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Leaving Behind *the Deviant Other* in Desistance-Persistence Explanations

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Introduction

Resettlement and correctional practices have been severely damaged by the 'othering' process in which offenders are not only seen as external enemies determined by their circumstances, but also as distinctive individuals who must be integrated and transformed into 'us'. As Young (2011, 64) pointed out, 'Ontological insecurity gives rise to a desire for clear-cut delineations, and for othering: it generates a binary of those in society and those without it, which is seen to correspond to the normal, on the one side, and the deviant and criminal on the other'. According to this view, individuals are divided between offenders and non-offenders and desistance is understood as a radical transformation in which offenders not only have to stop committing crimes completely, but also have to overcome all their social deficits by changing their lifestyle, identities, values, and aspirations. Some scholars have tried to take things forward from this approach, understanding desistance as a process

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with different shades of grey (Matza 1964; Glaser 1969; Leibrich 1996; Shover 2004; Bottoms et al. 2004; Murray 2009; Barry 2012). Moreover, research on desistance has opened the way for shifts in correctional practice from 'what works reducing offending' towards 'how change works' (Maruna and LeBel 2010, 66), or as Lewis more precisely pointed out: 'from programmes to lives' (Lewis 1990, 923). Nevertheless, these practices are still strongly embedded in notions of redemption, transformation and rehabilitation that evidence the social and moral distance between the *others* and *us*.

Using mixed-methods and a rich dataset from a panel of 334 young Chilean offenders, this chapter brings new evidence to show that the binary oppositional categories of the completely reformed desister and the categorically antisocial and non-virtuous persister are hardly found, and that individuals can be better identified as half-way desisters/persisters who oscillate between crime and conformity (Bottoms et al. 2004; Healy 2010).

In the first part of the chapter, I show that desistance does not necessarily imply a 'clean cut' with crime. The data evidences that focusing only on crime-free gaps, without considering changes in seriousness and frequency of crime, hides core aspects of the process of crime abandonment. In the second part, I argue that desistance and persistence categories are far from absolute. This is explained by the fact that the interviewees revealed important inconsistencies between their behaviour and their internal dispositions towards conformity. These different matters are discussed in a social context in which ambivalence, attachment, consumerism and masculinity emerge as key transversal issues in regards to the desistance process, both as factors that pull individuals away from crime and also push them back towards it.

The Study

To address the issues mentioned above, this study uses data from the Trajectories Study,[1] a research project that explores the criminal and life trajectories of a panel of young offenders in Chile. The sources of

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[1] The 'Trajectories Study' is a longitudinal study based at the Sociology Institute of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The aim of this research project is to explore the criminal trajectories of a sample of young offenders. It started in 2012 and three waves of questionnaires

information used for these analyses are a prospective questionnaire in two waves over 1 year, which was administered to a sample of 334 late-adolescent offenders (males aged 16–20) who were sentenced to probation in 2012 in Santiago; and 35 in-depth interviews that were conducted with a sub-sample of individuals from the panel in the first wave of interviews.[2]

Who Desists and Who Persists?

One of the main challenges of this study was how to operationalise desistance from crime. In almost all the studies carried out before the 1990s (but see Meisenhelder 1977), desistance had been defined in a static way, as the end of the criminal career (see Glueck and Glueck 1943; Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Farrington 1986; Farrington and Hawkins 1991). Although the research that followed has tried to be more sophisticated in dealing with the way in which desistance and persistence are operationalised, several limitations still remain.

The main and crucial limitation is that it is impossible to determine, with the methods available for researchers, if someone has definitively abandoned crime for good. Although there are now thorough and comprehensive longitudinal studies on desistance,[3] none of them has been able to follow all the interviewees until their death. Therefore, in strict terms, research on desistance has been characterised by the illusion that crime-free gaps indicate desistance from crime. Although crime-free gaps do not necessarily imply crime abandonment in the long term, they may indeed be signs that the individual is engaging (for a short or a long time) in the process of leaving crime behind.

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have been completed since then. For more information about the study, see http://trayectoriasde lictuales.uc.cl/.

[2] The youth from the sample were not first-time offenders, they had on average two previous convictions, a quarter had served prison sentences and they referred an average crime frequency of three crimes per day.

[3] See Farrall et al. (2014) for a discussion of the landmark studies on desistance.

