

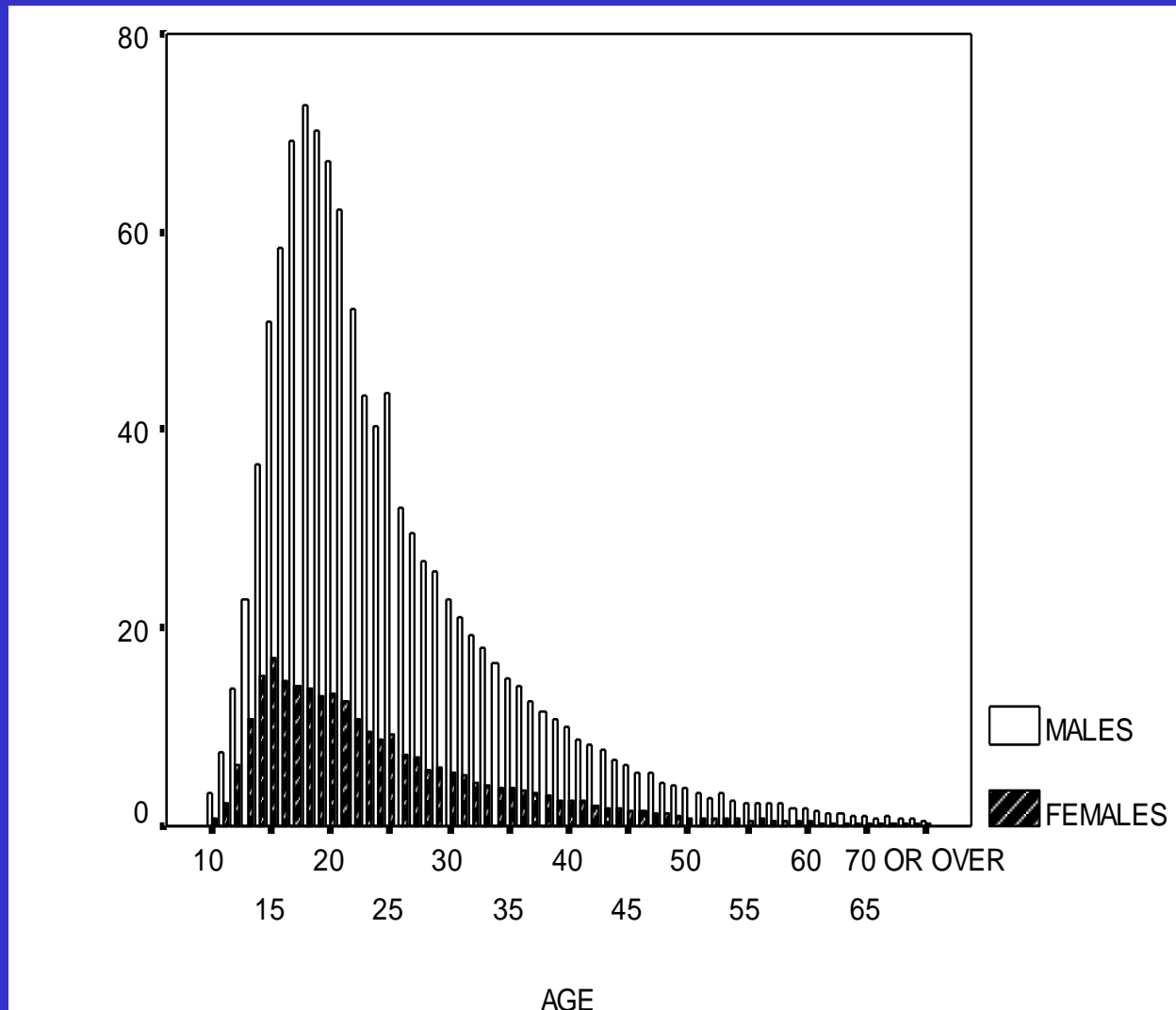
Starting Again - Desistance from Crime

Tony Bottoms

**ICPA Europe Conference, Magdalene College
Cambridge, September 2017**

A. BACKGROUND

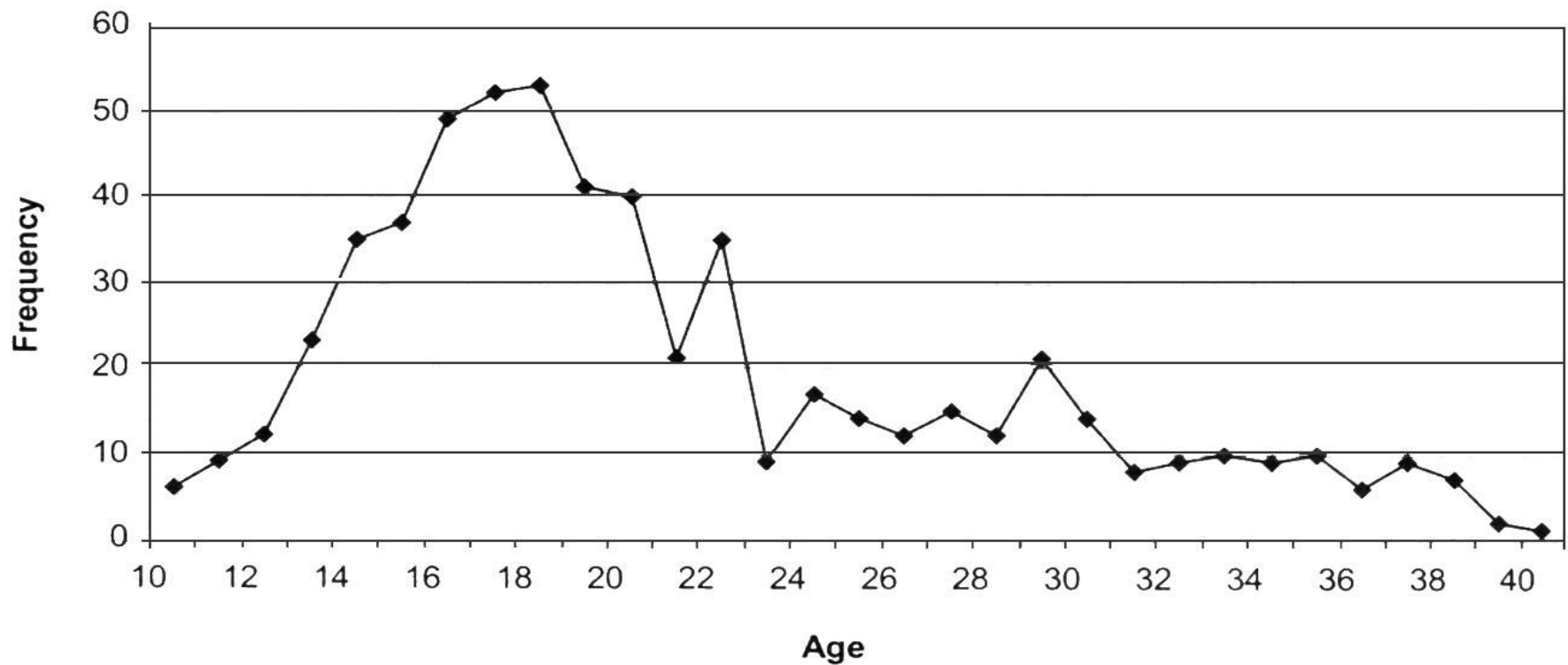
A cross-sectional age-crime curve



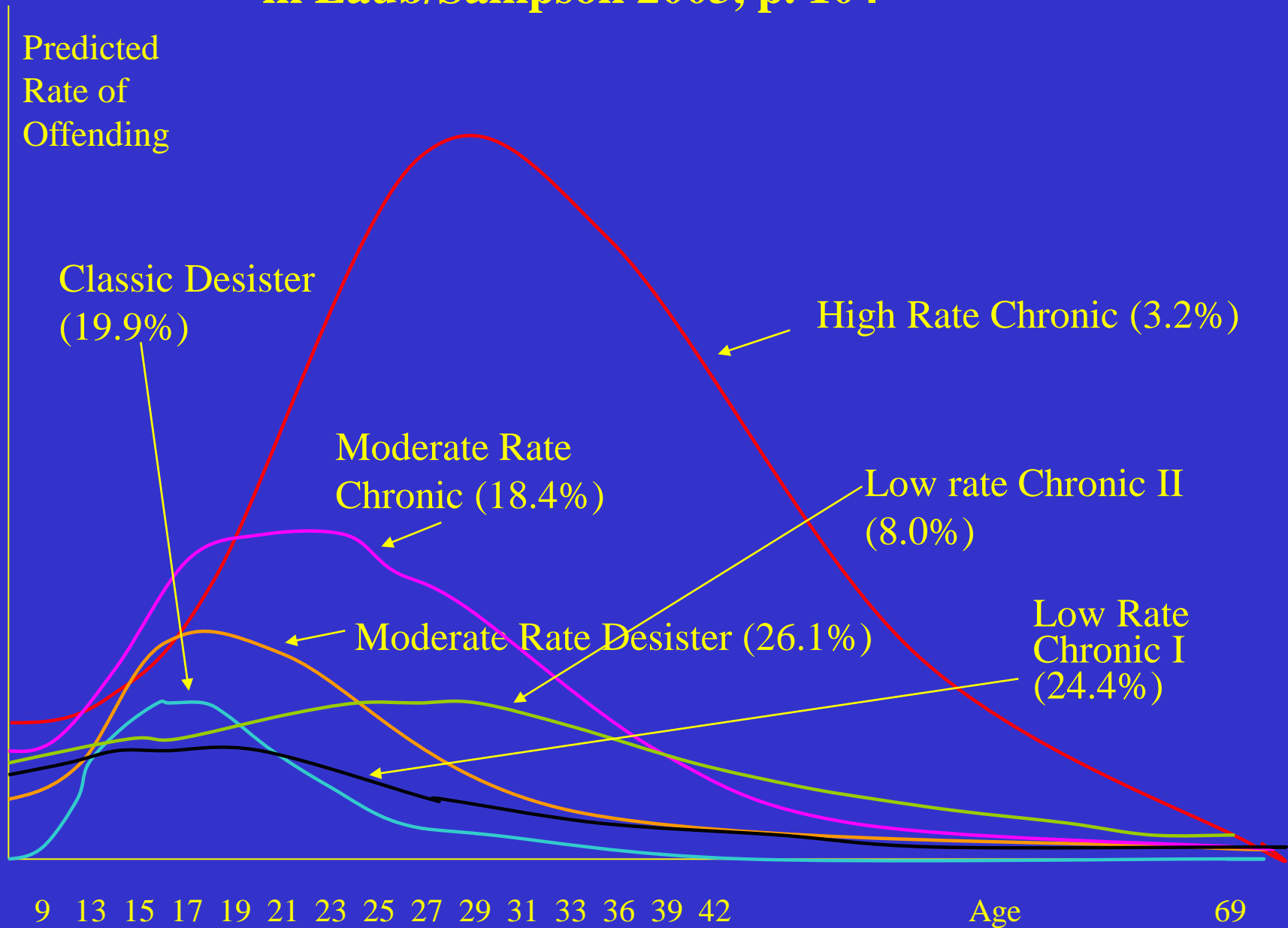
[Recorded offender rates per 1,000 relevant population by age-year and sex, England and Wales, 2000]

A Longitudinal Age-Crime Curve for 'chronic' offenders

Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development: age-crime curve for chronic offenders (defined as 4+ convictions)



Longitudinal Age-Crime Trajectories for Different Groups in Laub/Sampson 2003, p. 104



Early and Late Desistance

‘There is tentative evidence [of] significant differences between early and late desistance. In the early stages, ... [would-be desisters’] goals are more likely to revolve around finding conventional roles...and “becoming normal”. ..In the later stages, people may move on to a deeper set of concerns, including the creation of a different self-identity’

Source: Shapland and Bottoms (2017), p 754 (adapted).

‘The most important
[criminal justice]
influence on desistance
is getting convicted.’

Source: J. Macleod et al (2012), p. 209

Maturation: Brain Development in Early Adulthood

There is increasing evidence that the pre-frontal cortex of the brain continues to develop in late adolescence and early adulthood. This appears to lead to improvements in executive functioning, especially improved impulse control, and improved planning.

(see Johnson et al, 2009)

“Recentering”

‘Emerging adulthood is the critical developmental stage during which individuals select life goals based on available resources and opportunities...Life goals are narrowed, eliminated, and refined...Articulating and selecting goals, directing one’s resources to achieve those goals, and evaluating one’s success in meeting identified goals contribute to emerging adult mental health.’

