to redeem the self from wrongdoing. These were: (a) his emergent awareness of his reactivity that brought about greater control over his violent behaviour, “I sort of clicked to what I was doing [and] stopped”; (b) being accountable for his actions, “took him up to the [principal’s] office and explained the situation”; and (c) his show of remorse “I apologised to him profusely”.

I was constantly in fights...I was very agitated quite easily. Very quick [to] temper...every day they would taunt me for some sort of reaction and...attack me...I sort of lost my cool – I would rather not go into it – it makes me feel terrible. I sort of clicked to what I was doing – stopped and took him up to the [principal’s] office and explained the situation. I apologised to him profusely.

Additionally, Dale’s firm moral position, overtly expressed in his claim of being “a decent human being”, and a strong agentic position was evident in stories of resisting and avoiding the risk within which he was encased. His critical stance toward blaming one’s childhood or using it as an excuse for being irresponsible, reckless and criminal was a theme within his narrative. This theme functioned to position the protagonist in Dale’s narrative as the opposite of such. Emphatic effect was also created by his ironic tone, for example in the form of hyperbole in the statement “I don’t go around trying to get millions of young girls pregnant”.

I’m not going to sit there and go, ”I am going to do some stupid shit and blame it on my childhood”...[I] continue to be what I believe is a decent human being...I don’t drink and blame it on mum because she was such a terrible mother. I don’t go around trying to get millions of young girls pregnant. Not breaking laws and stuff...I’m not using it as an excuse for anything.

The controlled self was further accentuated in his expressed sensitivity to risk discourse and the construction of the self in opposition to the hegemonic articulation of the risk process. Within such stories, the devaluation of antisocial and offending others was also apparent.

It almost seems like I’m put into a poor stereotype category because of my childhood. These are the people, “you can’t blame me. I am a shit head because I was raised poorly”. Basic things like what's right and wrong should be hard wired into your brain. It should be things everyone knows.

The construction of the controlled self was additionally formed in stories in which Dale’s self-positioning placed him as separate from antisocial and criminal others. In the following exemplary excerpts, Dale spoke of his sense of disconnection from his peers. “I was never really one for hanging out there” was a plain expression of such distinction of self in which his physical separation was symbolic of his felt experience of being different from other young people in his town. Just like its residents, the essence of place was imbued with risk and a sense of hopelessness that was salient within his narrative. His mocking tone in comments that allude to the passivising remarks of others intensified his agentic stance of having power to exert control over, and give direction to, his life.

All the kids around town are going there, hanging out drinking, and just being dickheads. And I was never really one for hanging out there. Some of the people were pretty okay to talk to, but I have had people from those groups say to me that they blame their childhood. I’m like, “that’s a little idiotic. How about you stop drinking, being a tool, and maybe concentrate on school, don’t get kicked out of this one. How about you blame your education on your good job”.
In [X] I didn't really connect with anyone there. I mean it's the whole fact that everyone there is just fine to sit there and go alright, "I'm sixteen, I'm going to drop out of school and smoke pot for a living". So I didn't connect with anyone.

A strong attachment to school was a theme within the control narrative. Often this was expressed in terms of valuing cultural capital, and striving for academic achievement. John (aged 16) spoke of the importance of his school environment fostering academic achievement because it motivated him to perform at a higher standard in his endeavour to enter the field of medicine.

A lot of them [peers] have an intense drive to do well, so then there's obvious clashing because everyone wants to do well – the best...if someone does really well...it makes you want to do even better, so you work even harder...I want to do medicine, so that takes a lot of study.

Dale also spoke agreeably about his later secondary school experience and expressed a strong attachment to school; however, for a different reason to John and those alike. While Dale indicated that he performed reasonably well, he was not overly focused on academic achievement. Within his narrative, he justified his minimal effort toward his education by framing school as a place of respite from the stress of his home life. Thus, for Dale, school was a place dedicated to relaxation and enjoyment, and not for hard work.

I didn't have to worry about mum on my back. I didn't have to worry about my sisters [and] their father. I didn't have to worry about making sure everything was spotless, everything was fine, so mum wouldn't fly off the handle...It was a place that was stress free for me. I could go there, I could relax and have fun. And, you know, every now and again I did my work...I probably could've still had fun and done school at the same time if I didn't think of school as my weekend house – my house at the beach, sort of deal.

Within the control narrative, delaying the transition to adulthood and associated responsibilities was a key theme distinct from the theme of accelerating the transition to adulthood that was evident within the offending narratives. For Dale, moving out of the family home was a turning point that was connected to a decrease in responsibility and his desire to progress toward adulthood at a slower pace. In particular, Dale spoke of reveling in stability and a relaxed environment, which was conducive to his rejuvenation and restored sense of youth.

It's so much nicer living away from them [family]. It's terrible to say, but I love it. It is so much easier...This is not going to sound too ambitious, but I kind of hope things just cruise for now. Maybe even for like the next five years, I hope....I would be happy if I was 25 without some sort of huge career pathway planned out, just enjoying myself with, you know, my friends...I, sort of, just want to really enjoy the level of responsibility I have now. It's nice.

Within the control narrative, delaying the transition to adulthood was also expressed in terms of prioritising education and one’s career aspirations, which meant entering full time employment later and being dependent on practical support from family for an extended period of time. By way of comparison with a peer on an accelerated path to adulthood, Reggie (aged 20)
expressed his desire to defer adult responsibilities and relish the benefits of being young.

She was like in a hurry to grow up fast I think. Whereas I’m really not... I think she moved out of home pretty early and she – yeah, she just – she was just one of those people that wanted to get out of home and be an adult as soon as possible.

Once you start getting older you have to worry about more and more things that you wouldn’t have to have worried about at this age. So, I don’t want to have to worry about bills and starting a family and all that stuff. I don’t want to have to deal with that.

It doesn’t attract me like working really hard just to pay the bills and pay the rent when I could just be living at home and having my parents provide all my food for me and everything like that.

Entering romantic relationships and engaging in sexual activity at a later age than their peers was a related theme. Reggie expressed that romantic relationships were not a priority for him, as he was focused on his education. He also spoke of feeling uncomfortable in social interactions with females and was content experiencing such relationships vicariously through the stories of others.

I was never good with girls. Like, I don’t know, I’d always get really awkward... I just didn’t want to be, like, embarrassed, or rejected, or anything like that. And I was kind of like happy to live through other people – like in their stories and I’d always be, like, yeah like, “tell me about that”. And I don’t know, it just seemed, like, easier to do that than like actually go out and do it.

Additionally, the controlled self was also constructed in stories that revealed a more introverted interpersonal style. Reggie spoke of enjoying solitude and being able to amuse himself.

Like I really appreciate my time alone now and like I don’t go out that much and I just really... I do like being alone... I’ve never been like a bored person. I always find things to entertain myself.

In the narrative construction of the controlled self, Duane (aged 20) also described an introverted interpersonal style that reflected being anxious and avoidant in social interactions. Within such stories, the protagonist was positioned outside the social mainstream. In particular, his rigid moral stance, that took the form of acting within the narrow confines of (what he deemed) socially acceptable behaviour, set him apart from his peers.

I’m actually quite a shy person and I don’t actually like to be like that, but – and I – you know, I’m not one to break the rules or do things wrong. Whereas, you know, they’re more, you know – boisterous people.

I mean everyone goes to parties... which is not my kind of thing... I don’t drink alcohol for one thing... I don’t like noise... I can’t talk – that’s my shyness... I’m not a big participant in conversations.

Within the control narrative, the active resistance and avoidance of antisocial and offending behaviour was not only connected to a rigid moral stance, but also to expressions of fear and caution. For Grant (aged 23), the controlled self was constructed in stories of being the “Voice of
Reason” within his social group, which he described as “menaces to the neighbourhood” at times. An ironic tone is detected in this comment in the form of overstatement, which is moderated in the following remark “probably not that bad”. Within Grant’s narrative, the protagonist was positioned as sensible and cautious in relation to the reckless behaviour of his friends. This was expressed in his emphasis on the dangers of playing with fire, rather than the thrill of rule breaking. Additionally, his moral stance was revealed in comments emphasising reservation toward, and devaluation of, the antisocial act, such as “I never really wanted to”, “I was kind of reluctantly involved”, and “I just thought it was stupid”.

[We] used to spend lots of time in parks, for some reason, at night time. You know, being menaces to the neighbourhood – probably not that bad...and I remember I never really wanted to...I was kind of reluctantly involved. I got the nickname ‘Voice of Reason’...I just thought it was stupid...it might be something exciting – something outside of the rules...I just thought it was dangerous...I just didn’t find it very exciting I guess in the same way.

**7.3.8 Non-offending narrative two: Holding on**

The holding on narrative was comparable in certain respects to the pressure narrative. This master narrative followed the heroic plotline of battling to defy the odds. However, in contrast to the pressure narrative, the tenacious self was constructed in stories of perseverance and triumph over adversity, rather than derailment and defeat. The rhetorical function of this master narrative worked to position the protagonist as on the verge of derailment, yet continuing to show resolve for achievement and success. Accordingly, the tone of the holding on narrative was determination and a central theme was proving oneself. In particular, the young men spoke of constructing the self in defiance of ‘bad’ others that held prominent positions in their life.

Loss was a salient theme within Fraser’s (aged 20) narrative. Within stories of parental separation, Fraser grappled with mixed feelings of deprivation caused by the absence of his father, and feelings of relief associated with such absence and the avoidance of experiencing his father’s abusive behaviour.

Having just mum was kind of better than being stuck with an alcoholic or gambler for the rest of my life. So it’s kind of, I don’t know, to some extent I’m happy that they got divorced, but at the same time I’m not. I don’t know. It doesn’t make sense.

He was just rocking up home late, just bashing her, and being aggressive towards her...And it’s just from stories I heard about him...the stories you hear about him. It just makes me kind of angry you know?

I felt that I’m missing my father figure in life. But, then just thinking about what he did and what he was like, I didn’t miss it at the same time.
Fraser spoke of being in close proximity to risk and held the belief that “trouble” was virtually unavoidable. Within his narrative, this functioned to justify violence as an inescapable occurrence in which he was compelled to defend himself and others. This was suggestive of a less agentive claim for his violent acts.

You can get into trouble any day – there is no question about that. Like I can go to my car and accidentally bump into someone and it can be trouble. So its anywhere these days – anywhere you go – you can, you know, you can get into trouble easily.

Fraser recounted several stories of acting violently in various social settings such as school, nightclubs and with friends. Within such stories, Fraser took up a strong moral position and his use of justifications positioned him in the violence as protecting others. In Fraser’s story of a school fight, the protagonist was positioned as a “troublemaker” by his teachers and a hero by his peers. The phrase “kind of just made me” showed a quasi-passivity for the violent act and “I got to help him” was a necessitating device that framed his violence as reasonable for the protection of his friend. Fraser maintained distance from his use of violence by speaking of it in indirect terms of “help” and “saving” his friend’s life. Additionally, his selective focus on such elements emphasised the heroic plotline of his narrative and were suggestive of omissions in the story that concealed the associated harms of his violent behaviour.

There was a big punch on and I was there. And the guy that I was really close with got stabbed and that kind of just made me, “nup, I got to help him”...He came to me and went, “look, thank you for saving my life”.

Because of that particular incident I always got dragged into trouble because then teachers would be like, “yeah, yeah, yeah, two years ago he did this, did that, what makes you think he wouldn’t do it again?” So anything that happened would come back to me.

Similarly, within the exemplary excerpts below, the phrase “no one wants to see their mates getting bashed” was interjected before the agentive act to naturalise his use of violence through justification and generalisation. Within such stories, his girlfriend was a key moderating influence that lessened the frequency and intensity of Fraser’s violent behaviour. This was crucial in his narrative of averting potential derailment (i.e., going “down the wrong path”).

While I was with my ex[girlfriend] there was the years where a lot of times just because she’s there I didn’t want to do something...no one wants to see their mates getting bashed, so you jump in, you start fighting. But, then having your missus dragging you off and saying, “no that’s it. That’s enough. No don’t do it” this and that, kind of helped a lot.

I got into punch-ons a lot of times, but it was never to the point where I won't care about the consequence. Just because she [girlfriend] was there, so I could say she was one of the main reasons why I didn't go down the wrong path.
Fraser spoke of being socially positioned as an incompetent and bad student, as indicated in stories of being labelled, assumed guilty of wrongdoing and suspended from school (see section 7.2.1.1, Institutional competence). Fraser’s defiance of such social positioning was central to the narrative construction of the tenacious self. Accordingly, a theme within these stories was proving others wrong and showing that he was capable of achieving success.

Just prove them wrong...kind of swerving my way through punishments and just proving them wrong.

Prove people wrong for example after all that happened my coordinator comes in and says, “you won’t stay at the school past one year and you’ll be a drop kick”, this that. Then year 12 graduation he’s doing this massive speech saying how he was wrong in front of everyone.

Proving him [coordinator] wrong. I can get into my university degrees and proving other people that I can do stuff just because they say I can’t.

For Fraser, the tenacious self was further constructed in stories of challenging such social positioning in his striving to shape the self along opposing lines to stories of his father. In the following excerpt, Fraser sets himself apart from half of the antisocial group by expressing that he no longer associated with them. Criticism in the form of devaluation is also a rhetorical feature that created distance between the tenacious self and others in the group, who he referred to as “mummy and daddy’s boys”, “drop kicks” and “junkies always in trouble”.

I didn’t want to be like my father. That’s pretty much it. Because I knew that when I started going with the troublemaker group, type of thing, I knew I wasn’t going to end up good. And half of that group I don’t talk to anymore. Half of them is mummy and daddy’s boys. They’re the drop kicks, you know, on the streets, junkies always in trouble, and stuff like that.

Within Fraser’s narrative, the death of his mother from terminal illness was a significant event that brought about a change in life direction. He spoke of such loss prompting him to discontinue his tertiary education; and additionally, placing him on an accelerated path to adulthood. The tenacious self was constructed in stories of taking on adult responsibilities of entering full time employment, living independently and purchasing a home. Emphatic effect was given to his expression of achievement by reference to such being atypical for his age and especially in the area in which he lived.