There are different ways to determine if crime cessation is taking place in an individual's life. It is possible to rely on official data (arrests or convictions) or on self-reported crime; and it is also possible to consider only the absence of criminal offences or the individual's own perceptions of themselves as offenders or non-offenders. The latter has been described by Maruna and Farrall (2004) as secondary desistance and it implies the transition from non-offending behaviour to self-identification as a non-offender. In order to assess crime cessation in the second wave, I have classified the individuals from the study as desisters or persisters on the basis of self-reported data from the second wave questionnaire checked against official records as Table 10.1 shows.

It is interesting to note how desistance rates vary considerably when different measures are used. For instance, *identity desistance* rate is considerably higher than *behavioural desistance* rate. Since behavioural desistance was assessed as a period of at least 1 year without any self-reported and

Table 10.1 Desistance and persistence rates in the second wave

Categories	Operationalisation	Desistance second wave (%)	Persistence second wave (%)
Behavioural desistance	Reports no crime in the last year, checked against official records[a]	41	59
Attitudinal desistance	Answers yes to 'I have abandoned crime completely in the last year'	65	35
Identity desistance	Answers no to 'I see myself as a delinquent'	79	21
Behavioural, attitudinal and identity desistance	Answers yes to 'I have abandoned crime completely in the last year', reports no crime in the last year and answers no to 'I see myself as a delinquent'	33	67

[a]Self-reported crime was assessed asking the interviewees if they had committed at least one crime from a list of 23 criminal offences in the last 12 months. The frequency and the characteristics of the reported offenses were also assessed through a set of questions and scales. Self-reported crime was cross-checked against official criminal data provided by the National Office of the Public Defender.

official criminal offences, this difference could be due to individuals who had stopped committing crimes for a period shorter than 1 year (e.g. someone who had ceased committing crime 3 months before the interview). If so, contrary to the belief that self-identification as a non-offender is something that happens gradually and incrementally after crime cessation, it is possible to argue that *secondary desistance* occurred relatively quickly for these individuals (at least in a period shorter than 1 year without any criminal offence). It could also be the case that identity changes occurred simultaneously with behavioural changes and they are 'mutually reinforcing facets of the change process' as Giordano (2016) has observed. Or it could be simply because these individuals maintained a non-offender identity besides their criminal behaviour as several scholars have noted (Gibbons 1965; Irwin 1970; Presser 2008; Murray 2009; Healy 2010).

It can also be observed from the data that when a stricter operationalisation of desistance was used, one that put behavioural, attitudinal and identity measures together, the desistance rate decreased further than when only behavioural changes were taken into account. This illustrates the fact that desistance might include dimensions that are beyond the crime and no-crime classification.

Half Way: Desistance as a Continuous Variable

Although the former operationalisation of desistance is informative, the process of moving away from crime could be better understood as not only the absence of criminal behaviour for a reasonably long period of time but also the presence of downward changes, such as de-escalation and deceleration across time (Loeber et al. 2016, 2012; Piquero et al. 2012; Le Blanc and Fréchete 1989).

Changes in Severity of Crime from First to Second Wave

De-escalation has been mainly defined as the decrease of the seriousness of crime when two consecutive time periods of observation are compared (Loeber et al. 2016). Mainly, criminology scholars have used

the seriousness rating score developed by Wolfgang et al. (1985) that divides offences into three levels of gravity: minor, moderate and serious.[4] The main disadvantages of this classification are: it puts offences of a dissimilar nature in the same category; it does not necessarily match with the level of seriousness that the criminal offences have been assigned by the criminal justice system; and it does not consider the perceptions of the individuals who commit the crime.

In order to address these limitations, I have constructed a measure of seriousness in which a score (1, 2 or 3) was assigned to each criminal offence from the list of all the offences included in the questionnaire, according to the seriousness in terms of the applicable conviction and the individual's perception regarding the harm that the offences generate in society (see Table 10.2).[5] The final score was obtained by averaging both scores.

In wave one, each individual received a score (1, 2 or 3) according to the most serious criminal behaviour that they declared having committed in the last year and the same procedure was done for wave two. Results are displayed in Table 10.3. It appears that 31%

Table 10.2 An operationalisation of the seriousness of criminal behaviour

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Criminal code applicable conviction[a]	Diversion	Prison sentence for a maximum of 3 years	Prison sentence for a maximum of 5 years
How much harm (specific criminal behaviour) generated to society[b]	None	Some	A lot

[a]The Chilean legal system belongs to the Continental Law tradition and thus the Criminal Code defines the conducts that constitute an offence and the applicable conviction.
[b]Interviewees were asked to rank criminal offences (non-some-a lot) according to the harm that they generate within society.

