YOUNG WOMEN IN TRANSITION: FROM OFFENDING TO DESISTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that offending behaviour is primarily the preserve of youth has challenged criminologists for the best part of a century to date and will no doubt continue to do so. Burt's (1925) medical-psychological study initiated a wave of positivist research that made young people 'the hapless population upon which much of the emphasis of "scientific criminology" and "administrative criminology" was to come to rest' (quoted in Brown: 2005: 29). Children and young people have been set apart from adults by dint of their age and status rather than their capacities and competences (Archard, 1993; Franklin, 2002). There are special measures in place to protect them from harm (whether this be self-inflicted or imposed by others), they are herded into institutionalised educational establishments from the age of five purportedly to improve their life chances, and they can be denied access to opportunities afforded 'adults' in mainstream society until they are well into their twenties. They are the main focus of criminal enquiry and their behaviour is often seen as abnormal, rebellious or pathological rather than a manifestation of the power imbalances inherent in society. This chapter argues, however, that young people strive towards conventionality and integration (MacDonald, 1997; Williamson, 1995), albeit often held back by the attitudes and practices of adults which can be both discriminating and disempowering (Barry, 2005).

YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Young people adopt diverse pathways in the transition to adulthood but are often restricted by structural constraints, notably in relation to their legal status as young adults as well as their opportunities for further education and employment. The importance of social inequalities and social institutions in determining or undermining youth transitions is becoming increasingly apparent. Many young people are excluded from higher education (through a lack of qualifications or financial support), from employment opportunities and from housing. Nevertheless, the fact is that the majority of young people who are marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged, within the labour market as elsewhere, do not actively rebel against their predicament and indeed aspire towards mainstream goals (MacDonald, 1997; Williamson, 1997; Wyn and White, 1997).

Traditionally, transitions research has portrayed a linear, psychosocial movement towards conventional goals, summarised by Coles (1995) as the school-to-work transition; the domestic transition from family of origin to family of destination; and the housing transition from living at home to living independently. Prior to this increasing sociological interest in youth transitions, however, anthropologists had been examining the experiences of adolescents in small-scale societies and the 'rites of passage' that they progress through in preparation for adulthood. Whilst the term 'youth' was not seen as a middle phase between childhood and adulthood in such anthropological studies, Van Gennep (1960, cited in Turner, 1967) nevertheless identified three elements in the transition from childhood to adulthood in terms of 'rites of passage'. These were:

separation –the detachment of the individual from an earlier fixed point in the social structure;

margin – a 'liminal' period when there are few commonalities with the past or coming state;

aggregation – the individual once more has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others that are clearly defined.

Turner (1969) describes individuals within the margin or liminal phase as: 'persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs' (ibid: 125). The elements of transition described by Turner, van Gennep and Coles, amongst others, are predominantly structurally defined and determined, as well as linear, but Stephen and Squires (2003), for example, argue that young people's transitions in late modernity are neither linear nor predictable but are fragmented, prolonged and cyclical. Equally, young people are increasingly seen as being proactive in defining, negotiating and making sense of their own transitions, within the confines of structural constraints. Many recent accounts of young people's experience of youth transitions (*inter alia*, Holland *et al*, 1999; Barry, 2001) suggest that their narratives and transitional experiences are guided as much by personal agency and responsibility as they are by structural factors, not least because of the 'risk society' notion (Beck, 1992) that young people now have to resolve their own problems, overcome structural constraints and 'individualize' their own life projects (Cote, 2002). Whilst the concept of individualisation describes both structure and agency, the individual is nevertheless at the centre (albeit structurally defined), and factors such as class, gender and social networks are peripheral. Furlong and

Cartmel (1997), however, warn against an over-emphasis on individualisation at the expense of social and structural change, suggesting it would be an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997: 114) to focus on individual responsibility and self-determination without taking into account the powerful impact of existing social structures. Likewise, Shildrick and MacDonald (2006) argue that post-subcultural studies epitomise the move within a postmodern theoretical environment towards less interest in social inequalities and an over-emphasis on individualistic solutions. Nevertheless, as long as young people experience 'ageism' – socially, legally and economically – within society, they will continue to have a low status as 'liminal beings' (Turner, 1967), however much they determine their own transitional pathways.