It just means that I have to be my own man now...I have to take care of myself now...you know, standing on my own two feet without any support there.

Like, I’ve got a job, I got myself a house a month ago, I got the mortgage, I’ve got everything sorted. The fact that at 20 years of age, having your own house is not something that you see around the [X] suburbs – especially in the [X] suburbs – so me being able to do that, I feel a sense of accomplishment.
Additionally, the narrative construction of the tenacious self in stories of being a responsible adult facilitated the movement away from risk, particularly substance use within his social group and scene. For Fraser, being independent and reaching adult status meant that the consequences of offending were not worth the risk of losing all that he had accomplished.

Someone like me, I can’t afford to get in trouble now...I can go out and buy whatever pills, have fun in my life, but I’ve got to think about my work. I’ve got to drive to work – for example if I lose my licence that’s it...I’ll probably lose my job and there goes the mortgage, there goes the house, and all that stuff...all that would be ruined. I’d be back at zero.

7.3.9 Non-offending narrative three: Reversal

The reversal narrative followed a pattern of regression and later progression that reflected one’s recovery from traversing onto a maladaptive path. The tone of the reversal narrative was optimistic and the redeemed self was constructed in stories of early recognition that one was moving in the ‘wrong’ direction, which brought about adaptive change. The rhetorical function of this master narrative worked to position the protagonist’s movement toward offending as a brief and misguided detour in the life course. The narrative construction of the redeemed self-contained themes of seeking freedom and autonomy, strong school attachment and investing in cultural capital. While a defining feature of the reversal narrative was the movement away from antisocial and offending behaviour, these young men tended to bridge a social space that existed between the antisocial group and more prosocial peers.

Young men within this narrative category mostly spoke of being truant from school, bullying others, recreational substance use and defiance of authority figures (i.e., teachers and parents). Of those who expressed a redeemed self that was embodied within the reversal narrative, Emmerson (aged 18) was the only young man to speak of criminal justice system involvement. Comparatively, he had progressed the furthest along an offending trajectory and spoke of receiving a Good Behaviour Bond for crimes involving motor vehicle theft.

Emmerson described his early years as stable and he spoke of enjoying feeling carefree in primary school.

I enjoyed it [primary school]. It was more simple...it was just chilled - nothing to really worry about. The only thing you had to worry about was, like, what sport you were playing at lunchtime and all that

Conversely, Emmerson found commencing secondary school a destabilising transition, which he linked to the pressures of a different social environment in combination with his socially reserved nature. Emmerson spoke of a culture of racism and deferred to his older cousins in establishing a sense of place and belonging. Generalisations such as “all” the Lebanese people in the area were “all
trouble” interjected before the passivating phrase “they’d just bring me into trouble” showed deflected agency for following an offending trajectory. Incompletion of the necessitating phrase “I just had to, like, I don’t know” suggested possible awareness that agency was being deflected.

Where I grew up they’re all, like, Lebanese people and, like, I know they’re all trouble in many ways. I just had to, like, I don’t know – so I hang around with them and they’d just bring me into trouble.

Additionally, in Emmerson’s narrative of moving toward offending, the protagonist was positioned as a naïve outsider. This, in conjunction with the necessitating phrase “you just have to grow into it” had the rhetorical effect of excusing his actions as unintentional; and thus, worked to minimise his responsibility for his involvement with an antisocial group.

All hotheads. They all like to fight. A bit of racism going on too...It was new to me. Like, I’ve never experienced this before ever – like, “what is this?” And then you just have to grow into it. And then you realise that’s what it’s like.

Similarly, Emmerson’s self-positioning as a “shy kid” placed him as timid and suggestible to the influence of his antisocial cousin who “got me into all of it”, which was an unagentive claim. The phrase “pretty much” interjected before this, along with the concluding remark “that’s how it kind of happened” revealed a lack of conviction that further suggested awareness that agency was being deflected.

I was hanging around with the wrong people...my cousin was one of the ringleaders...like my first cousin and he pretty much got me into all of it...I’m a bit of a shy kid. Yeah, I didn’t really hang around much. I didn’t want to start conversations with people, so he was like, “oh come hang out with us. Come after school with us” and yeah, that’s how it kind of happened.

Emmerson expressed a moral stance in the phrase “I knew it was wrong. I knew it”. The rhetorical questions following this statement worked to justify his wrongdoing on the basis of social connection and fidelity to family.

I knew it was wrong. I knew it. But what else am I meant to do? Be by myself and family’s family, yeah?

However, a shift in agentive positioning was evident in the following excerpt in which strong agentive claim for the criminal act was shown in Emmerson’s description of the time, energy and commitment he directed toward perfecting his skills and tools for the purpose of stealing cars.

They taught me how to jack like simple cars yeah?...and my dad had a Mercedes Benz and I practised jacking on that for like two, three months and I finally got it and I realised the concept of it – how to do it...I made my own tools, like special tools and stuff – I made it myself.

Emmerson spoke of the exclusivity and prominence associated with antisocial group membership (see section 7.2.4.3, The club). Additionally, he described the accolade he received from
his peers for his ability to steal cars, as well as the excitement and economic gain as attracting him to move toward offending. In particular, Emmerson expressed pride in having mastered the requisite skills for the criminal task, which he spoke of as giving him special status within the group. This was indicated in the comment “no one else could do it but me” and the necessitating phrase “I’d have to steal it because I was pretty good at it”. Such phrases also showed agentive claim for the act of stealing cars.

I became good at bad things. Like, I could steal like any car, like a brand new Mercedes, like, I'd probably be able to steal it and no one else could do it but me.

Once a week we probably just go steal a car. I'd have to steal it because I was pretty good at it. And we'd take it to my mate’s garage, strip it, sell parts, and just get money.

It was good because I was making money out of it. A lot of money. And it was just a good thrill, like, it felt good.

Conversely, the redeemed self was constructed in stories of being a quiet achiever, in which Emmerson’s effort for academic attainment went unnoticed and was not associated with the same praise or special status that he gained from offending. Emphatic effect was created through repetition of the phrase “no one”, which revealed his sense of isolation in pursuing success.

No one notices. No one really notices. No one says, “oh you’re doing really good” at this or that. It's just for your own benefit, if that makes sense...they don't notice that, like, I really try. I want to get the best...I work my arse off for a B or a B plus and that doesn't really get recognised unless you get A...my parents yeah – but, I don't know, they don’t really notice.

[Crime] was something different. I got praised a lot.

Hence, a theme within Emmerson’s narrative construction of the redeemed self was achievement for one’s own sake as incentive for success.

I've realised that it's all about your own self. Like, don't worry about what others praise you for. It's just about your own accomplishments...you want to do things for yourself. I realised that, like, when you achieve something you do it for yourself, not to impress others, or the thrill of it, or all that kind of stuff.

For Emmerson, getting caught by police was a turning point that moved him away from offending. Within the narrative construction of the redeemed self, spiritual meaning was attributed to being apprehended, which prompted Emmerson to rectify his behaviour.

I reckon it was just the Gods were telling me to sort out my life.

Additionally, success was a theme within his narrative, which he viewed as incompatible with a criminal record. Thus, the redeemed self was further constructed in stories of having optimism for the future and striving to achieve success in adulthood, which was linked to investing in cultural capital.
I want to be successful. I want to be successful that's all I want to be...have my first house by 25...get a good-paying job. Probably start a family.

I've got a bright future ahead of me and I don't want to ruin that...I want to be successful and having a record can set me back a lot...I couldn't probably get an office job like I wanted and it'd be hard for me to get jobs because people do a police check on me. No one wants to hire a criminal.

If you want to be successful, you've got to sacrifice sleep to study. You've got to be dedicated.

The theme of stagnation in stories of working at a supermarket was key to Emmerson's striving for success and investment in cultural capital. Success not only represented achievement, but also avoidance of the depression and monotony he associated with living an unfulfilled existence.

I work at...[a supermarket] now and I see the people there and it's just like depressing. Everyone's like depressed and everyone hates their life. I don't want to be there forever.

My mate he's been there [supermarket] – he's like 55 – he's been there for 34 years. He told me, like, “just don't stay here. You're going to hate yourself”...Yeah everyone that works there full-time hates life. It's just shit. It's not good.

Emmerson spoke of his family relocating interstate at the critical time he was moving away from offending. While geographic distance facilitated Emmerson's disconnection from the antisocial group, the redeemed self was constructed in stories of maintaining one's distance from criminal others and yet being indirectly associated.

I've got mates that are mates with, like, people – like, I just keep my distance because I could be making so much money right now, so easily. But, I choose to go to work instead and earn my money.

Because my mates now, like, we're all, like, a massive group. But, the ones I stick close to, they're not truly like the trouble makers. The other ones, like, they sell drugs and stuff like that, and they're a bit of trouble. And I just know to keep my distance from them.

7.4 Summary

This chapter was divided into three parts. In the first part, a brief overview was given of two key theoretical frameworks, specifically positioning theory and a theory of social practice that provided useful constructs for making sense of the young men's narrative accounts. In the second part, the five identified superordinate themes and their associated constituent themes were presented and delineated the processes of continuity and/or change in (non-)offending behaviour. In the third part, the predominant stories in the text were organised into master narratives, which illuminated the self-stories that promoted movement toward and/or away from offending. A discussion of the findings, presented in the last chapter of this thesis, considers the implications for theory, policy and practice, additionally offering some methodological commentary and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 8: Discussion

This qualitative research was informed by a theoretical amalgam that provided the basis for exploring young men’s narrative accounts of significant events and transitions in the life course, the subjective meaning attached to such experiences, and the construction of the narrative self in stories of continuity and change in (non-)offending behaviour. Guided by the research aim, pertinent literature and theoretical frameworks, the resultant thematic and narrative findings discussed in this chapter are synthesised into a proposed positioning theory of crime. Additionally, implications of the research findings and theory generated are discussed, along with methodological observations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

8.1 Re-conceptualising the risk process for offending

In seeking the life stories of young men, this research set out to lessen the gap in the knowledge required for intervening in offending pathways and addressing the needs of young men ‘at risk’. The research sought to integrate knowledge of crime with age-graded transitions in the life course in order to understand and approach the complexity of offending behaviour as a process of change over time, specifically during the transition to adulthood. By exploring participant narrative accounts, insight was gained into the construction and re-construction of the (non-)offending self in stories that revealed how the young men experienced, interpreted and made sense of their personal context of risk. Importantly, such stories illuminated the processes by which risk was negotiated and influenced the movement toward and/or away from offending behaviour.

The term ‘at risk’ is familiar within literature and contexts that pertain to working with young people (i.e., education, psychology, social work, criminal justice). However, the term carries various meaning that is context dependent. This is noted by McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter (2013) who conceptualise risk as a continuum ranging from minimal risk at the lower end and solidly at risk at the upper end. They argue that no young person is invulnerable to risk “because of the complex ecology of stressors that young people face” (p. 8). Accordingly, they offer the following definition: “At risk denotes a set of presumed cause-effect dynamics that place an individual child or adolescent in danger of future negative outcomes.” (p. 8). The findings of this research support such a broad understanding of risk that encompasses all young people. Examination of the narrative accounts of a diverse spectrum of young men suggested that exposure to risk is an inherent feature of social systems and structures, especially during emerging adulthood, that is likely exacerbated by institutional transitions.

Few young men in this research described their proximity to risk as distant. The narratives of these young men were characterised by subjective stability in the life course. However, their life
stories were not devoid of experiences commonly regarded as disruptive or ‘risk factors’. Among an array of negative experiences, they spoke of parental separation, strained family relationships, abuse, family criminality, death of a loved one, antisocial peers, and social exclusion. However, such experiences did not divert the narrative plotline from its overall progressive track. Additionally, these young men did not attribute their positive trajectory to chance or good fortune or to what those in the social sciences would typically refer to as the predominance of ‘protective factors’. Rather, emphasised within their narrative accounts was vigilance in negotiating the risks in their environment. They pursued a successful life project by avoiding and bounding off risk, at times with the assistance of others such as caregivers. Maintaining distance from risk required constructive effort and was an active and agentic process.

The majority of young men spoke of being in close proximity to risk. While narrated lives were individually unique, generally the structural conditions described by those who experienced risk as close were not viewed as fundamentally exceptional from those who experienced risk as distant. Quantitative measurement of such was outside the scope of this research; however, this presents as a possible focus for future enquiry. The qualitative difference emphasises the potency of the narrative-phenomenological experience of risk in the construction of divergent life pathways. Analysis of the narrative accounts showed that social-environmental risk was a ‘constant’ element in life accounts. Thus, divergent pathways were not so much the product of variability in an individual’s exposure to risky environments, as is an assumption of an artefact approach to risk. Rather, subjective-agency factors were seen to determine one’s movement toward or away from risk and in turn one’s sense of proximity to risk as either close or distant. The findings support Kemshall and colleagues (2007) argument that risk factors are not purely additive in the life course and emphasise a moderate constructionism perspective that conceptualises life pathways as the outcome of negotiation and continuous interaction between agency and structure.

Both agentic and passive positions were claimed in stories within which narrators spoke of a protagonist moving toward risk by their own volition and/or being pushed toward risk by outside forces. In either case, often the impetus was the same: to enhance one’s social connection, to raise one’s social status, to distort one’s experience of the (social) world and/or to seek sensation in the thrill of play. Being drawn into the risk process was connected in stories to cumulative structural insecurity and disadvantage in the life course, and was reflected in the construction of a regressive narrative.

Some young men described being surrounded by risk. They spoke of few opportunities for refuge and respite especially when risk was part of their family life. Escaping the risk process was increasingly difficult when risk was also experienced in other areas, such as the school environment
and neighbourhood. Most of these young men had come to resign themselves to a fatalistic life that offered little in the way of self-determination. Hence, they tended to experience the progression toward an offending trajectory as an inevitable consequence of their surroundings. For young men surrounded by risk, the dominance of risk discourse (that marked them as a candidate for failure) more often infiltrated personal narratives and shaped the construction of a ‘bad’ or ‘criminal’ self. Constructing a version of self along opposing lines required great persistence and agency beyond what many of these young men were able to sustain in the context of significant structural challenges.