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[4] Minor delinquency consists of shoplifting, vandalism and fraud; moderate delinquency includes theft, gang fighting, carrying weapons and joyriding; and serious delinquency consists of car theft, strong-arming, selling drugs, breaking and entering, forced sex, homicide and assault.
[5] A list of 21 criminal behaviours was used from a total of 23. Domestic violence ($N = 6$) and sexual assault ($N = 1$) were not considered because of their low prevalence at the second wave.

Table 10.3 Changes in the seriousness of criminal behaviour between the two waves

	N	Percentage (%)
Desisted from crime by the second wave	67	31
Decreased the level of seriousness by the second wave	59	28
Maintained the same level of seriousness by the second wave	83	39
Increased the level of seriousness by the second wave	5	2
Total	214[a]	100

[a]This analysis only considers the juveniles who were categorised as persisters in the first wave (persisters first wave); i.e. individuals who declared they had committed crimes in the year before the first wave of interviews.

Table 10.4 Seriousness classification of persisters in the second wave

	N	Frequency (%)
Maintained the same level of seriousness by the second wave	104	54
Decreased the level of seriousness by the second wave	84	43
Increased the level of seriousness by the second wave	5	3
Total	193	100

of the individuals who were active in crime at the first wave (persisters first wave) stopped committing crimes by the second wave. Further, 39% of the individuals maintained, 28% decreased and only 2% increased the seriousness of their offences between the two waves.

If we examine (see Table 10.4) the ones who were categorised as persisters in the second wave (independently if they were desisters or persisters in the first wave), it can be observed that 43% of the persisters continued offending or resumed crime in a less serious category than before.[6]

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[6] In order to classify the level of seriousness of offending for the individuals who did not commit any crime during the year previous to the first wave (Desisters first wave), I used the most serious offence that they declared in the life calendar prior to them stopping committing crimes.

In order to interpret and properly understand the above, I used the in-depth interviews to explore the circumstances and factors involved in the decrease of seriousness.

Instrumental Changes Towards Less Serious Crimes

Several interviewees argued that in periods in which they were very active in crime, they reached a point at which they were risking too much, were under high surveillance by the police and the judges were 'sick' of them because of their frequent appearances in the courtroom. When that occurred, one of the strategies used was to decrease the seriousness of their offences in order to disappear from the radar of the police for a while. Although desisting from crime in the long term was not the purpose of this, this tactic triggered several unintended processes that in some cases opened the way for crime abandonment. For instance, since less serious crimes such as theft and pickpocketing are normally lone offences, they established a significant distance from their antisocial peers. Moreover, some individuals abandoned the lifestyle associated with robberies, characterised by the use of drugs for help in achieving an appropriate state of mind to commit the crimes and facilitate the use of violence. Most importantly, since robberies generally imply getting cash immediately, through replacing them with thefts (in which you have to sell what you stole to get money), some individuals started to learn to postpone immediate gratification and to discard their fantasies about 'easy money'.

Being Criminal in Conformist Social Settings

Consistent with Haynie et al. (2014) the desisters from the sample argued that one of the main facilitators of their change process was that, even during times when they were very criminally active, they always kept social attachments in conformist settings. Nevertheless, this way of life was not easy to maintain and several individuals argued that they lost significant prosocial attachments when their criminal behaviour was exposed. In order to avoid that, interviewees restricted their criminal behaviour to less serious crimes that did not threaten their status in conventional

settings. Some engaged in crimes that were more 'normal' in their social environments, such as selling stolen goods. Others limited their behaviour to thefts; since these are committed during the day and you have to dress as a conventional person in order to pass unnoticed, this allowed them to deceive their family, friends and neighbours, making them believe that they were going to work.