If, as Beck (1992) suggests, agency and individualization are given as much emphasis as structure in youth transitions, then it would seem reasonable to assume that the timing of such transitions would vary greatly between individuals, depending on their capacity to progress their life projects. However, there tends to be continuity in the overall timing of transitions, not least as reflected by the age-crime curve where offending could be seen to increase and decrease over time in line with fluctuations in power and social status for young people. This general continuity between age and the transition to adulthood suggests that structural factors are more constraining than individual factors are enabling, but that offending in youth gives a semblance of self-determination in an otherwise constraining environment, and this is discussed further below.

OFFENDING AND CAPITAL IN TRANSITION

It is argued here that the three phases of transition (childhood, youth and adulthood) run parallel to the three phases of offending, namely onset, maintenance[1] and desistance. As criminological theory currently stands, there seems to be a lack of congruence and continuity between those factors influencing onset and those influencing desistance. On the one hand, it is other people that are predominantly seen as influencing children and young people to start offending (e.g., subcultural theories, social control theory, differential association), and yet, on the other hand, individual agency tends to be seen as the most influential element in young people's desistance from offending (e.g., narrative theory, rational choice theory). This anomaly – that interdependence is associated with onset but not with desistance - requires further attention, not least when young people seem to desist from crime in order to achieve mainstream goals. One possible concept which may enable a greater understanding of offending and desistance as a process is the concept of 'capital' as espoused by Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1986).

Pierre Bourdieu identifies four types of capital to explain how individuals gain power through social action. These are:

- Social capital - which is valued relations and networks with significant others;

- Economic capital - which is the financial means to at least the necessities of everyday living;

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[1] I choose to use the word 'maintenance' rather than 'persistence' since the latter often suggests not only dogged obstinacy or purposefulness, but also increased frequency of offending. Maintenance, on the other hand, suggests the possibility of merely keeping going with offending, with or without purpose, and can imply a reduction as well as an increase in offending behaviour.

- Cultural capital - which is legitimate competence, skills or status and comes from knowledge of one's cultural identity and lifestyles; and

- Symbolic capital - which is an overarching resource that brings prestige and honour gained from the collective, legitimate and recognised culmination of the other three forms of capital.

These types of capital are, it is argued here, difficult to accumulate in transition. Young people have few permanent friendships at that age; limited in opportunities to earn money or respect; are confined to full-time education and are segregated from the adult labour market. However, they can gain some capital within the peer group, through the kudos and reputation gained from being a successful offender or having money and consumables as a result. But such capital is difficult to sustain through offending over time, not least because of the negative connotations of being labelled an 'offender' or being constantly embroiled within the criminal justice system. Hence young people's desire to find alternative sources of capital as they get older.

Most theorists in criminology support the proposition that social integration, whether this be by individual, structural or political means, is an important factor influencing the behaviour and attitudes of young people in transition today. Most theorists also agree that young people are keen to adjust within society, to strive to achieve their aspirations and to be recognised by society as a whole for their efforts. Subcultural and other criminological theories on their own, whilst allowing a description and analysis of why young people may choose deviant means to conventional ends, do not take full cognisance of young people's expectations and aspirations as well as their lack of opportunities, rights, capital and status during the transition to adulthood.

Whilst research on youth transitions has been used relatively sparsely in the field of criminology[2] it is argued that such literature can provide a better understanding of youth offending as perceived and experienced by young people. Not only are the phases of transition important markers to young people, but they should also be important markers to criminologists keen to understand the usually temporary and youthful nature of offending. Studying youth transitions in parallel with youth offending enables an exploration of the dynamics of age, power, interdependence and integration in the transition to full citizenship in adulthood. Equally, adding the capital component enables a greater understanding of the 'liminality' of youth transitions and the age-crime curve. It is argued in this chapter that the successful transition from the world of youth to that of adulthood, encouraged by an accumulation of legitimate and sustainable capital, is one of the culminating factors in reducing offending behaviour by young people. The following findings from a Scottish study of youth offending by both young men and young women illustrate the argument, although the focus here is specifically on the young women.