8.2 A positioning theory of crime

In selectively sequencing significant events, the young men told stories of how their life pathway unfolded in a direction toward and/or away from offending. Narrators positioned themselves within their stories and recounted social exchanges in which they spoke of negotiating positions assigned to them in dialogue, by institutional roles and through socio-cultural relationships. From the analysis, two key social positions were identified as being critical to divergence in trajectories during the transition to adulthood; these were: (a) ‘institutional competence’ (e.g., educational and vocational competence) and (b) ‘social insider’ (i.e., community acceptance and inclusion). The two social positions form the basis for a proposed positioning theory of crime in which the erosion of these positions – that is, being assigned to the subordinate category: institutional incompetence and/or social outsider – is viewed to conduce to offending behaviour. More specifically, within narrative accounts the erosion of the critical social positions was connected to being funnelled down and out of the educational system via a process of rejection, and toward formal systems of social control that narrowed opportunities for change (Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1992; 1997). Additionally, social exclusion promoted an offending trajectory, as antisocial behaviour was a functional and symbolic effort of empowerment in the context of marginalisation and subjugation. The erosion of the critical social positions generated structural challenges and inhibited the young men from fulfilling intellectual, psychological and social developmental needs. The analysis across narrative accounts of causal connections pointed to a collection of factors that threatened to erode the critical social positions, as well as factors that moderated such erosion. Moderating factors mediated the progression of an offending trajectory and promoted positive adaptive outcomes.

A positioning theory of crime conceptualises life pathways as a negotiated process, involving continuous interaction between agency and structure. It accounts for crime as a process of change over time by integrating transitions in offending behaviour with life course transitions. More specifically, the transition to adulthood is regarded as a crucial developmental period that affords
unique risks and opportunities as young people negotiate the critical social positions and consolidate the future direction of their adult lives. It is argued that especially during the transition to adulthood, structural insecurity as an outcome of eroded social positioning places young people on – or directs them toward – an offending trajectory that requires strong agency to re-direct along conventional lines of (emerging) adult life. Therefore, from this perspective “we are products of social and psychological forces, but we are also causal agents in the construction of our environment and ourselves” (France & Homel, 2006, p. 301). See Figure 2 for a schematic representation of the proposed positioning theory of crime.

It is theorised here that escaping the risk process is contingent upon successfully negotiating distinct, although interrelated, critical social positions of institutional competence and social insider. While the young men in this research spoke of these social positions being assigned to others in their peer network, very few told stories in which they were assigned to both positions. Within their stories, being simultaneously assigned to these social positions was a difficult feat because such positioning was only made available to an elite minority within the social order, those being persons deemed to possess socially desirable attributes such as talents (e.g., academic, sporting, musical), material wealth, physical attractiveness and charisma. This could be conceived as relational power derived from capital accumulation.

The young men who spoke of resisting antisocial and offending behaviour most often told stories within which they were socially positioned as institutionally competent, yet were assigned to the subordinate position of social outsider amongst their peers. Within their narratives, it followed that being assigned to the social position of competent and good student also corresponded with taking up and being assigned to the position of competent worker. The young men regarded this positioning as a constituent part of constructing a successful life project. Negotiating a social position of competent worker from the subordinate position of incompetent and bad student was a more challenging task. However, this positioning was possible only for some and enabled these young men to circumvent the risk process. Although much less common in stories, the reverse social positioning, whereby one belongs to the category of incompetent and bad student whilst a social insider, was also connected to circumventing the risk process. Accordingly, the appeal of negotiating a social insider position through antisocial group membership was negated by already being assigned to the social insider position through (pro-social) desirable attributes, for example sporting ability.
Figure 2. A Schematic Representation of a Positioning Theory of Crime. Escaping the risk process and constructing a successful life project is contingent upon successfully negotiating the critical social positions. Erosion factors threaten the critical social positions, while moderating factors are viewed to secure the critical social positions and/or counterbalance the negative impacts of eroded social positioning on one’s definition of self and life direction.
8.2.1 Moderating factors

The narratives of young men who to the greatest extent avoided risk and resisted an offending trajectory contained certain factors that were less discernible in the narratives of those who were susceptible to the risk process. These factors attenuated the risk process by reinforcing the critical social positions and/or counterbalancing the negative impact on one’s definition of self and life direction when these positions were eroded. Although the moderating factors are considered distinct, they involved mutually influential (i.e., bidirectional and reciprocal) relations in accounts and are namely: agency, cultural capital, personal competence, individuated self and seeking–accepting support. These factors were unique to non-offending narratives; however, they emerged in stories of desistance from crime. As similarly found by C. Murray (2011), although those in a process of desistance from crime shared a history with persistent offending persons, their current experience more closely resembled those who resisted offending altogether. At the end of this section, the moderating factors are discussed with reference to the master non-offending narratives, which reflect the phenomenological experience of moving away from offending.

Agency

Resistance to the risk process in circumstances where social-environmental risk was expansive and enduring demanded greater agency and self-determination. In particular, Dale’s (aged 18) narrative highlighted the power of individual agency in overcoming structural constraints. While Dale narrated a protagonist that was surrounded by a risky social environment, he constructed distance by separating the self from risky places, differentiating the self from risky others and establishing a narrative identity in opposition to pathologising risk discourse. Often the construction of distance from risk conduced to the critical social position of institutional competence. This was most apparent in the school setting where the young men’s stories reflected being assigned to the social position of competent and good student. However, prolonged resistance to risk required significant effort and persistence that for some was not sustainable. As Philip (aged 18) commented “you can only hold off for so long you know. You can only say no for so long”. Escaping the risk process altogether or after ensnarement required strong agency to forge one’s life direction away from crime.

Cultural capital

Investment in cultural capital was a predominant theme in non-offending narratives that also conduced to the critical social position of institutional competence. Social cognitive theory, formally social learning theory (Bandura, 2006), elucidates the young men’s stories of coming to value cultural capital. Narrators connected investment in cultural capital to the construction of a
successful life project by observing and reproducing upward social mobility as a positive outcome. Within stories, parents/caregivers were often spoken of as key figures who modelled the consequences of investment in cultural capital. The young men’s observation of upward social mobility as a reward of accumulation and stagnation or downward social mobility as a negative consequence of insufficient accumulation was described as influential in the reproduction of personal investment in and accumulation of cultural capital.

Some young men described the processes by which investment in cultural capital was reinforced within the family system by impressing upon them certain attitudes and knowledge needed for success in life. In the absence of reinforcement within the family system, others spoke of consciously acquiring such properties through observing external models. While various aspects of cultural capital were valued (i.e., style of speech and outward appearance), the potential to convert knowledge and academic credentials into economic capital was most emphasised in stories as important for constructing a successful life project. Such stories further emphasised the young men’s agency and self-determination in directing attention, time and energy into actualising their individual life project. Investment in cultural capital generated strong attachment to school and resulted in the young men taking up and being assigned to the competent and good student position. This brought about active avoidance of, and resistance to following an offending trajectory, since the young men desired to maintain their social positioning and prospects for upward social mobility. Although expressed differently, these findings parallel Bonino and colleagues (2005) who explain that:

Numerous studies have revealed the importance of academic achievement as a protective factor for all risk factors. Being successful in school reinforces adolescents’ sense of identity and allows them to attain a positive image in the eyes of their peers and adults. For this reason, those who are unfulfilled in the school context seek other forms of fulfillment and other ways to put themselves on display, which can take the form of transgression (p. 165).

Prioritising economic capital over cultural capital was a theme within offending narratives, particularly where income was derived from criminal pursuits. However, many of these young men came to regret early school leaving, realising that without the accumulation of sufficient cultural capital they were limited in accessing opportunities for upward social mobility. Hence, the negative structural consequences of offending generated value for cultural capital that for some was then translated into investment and accumulation. Thus, as the young men negotiated critical social positions, specifically institutional competence, the completion of education and training became a goal for those moving away from crime.
**Personal competence**

The narratives and stories told in one’s social world are central to the social construction of the self (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008). At its most forceful, “identity is stamped rather than cultivated: identity is imposed from without rather than unfolded from within” (K. D. Murray, 1995, p. 184, emphasis in the original). Hence, the critical social positions are a powerful force in shaping identity and social action. The young men in this research moved toward an offending trajectory when they were assigned to subordinate social positions; however, one also “needs a story to participate in the conversation that defines one’s identity” (K. D. Murray, 1995, p. 186). Therefore, the construction of a self-story in tension with one’s subordinate social positioning moderated the negative impacts on one’s definition of self and life direction. This was especially so where one was socially positioned as institutionally incompetent and assigned to the position of incompetent and bad student. Within such accounts, narrators spoke of a protagonist in battle with the world and social others that operated to limit their enactment of a successful life project. The young men’s self-positioning within stories placed them as institutionally competent, despite social positioning to the contrary.

Fraser’s (aged 20) narrative of holding on exemplifies the strength of this moderating factor. In particular, the theme of proving himself – of proving to others his capacity to achieve through succeeding in life – attenuated the negative effects of being socially positioned as an incompetent and bad student. Within desisting stories, one’s self-positioning as institutionally competent rarely occurred independently of others. Rather, the young men spoke of being assigned to the social position of institutional competence, which in turn was taken up as a personal position of competence, and promoted a pathway away from crime. Similarly, the redemption script of desisting persons in Maruna’s (2001) research showed that: “at first, the individual had no belief in himself or herself, but someone else (often a partner or a social organisation) “believed in” the person and made the ex-offender realize they did in fact have personal value” (p. 96).

**Individuated self**

Social structure impacts on one’s experience and definition of self. When the self is “inclusive of others in its very definition, no fully separate self exists – that is, no self separated from the whole”, such a relational self is more common among persons with less social power (Linehan, 1993, p.32). In this research, the young men who exhibited a relational self (as opposed to an individuated self) moved toward offending in invalidating environments. Their narratives suggested that antisocial and offending behaviour was promoted by the collision of a relational self with subordinate social positioning. They attempted to negotiate the critical social positions, for example, by constructing personas of ‘class clown’, ‘tough’ and ‘cool’. The young men alleviated their felt
experience of discordance with subordinate social positioning by: accelerating the transition to adulthood, redistributing wealth by acts of theft, acts of violent resistance, and negotiating insider positioning amongst their peers through antisocial group membership. These young men told narratives of difference, within which they sought sameness.

Conversely, similarly positioned young men who exhibited an individuated self accentuated difference in their narratives and privileged the self-story above other narratives and stories told around them. The narrative construction of difference created distance between the self and other that operated as a buffer against the risk process. In particular, the devaluation of others (of antisocial behaviour and persons) framed their difference as an asset and also alleviated any felt discordance with being socially positioned as an outsider. This counterbalanced the negative impact of being assigned to the subordinate social outsider position, and by establishing distance from risk they secured the social position of institutional competence. This corresponded with the movement away from offending, which was evident in non-offending narratives and stories of desistance from crime. Within stories of desistance, a past relational self became an individuated self in the present that no longer needed to experience inclusion and sameness as once before. This facilitated disconnection from an antisocial group and social integration through the accumulation of capital within “a society that recognises and rewards only the individuated self” (Linehan, 1993, p.32).

Seeking–accepting support

Within the young men’s narratives, certain erosion factors threatened the critical social positions. These erosion factors are discussed in detail in the following section (8.2.2); however, stories of seeking–accepting support followed a progressive plotline whereby the negative impact of erosion factors on critical social positions was moderated by the positive outcome of intervention efforts. For example, institutional detachment stemming from difficulty with schoolwork may threaten the social position of institutional competence. However, seeking or accepting support that addresses the learning difficulty may secure social positioning as a competent and good student. Narrators spoke of seeking–accepting support from a wide range of places including caregivers, significant adult others (e.g., teachers, parents of friends), spiritual leaders, community organisations and professionals.

In contrast, those who followed an offending trajectory told stories of being averse to seeking–accepting support. Either they did not believe it was possible to intervene in their trajectory or they were mistrustful and concerned that intervention efforts would be more detrimental than helpful. They were apprehensive about seeking-accepting support because of the possibility of themselves or close others becoming involved in the welfare and/or justice system. Others
perceived support to be unavailable or felt they were managing effectively on their own. In particular, the young men valued their autonomy and were concerned that seeking–accepting support would compromise their independence and control over their circumstances. However, a shift toward seeking–accepting support occurred within desistance stories and was connected to overcoming structural challenges in the movement away from offending.

Master non-offending narratives

The master narratives offer insight into the negotiation of the critical social positions and participants’ self-positioning in stories that shapes the self and life’s direction. From examination of the non-offending narratives, the moderating factors were seen to attenuate the risk process by impacting on one’s social and personal positioning and therefore, one’s definition of self and the negotiation, construction and resistance of risk.

Three master non-offending narratives were identified, namely: control, holding on and reversal. These three narratives map onto a continuum of risk for the onset of offending behaviour that locates the self as farthest from risk in the control narrative, grappling with risk in the holding on narrative and actively escaping risk in the reversal narrative. To a greater or lesser extent, the moderating factors were discernible across all three master narratives. Agency and self-determination were most emphasised in the control narrative. The devaluation of antisocial behaviour and persons was a central theme of this master narrative that corresponded with the expression of an individuated self, investment in cultural capital and delaying the transition to adulthood. While these moderating factors also gave shape to the holding on narrative, a self-story of personal competence and seeking–accepting support were needed for grappling with risk. Within the reversal narrative, the negative consequences of eroded critical social positions prompted investment in cultural capital and a shift from a relational to individuated self. Agency was particularly important for recovery from traversing onto a path toward offending and escaping the risk process.