B. THE SHEFFIELD DESISTANCE STUDY, 2003-7

Sheffield Desistance Study: Eligibility Requirements

1. Born in 1982, 1983 or 1984.
2. Currently serving *either* a short or medium-term custodial sentence, *or* a community sentence under the supervision of the probation service.
3. Has a minimum of two conviction occasions for 'standard list' offences.
4. Had a current address in Sheffield at the time of the last conviction.

Prior criminality at first interview

Prior to first interview	Conviction occasions Mean	Number of offences Mean
Convictions for standard list offences	8.0	17.6
Cautions for standard list offences	1.7	
Convictions for other offences	1.1	2.7
Cautions for other offences	0.1	
Total number of convictions/cautions	10.9	20.3

OGRS: Mean 77%, Median 83%

Overall, Sheffield sample had 909 conviction occasions for standard list offences by age c.21; compare Cambridge Study, 686 by age 40.

Selected Social Items at Interview 1

Employment:

no job of any kind in last year	58%
'regular' job at some time in last year	24%
	(10% for full year)
cash in hand/casual jobs only	18%

Qualifications and schooling:

Excluded from school at some point	93%
Excluded permanently or for more than a month	46%
Left school without qualifications	86%
Obtained qualifications since school	51%

Driving:

licences held (1 full licence, 5 provisional licences)	5%
--	----

Sheffield Study Reoffending

A. Reconvictions:

Between Interviews 1 and 2 63%

Between Interviews 2 and 3 70%

Between Interviews 3 and 4 76%

Any reconviction 80%

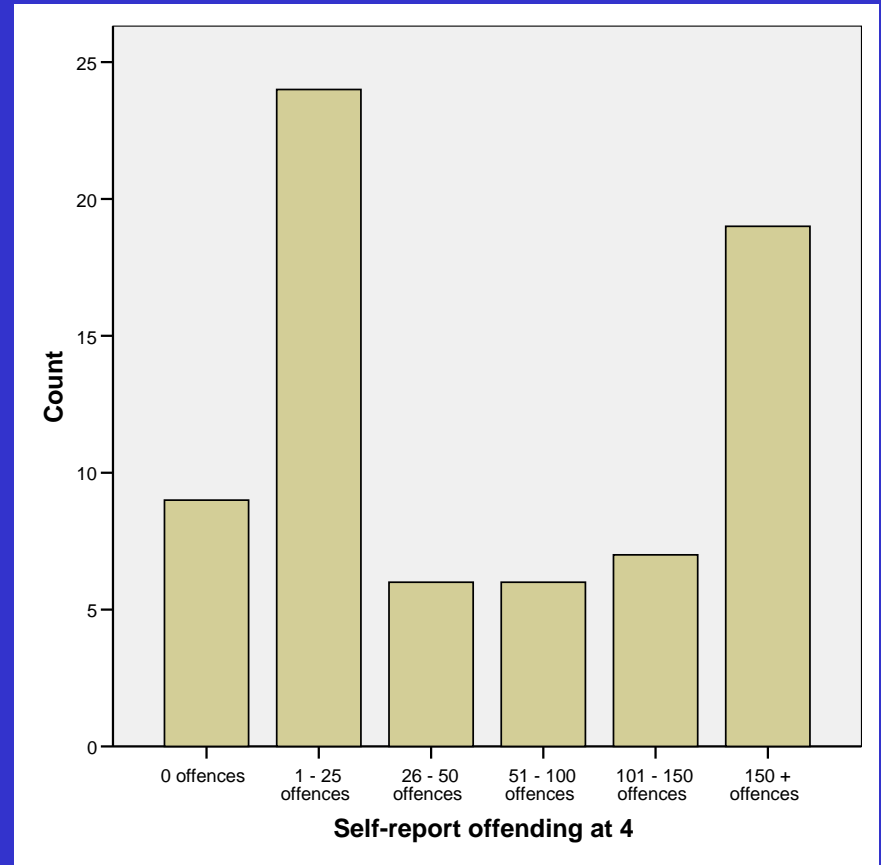
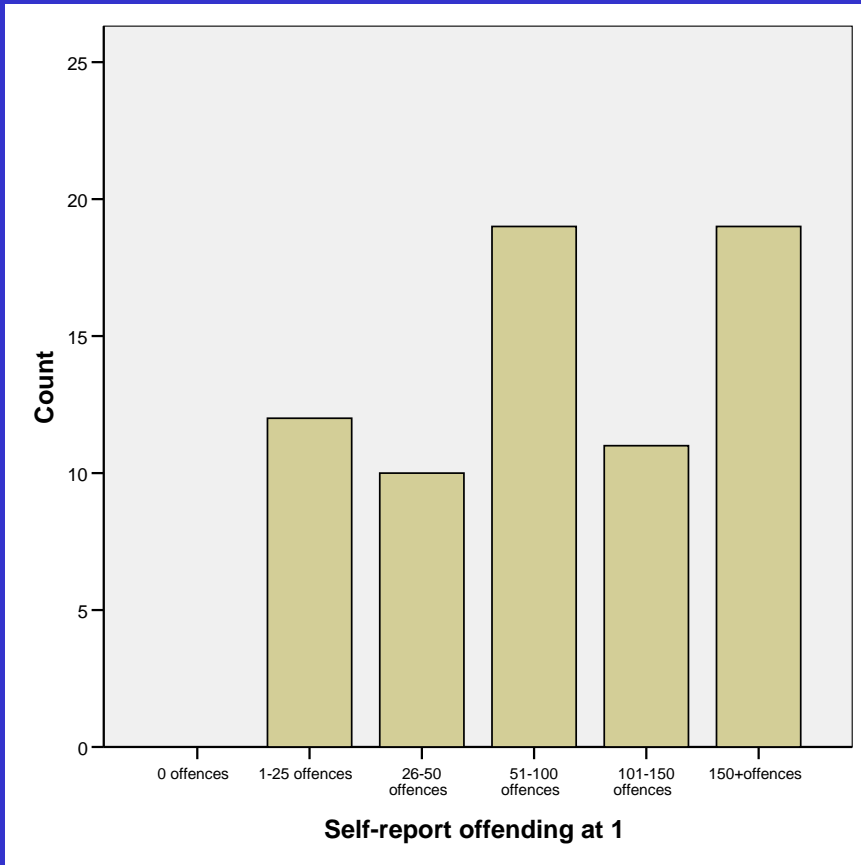
B. Frequency of Offences

