EMERALD POINTS

THE AMBIGUITIES OF DESISTANCE

Ex-offenders, Higher Education and the Desistance Journey

DAVID HONEYWELL

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Praise for *The Ambiguities of Desistance*

David Honeywell's book provides a uniquely critical and reflective exploration of desistance which is both experientially grounded and research-informed. Written in a direct, engaging and challenging style, it deserves to be widely read by scholars, students and practitioners – indeed by anyone and everyone concerned both with supporting desistance from crime and with changing how we do justice. This book is full of voices we need to hear and heed, not least the author's.

–Professor Fergus McNeill, *University of Glasgow*

Desistance theory has always benefitted from both the autobiographical perspectives of former prisoners as well as systematic academic study, yet in this fascinating new work, David Honeywell combines both of these sources of expertise, drawing on his own lived experience and rigorous research. The intersection of the two makes for a challenging, original and groundbreaking work and a model for keeping criminological research relevant and vibrant.

–Professor Shadd Maruna, *Queen's University Belfast*

In one of the finest books ever written about imprisonment, Men in Prison, Victor Serge declares 'A victory over jail is a great victory'. In this book David Honeywell follows Serge to present his own personal victory and those of others who have emerged from imprisonment and made their way through a university education. These remarkable journeys from institutions at the base of society to those nearer its top are gathered as evidence of the complications of desistance. Dr Honeywell offers the reader rare insights drawn from his own incarceration and his subsequent contributions to convict criminology. Like Serge, Honeywell takes his own prison experience and combines it with others into a particularly vivid and triumphant account of lives that prison did not destroy. Share his victory and theirs when you read this book.

–Dr Rod Earl, *The Open University*

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BY

DAVID HONEYWELL
University of Manchester, UK

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Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr David Honeywell is a Research Assistant in the *Division of Psychology and Mental Health*, in the University of Manchester, UK. His current research involves working with suicidal prisoners. He also has a background as a criminology lecturer and has worked at Universities of York, Durham and Hull where he has taught crime and deviance, criminal justice and prisons and desistance. As a convict criminologist, he draws on a unique blend of sociological academic qualifications and his lived experience as a former offender and prisoner to identify, analyse and understand the complexities of desistance from crime and challenges prisoners and ex-prisoners may experience.

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PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

In this section I have included the 'Participants' Biographies, including their demographics such as class, race, gender and sexuality which the participants were asked to identify themselves.

- Carla, 22, was a white, English, middle class, lesbian female. She was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for perverting the course of justice (i.e., making a false rape allegation). She also had substance and alcohol abuse issues and also struggled with her own identity as a lesbian woman. She found prison liberating as she was able for the first time in her life explore and express her sexuality with other women. She now works with a major charity that helps other individuals who are experiencing the same issues.
- Charlie, 40, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm. He has struggled to acknowledge his offence and feels shame and guilt over it. He comes from a tightly knit and supportive family which has helped him to rebuild his life. Charlie had gained a degree in criminology before he offended which was related to his work with probation. Prison gave him a new and more positive perspective of his clients. He is now working towards a doctorate.
- Chloe, 38, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual female. She was sentenced to six years in prison but did not want to disclose any details of why she was imprisoned because of the traumatic memories it invokes. At the time of writing she worked for a prison reform charity but has since moved jobs. She has been successful in higher education gaining both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.
- Clarissa, 41, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She was in custody 11 times for offences ranging from shop lifting and possession to driving while being disqualified. She has continued to work for the council and has enjoyed delivering guest talks to college students about her previous struggle with substance abuse. Clarissa was a victim of child sexual abuse and later developed drug issues. Education provided her with

opportunities not least, including accommodation where she was able to escape a volatile relationship.