8.2.2 Erosion factors

It is argued that escaping the risk process and constructing a successful life project is contingent upon successfully negotiating the critical social positions of institutional competence and social insider. The analysis across narrative accounts of causal connections pointed to a collection of factors that threatened to erode the critical social positions, as well as factors that moderated such erosion. The moderating factors discussed above secured the critical social positions and/or counterbalanced the negative impacts of eroded social positioning on one’s definition of self and life direction. Conversely, the following erosion factors threatened the critical social positions, increasing
one’s susceptibility to the risk process and the progression of an offending trajectory. Like the moderating factors, erosion factors are considered distinct, although they were mutually connected in accounts. More specifically, erosion factors formed the basis for producing other erosion factors and involved bidirectional and reciprocal relations with the critical social positions such that the erosion of critical social positions also gave rise to erosion factors. Specifically, the erosion factors are: detachment, psychological distress, substance use, bullying, transience, high disruption conflict and absence of a regulating figure. Finally, the master offending narratives are discussed as self-stories, reflecting the phenomenological experience of erosion of the critical social positions and the movement toward offending.

*Detachment*

Detachment was a central erosion factor within the young men’s stories that took two main forms: emotional detachment, that is “a nonfeeling dissociated state” (Bernstein, 2005, p.469); and institutional detachment, defined as weak social bonds for example to school, work and family (Sampson & Laub, 1990). In general, the young men experienced detachment as taking on a mode of carelessness toward one’s self, others and social institutions. Detachment was a highly potent erosion factor because of the degree to which it was interrelated with other erosion factors and the critical social positions. For example, taking on a mode of carelessness toward school may be the cause and/or outcome of being socially positioned as an incompetent and bad student. Not being engaged by teaching practices and class content often brought about detachment from school. This was connected in stories to either a lack of interest in the subject matter or difficulty completing tasks, which resulted in frustration on the part of the young men and the teacher. As a result, the young men were assigned to the position of incompetent and bad student. Comparably, Bonino and colleagues (2005) found that young people who “see school as unimportant to their lives, who repeatedly experience failure, who have the greatest doubts about their cognitive abilities, may be at greater risk for frustration, distrust, and indifference toward authority” (Bonino et al., 2005, p. 174).

Within the young men’s narratives, experiences of alienation (including school exclusion and peer group oppression), psychological distress and derailment from one’s intended life course most often brought about detachment. Behaviour associated with detachment, such as avoidance (e.g., truancy), substance use, and recklessness/risk-taking was linked to the erosion of the critical social positions; and therefore, promoted the progression of an offending trajectory. Such progression toward antisocial and offending behaviour is further understood as the outcome of “a greater need for self-affirmation in other contexts and other ways” (Bonino et al., 2005, p. 174).
**Psychological distress**

Psychological distress is a general term that encompasses subjective “mood states of mild to severe forms, transient to persistent, as well as symptoms of psychiatric disorders to normal emotional responses to adversity” (Kim, 2007, p. 17). Psychological distress was described by the young men in its various forms and was the outcome of discrete or continuous “conditions of threat, challenge, demands, or structural constraints” that exceeded one’s resources for coping (Wheaton & Montazer, 2010, p. 173). When psychological distress was connected to impairment in educational, social, occupational, behavioural and cognitive functioning or efficiency (Raine, 1993) it became an erosion factor. Narrative accounts reflected medical discourse of pathology that defined the self as deficit and aberrant based on an accepted model of mental illness. As argued by Besley (2002), diagnostic labels can become an internalised narrative of self. Thus, for some young men, such labels came to account for how and who they were as individuals. In particular, for Jake (aged 21), “split personality schizophrenia” was a construction of self through which he made sense of being violent and his subsequent “black outs” that disrupted his memory recall of violent episodes. Psychological distress was interrelated with other erosion factors, for example transient living situations were linked in stories to psychological distress that was further linked to detachment and substance use as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Especially in combination, such erosion factors threatened the critical social positions and moved the young men further toward/along an offending trajectory.

**Substance use**

In a review of the literature, Paglia and Room (1999) report that young people’s motives for using substances sum to: rebellion, sensation-seeking, pleasure-seeking, relief from boredom, satisfying curiosity, enhancing social connection, attaining peer status and as a mechanism for escaping or coping. Thus, they regard substance use as a functional and symbolic behaviour. For instance, restrictions on alcohol and cigarettes that prohibit use by minors reinforce the use of substances as a claim on adult status. Therefore, during emerging adulthood, “substance use can symbolize freedom and autonomy, providing youth with a seemingly adult status” (Paglia & Room, 1999, p. 8). These sentiments were more or less expressed within the young men’s narratives. However, predominantly substance use featured in stories as a maladaptive coping strategy that facilitated detachment from psychological distress and/or was a ritual denoting group membership – within the (antisocial) peer group and in work settings where substance use was part of the social culture.

Not only did substance use symbolise adult status in stories, but it also symbolised being ‘bad’, which threatened the critical social positions. The resultant dysfunction and associated harms
(i.e., physical/psychological impairment, financial strain, damaged relationships; see Cohen, 2014) of substance use, especially chronic use, further conduces to erosion of the critical social positions. The young men spoke of peer rejection, expulsion from school, the loss of employment and placement in psychiatric inpatient treatment as consequences of their substance use. In particular, substance use had a complex relationship with the social insider/outsider binary. Being assigned to the position of social outsider was linked to substance use as a method of coping with alienation. However, others assigned to the social outsider position negotiated a social insider position through substance use, which facilitated social connection with an antisocial group. Similarly, Bonino and colleagues (2005) found that “antisocial acts can allow adolescents to gain visibility, feel accepted by their peers, and in some cases, to feel desirable” (p. 155). When examined more closely, this appears to be a quasi social insider position that in actuality only reinforced the young men’s positioning as a social outsider amongst some peers and the broader community. Perhaps, the appeal of an antisocial group when positioned as a social outsider is better understood as a potential source of social and symbolic capital as conceptualised by Barry (2006). In essence, being positioned as a social outsider directed the young men toward an offending trajectory.

Bullying

Bullying is diverse in form, which presents challenges for conceptual and operational definitions that impact upon measurements of prevalence. Although bullying takes place in a range of settings, it typically occurs in peer-to-peer relationships within the school environment (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn & Sanchez, 2007). In Australia, it is estimated that one in 10 students bully their peers and one in six students are bullied on a weekly basis (Rigby, 1996). Descriptions of bullying in the research literature include acts that are: indirect (e.g., spreading rumours), relational (e.g., exclusion), physical (e.g., hitting, kicking), verbal (e.g., ridicule) and generic (e.g., harassment, torment) (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). The term bullying refers to the infliction of repeated acts of aggression by a person or group that intentionally causes harm and involves the actual or perceived loss of power to another person or group (Craig, Pepler & Blais, 2007; DeCamp & Newby, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2007). Consistent with the literature on bullying, the young men in this research told bullying stories within which they claimed the status of ‘pure bully’, ‘pure victim’ or a dual status of ‘bully-victim’, a category that is gaining greater research attention. Maladaptive outcomes have been associated with each of these categories; however, bully-victims are found to be at greatest risk for maladjustment (Yang & Salmivalli, 2013).

The negative effects of bullying are wide ranging and encompass depression, suicidal ideation, self harm, anxiety, low self-esteem, negative social self-concept, psychosomatic symptoms and detachment from school (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013; DeCamp & Newby, 2014; Dowling &
Carey, 2013; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Within this research, psychological distress, detachment and
substance use were erosion factors contained within bullying stories that cumulatively threatened
the critical social positions, increasing one’s susceptibility to the risk process. In effect, to be bullied
is to be assigned to the social outsider position. Consequently, the young men described attempting
to negotiate social insider positioning by bullying others to escape being the target of bullying or
standing up to bullying by way of counterattack. Typically, this compromised the critical social
position of institutional competence and the young men spoke of being reprimanded and in some
instances expelled for their efforts to stop the bullying. This was further linked in stories to feeling
that authority figures (i.e., school officials) failed to provide support and protection from bullying, a
finding consistent with past research (Brown et al., 2013; O’Connell, Pepler and Craig, 1999).

In their review, DeCamp and Newby (2014) reported that the preponderance of literature on
the relationship between bullying and criminal behaviour focuses on the “bully as the offender” (p.
5). However, their research supports emerging findings that indicate that being the target of bullying
also places individuals at risk of offending and suggests bullying all round is a criminogenic factor.
The present examination of young men’s narrative accounts suggests that experiences of bullying
others, being bullied or a combination of both is a precursor to an offending trajectory through
associated erosion of the critical social positions.

Transience

Transience was an erosion factor that included itinerant schooling, geographical movement,
homelessness and displacement from one’s country of origin (including family, home and
community). For some, itinerant schooling was the outcome of being assigned to the position of
incompetent and bad student and reflected transitions between schools in the process of being
funnelled down and out of the educational system. For others, itinerant schooling was the outcome
of frequent geographical moves. The most chaotic narrative constructions contained stories of
frequent geographical moves, which were related to struggling parents and being surrounded by
risk. Such stories indicated that, in part, parents struggled because they were assigned to the
subordinate critical social positions and that such positioning could be passed between parent and
child. For example, Mathew (aged 16) said, “everybody just looks at you like your parents made you
grow up like a dumb cunt or like a bad kid”. In particular, struggling parents sought safety from
family violence; had unstable employment, income and housing; substance use problems; criminal
justice system involvement; and physical/mental health conditions. Additionally, some young men
told stories of frequent moves between caregivers and placements in out of home care. Consistent
with the observations of Johnson and Chamberlain (2014), often family conflict precipitated the
young men leaving home, which resulted in homelessness for some.
Displacement from one’s country of origin was also a form of transience that uniquely compromised the critical social positions. Simons and Connelly (2000) state that young people “acquiring English are frequently at risk for academic failure or underachievement owing to a multitude of variables other than language that affect their lives, including, poverty, transience, and parental disempowerment” (p. v). Challenges extending beyond language barriers detailed in the young men’s stories included social exclusion, racial prejudice/discrimination, and cultural adjustment. Consequently, it was immensely difficult for these young men to negotiate a position of competent and good student, despite their expressed will and determination. Often they were assigned to the position of social outsider and spoke of being subjected to the arbitrary and prejudicial exercise of power by authority figures, as well as persistent bullying by peers that for some would be more accurately described as racial violence. In many instances, family/personal investment in accumulating capital was a primary reason for immigration from one’s country of origin to Australia (i.e., to gain an education, access to greater employment prospects, increased financial prosperity and social status). Hence, the young men’s self-stories clashed with broader narratives and stories that constrained identity construction and life pathways, which resulted in a sense of derailment from one’s intended life course.

While the form of transience differed, the process of erosion of the critical social positions tended to be similar across stories. Predominantly, transience was closely connected to detachment. The instability generated by displacement, itinerant schooling and frequent moves undermined the formation of social bonds and was also frequently connected in stories to bullying. Becoming homeless often preceded or occurred together with detachment and for some, represented life course derailment. Similarly stated by Johnson and Chamberlain (2014), the contexts that produced transience, as well as transience itself were linked to psychological distress that was interrelated with substance use. The structural challenges and associated vulnerability/disempowerment expressly part of experiences of transience were difficult to overcome, made that much more difficult when a sense of agency over one’s circumstances was lost, as also suggested by Gitterman (2014).

High disruption family conflict

Relationships within the family system are often highly conflicted due to the greater degree of intimacy and interdependence (Reis & Sprecher, 2009). During the transition to adulthood, “conflict and detachment, rather than harmony and attachment, characterize normal family life” (Steinberg, 1990, p. 256). This was reflected in the young men’s narratives, which contained stories of family conflict regardless of trajectory. Family conflict can be defined in terms of its psychological (i.e., goal incompatibility) and behavioural (i.e., problem solving, yelling, pushing) attributes (Koerner
& Fitzpatrick, 2006). One’s individual response to the experience of family conflict, rather than the nature of conflict itself, is what gave this factor the power to erode the critical social positions.

Family violence is widely regarded as a risk factor for young offending (Krisberg & Wolf, 2005). However, stories of family conflict, which included experiences of invalidating and violent family environments, were also contained within non-offending narratives. Additionally, stories of family conflict that were not violent in nature were contained within offending narratives. Thus, the young men’s stories of family conflict emphasised that what was most influential in the construction of life pathways was the response to conflict – thus, highlighting that life pathways are a negotiated process, involving interaction between agency and structure. Within narrative accounts, family conflict was causally linked to the progression of offending when ‘high disruption’ in the life course was an outcome. More specifically, high disruption responses to conflict took the form of other erosion factors (i.e., transient living, detachment, psychological distress, bullying and substance use). Therefore, narrative accounts indicated that high disruption conflict (rather than the mere presence of conflict or the specific nature of conflict) was implicated in offending trajectories through generating erosion factors that compromised the critical social positions.

Absence of a regulating figure

Within the young men’s narratives, the absence of a regulating figure was commonly identified as a significant experience causally linked to the progression of an offending trajectory. This erosion factor was typically expressed in terms of an absent father. The loss of such relationship was associated with feelings of inadequacy and anger and some young men spoke of being positioned as a social outsider amongst peers from intact families. However, what was most significant about the absence or loss of this relationship was the lack of a strong structuring and regulating figure that within stories had the power to modify the young men’s behaviour, guide them in a positive direction and in turn support successful negotiation of the critical social positions. This is consistent with research on adolescent antisocial behaviour that indicates, “poor self-regulation is accompanied by equally poor external regulation” (Bonino et al., 2005, p. 161). The attribution of unruly behaviour to the lack of an external regulating figure suggests deflected agency. However, it is also consistent with theory and research suggesting that adolescents develop autonomy through gradually shifting from external regulation to internal self-regulation, which forms the basis for identity development (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

Master offending narratives

Narrators told stories within which the protagonist negotiated assigned social positions. These were subjective accounts of social positioning that were made more explicit by stories of
concrete events. For instance, stories of being expelled from school clearly indicated being assigned to the social position of incompetent and bad student; additionally, stories of pervasive bullying indicated one’s social positioning as an outsider. What was most important, however, was how such social positioning shaped social action, as well as one’s experience and definition of the self through the construction of a self-story embedded within the wider narratives and stories told in the social world. Hence, the master offending narratives are self-stories constructed within the confines of social discourse that permit and constrain certain ways of being and conduct to harmful action. The young men made sense of ensnarement in the risk process and their offending behaviour by telling six distinct, although not mutually exclusive, master narratives within which the self was constructed in key stories of: oppressive forces, being sidetracked, crime glorification, coercive structural pressure, antisocial ambivalence and deep-seated inadequacy.