Before Interview 1 8.2 standard list offences p.a.†

After Interview 3 2.6 standard list offences p.a.†

† standardized to account for periods in custody

Patterns of self-reported criminality prior to first and fourth interviews



[Comparison restricted to respondents interviewed at 4 and “at risk” between 3 and 4 (N=71). Data adjusted for time at risk]

Sheffield Study: Life Goals

At interview 1: What kind of person would you like to be, say in 3 years' time? (more than one response allowed) (n=110)

	%
Going straight/drug and alcohol free	40
Live a normal/regular life	32
Successful	27
Be a good person/responsible	25
Be a family man	21
No change	8
Be rich	3
DK/not applicable/other	15

Sources: Shapland and Bottoms (2011), p. 262; Bottoms and Shapland (2016)

Examples

- Confident. Hardworking. Trustworthy. Good person to get on with.
- A really good job in computers. I'd get meself a car, a good relationship, a kid, sommat like that. Me own flat...a normal life...and I'd like to be able to say I've not touched no drugs for 3 years.

Sheffield Study:

Top six obstacles to going straight or staying straight

	Interview 1 %	Interview 2 %	Interview 3 %	Interview 4 %
Lack of money	77	66	67	61
Opportunity for easy money	69	52	66	48
Need for excitement or to relieve boredom	61	48	50	47
Lack of work	60	47	49	51
Having a record	54	57	36	39
Taking drugs	46	40	43	34

Source: Bottoms and Shapland (2011), p. 61

Explaining the Final Level of Official Criminality (Standard List Offences)

Total lifetime official offending	P = .003
Self-reported obstacles to desistance†	P = .015
Whether self-identity linked to peers†	P = .004
Robbery pattern in official offending	P = .000