- Dafydd, 27, was a white, Welsh, middle class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to 14 months' imprisonment and was handed a 4-year driving ban for dangerous driving. He came from a stable middle class background but as a youth had begun truanting with other school friends which was the start of his offending. He arrived at a D Category prison almost immediately after being convicted. Dafydd immediately experienced a privileged prisoner status because of his previous academic achievements and because he had been a full-time university student at the time of his arrest.
- Debbie, 42, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison for theft from her employer. Education enabled Debbie to transform her life where she has now become an entrusted and successful employee working with ex-offenders, homeless and substance users.
- Dylan, 27, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual male. He served a 15-month prison sentence for violence. He came from a family who were involved in criminality and he had a difficult start at university after disclosing his past during a seminar. He eventually graduated with a degree in criminology and has continued to postgraduate study. Dylan has had to struggle against his past and present barriers, but as this study has demonstrated, he has shown resilience which was developed from education and overcoming hardships.
- Gemma, 34, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She served five prison sentences over her lifetime for drug-related offences. At the time of my study, she was working with individuals with substance abuse issues. Despite her obvious transformation, she has experienced continual stigma and discrimination from the area where she grew up and is well known for her former offending. She began a Leadership and Management degree but only completed part of it as she gained employment.
- Germaine, 29, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for drugs offences. She was a high-profile case because of the severity of criminal activities of her family, which made it difficult for her to hide her past. Germaine is interested in fashion and design which led to her gaining a degree. She has financial struggles which at the time of the interview were preventing her continuing on to postgraduate study.
- Gerry, 36, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual male. He served several prison sentences for theft, burglary and street crime. He was

what traditional sociologists would have described as a typical recidivist who continued to re-offend, deliberately choosing deviant behaviour [which included drug dealing] over legitimate means. But although there were predictors and causality of his offending, eventually, he decided to stop. He has since worked for the council and has been successful with continual employment.

- Jimmy, 47, was a white, Scottish, working class, heterosexual male. He served four prison sentences, the last being for five years. He admittedly has never fully desisted but no longer commits acts of violence. He became a teetotaller many years ago as this was his main offending trigger. He has now succeeded in gaining a degree in design and continues to find new projects and enjoys being dad to his small boy.
- Ju Ju, 67, was a white, English, middle class heterosexual male. He was sentenced to seven years and six months for statutory rape. He was British born but has resided in New Zealand most of his life. He was the oldest of the sample and has enjoyed a lifetime career as a psychologist and researcher. Education has been an important part of his life before and after prison which has enabled him to immediately overcome the barriers that others have encountered during their entry into university.
- Judy, 41, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual female. She had spent time remanded in custody, had served a three-month prison sentence and had spent time on probation for shop lifting. Since Judy was interviewed, she has moved jobs but made her career that helps others from going along the same path as herself. This redemptive approach was distinctive for many of the others also and a main theme within this study.
- Len, 48, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual male. He served a life sentence for murder and continues to deal with the psychological problems that led to his offence. Len has had many internal issues to deal with and even felt education was more of a curse as it opened his eyes to the cruel world he once inhabited. Education, however, still gives him a goal to succeed and he continues his education which he feels has given him structure.
- Melody, 44, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She served a four year prison sentence for violence and fraud. She discovered she had been adopted around the age of six and relates this to her deviance. However, it would seem that it is socially linked but the important

point is that for Melody this link to her birth family gives her sense of identity.

- Peter, 58, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to three months in the 1980s for incitement to commit arson. He came from a privileged background and had a very good early education. Peter did not have an ongoing criminal lifestyle and therefore felt somewhat unrepresentative for this study. Although during his early years he was sent to prison, this was more of a mere glitch during his more rebellious teens. He has continued to become successful in academe and contributes widely to criminological research.
- Ruby, 40, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual female. She served several short-term prison sentences for shop lifting, assault and drug use. She has worked with other individuals with substance abuse issues and is now a trainee probation officer. It was essential for Ruby to demonstrate her independence and gain a degree in criminology and sustain successful employment.
- Sid, 47, was a white, English, working class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for drug dealing. He is a university lecturer and a convict criminologist who gained a degree in criminology and continued his education to doctoral level. Sid is active in prisoner and desistance research and has been instrumental in networking and mentoring of other individuals who have left prison.
- Stacey, 26, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual female and one of the youngest of the sample. She had the longest criminal record than the others with over 100 convictions which included mainly violence and criminal damage. Her background gives a fascinating insight into the pains of teenage angst, living in care and decline into criminality. Education was her catalyst for change which was influenced by her mentors with shared lived experiences.
- Tariq, 28, was an English born Asian, middle class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for violence and disorder. He was the only ethnic minority in the sample, yet his narrative still provided an interesting insight into some of the cultural differences for desisters. He had good support from his family which is supported by other desistance studies. Tariq was also one of the few who already had a university education before he went to prison. He continues with education and has been involved in local community police initiatives and is now working towards a doctorate.