These stories offer an explanatory account of offending behaviour that suggests a moral stance (McAdams, 2008; M. Murray, 2008; Presser, 2010). Self-stories contained neutralisations (i.e., justifications and excuses) (Sykes & Matza, 1957) of wrongdoing that functioned as a defence of self and rationalisation of behaviour in claims of essential moral decency. Thus, one’s need to neutralise wrongdoing indicates commitment to the conventional value system and order of society. Such neutralisations are frequently misconceived in correctional treatment as the pathological denial of responsibility, and thus, are regarded as a category of cognitive distortion in the offence process that necessitates confrontation and modification (Kazemian & Farrington, 2010). Rather, the absence of neutralisations in accounts of offending would be of greater concern. Neutralisations should be more accurately conceived as a normative and adaptive response to inconsistency and disequilibrium that provides a coherent structure to the experience of selfhood (Maruna, 2004). Therefore, Maruna and Copes (2005) argue that “neutralization techniques indicate an acceptance of shared moral values” (p. 272) and “should be seen as a theory of narrative sense making and hence part of the process of identity construction” (p. 282).

Neutralisations are an implicit cognitive process in accounting for wrongdoing, that are possibly used more extensively when one is positioned to explain themselves and offending behaviour to an outsider, such as in the research setting (Maruna & Copes, 2005). Understanding how neutralisations are causally implicated in divergent offending trajectories was not the focus of this research, although it presents as an interesting topic of investigation for future study. Instead, neutralisations were examined as part of the rhetorical function of narratives that illuminated the phenomenology of experiences that moved young men toward and/or away from offending.

The oppression narrative was the most complex and prevalent amongst the young men, and thus, is given more attention in this discussion. Narrators explained antisocial and offending
behaviour as both a justifiable and necessary response to the experience of systematic oppression. The protagonist within the oppression narrative was positioned as rightfully elevating their state of inequality within the social order through acts of empowerment that violated law and the rights of others. To a lesser degree, the protagonist was positioned as a dominant figure and was attributed special status that provided the authority to subjugate and violate the rights of others. The oppression narrative parallels the ‘theory of differential oppression’ (Regoli & Hewitt, 1991), which is also compatible with the developmental taxonomy of antisocial behaviour (Moffitt, 1993). The theory of differential oppression asserts that minors have the least power to negotiate change in their environment and are oppressed when denied self-determination and opportunities for developing competence and self-efficacy by adults. Adaptations to oppression manifest in delinquent behaviour that establishes a degree of control, autonomy and empowerment not otherwise felt. However, this reinforces the conceptions of powerful others (i.e., adults and authorities) that those with a social identity of subordination attached to conditions of age (and moreover in this research, socio-economic status, the peer group and race) are inferior, deviant and in need of external control (Regoli, Hewitt & DeLisi, 2008).

Within the sidetracked narrative, offending behaviour was explained as an unintended consequence or an act unwittingly engaged in by a highly suggestible and impressionable protagonist that, while well meaning, was all too easily influenced in the moment by ‘bad’ others and an inadequate social milieu. Such self-identification resembled the foolish persona described by Presser (2008), which is “a characteristic that seems to be antithetical to intentional misconduct” (p. 89). In contrast, the protagonist within the criminal narrative was most intentional in the exploration and construction of a criminal identity. Possessing a criminal identity reflects the dehumanising discourse of criminal essentialism, and this “notion of intractable criminality is still very much alive in criminology and popular thought” (Maruna, 2001, p. 19). However, the criminal narrative illuminates the subjectivity of the criminal self as pursuing a successful life project through illegitimate means, especially when excluded from conventional pathways by erosion of the critical social positions. Narrators described losing control of the criminal self within a volatile life of crime and grappled in the present with the moral stance of escalating offending. This was the impetus for change, which highlighted the criminal self as a normative and temporary period of identity exploration during the transition to adulthood, which was amenable to prosocial revision. Within the pressure narrative, a highly prosocial protagonist claimed lost agency and was derailed from a successful life trajectory by external coercive forces. This master narrative was most aligned with conceptualisations of crime at the broader social level that view individuals as products of their social circumstances (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). The protagonist in the dissonance narrative experienced a fractured self, as the
result of opposing narratives of ‘control’ and ‘criminal’ colliding and intruding into one another. In constructing a coherent identity within this clash of narratives (Mair, 2010), an essentially competent and moral self was described as being gradually weakened over time by ‘bad’ others; thus, neutralising the antisocial and criminal acts that were inconsistent with one’s core values and goals. Within the failure narrative, antisocial and offending behaviour was the outcome of an inadequate self that was immobilised by an internalised pathology (White & Epston, 1990). The self was inexorably fixed in a destructive pattern of self-limiting beliefs, self-doubt and self-sabotage.

8.2.3 The movement toward and/or away from offending

It is argued that escaping the risk process is contingent upon successfully negotiating the critical social positions. Thus, the avoidance and resistance of progressing toward an offending trajectory (i.e., positive prosocial behaviour in the transition to adulthood) necessitates taking up and being assigned to the positions of institutional competence and social insider. As discussed, in instances where the critical social positions are threatened by erosion factors, the negative impact on one’s life direction may be moderated by certain factors that enable circumvention of the risk process.

With reference to the model, erosion of the critical social positions is linked to the onset of offending behaviour. Being assigned to the subordinate category/s resulted in the young men being funneled down and out of the educational system via a process of rejection, and toward formal systems of social control that reified an offending identity and narrowed opportunities for change. Additionally, the young men gravitated toward antisocial peers or demonstrated active resistance through antisocial behaviour when positioned as a social outsider that moved them along an offending trajectory. Within this phase, antisocial and offending behaviour was frequently likened to a game, competition or sport, which was experienced as entertaining, exciting, fun, and an adventure. Similar themes can be found in the work of Katz (1988) and Presser (2008). Also, an accelerated transition to adulthood was interwoven in narratives with the onset of an offending trajectory and was associated with establishing a sense of autonomy, control and empowerment (Moffitt, 1993; Regoli & Hewitt, 1991). The objective of accelerating the transition to adulthood was to overcome age related power-imbalances and the marginal status of youth, which was further interconnected with erosion factors (e.g., detachment and transience) that compelled the young men to move rapidly from adolescent dependency to adult self-sufficiency.

The model explains the maintenance phase of offending as the persistence of structural insecurity resulting from perpetual erosion of the critical social positions, where moderating factors remain insufficient in degree to support the process of desistance from crime. It is argued that
successful negotiation of the critical social positions creates the necessary structural opportunities for durable change by increasing transformative power that is derived from capital investment and accumulation. This represents a subjective-social model of recidivism/desistance (LeBel et al., 2008) that attends to the theoretical anomaly that “marginalization is associated with onset but is not necessarily addressed in desistance” (Barry, 2006, p. 22).

The research findings suggest that incarceration was, particularly, connected in stories to the maintenance of offending beyond the impact of formal sanctions disrupting social bonds (Laub, Sampson, Corbett & Smith, 1995). The normative and arguably necessary adaptations to the custodial setting were not easily divested by the young men post release. Such adaptations were dysfunctional in the community context, as argued by Haney (2001), and impeded successful negotiation of the critical social positions, contributing to the maintenance of offending behaviour. Alternatively, the maintenance of offending may be explained as the continued erosion of the critical social positions due to wilful rejection. Instead, the critical social positions are replaced with enacting a fantasy of eminence through club membership. Accordingly, one takes up and is assigned to the privileged position within the personal (criminal) world that stands in opposition to being positioned as the binary other by the social order. Thus, enacting a fantasy of eminence maintained offending behaviour through the association of club membership with highly valued status (i.e., feeling important, special, powerful and revered) that was more desirable than accepting the disempowering subordinate social positioning ascribed by the social order. Additionally, the maintenance phase of offending was linked to continuing the notoriety of the club and the prominence of its members by escalating risk and criminal activity. Ultimately, the expansion and escalation of antisocial and offending behaviour isolated the young men from prosocial others and limited potential pathways, ensnaring the young men on an offending trajectory.

Finally, desistance from crime is conceptualised in the model as the outcome of successfully negotiating and securing (fully or partially) the critical social positions. The natural aging out of crime during the transition to adulthood was a theme within stories of desistance. For some young men, youth status was connected to the perceived normative and time limited engagement in antisocial and criminal acts. Thus, reaching adult status marked the natural end of an offending trajectory and closed a perceived period of immunity from ‘serious’ sanctions and the age of being irresponsible and having foolhardy fun. Adulthood consequently brought about a sense of responsibility for self and others that prompted one to direct attention, time and energy into the construction of a successful life project, which in turn necessitated successful negotiation of the critical social positions.
Crucially, however, being assigned to the critical social positions was emphasised in stories of desistance. Being assigned to the social position of institutional competence was especially important for shaping a self-story of competence that promoted a sense of agency, self-efficacy and self-worth in the movement away from crime. The young men commonly expressed this as a “chain reaction” of achievement that built momentum for change through gaining a sense of accomplishment. As alluded to previously, this echoed the desistance narrative or ‘redemption script’ described in Maruna’s (2001) study within which individuals “portray[ed] themselves very much in control of their current and future life direction. This change in personal agency is frequently attributed to empowerment from some outside source” (p. 13). Being assigned to the social position of institutional competence was most difficult to envision, let alone negotiate and take up as a personal position, for those deeply entrenched in the justice system.

The narrated process of desistance was multifaceted and in many instances, the structural challenges associated with an offending pathway gave rise to moderating factors, which facilitated restoration of the critical social positions. In particular, the young men’s worsening circumstances eventually compelled them to seek-accept support to overcome the structural challenges they faced. Pain and adversity associated with antisocial group membership, acts of crime and criminal justice system involvement encouraged the shift from a relational self to an individuated self that enabled the young men to alter their social interactions and detach from an antisocial group. Experiences of pain and trauma also symbolised ‘game over’ for those who experienced offending as entertaining, resulting in one’s disenchantment with criminal acts. Additionally, transitions into and out of prison prompted re-evaluation of the self and the potential for change to germinate and possibly be acted upon. In this way, incarceration planted subjective-agency seeds of desistance. Regret for the past was typically associated with retrospectively coming to value cultural capital, and thus, lamenting past disregard for education as offending was associated with stagnation and regression over time. As a result, the construction of a successful life project was no longer sought through offending and in a display of agentic claim the young men revised life plans to reflect the accomplishment of developmental tasks. Achieving developmental tasks and/or reaching the age of majority lessened the appeal of – and eliminated the need for – offending, as it was no longer considered rewarding, a finding consistent with Moffitt’s (1993) developmental taxonomy of antisocial behaviour.

8.3 Implications of the research

Thus far, this chapter has presented an exposition of a positioning theory of crime. The selected implications for policy and practice are discussed next with specific reference to conceptualisation and operation of the risk factor prevention paradigm. Furthermore, a positioning theory of crime necessitates that the problem of offending be approached from a reflexive stance
that acknowledges the “co-production of crime by human subjects, and by the social and
organizational structures that humans develop” (Henry & Milovanovic, 1996, p. x). As such, the
implications of the research for crime prevention and intervention efforts are discussed below.

8.3.1 The risk factor prevention paradigm

Laub and colleagues (1995) state that “research rather than ideology and politics should
govern the direction of crime control policies” (p. 91). A step in the right direction, perhaps, is the
risk factor prevention paradigm that has gained wide currency in criminal justice policy and practice
and has become the dominant discourse in juvenile justice. Such far-reaching appeal can be
attributed to the fact that much risk factor research is grounded in the positivist tradition that claims
empirical methods can objectively identify clearly defined factors that predict or increase the risk of
offending. The potential of such is highly enticing for policy makers and practitioners, especially
within a climate that demands evidence-based and defensible approaches to correctional
intervention and management (Case & Haines, 2009).

Quantitative research methods have generated an extensive and growing list of risk factors
spanning child, family, school, peer and neighbourhood domains. However, “the sheer size of this
list, which must be considered only a partial consideration of potential risk factors, betrays the field’s
lack of ability to synthesize or tell a fully coherent story” about offending processes (Hinshaw, 2002,
p. 435). Often it is asserted that risk factors cause or predict offending, when more precisely they are
speculative, remote and “merely correlates of relatively vague proxies for criminality” (O’Mahony,
2009, p. 101). Thus, beneath a seemingly robust surface, the risk factor prevention paradigm is an
imprecise and superficial conception that “continues to present an over-simplified, reductionist and
even misleading picture of the relationship between risk factors and offending behaviour” (Case &
Haines, 2009, p. 34). Making a similar point, O’Mahony (2009) argues that the risk factor prevention
paradigm “flatters only to deceive. Its indiscriminate embrace of an embarrassing wealth of risk
factors creates only the illusion of explanation” (p. 113).

Such critics further argue that the epidemiological nature of the risk factor prevention
paradigm has been exploited to relieve society (and thus, the state) of the burden of responsibility
by attributing crime to individual pathology (Case & Haines, 2009). Additionally, the
conceptualisation of risk as an artefact has produced deterministic understandings of risk factor
influence that has given rise to probabilistic prediction approaches to the assessment of recidivism
risk. It is of concern that such practices may operate in harmful ways, as “it routinely promotes
intrusive, coercive and potentially criminalizing interventions” that operate “well beyond what the
science can justify and is capable of opening the door to even more dubious forms of social control
and social engineering” (O’Mahony, 2009, p. 113). Not to mention that the validity of risk assessment processes that are reliant on statistical factorisation/aggregation, and which privilege the perspective of the practitioner, are questionable on the basis that young people’s subjective experience and individual constructions of risk are marginalised. Thus, the risk factors measured and targeted in positivist driven approaches to risk may not accord with or address the phenomenological, subjective experience of risk (Case & Haines, 2009). As a result, risk assessments are more concerned with measurement of objective risk for the purpose of implementing interventions designed to make young people more ‘responsible’, rather than to address their individual needs within the broader social-cultural-political context (France & Homel, 2006).