THE SCOTTISH DESISTANCE STUDY

In 2000-2001, the author explored the reasons for, and advantages and disadvantages of, starting, continuing and stopping offending amongst 40 persistent young offenders in Scotland, 20 male and 20 female, aged 18-33. All of the men and seven of the women were approached via the auspices of a voluntary organisation running intensive probation projects in Scotland, and the remaining thirteen women were ex-probation clients referred to the researcher via various social work departments. All

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[2] Although, see Bottoms et al. (2004), Harada (1995), MacDonald and Marsh (2005) and Smith (2006).

had been on probation in the past and the mean average number of previous offences for the men was 24 and for the women 12. The majority of the sample had been high-tariff, persistent offenders for a substantial part of their lives, on average 10 years in childhood and youth. Fourteen of the women started offending before the age of 16.

Most interviews were conducted in respondents' own homes, and the interview lasted on average one and a half hours. It involved in-depth discussion of offending histories, biographies, reasons given for onset, maintenance and desistance, the advantages and disadvantages of starting, continuing and stopping offending, and future expectations and aspirations.

THE ONSET PHASE

The main influence on both the young men and the young women in the onset phase of offending was the fact that their peers were offending and they wanted to be seen as part of that friendship group. Having friends was a crucial source of social capital as they moved away from the influence of the family and into the secondary school environment, and having a reputation as an offender also gave them symbolic capital. The women were more likely to start offending specifically for the attention of usually a male partner who was offending, because this gave them social and symbolic capital, as one 23 year old woman suggested:

> [My first boyfriend] was a drug dealer and I admired him… I fancied
> him and I thought he was cool because everybody respected him, and
> all the people my age respected me because I was mucking about with
> this person.

Gilligan (1982) suggests that young women are more likely to be influenced by their need for attention from and interaction with other young people in the transition to adulthood, but the influence of male drug-using partners in particular was a key risk factor for the young women in this study. They were much more likely to be influenced to take drugs by partners who were themselves using drugs – not least if those partners wanted the women to offend in order to feed a drug habit. This often resulted in the women becoming not only dependent on drugs but also dependent on those relationships with drug-using partners for love and attention, however violent they became, as one 21 year old woman explained:

> I got forced into it. Basically my boyfriend turned round and said do
> you love me? I said aye, I love you. He said, if you love me, try this. I
> said I don't want to. And he said he'd batter me if I didn't.

Although sociability and relationships were the main impetus for these young women starting offending, they were also much more likely than the men to see the monetary advantages of offending (for consumables, clothes and drugs), whereas the men were more likely to see the personal advantages of relieving boredom and keeping in with their friends. For the women in particular, the economic and symbolic capital gained from offending was more apparent in the starting phase, as one woman explained about why she started offending at the age of 17:

> [Shoplifting] gave me confidence. I felt going with somebody else's
> cheque book and getting all dressed up and going in [to a shop], I
> could spend what I wanted, they treated me well because they thought

I had enough money. They had a different outlook… It was like a

power trip (29 year old female).

The women were also more likely to cite the latent adverse effects of traumatic childhoods, such as sexual abuse or family illness or bereavement, as major factors in their starting offending, which may in turn have exacerbated their drug use:

'When I was younger I got interfered with. That's got a lot to do with it, with anger and that… I was only four' (20 year old female).

It was a horrible childhood… my mum and dad split up when I was 14 – happiest day of my life when my mum and dad split up because she was just a punch bag to him (33 year old female).

The women were more than twice as likely as the men to see the advantages of starting offending. Indeed, their calculation of the monetary gain in starting offending makes the fact that they eventually stop offending all the more incongruent, given that they seemingly stopped more easily than the men. Likewise, given that the men could see few advantages in starting offending, it is perhaps surprising that they carried on with such activity for so long. When asked what they perceived as the disadvantages of starting to offend, the women were more likely than the men to cite disadvantages, namely becoming embroiled in the criminal justice system (e.g., getting caught, having court appearances and being detained) and losing the trust of their family and local community. As will be seen in the following section, however, the balance of

advantages to disadvantages changes dramatically between the sexes as these young people move into the maintenance phase of offending.