- Tom, 60, was a white, English, middle class, heterosexual male. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for repeated sex offences. Since leaving prison, he has made progress in academe which boosted his self-esteem and gave him the confidence to confront his past. And although he has experienced more restrictions than anyone else due to the nature of his offences, he feels that higher education enabled a complete transformation of self.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mother for all the support she has given over the years. Without her continual belief in me and refusal to give up on me, my life chances would have been very different. Also thanks to my sister Carol who has shown more courage than I ever have and who supported me throughout the financial struggles of funding my PhD.

My circle of academic friends is widespread, yet the criminology community is quite tightly knit. A special thanks goes to those who have been there for me from the start and also to those who have more recently entered my life and continue to support my ventures. My PhD supervisor Gareth Millington was everything a PhD student could want from a supervisor. His patience, understanding and firm guidance saw me through one of the most difficult periods of my life, but if it was not for his believing in me in the first place, I may never have got it off the ground.

I want to thank my mentor and walking partner Professor Maggie O'Neill who has always been there to offer support and guidance as has Professor Simon Winlow who has become a friend and mentor over the years since teaching me at Teesside University in 2001. I would give a special thank you to my friends in desistance. Andy Aresti, a fellow convict criminologist, introduced me to a new concept called desistance at the very beginning of my career in 2013. I have never looked back and Andy has remained a good friend and academic influence throughout. Professor Fergus McNeill's theories of desistance inspired me to develop my own concepts. Fergus has been a good friend and colleague and has always been close at hand to offer academic and personal support over the years. Shadd Maruna has been an enormous influence with his huge wealth of knowledge and groundbreaking ideas and Dr Adam Calverley whose desistance research inspired me early in my career and who later became a good friend and work colleague I had the pleasure to work with at Hull University.

I would like to say how much I am enjoying working with my current team at the University of Manchester on our project about prisoner suicide called PROSPECT. This research is incredibly important, and I feel very lucky to be part of it. A particular thank you to Dr Dan Pratt who not only believed in me

but also has made a huge contribution towards the new era of desistance theory, which Professor Shadd Maruna foresees as being mainly steered by ex-prisoner desisters. Dr Pratt has contributed towards this by enabling someone in my position to be a part of such an important study within such a prestigious university for which I will be eternally grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank all my students past and present who make my job so worthwhile. The continual cohort of students and popularity of criminology not only made my life transition from prison to university possible, but also my students' energy and enthusiasm has always kept me on my toes. I know at times we do not see 'eye to eye' but the unique bond I have always had with my students and their interest in my lived experience as a former prisoner has been heart-warming to say to least.

A final thanks to all those who have unknowingly and knowingly helped me through my desistance journey.

1

INTRODUCING DESISTANCE THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

> *Little of what we know about prison comes from the mouths of prisoners, and very few academic accounts of prison life manage to convey some of its most profound and important features: its daily pressures and frustrations, the culture of the wings and landings, and the relationships which shape the everyday experience of being imprisoned.*
>
> *(Crewe and Bennett, 2012: ii)*

BACKGROUND

The Ambiguities of Desistance is based on my PhD thesis, written in 2013–2018 which was about ex-prisoners and their self-transformation through higher education. Education was at the forefront of my study where I interviewed 24 individuals both males and females with three broad research questions: (1) How does the reformed ex-prisoner experience self-change and negotiate his/her ex-offender status through education? (2) What impact does higher education have on the ex-offender in terms of rehabilitation? (3) What barriers constrain the ex-prisoner's transition into conventional society, and in particular his/her chosen career path? Initially I set out to prove how transformative education was for ex-prisoners but it soon became clear that the complexities of their stories were worthy of a desistance focussed analysis.

WHAT IS DESISTANCE?

Desistance is taken from the term 'desist' which means to abstain from doing something. There are many examples of desisting from something but criminologists have used its meaning to coin the term 'desistance' (abstaining from crime). And scholars of this theory tend to favour it as having a process that includes a beginning (a willingness to change), a middle (identity transformation) and an end goal (reintegration and acceptance). I argue that desistance in many cases is much more chaotic than this and is much less to do with abstaining from crime and criminal activity. It is more about making significant lifestyle changes and choices and thus desistance is in fact an ongoing and never-ending process. This is supported by desistance studies associated with drug users and the notion of the 'chicken and egg' factor (see Colman and Vander Laenen, 2012). Colman and Vander Laenen posit that while desistance often focuses predominantly on why and how offenders move away from crime, it is often the case that the secondary factor (identity transformation) and recovery from such as substance abuse needs to be addressed first.