The constructionist understanding of risk and offending presented in section 8.2 of this chapter departs from, and counters over-simplified, static, deterministic and statistical conceptualisations by emphasising the dynamic and complex interplay between agency and structure. It is argued that risk is contextually situated and to varying degrees, one’s exposure and response to risk is actively shaped through individual interaction, construction and negotiation of social experience (Kemshall et al., 2007). However, understanding risk and offending as a constructed, negotiated and resisted process with inherent complexity has problematised existing conceptualisations, “having a potentially unconstructive, deleterious effect on a research movement that has been, until that point, easy to understand and readily accepted” (Case & Haines, 2009, p. 317). In other words, evolving understanding of risk from developmental determinism to bounded individual agency has undermined and diminished the confidence placed in the artefact approach. The limitations of the artefact approach have been brought to the fore by constructionism, although remain to be adequately resolved in the form of an alternative explanatory theory or framework. Therefore, the largely untapped potential of constructionism is to redefine the notion of risk, as well as reconceptualise risk as a process that explains more comprehensively the causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted (Case & Haines, 2009; Hinshaw, 2002). The development of a positioning theory of crime based on the findings of this research begins to fill this knowledge gap. A discussion of how the proposed theory may address limitations of current risk conceptualisations is presented below.

The novelty of a positioning theory of crime is the two critical social positions at its very basis, which provide the model with greater explanatory utility. This is because social positions reflect the broader social, cultural and political processes embedded within social arrangements; and thus, “reflects the force of cultural and institutional prescriptions that define and limit the boundaries of the self” (Raggatt, 2007, p. 359). Quite rightly, O’Mahony (2009) asks, “how meaningful can it be to establish correlations with inherently ambiguous, culturally variant and
contestable definitions of criminality?” (p. 106). A positioning theory of crime can more meaningfully attend to this issue. The reason for this is that social positions are fluid, multilayered and contextually situated such that the model is able to take into account both the individual social contexts, as well as concomitant structural and cultural environmental changes (France & Homel, 2006). Further, as has been asserted by constructionists, risk pathways toward offending are a negotiated process. The inclusion of the critical social positions in the model identifies in more precise terms the ‘what’ that is being individually constructed, negotiated and resisted. Thus, it locates a central point of reference in the interaction between agency and structure. In particular, social positions are linked to ‘societal access routes’, since access routes are “shaped by social arrangements and institutional practices and so are features of the society” (France & Homel, 2006, p. 298). More specifically, societal access routes refer to the opportunities that individuals have to move forward at any point in time through social mobility. Thus, Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of social practice applies to the ‘how’ of individual construction, negotiation and resistance processes as agents struggle in the field to advance their relational positioning and contest over what constitutes capital and how it is distributed.

The model redefines the notion of risk, such that it is no longer simply attached to the presence of risk factors per se. Instead risk is re-conceptualised as a process of structural insecurity that is generated by erosion of the critical social positions, consequently placing young people on – or at least directing them toward – an offending trajectory. However, rather than offending being a pre-determined outcome of this process, it is recognised that young people have the capacity to self-determine. Hence, young people negotiate and manage their own outcomes through social action following exposure to risk (Case & Haines, 2009). Such re-conceptualisation is necessary because the comprehensive list of risk factors produced by positivist methods of enquiry imbue factors such as family size and low self-esteem with critical causal influence that is misleading, overreaching and unwarranted (O’Mahony, 2009). The causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted is more fully explained in the model proposed by a set of erosion factors (see section 8.2.2) that threaten the critical social positions, giving rise to structural insecurity that constrain societal access routes. Such mechanisms are viewed as causal to the extent that they were key in the narrative causal sequencing of events within the young men’s accounts of movement toward and/or away from offending.

O’Mahony (2009) points out that an inherent flaw of the risk factor prevention paradigm is the disjointed percep that social disadvantage variables (e.g., poverty) are criminogenic. He argues that it is the underlying social processes of devaluation, disadvantage and discrimination that are almost undoubtedly germane to certain patterns of offending, which reflect psychological reactions
to the experience of discredited identity, injustice and inequality. A positioning theory of crime can account for such underlying social processes as the erosion of the critical social positions, whereby one is assigned by the social order to the subordinate category. This was highly apparent in the self-story of oppression, which was the most prevalent master offending narrative told by the young men. The oppression narrative illuminated offending behaviour as a response to the experience of systematic oppression tied to a social identity of subordination, and thus, is a potent example of O’Mahony’s point that reveals the power of social and psychological forces in shaping the self and (harmful) social action. Accordingly, encompassed within the model is recognition of one’s subjective experience of desire, need, intention, emotion, choices, goals and motivations, which is lacking in the traditional risk factor prevention paradigm (O’Mahony, 2009).

Another criticism of the traditional risk factor prevention paradigm is that there is no substantial examination of its utility in promoting positive adaptive behaviour. While the inclusion of protective factors presents as advancement, conceptualisation of protective factors has been limited to the reduction or avoidance of negative outcomes and has been detached from understanding the processes of change that promote desistance from crime (Case & Haines, 2009; Hinshaw, 2002). This missing link is addressed within a positioning theory of crime, which theorises that escaping the risk process (or said otherwise – constructing a successful life project) is contingent upon successfully negotiating the critical social positions. Additionally, this process is facilitated by a set of moderating factors (see section 8.2.1), which operate to reinforce the critical social positions and/or attenuate the negative effects of their erosion, and thus, are viewed to promote positive adaptive outcomes.

8.3.2 Reflexive policy and practice: Prevention and intervention

Presser (2008) contends that a more reflexive approach to criminology is needed that is attuned to the role of criminologists “in constructing the problem of crime and those problem persons we call offenders” (p. 151). Discourses that frame crime at the individual level abstracted from the social structural systems within which persons are embedded marginalises the role of society in constructing criminality. As a result, criminal responsibility is shifted onto individuals rather than being shared collectively as a community. A positioning theory of crime necessitates that the problem of offending be approached from a reflexive stance, as it is within social exchanges that persons are positioned in dialogue, institutional roles and through socio-cultural relationships. Thus, we must become more reflexive as a society and recognise the role of individuals, institutions and wider socio-cultural-political relations in constructing the problem of crime and criminals through social practices that generate structural insecurity. The promotion of discourses of empowerment, inclusion, tolerance, altruism and compassion among others is needed to construct social relations
that allow for the redistribution of power more evenly within society and opportunities to create societal access routes.

In particular, the institution of education exerts a large influence in the lives of young people and is recognised to play a crucial “role in the production of academic success and failure” (Slee, 2011, p. 146). Pedagogical discourses that underpin the categorisation and classification of students in terms of ability reproduce social hierarchies. The findings of this research suggest that infiltrating the school system are discourses of responsibilisation that individualises the ‘problem’ behaviour of young people, rendering them subject to scrutiny and more punishment. Such discourses situate the school outside the space of causal processes linked to an offending trajectory; and thus, enables schools to deny their role in constructing the problem of crime while all at once identifying and ‘weeding out the bad apples’ from the system, thereby limiting societal access routes. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was approached in relation to this research; however, the Department declined to support the project because “there is limited benefit in this proposal for schools/education policy-making as the primary focus appears to be offending behaviour/involvement with the justice system” (E. Hartnell-Young, personal communication, July 07, 2012). Thus, it is clear not only from the young men’s narrative accounts that the education system has little concern for its role in constructing risk-prevention pathways, despite a preponderance of evidence that implicates school factors in the progression of antisocial and offending behaviour (Bonino et al., 2005; Hinshaw, 2002; Laub et al., 1995). As argued by O’Mahony, “a truly radical transformation of social institutions” is needed, particularly the institution of education “in order to produce schools that empower and fulfil all their children” (p. 109). A more reflexive education system is needed, one that begins with turning the discursive gaze of responsibilisation back on the system, rather than solely on the individual.

While a positioning theory of crime represents a model of causal processes, rather than an extensive list of variables, the basic logic and utility of the traditional risk factor prevention paradigm is preserved. That is, key factors (i.e., erosion and moderating factors) influence the causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted. Accordingly, methods of prevention and intervention can be designed to counteract the negative effects or enhance the positive outcomes of such factors (Farrington, 2007). The erosion and moderating factors identified as an outcome of this research presents a more manageable and focused list that are amenable to modification. Some are far from new and reinforce the need for prevention and intervention efforts that address the substance use and mental health of young people. However, prevention and intervention efforts should also be implemented with a focus on “changing social arrangements to create opportunities and systems that facilitate the formation of such supportive structures” (France & Homel, 2006, p. 305). Such an
approach may also encourage young people most in need to seek-accept support. Addressing bullying is an obvious target for prevention and intervention efforts, which behoves the institution of education to effectively respond to violence in schools and create a safer school environment. A meta-analysis undertaken by Ferguson and colleagues (2007) suggests, however, that implementing anti-bullying programs has not been practically effective; thus, alternative responses to reducing bullying in schools needs to be explored. Perhaps such programs have been inadequate because they have targeted the problem at an individual level, rather than addressing bullying as part of the broader social and cultural context.

As previously discussed, an attractive component of the risk-prevention paradigm is the formulation of risk as an objective construct amenable to probabilistic prediction. This has given rise to an increased reliance on structured frameworks and tools in risk assessment practice. However, a concern emerging from this approach to the assessment of young people is the rigid and reductionist abstraction of risk that fails to “capture the complex, rich detail of their lives and their behaviour” (Baker & Kelly, 2011, p. 71). Accordingly, such risk assessment practices do not adequately contextualise risk in the lived experience of young people that would offer a more holistic view, and the integration of the subjective meaning young people attach to their individual circumstances with the perspective of the practitioner. Baker and Kelly (2011) argue that giving narrative a more prominent place in risk assessment can promote practices “that are more nuanced and more robust” as well as “able to capture a sense of the young person’s trajectory and hence provide a basis for dynamic, risk-responsive interventions” (p. 80). A positioning theory of crime presents as a novel framework for a more dynamic and complex approach to risk assessment. First, it provides scope for evaluation of risk at the broader social-cultural-political level. Second, it gives consideration to young people’s ability to recognise, negotiate, resist, and thus, self-determine outcomes following exposure to risk. Third, it emphasises the utility of incorporating life narratives into the assessment process as a site for evaluating moral agency, as well as the cognitive construction of narrative lines, which has real effects in terms of shaping the self and social action.

There may, therefore, be practical utility in viewing the master narratives identified from this research as broad narrative categories applicable to the assessment of risk and determining interventions. More specifically, the master narratives map onto a continuum of risk for the onset of offending. For instance, the self is located farthest from risk in the control narrative, grappling with risk in the holding on narrative and actively escaping risk in the reversal narrative. Additionally, the way individuals identify themselves in narrative makes (harmful) action possible; therefore, changing one’s self identification presents as a focus for intervention (Presser, 2008). The broad narrative categories suggest possible selves for identification in assessment and narrative re-construction in
intervention, namely the self as: oppressed, dominant, episodic, criminal, coerced, ambivalent, and inadequate. To operationalise such an approach in practice would require refinement and development for the specific purpose of risk assessment that may be an objective of future research. Perhaps a starting point may be Hermans’ (2001) method for assessing the dialogical self, namely the ‘Personal Position Repertoire’, which is a framework that can be “adapted and revised according to the purposes and needs of individual researchers or practitioners in their specific setting and circumstances” (p. 324). Additionally, Raggatt (2000, 2002) has proposed a ‘Personality Web Protocol’ that takes a narrative approach to the assessment of the dialogical self.

Presser (2008) has proposed that narratives of powerlessness and difference conduces to harmful action. Such broad narrative themes were discernible in the stories of young men in this research and emphasise the need for the transformation of social arrangements and institutions in order to produce greater possibilities for social participation and personal development. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is the dominant rehabilitative paradigm within forensic treatment. However, in its current design and practice correctional interventions tend to be undertaken with indifference to the structural context within which narrative constructions of offending are embedded (Waldram, 2010). Perhaps this is because “the evolution of one’s deviance from identifiable causes positions us as less deviant than the ascribed label suggests” (Presser, 2008, p. 6). Being labelled deviant and classified/categorised by corrections reifies an offender identity; and thus, those involved in the criminal justice system are given little, if any, opportunity to take up and be assigned to counter positions that reflect commitment to conventional societal values. Critical interventions can and should be implemented that attend to the appraisal of self-narratives as mediated and interpreted presentations of the past, that are constructed and reconstructed with continuous reference to subject positions that operate discursively and determine power relations (Presser, 2008).

It is argued by Waldram (2010) that, within the CBT framework, value is placed on consistency with intervention principles and judicial facts such that subjective meaning is critically interpreted as pathological cognitive distortion in correctional interventions. It is further argued that this disregard for the narrative-phenomenological experience of offending conceals, misconstrues and may eliminate the positive, moral notions of self. O’Conner (2000) remarks, “when a criminal is willing to present his acts discursively, that act of telling could provide the seed of a moral agency” (p. 74) that creates a site for “potentially therapeutic discourse” (p. 73). The master offending narratives identified in this research revealed such seeds of moral agency. Narratives illuminated how the risk process was experienced and acts of offending were integrated within a self-story that preserved one’s essential moral decency. Hence, correctional intervention may be advanced by
engaging in narrative processing that locates one’s own morality in stories and supports persons to
shift their inherent moral sensibility in ways that guide behaviour in risky contexts (Waldram, 2010).