THE MAINTENANCE PHASE

Once offending became a routine, there was a marked change in attitude to offending between the men and women. Offending may have brought capital initially, but the majority realised over time that the capital gained from offending was short-lived and eventually created more hassle for them than going straight. This was much more apparent for the women than the men. The men seemed to think *less* about what they were actually doing by offending (and became increasingly opportunistic about it) whereas the women seemed to think *more* about their behaviour and its adverse consequences, but nevertheless continued to offend out of necessity or pragmatism.

At the time of interview, over half the respondents had been involved in offending for between 6 and 9 years, although the majority had since stopped offending. Whilst the type of offence committed varied minimally between onset and maintenance, the frequency and sophistication of that behaviour increased over time, as did the reasons and justifications for that behaviour. For example, whilst most offending initially was for sociability reasons or for money for consumables, it increasingly became a solitary activity and a means of funding only a drug habit, especially for the women. The longer they offended, necessity overtook sociability and routine replaced excitement. Offending often became a business, with customers replacing friends as the *raison d'etre*. Money for drugs became increasingly important to many of these young women in the maintenance phase, with many adapting their offending to maximise the economic gains anticipated:

As my face got known for shoplifting, I stopped that and went into

house breaking… I went on to fraud, credit card fraud… I was making

about £300 to £400 a day and it was just going on purely drugs… I was

a prostitute and using credit cards to go buy clothes to work in (27 year

old female).

It could be argued that this 'force of habit' has wider connotations, in that the status quo may be more secure and preferable to a change in lifestyle or peer group. The need to uphold a reputation could also be seen as wanting to maintain the status quo amongst existing friends as a 'face-saving' mechanism, rather than giving up what is known for something that is uncertain: 'I think it was because nobody knew me… I felt as if I had to make a name for myself' (24 year old male). Bromley (1993: 11) highlights this need to *maintain* a reputation gained in the past because to do otherwise would draw adverse attention to their seemingly changed persona: 'The autonomy of reputation, as a process distinct from the personality it is supposed to reflect, is the cause of much ambivalence'.

Whilst consumption of clothes, leisure, cigarettes and alcohol were important to these young people in youth, many of the women required money to maintain a developing drug addiction. They spoke of relationships with partners who were also offending for drugs, and this created a dichotomy for many of the women who wanted to support their partner's lifestyle, but did not necessarily want to match their partner's drug habit. Often when a relationship had started out as a source of love and attention, it rapidly became a liability, often resulting in domestic violence and addiction as well as stigmatisation within these women's wider social networks.

Covington (1985) and Taylor (1993) suggest that drug-related offending by women is often partner-induced, initially to please the partner but often latterly because of coercion through abuse or the women becoming addicted to drugs themselves. For the majority of the young women (18 out of the 20), drug or alcohol use was seen as the main reason for, or an influence in, their offending in the past. Early offending, both in terms of experimenting with drugs or committing other offences such as theft, tended to be for friendship for these respondents. When substance use became a problem for them, it increased their propensity to offend over time. There was then a noticeable shift in the reasons for offending if the individual became addicted to a substance and needed money to fund their usage: 'I was getting addicted to speed. When I was 16 years old, I was on an ounce a day, which is £80 so I had to steal to get my habit' (23 year old female):

> I didn't realise it was killing me. I didn't think there was anything wrong with me but it got to a point every day you wake up, you do the same thing, you get up, you've the clothes on you had on from the night before, you get up, you find where you're going to get money from, you'd walk for miles and miles, you'd climb a mountain for a tenner at the top of it and you'd walk back down it again and buy yourself a bag [of heroin]. You wouldn't eat. The only thing you would eat was chocolate. If you never had money for chocolate… you'd steal a bar of chocolate to keep your sugar level up (21 year old female).

The men and women diverged in their 'choice' of whether to offend or not in the maintenance phase. The men were more likely to be dependent on *status* gained from offending whereas the women were more likely to be dependent on *drugs* as a result

of starting to offend, and therefore chose to commit specific offences in the maintenance phase to fund their habit. Substance misuse and crime have tended to show a close association that cannot be put down to chance alone. Whilst crime rates have dropped over the last 10 years in most Western countries (Leonardsen, 2003), there have been 'alarming trends' in increased substance misuse since the Second World War (Pudney, 2002).