Albertson et al. (2015) also found that amongst military veteran desisters, recovery from drug use involved a whole set of social interactions and transitions. This is supported by Best et al. (2008) who found that abstinence was sustained by social network factors (moving away from drug-using friends and support from non-using friends) and practical factors such as accommodation and employment as well as religious or spiritual factors (p. 619).

These findings are unsurprising which is a common theme within desistance studies that often show what you might expect. It seems completely obvious that if someone has a stable home and a job and is accepted within society, they are more likely to be well-rounded citizens. Therefore, stability would clearly give someone more chance of transforming their lives than if they remained in the same chaos from where their problems arose. If we take the environment, for example, some of my interviewees who had battled drug use and domestic violence were able to completely change their lives by moving into their university halls of residence.

It has taken many years of analysis but most desistance scholars now tend to stress that desistance includes the interplay between ageing, informal social control and cognitive transformation theories. But it is not just about getting older, getting married or getting a job, but what significance these things all have and how stabilising they are. Getting older may bring more isolation and less employment opportunities. A job might be highly stressful for some individuals and not be suitable for their temperament or it might not pay enough. A marriage may be toxic and exacerbate further offending, so while

desistance theories point to these things as contributing towards change, it merely scratches the surface.

One thing that can be agreed by all is that there has to be an initial decision to give up crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) argue that rational choice (see also Cornish and Clarke, 1986) usually stems from shock such as being wounded in a bank robbery; growing tired of prison; anxieties related to crime; and taking stock of what is most important to them. This may be true, but they will only change when they want to change because whatever the catalyst to change might be, desistance is a subjective choice. And even the most serious criminals can and often do eventually decide to make changes in their lives and abstain from crime.

Earlier desistance studies focussed on external factors being the most influential on self-change using an informal social control perspective which discussed 'turning points' such as marriage, college, employment and the military as being influential on reform (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Shover, 1996). Sampson and Laub's (1993) informal social control theory was a follow-up of Glueck and Glueck's (1940) earlier work which argued that ageing was the only factor which emerged as significant in the reformative processes. But although 'age remains among the best predictors of desistance' (as cited in McNeill et al., 2012, p. 4), this theory is not without its flaws because the ageing process can occur in ways other than biologically, such as through maturation excelled through life experiences (Rutter, 1996).

SO WHEN IS SOMEONE A FULLY FLEDGED DESISTER?

More recently, there has been more focus on subjective transformations (Burnett and Maruna, 2004; LeBel et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001). Examples of this come from Giordano et al. (2002) and Farrall (2005) who argue that would-be desisters need to identify a 'blue print' for the 'sort of' person they want to become which is partly about role-adoption and partly about identifying a set of values or moral standards. Maruna (2001) extends this notion by examining how desisters use a method of re-biographing where desisters reinterpret their past in such away as to recast their past experiences as needing to have occurred for the 'real me' to emerge. They display an 'almost missionary sense of purpose in life' (Maruna, 2001, p. 9) and construct new narratives of their past in order to make sense of the past and the future. In other words desisters see their past experiences as having been essential in making them the better person they are today.

That is not to say that they do not still feel shame and regret for their previous activities which is something that Farrall and Calverley (2006) suggest are most common towards the end of the emotional trajectory. This emotional trajectory is clearly outlined within Giordano et al.'s (2002) four-part theory of cognitive transformation: (1) A general cognitive openness to change; (2) Exposure and reaction to 'hooks for change' or turning points; (3) The envisioning of an appealing and conventional 'replacement self' and (4) A transformation in the way the actor views deviant behaviour so in other words, the transformative process eventually leads to a less favourable perspective of deviance. Giordano and colleagues extended the cognitive transformation theory through exploring spirituality and desistance which Maruna et al. (2006) also examined in their study of religious conversion. It offers an additional perspective of life transformations whereby individuals find religion as a hook for change (Giordano et al., 2002) and the religious community enables belonging and reintegration (McNeill, 2016). But Giordano et al.'s (2008) study supports the argument that desistance from crime is limited with its focus on crime. They argue, their results were unable to provide lasting changes through an individual's religious faith alone without the influence of other factors such as socio-economic factors that relate to desistance from crime. They suggest further research would benefit from a broader focus on areas of life other than criminality that may be enhanced by a strong religious faith, including mental health and parenting outcomes (as cited in Giordano et al., 2008).