There is a further opportunity within correctional interventions that engage in narrative
processing to construct a language or discourse for change that replaces criminal essentialism
(Maruna, 2001). The importance of empowerment within a language of change was evident in
Maruna’s findings, and was also a crucial aspect of the young men’s narrated processes of
desistance within this research. In essence, empowerment is viewed to be at the very core of
constructing a successful life project; and thus, positive adaptive behaviour. A narrative of difference
was also discernible in the talk of young men who to the greatest extent avoided and resisted an
offending trajectory. However, their experience of difference was ascribed alternative meaning that
did not reflect the subjectivity of powerlessness. As such, it is imperative that social arrangements
and institutions create opportunities for the empowerment of young people not only through
societal access routes, but by implementing practices that build strengths, enhance motivation and
develop goals in ways that work with momentum, rather than resistance (Mott & Gysin, 2003).

The YMCA Bridge Project is an example of effective practice that empowers young people
and facilitates negotiation of the critical social positions by promoting (re-)connection with
mainstream society through the provision of support, training, mentoring and employment
opportunities. The success of The Bridge Project is evidenced by program evaluation that shows a
reduction in recidivism from 66% to 3% (M. Cronin, personal communication, July 3, 2013). The
social order needs to make available alternative positions for young people who are constructing
and re-constructing the self in a process of desistance. This is a most challenging task within the
correctional setting, which produces destructive effects through a power culture (Liebling & Maruna,
2005) and stigmatising discourses, to which the treatment community are not immune (Lay &
puzzle are twofold: time inside the prison needs to be conducive to changed thoughts, and time
after release needs to be conducive to changed actions. Thus both symbolic and bodily interaction
with the social fabric of life need to be shaped” (p. 22).

8.4 Methodological considerations

The research project evolved from its original inception as a study of the phenomenological
experience of the movement toward and/or away from offending, to employing narrative as more
than just a research method, but a mode of (self-)representation for exploration. Moreover, the
research practice has been an active process of continual learning and reflection, supported by the
supervision process. Barton (2013) has aptly encapsulated the research experience as:
A complex learning process, which involves exciting developmental aspects of engagement and outcomes as well as those elements of uncertainty, doubt and frustration. Hence, there is an element of messiness to this whole process (p. xi).

Such ‘messiness’ has been especially encountered in traversing the vast amount of literature that pertains to the large scope of the research area. Also, complicating the process and sense making of the literature has been the obfuscation of the elements of ontologies, epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods, which has led to confusion, resulting in research being variously, and sometimes contradictorily, described. The literature reviewed in this thesis is certainly not exhaustive, but is illustrative of the focus of the field of enquiry.

Narrative interviews were the most appropriate method to address the research aim because of their utility for illuminating the subjective meaning of experience in ways that create possibilities for a multilayered analysis that concerns the phenomenological and structural in relationship. Encompassed within this approach is the scope to explore how subjectivity, narrative identity and social action are shaped in self-stories, which are embedded within broader discourses. The promise of such a blended methodological approach has brought about an emerging and evolving ‘narrative-phenomenology’. The approach has been undertaken in different forms (Mattingly, 2010; Langdrige, 2007), leaving the application of narrative-phenomenology open to further development, definition and consensus. This research represents another variation of the approach, which came about through the amalgamation of narrative and phenomenological methods considered to be most suitable for the research task.

The research was specifically concerned with the subjective experience of males because they are over represented in the criminal justice system. This is a common justification for gender bias in forensic research practice. However, existing knowledge in the field would be advanced by greater interest in the subjective experience of females, both those with an offence history and those without. An objective of future research may be to examine whether or not the findings of this study are comparable to findings from a female sample. Additionally, age was a selection criterion that reflected the period of transition from adolescence to adulthood, specifically age 15 – 25 years. While a large proportion of young men narrated stories of desistance, for many this was a process of transition that was still unfolding. The advantage of this was gaining insight into the desistance process as it was experienced in the present. Conversely, however, the research findings were somewhat limited in exploring this process, as desistance from crime was not deemed to be fully complete. For example, young men who spoke of being in a process of desistance expressed a greater degree of uncertainty about their future and structural insecurity was still very much a feature of their lives. Including older participants in the sample would address this issue and
potentially enhance the explanatory power of the research findings. A criticism of research of this nature has been the ‘homoogenisation of offending’ that is founded on “uncritical acceptance of universalised categories of ‘crime’, ‘offending’ and ‘antisocial behaviour’” (Case & Haines, 2009, p. 24). Thus, a further limitation of the findings is that they may be overly general due to a lack of sensitivity to specific forms of offending, with the exception of sexual offending, which was considered to be distinct in form (Smallbone, 2006), and for this reason was excluded from the sample.

The composition of the sample in this research sought to capture a continuum of antisocial/offending behaviour ranging from young men with no formal contact with the justice system to repeat offending and incarceration. While it is considered that in this research such intent was achieved, participants recruited from the Youth Unit of a maximum-security adult prison indicated that it was a ‘privilege’ to be placed on the unit. More specifically, they were aware of their differential treatment with respect to the larger prison population that reflected the fundamental assumption that young people are “more amenable to treatment in comparison to adults and therefore more likely to profit from efforts related to rehabilitation” (Bryan-Hancock & Casey, 2011, p. 69). The young men’s placement on the unit was offered as a ‘chance’ (possibly a ‘last chance’) that would be forfeited in the event of wrongdoing. Thus, it would seem that those young men who were given the least chance by the Department of Justice were not captured in this sample. The voices of these young men also need to be heard and their contribution to knowledge is valuable for developing the discourse in this area.

Effort was made to avoid providing participants with the language from which they could construct their narrative accounts (Presser, 2010). However, in approaching the interview process as a reciprocal act of knowledge construction, there were times when it was appropriate to offer a summary/interpretation of the participant’s narrative construction. This was undertaken cautiously and was effectively a moment of (immediate) ‘respondent validation’. It enabled the researcher to check the appropriation of meaning with the participant; and thus, a common and shared understanding of the narrative was reached through confirming certain interpretations and/or sparking disagreement and raising alternative interpretations (Parker, 2005). This process is also viewed to increase the power of participants in the research setting and promote the telling of stories. This was one way in which the researcher demonstrated an attentive and non-judgemental stance toward participants’ stories and encouraged participants to collaborate in the co-construction of knowledge (Esin, 2011). It is acknowledged that the interview process shaped the young men’s life stories (O’Conner, 2000; Presser, 2008).

Additionally, participants were asked during the interview to generate a written timeline of
their significant life experiences in the form of a graph. In many instances, this task interrupted the production of narrative accounts, so timelines were completed superficially or not at all in favour of a quality narrative. Where timelines were completed comprehensively, they were incorporated in the analysis of data. However, timelines were not viewed to significantly enhance the analytical process, and consequently, it was not of concern that timelines were completed inconsistently. During the analysis phase it became apparent that the dominance of risk discourse was an influential force in interpreting the data, which required conscious effort to manage. While themes of interest were generated with reference to existing theory and research, primacy was given to the units of meaning that reflected the young men’s subjective experience of risk, rather than the risk factors generated by positivist research methods.

Braithwaite (1995) contends that theories of crime “will fail for many types of cases” for the reason that “this is inherent in the application of criminological theories that will ever be only partial in their explanatory power” (p. 200). The positioning theory of crime proposed as an outcome of this research is an attempt “to reduce complex multifactorial causation to a much more limited set of causal mechanisms” (O’Mahony, p. 112). However, the causal mechanisms delineated are only regarded as causal to the extent that they reflect the selective causal sequencing of significant experiences narrated in the interview process. A positioning theory of crime presents as an alternative model for conceptualising the relationship between risk and offending trajectories that can be further examined and applied in contexts related to working with young people.

8.5 Conclusion

An innovative narrative-phenomenological approach was undertaken to explore young men’s narrative accounts of the phenomenological experience of moving toward and/or away from offending with reference to multiple life transitions. As an outcome of the research findings, the risk process was re-conceptualised, giving prominence to the complex interplay between agency and structure, and from which a positioning theory of crime was developed. The proposed theory presents as an alternative model of the relationship between risk and offending pathways, explaining more comprehensively the causal mechanisms by which risk effects are exerted as the erosion of critical social positions that bring about structural insecurity. Additionally, the extensive list of factors generated by positivist methods of enquiry is reduced in the model to a more manageable, focused and dynamic list of factors that are sensitive to the subjective experience of risk and are amenable to modification. Hence, while the model represents causal processes, rather than a list of variables, the basic logic and utility of the traditional risk factor prevention paradigm is preserved and the erosion and moderating factors suggest potential targets for prevention and intervention efforts.
Perhaps more importantly what is argued for on the basis of a positioning theory of crime is the development of reflexive policy and practice that addresses crime as a problem co-produced by individuals, social arrangements and institutional structures. Therefore, what is truly needed is radical transformation of social systems and institutional practices that create opportunities promoting the formation of supportive structures. The education system is one such institution that has been identified as a critical site for transformation, necessitating the development of replacement discourses that shape the ‘problem’ behaviour of young people as the collective responsibility of the school system, rather than the sole responsibility of the individual (and family). Additionally, the development of replacement discourses within the institution of corrections is needed that permits and legitimises subjective experience and narratives of offending that are embedded within the social-cultural-political contexts of their construction. Not only does this enable risk assessment practices to evaluate risk at levels broader than the individual, but it also takes into account the moral notions of the self, as well as the concept of risk as a constructed, negotiated and resisted process. It offers a more nuanced approach to the assessment of risk that generates a sense of trajectory and provides a more robust basis for dynamic, risk-responsive interventions. Likewise, narrative processing in intervention creates sites for therapeutic discourse, of which the construction of a language of change and empowerment that replaces criminal essentialism is highly important for promoting desistance from crime.
References


Appendices
Appendix A: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Memorandum

To: Prof David Mellor
   School of Psychology
   B

From: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC)

Date: 26 June, 2012

Subject: 2012-044
   Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood
   Please quote this project number in all future communications

The application for this project was considered at the DUHREC meeting held on 26/03/2012.

Approval has been given for Miss Poppy Edwards, under the supervision of Prof David Mellor, School of Psychology, to undertake this project from 26/06/2012 to 26/06/2016.

The approval given by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Human Research Ethics Unit immediately should any of the following occur:

* Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
* Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
* Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
* The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
* Modifications are requested by other HRECs.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Human Research Ethics Unit
research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Telephone: 03 9251 7123
Appendix B: Justice Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Department of Justice

Justice Human Research Ethics Committee

Innovation and Strategy Unit
Level 21
121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000
GPO Box 123A
Melbourne, Victoria 3001
Telephone: (03) 8684 1514
Facsimile: (03) 8684 1525
DX 210077

12 June 2012

Professor David Mellor
Deakin University

Re: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

Dear Professor Mellor,

I am happy to inform you that the Department of Justice Human Research Ethics Committee (JHREC) considered your response to the provisional approval requirements in relation to the project Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood and granted full approval for the duration of the investigation. The Department of Justice reference number for this project is CF/12/8113. Please note the following requirements:

- To confirm JHREC approval sign the Undertaking form attached and provide both an electronic and hardcopy version within ten business days.
- The JHREC is to be notified immediately of any matter that arises that may affect the conduct or continuation of the approved project.
- You are required to provide an Annual Report every 12 months (if applicable) and to provide a completion report at the end of the project (see the Department of Justice Website for the forms).
- Note that for long term/ongoing projects approval is only granted for three years, after which time a completion report is to be submitted and the project renewed with a new application.
- The Department of Justice would also appreciate receiving copies of any relevant publications, papers, theses, conferences presentations or audiovisual materials that result from this research.
- All future correspondence regarding this project must be sent electronically to ethics@justice.vic.gov.au and include the reference number and the project title. Hard copies of signed documents or original correspondence are to be sent to The Secretary, JHREC, Level 21, 121 Exhibition St, Melbourne, VIC 3000.

If you have any queries regarding this application you are welcome to contact me on (03) 8684 1514 or email: ethics@justice.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Jonathan Clark
Secretary,
Department of Justice Human Research Ethics Committee
Appendix C: Corrections Victoria Research Committee Approval

Department of Justice
Corrections Victoria

Level 22
121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: (03) 8684 6600
Facsimile: (03) 8684 6611
www.justice.vic.gov.au
DX 210085

5 April 2012

Professor David Mellor
Deakin University

Professor David Mellor,

Research Project: Processes of change in the transition to adulthood.

The Corrections Victoria Research Committee (CVRC) has considered your recent application to the Department of Justice Research Committee (JHREC) for approval to undertake research examining young male's transition to adulthood. CVRC believes that this research has the potential to contribute new knowledge to this important area, and might also have broader implications for policy and practice.

CVRC is supportive of this research and your application. CV support is conditional on the researcher providing CV with an electronic copy of the summary of research findings, copies of any conference papers and other publications arising from the research. As part of the ethics approval process you are also required to submit a summary of your final research report to the JHREC.

If you should need any amendments to your research please advise the Research and Evaluation Unit prior to submission of an amendment request to the JHREC.

If you have any queries regarding this correspondence, please contact Laura Wilson, Research and Evaluation Officer, Research and Evaluation on 868 46567.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Feiner
Manager, Research and Evaluation

cc: Yasmine Fauzee, Secretariat JHREC
Miss Poppy (Adelle) Edwards  
School of Psychology  
221 Burwood Highway  
Burwood, VIC 3125  
June 2012

RE: Application to undertake research involving the Department of Human Services

Dear Miss Edwards

I write to you concerning your application to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Research Coordinating Committee (RCC) to undertake research entitled “Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood”.

The DHS RCC will support/approve the research subject to the following conditions:

Pre-research Commencement
- The proposed research is conducted in accordance with the documentation you provided to the RCC;
- An approval letter is received from your University’s Human Research Ethics Committee or its equivalent;
- The department requires further detail from you regarding the following:
  o Target ages of participants;
  o Length of interview;
  o How the different groups will be compared, particularly Youth Justice compared with adult Community Corrections;
  o Has case management support and the part that plays in desistance been factored into the project?;
  o Has the availability of other social supports been factored into the project?
- Responsibility for facilitating appointments and recruiting participants must be undertaken by the researchers in conjunction with Youth Justice staff.