Just as many of the young women in this sample suggested that a methadone programme to stabilise their drug use would have precluded any need to offend, likewise many suggested that offending would not have been so necessary if they had found employment. However, legitimate employment was elusive to the majority of them, who seldom had the skills, qualifications or social networks necessary to find paid work. However, in the transition between school and eventual employment, offending was one way of ensuring some form of income, however precarious such activity was. Equally, whilst offending may have initially been seen a source of kudos and status for these young people, as their offending became more persistent, their reputations were undermined greatly by their involvement in the criminal justice system, thus further undermining their chances of finding employment. The disadvantages of offending eventually outweighed the advantages at a time when wider social networks and responsibilities (to themselves and their families) became increasingly valuable to them. They seemed no longer to value the advantages of offending accrued in the childhood and early youth phases but wanted to progress to adulthood and more conventional opportunities and responsibilities.

What had started out as generally sociable and enjoyable criminal activity in the onset phase had become isolating, habitual and increasingly risky behaviour for many in the

maintenance phase. The reasons given for *continuing* offending were rarely synonymous with the reasons for *starting* offending, and it seems that the initial kudos, sociability or excitement gained from offending soon wore off as drug use increased, practical need took over or 'criminal justice system fatigue' set in. Their offending seemed to become very much a pragmatic means of sustaining a certain lifestyle or habit in the seeming absence of an alternative lifestyle, and few were currently satisfied with their situation. Thus, many of the respondents talked of distancing themselves from offending peers in the latter stages of the maintenance phase, suggesting the beginning of the process of desistance.

THE DESISTANCE PHASE

Eighteen of the 20 young women suggested they had stopped offending at the time of interview and the majority of them also suggested they had done so within a year prior to interview. This was broadly supported by the official data collated two years after interview which suggested that 15 of the 20 women had, according to official criminal records, maintained an offence-free lifestyle since their decision to stop. Reasons for stopping offending revolved around the risks of being incarcerated and of losing people close to them. The women often had children whom they felt increasingly responsible for and whose welfare was linked to the mother being both in the community and free of a drug addiction. Not only losing a child through the mother's potential death from drugs but also losing the child to the care of social services were both concerns voiced by some of these young women.

There were few perceived 'pull' factors involved in their decision to stop offending, with a drug addiction, the criminal justice system, loss of trust within the family and a

deteriorating reputation being the main 'push' factors. The main pull factor was the dream of leading a normal life, with a loving relationship, a house and a job. This striving for normality and independence was much more noticeable amongst the women than the men, and the means of achieving it seemingly more readily available and attractive to the women – such as through being able to give their love and attention to another person – whether that be a partner or their own children.

Because of the drug problems that many of the women in this sample had, desistance was only seen as possible if and when their drug use reduced, stabilised or stopped altogether. If they did not need drugs, the majority said they would not need to offend, and this has been borne out in other studies of offending (for example, Jamieson et al, 1999). Therefore, their main preoccupation in the desistance phase was to give up drugs. A high proportion of the women (8 out of 20) were prescribed methadone in the later stages of an addiction. They suggested that this was a saving grace in their fight to stop drug taking and offending – although they recognised that methadone was also an addictive drug in its own right.

The 'hassle factor' which accompanied offending (e.g., getting caught, getting tired and disillusioned or having a criminal record or reputation) was also a major factor in their reasons for stopping:

> I had just grown up, realised the serious trouble I had been in… and well, at 20, I had my own house at this point… At the start, I had all nice stuff in it and then like with the heroin, I had sold it all for £20 at a time. Everything, and then I just thought to myself 'what am I doing here? I've got nothing. I'm in my twenties'. Do you know what I

mean?… and I was 'right, that's enough, time to grow up here'… the police knew… it was this house I was dealing in, right, and they were sitting right outside… the door was going constantly… that was enough. That was enough after that (23 year old female).

The advantages of no longer offending were mainly to do with no longer being the focus of police attention and no longer fearing imprisonment: 'Not having to worry about anything, about the police coming to the door. Nobody can come to me now and say 'you've done this' because I've not done nothing' (27 year old female).