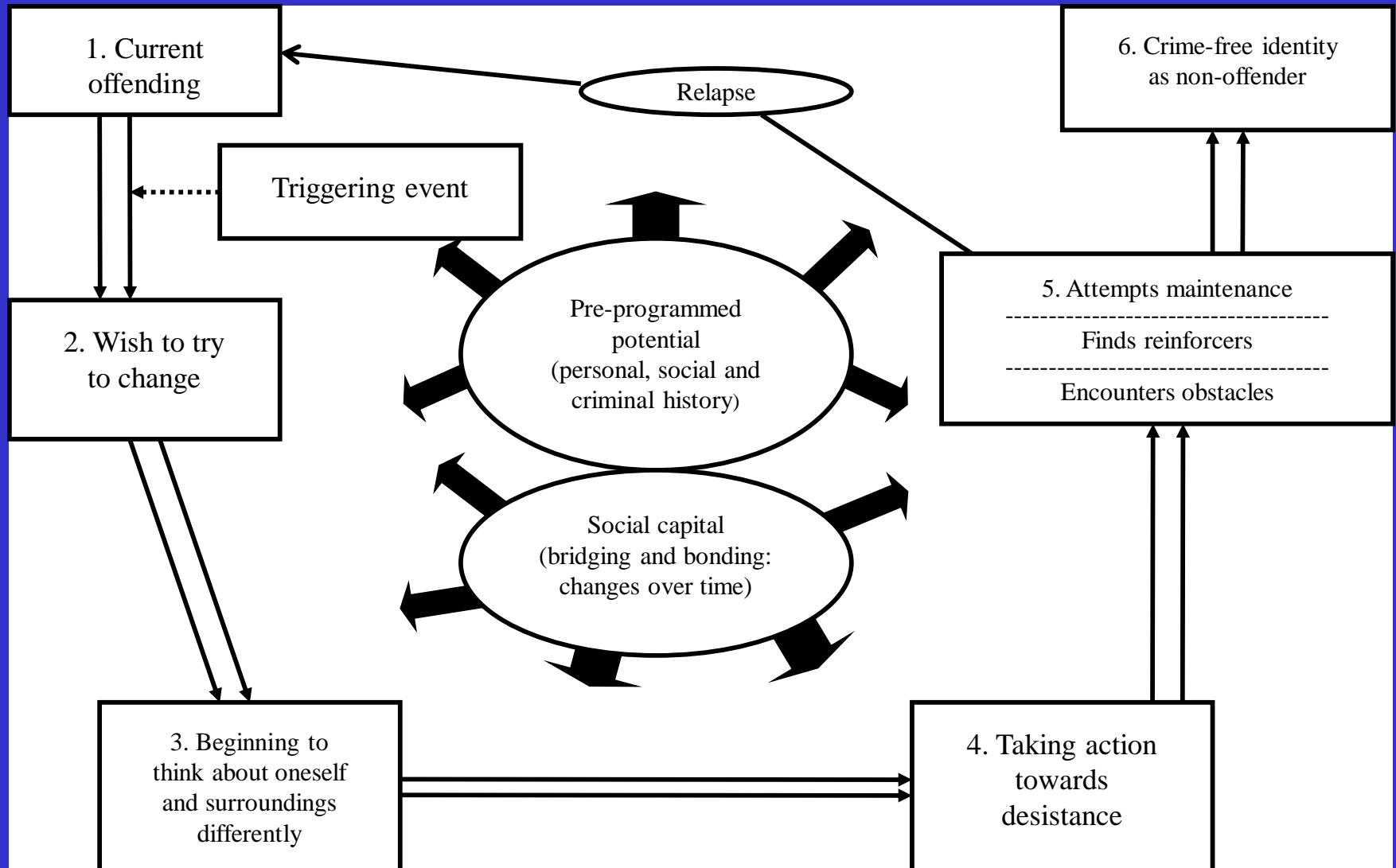
[Pseudo R² = 0.44]

†Measured at Interview 3

A Main Message

For persistent offenders, desistance is largely about learning to lead a non-criminal life when one has been leading a criminal life.

A tentative model of desistance



Giordano's 'Cognitive Transformation' Approach

(Influenced by Symbolic Interactionism)

- Stage I: A shift in X's openness to change.
- Stage II: Exposure to hook(s) for change, e.g. marriage or employment *in interaction with X's* attitude towards that hook.
- Stage III: Beginning to envisage a 'replacement self'.
- Stage IV: Transformation in the way X views deviant behaviour.