In other words, religious faith did not just impact on moving away from crime but also other aspects of the life transition. Although religion effects can be viewed usefully through the lens of social control, acquiring a spiritual foundation is also compatible with the principles of differential association theory, particularly symbolic interactionist versions (e.g. Giordano et al., 2002; Matsueda and Heimer, 1997). Thus, 'religion can be viewed not only as a source of external control over individual conduct but also as a catalyst for new definitions of the situation and as a cognitive blueprint for how one is to proceed as a changed individual' (as cited in Giordano et al., 2008, p. 102).

Introspection through the narrative approach which Maruna (2001) refers to as, 'within-person' changes are essential for the transformation of self as ex-offenders must continually address their offending 'triggers' and be self-critical of their own identities in order to make that transition. And though both informal social control and subjective approaches are equally important, 'individualisation discourse' puts the onus on the individual offender, thus eradicating the state from any blame (Barry, 2015, p. 94).

This is all very inspiring but the question still remains of when someone can be said (without any shadow of a doubt) to have successfully desisted? Perhaps someone who has desisted from serious criminal activity and has settled into a life with legitimated employment has a habit of breaking the speed limit. On occasions this person may have their licence revoked and even appeared in court but does that mean they have not desisted from crime? Proving one has changed is a continual onus on desisters but there are encouraging changes on the horizon in the United Kingdom as a direct result of a campaign known as 'ban the box' (see Unlock, 2018). 'Ban the box' encourages employers to change their recruitment policies towards people with convictions which has now been mirrored in relation to university admissions policies (see UCAS, 2018; University of Westminster, 2018). Not all organisations and universities are as on board with this as they should be, nevertheless it still offers some hope for those whose past demeanors continually blight their futures. Without hope, it is easier for many to revert back to their old ways and Burnett and Maruna (2004) identify hope as an important emotion in desires to desist. This was supported by Farrall and Calverley's (2006) study of emotional trajectories of desistance (i.e. the shifting emotions experienced during processes of desistance). Initially, hopes are for a 'better life' and sustain motivations to desist, whereas later, hopes become more concrete and more closely related to 'conventional' aspirations (better job, larger house, etc). But how does one maintain hope when they are being constantly defined by their worst life mistakes? It is agreed that desistance includes a transformative process which involves a reconstruction of new identities (Maruna, 2001) and reintegration, but the literature falls short of examining the ongoing complex challenges within long-term desistance (McNeill, 2016).

McNeill's tertiary desistance notion offers an important additional stage of the process, whereby individuals become part of a conventional community. This not only includes shifts in behaviours and identities but also shifts in one's sense of belonging to a (moral) community. It extends Maruna and Farrall's (2004) primary and secondary desistance concept which involve lulls (see Weaver and McNeill, 2007) in and out of criminal activity which eventually subside as they progress towards developing new identities. The tertiary stage adds to this by including how desisters reintegrate within conventional society which posits that since identity is socially constructed and negotiated, securing long-term change depends not just on how one sees oneself but also on how one is seen by others.

This suggests that external factors are still significant and essential contributors to successful desistance but not as a whole. That said, what is successful desistance anyway? Is it when someone has not offended for five years?

10 years? because unless it can be determined that someone never re-offended by the time they die, how can anyone measure or determine the completed cycle of desistance? Perhaps the answer can only come from within? The problem here of course is whether the desister would be believed.

DESISTANCE VERSUS REHABILITATION

There are systemic failures where authorities are only interested in how desistance can reduce re-offending which fails to address the more subjective, intuitive and emotional aspects of the desistance journey. Weaver and McNeill (2007) argue that it takes time to change entrenched behaviours and the problems that underlie them and therefore the criminal justice system should expect it to be a zig-zag process (Weaver and McNeill, 2007; Bilby et al., 2013) and therefore be more sparing with imprisonment. This is because of the complexities of the desistance journey and by using prison every time a desister relapses merely delays the desistance process for many more years.