Those close to these young people seemed to become increasingly important as they moved into early adulthood. Social and symbolic capital seemed also more influential for the young women in the sample, for example, over half the women suggested they stopped offending because of now having responsibilities for children, because of the positive impact of a relationship or because of the support from family more generally:

Reasons for stopping? Well the kids, know what I mean. To try and make a family… I just didn't want to hurt them anymore. I knew I had hurt them enough. [My daughter] had seen so much… She hadn't seen the needle or nothing, know what I mean, but kids aren't stupid (27 year old female).

The women suggested that they were more determined to stop offending if such offending meant jeopardising a loving relationship with a non-offending partner. Generally, it could be said that desistance for the women in this study resulted more

from *actual* commitments (to children, partners or parents), whereas for the men desistance was more in preparation for *potential* commitments (aspirations for employment or raising a family). Having real rather than imaginary responsibilities was no doubt a potential factor which precipitated earlier desistance amongst the women.

The women were also nearly three times as likely as the men to mention having freedom, control, pride and a 'normal' life again and were twice as likely to mention having improved relationships with family, children and partners and improved reputations within the community:

> I don't feel like scum anymore… [I] feel worth something now. I can make something of myself now. Get on with my life. I want to have babies and I want to get married. I just want all the normal things in life and I feel now that I'm grown up a wee bit and my head's more clearer. I've got a lot of loss of memory with drugs and I've still got a lot of very bad depressions but I've sort of got my family back a wee bit. I don't want to ever lose that, it's so sad (23 year old female).

The increasing pragmatism and disenchantment in the desistance phase was closely related to the 'hassle factor' mentioned above, but was also associated with a developing realisation that offending was not compatible with their increased need and desire to achieve conventional goals. The vast majority of this sample had similar conventional aspirations to those of young people more generally, namely a job, a house of their own and a family of their own (Barnardo's, 1996; Barry, 2001). Thirteen women mentioned wanting a job, and 10 women wanted a house of their

own. Five women mentioned having a settled family life, but only after they had gained stable employment.

Employment is often cited in the desistance literature as being a major precursor or trigger to desisting and yet 16 of the 18 young women who said they had stopped offending did not have employment but still considered that they were desisters. Of the 2 young women who were employed at the time of the interview, neither equated their desistance with actually finding employment, although one commented that the job gave her the opportunity to prove herself as reliable and trustworthy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings suggest that young women may start offending as a means, however misguided or short-sighted, of social integration, whether this be through friendships or relationships. Offending offered possible status and identity in moving from the confines of the family in childhood to the wider social network of the school milieu. However, in the maintenance phase, sociability and status were overtaken by necessity, resignation and addiction. Although they may not have had a lot to lose materially in the youth phase, the 'hassle factor' of the criminal justice system became increasingly inhibiting and relationships with family, partners and children became stronger and more empathic. Thus, the two key factors associated with desistance for these young women tended to be practical or social: that is, criminal justice system 'fatigue' or because of relationships with, or the support of, family, friends and significant others.

These young people eventually realised that their offending was losing them the trust of significant others, was losing them their freedom and was resulting in more costs than benefits as they moved into adulthood. Whilst offending offered them 'informal' legitimation by their peers and some continuity and recognition in the absence of more conventional and formal legitimation by the wider society, as they moved into adulthood, offending became less likely to give them longer-term capital, which was more likely to be gained from legitimate sources (for the women, this was more often through opportunities to take on responsibilities for children or partners, rather than through employment *per se*). The women were more concerned about their reputations within the wider community, their need to be good mothers and the possibility of further involvement in the criminal justice system if they continued to offend or take drugs. This new sense of responsibility and care in adulthood was a much more viable source of legitimate capital to the women than the men and they thus tended to move away from offending peers and emphasised renewed contact with, and support from, family members or non-offending partners. State benefits also became an alternative source of income for those aged over 18 and those prescribed methadone found the economic savings considerable.