Case history – “Len”: I

First interview: Len, aged 20, was on probation. He had been convicted on eight occasions, and had served one term of 12 months in a Young Offenders’ Institution (YOI). He had been ‘sleeping rough’ (homeless), but, through the intervention of a probation officer, had been found a place in a small hostel near the city centre. He said he felt no shame or regret for his offences, because they were mostly drug-related and ‘when you’re on drugs you don’t care’. But he claimed he *wants to stop because he is ‘sick of it’*: ‘waking up, trying to find money, trying to find something to eat, stuff like that, day in, day out’.

Case history – “Len”: II

During the research period, Len was convicted once, for taking a car and drunk driving, with a friend; but he also self-reported several other offences. The conviction *acted as a shock*. His *relationship with his mother had been improving*, so he moved back home, to the *outskirts of the city*. During his time at the hostel, he also met (in a café) a female teacher who then acted as *an informal counsellor* for him.

By the **fourth interview**, Len said he was completely off both drugs and alcohol, and he had stopped offending. He usually stayed at home seven nights a week. He considered it important to *‘think first and avoid my old group of friends’*. ‘I’m more grown up about things, and *take more responsibility* for the things I do’.

Diachronic Self-control

Planning daily routines and activities to avoid situations where the person believes they might be tempted to do something that, all things considered, they don't want to do. [That is, where they fear that they will show what philosophers call 'weakness of will' or *akrasia*].

Found frequently among respondents in the Sheffield Study, especially by (i) planning to avoid particular places; (ii) planning not to meet former criminal friends.

Source: Bottoms (2013)

C. OTHER DESISTANCE STUDIES

Social Control Through Social Bonds (Laub/Sampson)

- ‘Social Bonds’ effects on recidivism were apparent independently of predictions based on prior experience. (Social Bonds = marriage/employment/military service)
- Concept of “desistance by default”
- Warr’s challenge re delinquent peers

Sources: Sampson and Laub (1993), Laub and Sampson (2003); Warr (2002).

WHAT ABOUT GENDER?

Few studies of desistance among women, but important issues are:

- Romantic partners less helpful to desistance
- Strong significance of caring roles

Sources: Giordano (2016); Leverenz (2014)

DESISTANCE IN DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

Calverley: Study in England
contrasting desistance patterns for
Bangladeshi-origin offenders and
black-dual-heritage offenders

Sources: Calverley (2013)

References

- Arnett, J. et al (2011) *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?*, Oxford University Press.
- Bottoms, A. E. (2013) 'Learning from Odysseus: self-applied situational crime prevention as an aid to compliance' in P. Ugwudike and P. Raynor (eds.) *What Works in Offender Compliance*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bottoms, A. E. and Shapland, J. (2011) 'Steps towards desistance among male young adult recidivists' in S. Farrall *et al* (eds.) *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life after Punishment*, Routledge
- Bottoms, A. E. and Shapland, J. M. (2016) 'Learning to desist in early adulthood: the Sheffield Desistance Study' in J. M. Shapland, S. Farrall and A. E. Bottoms (eds.) *Global Perspectives on Desistance*, Routledge.
- Calverley, A. (2013) *Cultures of Desistance*, Routledge.
- Giordano, P. C., Cernovich, S. A. and Rudolph, J. L. (2002) 'Gender, crime and desistance: toward a theory of cognitive transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 107: 990-1064.

References cont...

- Giordano, P.C. (2016) 'Mechanisms underlying the desistance process: reflections on "A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance"' in J. M. Shapland, S. Farrall and A. E. Bottoms (eds.) *Global Perspectives on Desistance*, Routledge.
- Johnson, S. B. et al (2009) 'Adolescent maturity and the brain', *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45: 216-221.
- Laub, J. and Sampson, R. (2003) *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives*, Harvard UP.
- Leverentz, A. (2014) *The Ex-Prisoner's Dilemma*, Rutgers University Press.
- MacLeod, J., Grove, P. and Farrington, D. P. (2012) *Explaining Criminal Careers*, Oxford University Press..
- Piquero, A. R. Farrington, D. P. and Blumstein, A. (2007) *Key Issues in Criminal Career Research*, Cambridge University Press.
- Sampson, R. J. and Laub, J. H. (1993) *Crime in the Making*, Harvard University Press.
- Shapland, J. and Bottoms, A. E. (2011) 'Reflections on social values, offending and desistance among young adult recidivists' *Punishment and Society* 13 256-91.