When Violence Went Too Far

There were also cases in which individuals decreased the severity of their crime when they began to realise that their methods of intimidation were going too far. Most of the time, this was triggered by a shocking event during a robbery in which they observed that the victims were terrified or in which they had threatened vulnerable people, such as children, old people or pregnant women. This dissonance between their values and their behaviour opened the way for reflection as this narrative illustrates:

> *I (Interviewer)*: Was there any occasion in which you realised that you went too far?
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> *Francisco*: Yes...actually yes, once. We were robbing a mobile phone store...I saw a lady sitting on the floor, she looked at me and started to cry...she had urinated. Immediately I said to my friends: 'OK let's go we stop here, no more...' and after that I thought 'fuck, she was so scared...' When I am working I transform myself, you wouldn't have recognised me.
>
> *I*: And what did you feel in that moment?
>
> *Francisco*: 'Fuck...' I looked at my gun and I thought...'oh this is the kind of person that I am going to be at the end of all of this.' (Francisco, persister, age 20)

Shapland and Bottoms (2011) have claimed that desistance involves a process of *active maturation* in which individuals start thinking about their goals and ethical norms through reflection about *what sort of person they should be*. This kind of ethical reflection described in Virtue Ethics Theory stresses that individuals approach moral dilemmas not

simply by considering the moral rule itself, but by their own disposi-
tions and beliefs embedded in a certain context. This is what may have
happened in the example given, when the brutal nature of this experi-
ence encouraged Francisco to reflect beyond the violence of the act
itself. Indeed, he did not reflect on the fact that 'using violence when
robbing is bad', he reflected on himself as the individual who was
performing the violence: '[t]his is the kind of person that I am going to
be at the end of all of this.'

From a gender perspective, it has been argued that the use of violence
when committing crimes is not just instrumental; it is also a way of expres-
sing masculinity (Katz 1988; Newburn and Stanko 1994). Accordingly, the
abandonment of the use of violence might be interpreted as a way of
exploring more *adaptive* forms of masculinity or in Mosher and Tomkins'
(1988, 82) words, to learn 'how to be a man – a mensch – without being a
macho man'. Nowadays in advanced capitalist societies, aggressiveness is not
the only way of doing masculinities; pursuing a productive life and assuming
family gendered roles (Gadd and Farrall 2004) through rationality and
responsibility – 'the power of reason' – are also expressions of hegemonic
masculinities (Connell 2005, 164), as one of the interviewees pointed out:

> Now I'm more focused, less impulsive, I avoid fights . . . I have evolved,
> I am responsible for my family and I have future projections. (Felipe,
> desister, age 20)

Changes in Crime Frequency from First to Second Wave

Another way to assess changes different from crime cessation is to
analyse changes in the frequency of crime (deceleration). To do that,
individuals were asked (in both waves) how often they committed crimes
in the past year. This question was provided for each criminal offence
that they reported. The answers given were: *never, only once, a few times,
several times* and *a lot of times.* Using a similar procedure to the one used
to assess changes in the seriousness of crime, a matrix was created to
calculate changes in crime frequency from one wave to the other.

Table 10.5 Changes in crime frequency from first to second wave among active offenders in the first wave[a]

Category	N	Percentage (%)
Desistance	67	31
Decreased frequency	70	33
Maintained frequency	59	28
Increased frequency	18	8
Total	214	100

[a]Only the individuals who were criminally active in the first wave were considered for this analysis (N = 214).

Table 10.5 shows that only 8% of the individuals who were active on crime at the first wave increased and 28% maintained the frequency of their criminal behaviour. A further 31% stopped committing crimes completely and 33% decreased the frequency of their offences. Out of those who persisted in crime in the second wave, 36% continued committing crimes less often than in the first wave.

In the in-depth interviews it was observed that, similar to changes in seriousness, deceleration could be triggered by instrumental reasons. Nevertheless, changes in crime frequency were related to and often prompted by more sophisticated factors as well, such as changes in the motives that trigger crime and by resisting criminal temptations.

Deceleration and the Transition from Ambition to Need

Interviewees argued that their most prolific periods in terms of crime frequency coincided with times in which they were deeply engaged with consumerism. The excesses of a consumerist life obliged them to maintain a high frequency of criminal activity in order to financially sustain the lifestyle that they pursued, characterised by the acquisition of luxury goods to display power and to acquire social mobility (Young 2007). During these periods their offending was almost compulsive, experiencing lots of difficulties in constraining it because their desire to consume relied on a promise of gratification that was never fulfilled. Consumerism 'remains seductive only as long as the desire stays ungratified' (Bauman 2013, 46) and in the long term it exacerbates the perception of relative deprivation (Young 2007).