However, it is acknowledged that many who had *not* stopped offending also had access to such opportunities for accumulating capital – a loving relationship, children to look after, maybe a job - but were unable or unwilling, for varying reasons, to desist from crime. This anomaly has been a constant and major source of concern for criminologists and suggests that capital accumulation on its own cannot account for desistance. It is therefore suggested here that capital *expenditure* is a missing link in the chain of events surrounding both youth transitions and youth offending. Taking on responsibilities for themselves or others – giving their own capital to others or being

needed by others - gave them the impetus to stop offending. What was particularly striking about these young people's narratives, especially the women's, was their emphasis, once stopped offending, on taking on responsibilities for others and wanting to give back to others for the damage or hurt they had caused them in the past, however indirectly. The two main ways expenditure of capital can be achieved for young people are through taking on responsibility and 'generativity':

- **responsibility-taking** means having the desire, opportunity, incentive and capacity to be trusted with a task of benefit to others. Examples would be having employment, or having responsibility for one's own children or family.

- **generativity** means the passing on of care, attention or support to others based on one's own experiences, through, for example wanting to become a drugs counsellor or probation worker; wanting to ensure that their own children have a better life than they had; and wanting to make restitution to the local community for past offending.

In this study, it seemed that those who had desisted from crime were more likely to have opportunities for responsibility and generativity than those who were still persistent offenders. Thus, it may be that a combination of expenditure and accumulation of capital is necessary not only in the transition to adulthood but also in the transition to desistance. This combination of accumulation and expenditure of durable and legitimate capital is what I would call 'social recognition'. The concept of social recognition suggests that young people recognise the needs of others

(generativity) and are concurrently recognised by others in addressing those needs (responsibility taking).

The young women seemed to have greater opportunities not only to accumulate capital as they got older but also to spend it – by taking on responsibilities or through looking after a partner or children, for example. The young men, on the other hand, had fewer opportunities to both accumulate and spend legitimate capital in youth. They were more likely to hold onto the capital they gained from offending as a means of feeling socially integrated and having a stake in that micro-society of their peers.

CONSTRAINTS TO CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

However, opportunities for accumulating and spending capital are not always available to young people, not least in the transition to adulthood. There are several structural constraints which are beyond the control of more disadvantaged young people, which reduce their ability to accumulate and spend legitimate capital in the youth phase, and thereby also reduce their likelihood of giving up crime. For example:

- **Liminal status** – young people have few rights or opportunities as full citizens. They are marginalised in the labour market, have limited access to state benefits and limited opportunities to be trusted with responsibility for themselves or others.

- **Reputation** – their reputation as an offender made them less likely to be trusted with responsibility, and such discriminatory attitudes were far from easy to shift. Coping with 'bad friends' or police harassment when you live in the same neighbourhood requires a lot of patience and determination.

- **Housing status** – living at home was a financial necessity for some, which meant reduced autonomy and remaining in close proximity to the adverse influences of their peers or the police, as mentioned above. And yet to find a job often meant moving area but not having money for accommodation.

- **Unemployment** – many suggested if they could find work and a steady income, offending would no longer be necessary, but few of them had experienced sustained periods of employment. This was partly because of their criminal record, partly the uncertainties of the youth labour market.

- **Criminal justice system** – involvement in the criminal justice system was no doubt an eventual deterrent to offending but its repercussions were immense: a criminal record, police harassment and pending court cases made the accumulation and expenditure of capital more difficult. These young people needed a 'clean slate' to sustain a non-offending lifestyle but had little encouragement from the system in order to do that.

In conclusion, young people need opportunities to take on responsibilities for themselves and others, and to gain respect and trust in youth as well as in adulthood.

Social inclusion is not enough: it requires reciprocity and social recognition, but social recognition can only come from durable and legitimate opportunities to spend as well as to accumulate capital. The key to desistance, therefore, may be in offering young people responsibility and respect: legitimate opportunities to spend capital, thereby allowing them to be recognised as valued members of society rather than merely liminal beings in transition.

The implications of this research for policy in the criminal justice system are two-fold. First, given that the period of transition to adulthood runs a seemingly parallel course to that of onset, maintenance and desistance, it would seem logical to extend a welfare-based rather than punishment-based criminal justice system until the age of at least 21, if not 25. Such a system would also need to review the keeping and divulging of criminal records: for example, certain criminal records should only be divulged for judicial purposes and not for employment purposes. Secondly, pending the rejuvenation of the labour market, it may well be worth encouraging young people to take on volunteering work which could foster reciprocity and trust between young people and their communities as well as offer opportunities for generativity and responsibility taking.

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