At least with the recent emergence of desistance theory the self-determination and honest attempts to change by many people with criminal convictions is now validated within academic literature. The outdated notion of rehabilitation suggests someone needs fixing and that change has to be forced upon individuals, but as desistance scholars have demonstrated, self-change can only occur by one's own volition:

> *The study of desistance, in fact, originally emerged out of something of a critique of the professionally driven 'medical model' of rehabilitation. To explore desistance (sometimes referred to as 'spontaneous desistance' in early writing, drawing on the notion of 'spontaneous remission' in medicine) was to study those persons who change without the assistance of correctional interventions. From such a perspective, one either 'desists' on one's own accord or else one is 'rehabilitated' through formal counselling or 'treatment'.*
>
> *(Maruna, 2016, p. 292)*

Ward et al. (2012) emphasise an important point which is that psychologists use the term 'rehabilitation', while criminologists are understandably suspicious of its implication that individuals are being returned to a more acceptable set of behaviours. It is evident that the distinction between rehabilitation and desistance is still not fully understood by most. The process of

desistance has been around for a long time, it is just that people tend to claim individuals have been rehabilitated when they have actually desisted. Rehabilitation has always been the favoured narrative because it suggests someone has been forced to change or see the errors of their ways. This fits with the societal expectations and the collective consciousness of social construct rather than accepting people can and do change themselves.

This is why I feel education has always been appealing to prisoners because of how one finds education and makes a personal decision to embark on a programme of self-change and discovery. Education enables prisoners self-expression and an ability to develop emotionally, psychologically and intellectually. It is also a personal journey created from one's own volition so this alone positions education firmly within the desistance narrative. This further emphasises my argument in Chapter 2 that education in prison as a process towards early desistance is nothing new. It also leads me back to my earlier argument that a desistance culture within prisons would be a step in the right direction (see McNeill and Schinkel, 2016). We are not exploring some wild and bizarre concept but merely identifying and nurturing something which already exists. Rather than this idea being alien, it is just that we have only recently developed a theory called desistance.

EXAMINING THE DESISTANCE NARRATIVE

Moving away from crime and criminality should not always be the main focus which has always been the case within mainstream criminology but something narrative criminology continues to rectify. Even classic sociology and criminology studies such as the Chicago School in the 1930s (e.g. Shaw, 1931; Landesco, 1933; Sutherland, 1937) and desistance studies in the 1990s which have included autobiographical accounts that have not been widely acknowledged much within mainstream criminology (Presser and Sandberg, 2015). Yet Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralisation theory of how offenders play down their offences has stood the test of time and is still very much used in theoretical criminology teaching. This could be because of its emphasis on offenders being homogeneous and that they will always try to justify their actions. However, it could be argued that playing down one's own offending could in some instances be associated to feelings of shame and low self-esteem. Also, a completely unexplored area within narrative criminology is how some ex-offenders over-disclose their pasts to sometimes complete strangers. Is this a way of making sense of their lives and excusing oneself? It could be a way of

re-negotiating identities (i.e. trying to make sense of the world and re-biographing) (Maruna, 2001) or even a way of apologising. To put this into further context of neutralisation narratives, over-disclosing could be a way of dissociating oneself from past offending followed by reconstructive narrative (Maruna, 2001). For example, following a six-year prison sentence, 38-year-old Chloe explains:

> *I just felt like, I'd tell everybody because, I felt like everybody knew, like it was stamped on me and I would literally tell people [upset] probably inappropriately, over disclosing.*
>
> *(Chloe)*

This is something I can personally relate to but have never seen discussed in any literature and it is these types of nuances of the desistance narrative I wish to further explore within and beyond this book. My personal experience and the process and subsequent immersion in the theory are an original and ground-breaking feature of this book. It is also very timely as it resonates with Shadd Maruna's (2017) *Desistance as a Social Movement* prediction that the new era of desistance stories will come from ex-prisoner desisters themselves. The Convict Criminologist Organisation has already made significant leaps in this regard through a combination of first-hand experiences of the criminal justice system within academic research. There are many ex-prisoner activists and ex-prisoner scholars, some of whose interviews are used in this book, but as far as I am aware, there is no other desistance scholarship written by ex-prisoner desisters other than myself and fellow convict criminologist, Andy Aresti (see Aresti et al., 2010).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are four key chapters within this book which focus on the key desistance themes I have already outlined. In Chapter 2, building on the work of McNeill and Schinkel (2016) I will discuss how prisons may adopt a desistance model as part of their culture and draw on the narratives of those who claim prison provided time and space to make positive life changes. Susie Scott's theory of 'reinventive institutions' led me to develop an argument about how ambiguous institutions have become in recent years. Universities which are supposed to be liberal and inclusive of diverse groups are being punitive towards people with convictions. On the other hand, we are seeing more prison governors adopting a transformative approach towards prisoner education, thus furthering the