In contrast, during periods in which they experienced a deceleration of their criminal behaviour, their need for possessing and incorporating (in real and symbolic ways) material goods, such as drugs, fashion, cars and electronic devices decreased as well. They experienced a transition from ambition to need in which crime started to occur sporadically as a means to assure only economic survival. Axel, for example, a very prolific offender who committed around 20 robberies and burglaries per month, decreased them to an average of two per month in the year before the interview. When asking him why, he answered:

> Now I only commit crimes when I have no job and I need money for my daily survival, when I have to bring money home, to pay the bills and to eat. When you are in need, you have to forget about the law and do what you know how to do best. (Axel, persister age 19)

Fromm (1979, 90) called this pattern of change a transition from a *characterological having*, which refers to a 'passionate drive to retain and keep', to an *existential having*, which indicates what one needs to survive and develop, such as food, shelter, education, health, etc. This transition might be crucial for the desistance process, since according to Fromm (1979) it is only by the abandonment of the *characterological having* that individuals can achieve self-realisation and develop a life project that gives direction and meaning to their existence.

Resisting Crime in the Search After Habitus

Most offenders when trying to leave crime behind do not immediately start with searching for a job, a partner or a new place to live. Moreover, since crime is an exciting activity that most offenders enjoy and is embedded in almost all of the spheres of their lives, they know that abandoning it will have several costs beyond purely economic constraints. Accordingly, and being aware of the temptations that they will encounter, several offenders simply start by decreasing the frequency of crime through avoiding certain types of people, places and situations that trigger or are related with crime (Shapland and Bottoms 2011).

Avoidance is a clever strategy to begin with[7,8]; because it does not necessarily imply complete crime cessation, and thus allows individuals to manage their ambivalent desires to desist. It is not as radical as saying 'never again'; it is about trying to resist criminal temptations until reaching a point in which a non-criminal life starts to be *habitual*. Bourdieu (1990, 53) stated that *habitus* is composed of '[p]rinciples which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them'. According to this view, interviewees became exposed daily (perhaps sometimes even without consciously realising it) to new *normal* places (Farrall et al. 2014, 186), leisure activities, patterns of consumption and interpersonal relations, which opened the way to the acquisition of a new *habitus* that in turn shaped new positions in the social structure, paving the path for desistance to occur.

Challenging the Boundaries Between Desistance and Persistence Categories

As was mentioned at the beginning, desistance and persistence have been mainly defined in dichotomous terms as the absence or the presence of criminal activities in an individual's life. Even Maruna, whose work is an exemplary qualitative account of desistance, defined it as the 'long-term *abstinence* from crime' (Maruna 2001, 26, emphasis added). Nevertheless, some scholars have defied these binary classifications, arguing that desistance and persistence categories are far from stable and that several offenders transition from one category to the other over time (Matza 1964; Glaser 1969; Leibrich 1996; Shover 2004; Bottoms et al. 2004; Murray 2009; Barry 2012).

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[7] Only the individuals who were criminally active in the first wave were considered for this analysis ($N = 214$).

[8] Nevertheless, in the long term, desistance's maintenance entails a more active process in which individuals' exercise will and make choices to shape and reorientate their own life towards the future (Carlson 2016; Farrall 2002).

Table 10.6 Desistance and persistence categories in the first and second waves

	DES second wave		PER second wave	
DES first wave	72	22%	48	14%
PER first wave	66	20%	148	44%

Indeed, here it is observed that 34% ($n = 114$) of the individuals from the sample changed category between waves (see Table 10.6). Specifically, 40% of those who were desisters in the first wave[9] started committing crimes again the year after; and 31% of those who were persisters[10] stopped committing crimes after 1 year.

Variation between categories can be interpreted and explained by several factors that are beyond the scope of this article.[11] Nevertheless, as Bottoms et al. (2004, 383) pointed out, it seems to be clear that:

> whilst moving generally in a conformist direction, people oscillate on what we might visualise as a dimension, or continuum, between criminality and conformity. On such a continuum, complete criminality and complete conformity are, for the vast majority, points never likely to be reached.

Accordingly, for several desisters crime can always remain (or at least for extended periods of time) a possible alternative and for some persisters crime can co-exist with internal dispositions towards conformity.

Desisters Who Doubt

Desistance may not imply an absolute, clean-cut and final break with criminal activity (Shover 2004). Some offenders, even if they have stopped committing crimes for a long period of time, may never reach

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[9] The individuals who did not commit any crime in the year prior to the first wave interview were considered as desisters in the first wave.

[10] The individuals who committed at least one crime in the year prior to the first wave interview were considered as persisters in the first wave.

[11] See Droppelmann (forthcoming) for an analysis of the factors promoting change.