Monitoring of Research
- The provision of milestone updates to the RCC on the progress of your research;
- The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter, after this time extensions can be granted by notifying the RCC.

Dissemination of Research Findings
- The provision of a final report to the RCC at the completion of the research;
ORGANISATION INVITATION TO ASSIST RESEARCH
Plain Language Statement

Full Project Title: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood

Principal Researcher: Professor David Mellor
Student Researcher: Adelle (Poppy) Edwards

The research project entitled ‘Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood’ is being conducted by Adelle (Poppy) Edwards to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Psychology (Forensic) Degree under the supervision of Professor David Mellor. Your ongoing assistance in the research process is being sought and would be greatly appreciated.

The following provides a brief overview of the project.

Background

The strong relationship between age and crime indicates that offending peaks in adolescence and ceases in early adulthood, with only a few continuing to offend throughout their adult life (Casey & Day, 2009; Farrington, 1986; Moffitt, 1993). Most research in this area has focused on the ‘prediction’ of crime from identifiable ‘risk factors’ and ‘criminogenic needs’. However, such research fails to consider the role of developmental transitions, particularly the transition from adolescent dependency to adult self-sufficiency (Barry, 2010; Sampson & Laub, 1992). Additionally, most existing research overlooks the importance of understanding continuity and change in offending from the perspective of offending persons. Consequently, the voice of those who offend and do not offend, is missing from current research and theory. Not giving attention to how offending young people describe, interpret and construct their own lives among available opportunities and constraints, relative to non-offending young people, has the effect of reducing offending persons to passive beings, whose life is determined by their circumstances.

Project Explanation

The broad aim of this research is to explore young men’s accounts of key life transitions, times of decision and turning points that they view to have shaped their life direction. More specifically, the
focus of this research is to explore accounts of continuity and change in young men’s offending/non-offending behaviour with reference to multiple life transitions, such as:

(a) the overarching task of moving from adolescence to adulthood, and
(b) transitions in school, welfare and/or justice system involvement.

**Assisting the Research Project Involves**

In assisting the research process, Organisations will be asked to facilitate the recruitment of participants into the study. This involves (a) identifying potential participants who meet the selection criteria, (b) identifying who has the capacity to provide consent (based on an assessment of their maturity, intelligence and capacity to understand what participation involves), (c) providing the young men with initial information as to the nature of the project and (d) arranging a meeting to introduce the researcher to the young man.

Organisations may be asked to provide a suitable space for the purpose of conducting interviews with participants.

It is a requirement of the Human Research Ethics Committee that counselling is available to participants if needed. If appropriate, organisations may therefore be asked to provide support (e.g., from a case manager or school counsellor) to participants in the event that they become distressed as a result of the research process.

**Criteria for Selection of Participants**

Young men aged between 15 – 25, from a range of backgrounds with various degrees of contact with the welfare and/or justice system are eligible to participate in the research study. They must be able to converse fluently in English and not have a sexual offence history.

**Potential benefits of the anticipated research outcomes**

The research is anticipated to expand upon the existing body of knowledge (which has predominantly been generated from statistical methods) by exploring narrative accounts of young men. It will provide greater understanding of the processes that explain movement toward and/or away from offending, specifically during the transition to adulthood when large-scale change occurs. Therefore, studying offending as a process of change over time and from the perspective of non-offending persons will provide a greater understanding of offending behaviour, and also have implications for assessment, treatment and support of young people.
Interview Procedure

Prior to the interview, the researcher will meet with the potential participant and explain:

- the nature of the study
- any risks and benefits,
- that participation is voluntary, and
- that they are free to withdraw from the project prior to information being de-identified and without negative consequence.

To protect participants’ free and voluntary consent, it is imperative that the decision whether or not to participate in the research does not affect the young man’s relationship with the organisation in any way (positive or negative). Potential participants will be given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the project with the researcher. Following this, young men who voluntarily provide written informed consent to participate in the project will take part in a conversational interview of up to 90 minutes in duration.

The interview will involve participants drawing a timeline of significant life experiences and discussing the importance of these experiences in shaping their life direction.

The conversation may include the following broad topics:

- Education
- Parenthood
- Employment
- Living arrangements
- Contact with the welfare and/or justice system
- Romantic Relationships
- Antisocial/offending behaviour

Participants will also be asked some general questions (e.g., age, ethnicity and family background) and to talk about their plans for the future.

Participants will be compensated in the form of a $20 gift card.

How will the information be used?

The interview will be digitally recorded, transcribed and all information will be de-identified.

The information will be analysed by the researcher to ascertain how young men forge their life direction in the context of available opportunities and ongoing constraints.

The information will be reported in a variety of ways, which may include journal articles, media releases, conference papers and research theses.

Only the researchers will have authority to use or have access to the information for the purpose of analysing the data and reporting the findings.

At the completion of the project, research materials (e.g., digital recordings, transcripts, consent
forms) will be securely stored on university grounds for 6 years from the date of publication, after which time it will be destroyed.

Organisations supporting the research project will receive a summary of the overall findings and an individual report of aggregate (de-identified) results may be provided upon request.

**Contact Information**

For further information and/or to arrange a time to meet to discuss the project, please contact:

Student Researcher: Poppy Edwards  
E-mail: pedward@deakin.edu.au  
Mobile 0412 907 433

Principal Researcher: Professor David Mellor  
Email: mellor@deakin.edu.au  
Phone: 9244 3742

**Complaints**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,  
Telephone: 9251 7129, Facsimile: 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Appendix F: Organisational Consent Form

ORGANISATIONAL CONSENT FORM

TO: Organisations
Date: 
Full Project Title: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood
Reference Number: 2012-044

Thank you for your assistance with the research study exploring young men’s accounts of significant life experiences that they view to have shaped their life direction. Please provide certification as below:

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I give my permission for [staff/members/patrons] of [name of organisation] to assist in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal the participants’ identities and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

I agree that

1. I/ We WILL / WILL NOT facilitate the recruitment of participants into the study by (a) identifying potential participants who meet the selection criteria, (b) identifying who has the capacity to provide consent (based on an assessment of their maturity, intelligence and capacity to understand what participation involves), and (c) providing the young men with initial information as to the nature of the project and (d) arranging a meeting to introduce the researcher to the young man.

2. I/ We WILL / WILL NOT provide a suitable space for the purpose of conducting interviews with participants.

3. I/ We WILL / WILL NOT provide support to participants in the event that they become distressed as a result of the research process.

4. The organisation MAY / MAY NOT be named in research publications or other publicity without prior agreement.
5. I / We DO / DO NOT require an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the research findings related to the institution/organisation.

6. I / We EXPECT / DO NOT EXPECT to receive a copy of the research findings or publications.

Name of person giving consent (printed) .................................................................

Signature ................................................................. Date .................................
Life Pathways

Research Project

You are invited to participate in...

A research study exploring young men’s accounts of significant experiences, key life transitions, times of decision and turning points that they view to have shaped their life direction.

We are seeking males 15 – 25 years to participate in an interview for up to 90 minutes in duration

What is involved?

The interview will involve drawing a timeline of significant life experiences and discussing the importance of these experiences in shaping your life direction.

You will be asked to talk about experiences relating to:

- Education
- Employment
- Living arrangements
- Romantic relationships
- Parenthood and
- Involvements with welfare/justice institutions

Interested in participating?

Please contact [contact information]

---

2 The version of the flyer placed at organisations and Youth Justice Units included a statement offering limited remuneration for participation in the research.
Life Pathways
Research Project

You are invited to participate in...
A research study exploring young men’s accounts of significant experiences, key life transitions, times of decision and turning points that they view to have shaped their life direction.

We are seeking males 15 – 25 years to participate in a conversational interview for up to 90 minutes in duration

What is involved?
The interview will involve drawing a timeline of significant life experiences and discussing the importance of these experiences in shaping your life direction. You will be asked to talk about experiences relating to education, employment, living arrangements, romantic relationships, parenthood and involvements (and/or non-involvement) with welfare/justice institutions.

Interested in participating?
Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Life Pathways research

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Contact: pedward@deakin.edu.au
Appendix I: Participant Plain Language Statement

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

TO: Participants
Date:
Full Project Title: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood
Principal Researcher: Professor David Mellor  Student Researcher: Poppy Edwards

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood.

You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Your choice to participate is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with [name of organisation].

This project is being conducted by Adelle (Poppy) Edwards to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Psychology (Forensic) Degree under the supervision of Professor David Mellor

Project explanation

The purpose of this research is to understand how young men aged 15 – 25 identify and talk about significant life experiences that they view to have shaped their life direction.

For your participation, you will be compensated in the form of a $20 gift card.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to take part in an interview of up to 90 minutes in duration
- You will be interviewed alone by the researcher
- The interview will be digitally recorded
- You do not have to respond to any question you don’t want to answer
- The interview will involve drawing a timeline of significant life experiences and discussing the importance of these experiences in shaping your life direction
  - The conversation may include the following broad topics:
    - Education
    - Parenthood
    - Employment
    - Contact with the welfare and/or justice system
    - Living arrangements
    - Romantic Relationships
    - Antisocial/offending behaviour
- You will also be asked some general questions about you (e.g., age, ethnicity and family background) and to talk about your plans for the future

How will the information I give be used?

The information you give is private and confidential.
The interview will be digitally recorded

Information will be de-identified. This means that no one will be able to connect you back to the information you have given in the interview

Only the researchers will have authority to use or have access to the information for the purpose of analysing the data and reporting the findings

The information will be reported in academic documents

Your information will be securely stored on university grounds for 6 years from the date of publication, after which time it will be destroyed.

**What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

Your information is private and confidential.

**BUT** the researcher may have to share your confidential information with others when:

(a) the law requires this information (e.g., where information is given that may lead to the conviction of a crime/s); and

(b) if immediate risk of harm to you or others may be avoided only by sharing your confidential information.

Please do not provide specific details of any unadjudicated matters in the interview. This information will not be pursued by the researcher.

Participating in the project does not mean that you have to share any information about yourself that you do not want to.

The conversational interview may bring up parts of your life that are difficult to talk about and this might be upsetting to you.

If this occurs, you should contact either of the researchers and they will arrange counselling for you at a cost-free service that is in your area.

**Who is conducting this research?**

Student Researcher: Poppy Edwards
E-mail: pedward@deakin.edu.au

Principal Researcher: Professor David Mellor
Email: mellor@deakin.edu.au
Phone: 9244 3742

**Complaints**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,
Telephone: 9251 7129, Facsimile: 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Appendix J: Participant Plain Language Statement (Corrections Victoria)

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

TO: Participants
Date:
Full Project Title: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood
Principal Researcher: Professor David Mellor
Student Researcher: Poppy Edwards

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood.
You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Your choice to participate is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with Corrections Victoria or The Department of Justice.
This project is being conducted by Poppy Edwards to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Psychology (Forensic) Degree under the supervision of Professor David Mellor

Project explanation

The purpose of this research is to understand how young men aged 15 – 25 identify and talk about significant life experiences that they believe have shaped their life direction.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to take part in an interview of up to 90 minutes in duration
- You will be interviewed alone by the researcher
- You do not have to respond to any question you don’t want to answer
- The interview will involve drawing a timeline of significant life experiences and discussing how these experiences have shaped your life direction
  - The conversation may include the following broad topics:
    - Education
    - Parenthood
    - Employment
    - Living arrangements
    - Romantic Relationships
    - Contact with the welfare and/or justice system
    - Antisocial/offending behaviour
    - You will also be asked some general questions (e.g., your age, ethnicity and family background) and about your plans for the future

How will the information I give be used?

The information you give is private and confidential.

- Information will be de-identified. This means that no one will be able to connect you back to the information you have given in the interview
Only the researchers will have authority to use or have access to the information for the purpose of analysing the data and reporting the findings.

The information will be reported in academic documents.

Your information will be securely stored on university grounds for 6 years from the date of publication, after which time it will be destroyed.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Your information is private and confidential.

**BUT** the researcher may have to share your confidential information with others when:

(a) the law requires this information (e.g., where information is given that may lead to the conviction of a crime/s); and

(b) if immediate risk of harm to you or others may be avoided only by sharing your confidential information.

Please do not provide specific details of any unadjudicated matters in the interview. This information will not be pursued by the researcher.

Participating in the project does not mean that you have to share any information about yourself that you do not want to. However, the interview may bring up parts of your life that are difficult to talk about and this might be upsetting to you.

If this occurs, you should seek clinical support from prison staff.

**Complaints**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

**Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee**
**Department of Justice**
Tel: 03 8684 1514
Email: ethics@justice.vic.gov.au

**The Manager, Research Integrity**
**Deakin University**
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood Victoria 3125
Tel: 9251 7129
Facsimile: 9244 6581
Email: research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TO: Participants
Date:
Full Project Title: Processes of Change in the Transition to Adulthood
Reference Number: 2012-044

I have read the ‘Plain Language Statement’.

I understand what participation in the project involves and I agree to be a participant in this study.

I understand that any information/personal details given by me will be reported in a way that does not identify who I am.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The potential benefits and risks of participating in the project have been fully explained to me. The safeguards associated with participating have also been explained to me.

I understand that the conversational interview may bring up parts of my life that are difficult to talk about and this might be upsetting to me.

I understand the researcher may have to share my confidential information with others when:

(a) the law requires this information (e.g., where information is given that may lead to the conviction of a crime/s); and

(b) if immediate risk of harm to myself or others may be avoided only by sharing my confidential information.

I understand that I should not provide specific details of any unadjudicated matters in the interview.

I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered.

I understand that I can withdraw from this project before information has been analysed by the researcher without any negative consequences.

Participant’s Name (printed) ......................................................................................................................

Signature ........................................................................................................................................ Date ..............
Appendix L: Timeline of Significant Life Experiences Worksheet

Satisfaction with life

Events across time