Table 10.7 Percentage of desisters who were doubtful regarding their capacity to stay away from crime

	Percentage that answered 'Yes' (%)
1. Sometimes I want to desist, sometimes I don't	23
2. I stopped, but if I have the opportunity of doing something big, I will do it	13
3. Answered, 'yes' to question one or two	28

an absolute lifestyle of conformity, or may never achieve the deep and radical internal transformation pointed out in some desistance studies (Leibrich 1996; Maruna 2001).

As Table 10.7 shows, contrary to what one would have expected and even after being away from crime for a year or more, more than a quarter of the individuals who did not commit any crimes in the period prior to the second wave were ambivalent regarding their decision to stay out of crime or being able to commit crimes again if they had the opportunity.

In the in-depth interviews, ambivalence was explored and it was observed that it was related to three main elements: crime grief, a negated future and fear.

Crime Grief: Bargaining with Crime

The great majority of the narratives from the desisters were characterised by ambivalence, uncertainty and contradictions. Although they had well-defined conformist aspirations for the future, they did not have a clear idea of themselves, their lives and their preferences in the present. From their corporal expressions and emotional tone, it was possible to infer that talking about their conformist futures was not only boring but also distressing. In comparison, when looking back at the times when they were actively offending, their narratives became more alive, vibrant and exciting.

For the interviewees, crime was difficult to surrender not only because it was their way of life and for most the only thing that they knew how to do, but also because it was a source of pleasure,

enjoyment and satisfaction. Crime was not just a utilitarian affair; it was embedded in the pleasure of transgression as a source of control and identity reassurance (Matthews 2002; Young 2007). Their emotional attachment to crime was so strong that they were experiencing grief and were still *bargaining*[12] with crime, trying to delay or even undo their decision to leave it behind. As happens in any other mourning process, they *secretly* wanted to postpone their loss by leaving the door open to crime. Moreover, several desisters in the study dreamt about a re-encounter with crime and fantasised about having a farewell episode in which they would commit their last and biggest offence. The following example comes from Cristian's narrative. At the time of the interview he was 19 years old, he was studying to become a chef and had desisted for more than 1 year.

I:	How were you when you were committing robberies?
Cristian:	I was very clever . . . even today I wonder how good I was and the capabilities that I had to plan, to think about every single detail . . .
I:	And how often did you do that? (robbing petrol stations)
Cristian:	Very often. It didn't matter how much money I got; I went back again.
I:	Why did you come back?
Cristian:	Because I loved it, I really enjoyed it, specially the excitement of doing it again and again . . .
I:	And if you had the opportunity of doing something big again, would you do it?
Cristian:	Mmmmm . . . yes, I guess I would . . .
I:	Can you say that you have stopped completely?
Cristian:	I am not sure if I can say completely, there will be always something left, a kind of thread that linked you to crime . . . like a murderer who killed someone; he will always have this instinct of being aggressive . . .

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[12] For a description of the bargaining stage of grief, see Kübler-Ross (1969).

Never Say Never, Who Knows What the Future Holds

Grief was not the only factor related to ambivalence. In the in-depth interviews when desisters were asked if they would commit crimes in the future, most were unable to give a straightforward answer. They argued that although they did not want to relapse, they could not say *never*, because they did not know what the future held. Messerschmidt (1986, 63) argues that 'individuals become aware of their position in society by perceiving what future is possible for them...to the individual male in marginalised community, his lack of future reflects the fate of his class'. This was evident when an interviewee reflected about his future:

> Future? What future? I have never thought about my future...I have always been so poor that I live from day-to-day. (Daniel, persister, age 18)

Their negated future was marked by their lack of employment opportunities, social distress and fragile living arrangements. Between 2010 and 2014, 76% of employment in Chile was informal, unstable and precarious (Fundación Sol 2015). In the case of the individuals from the study, this situation was even worse: only 14% of the ones who had worked in the last year had a formal job. The rest were involved in sporadic jobs with no contracts or social security. Moreover, they were constantly confronted with enormous social distress. In the last year, 48% of the interviewees experienced at least one stressful event in their families and immediate social environment (see Fig. 10.1).

If we consider their living arrangements and familial structures, these events might have devastating consequences. Indeed, almost all the individuals from the study lived in households with interdependence among their members in terms of livelihood strategies. Accordingly, if one of the members lost his job, went to prison, fell ill, got involved in drugs or decided to abandon the house, the other household members would be affected in some way. Experiences such as these reinforced the imaginary idea that they had of their lives as being driven by 'destiny' (see Irwin 1970; Maruna 2001; Zemel et al. 2016).
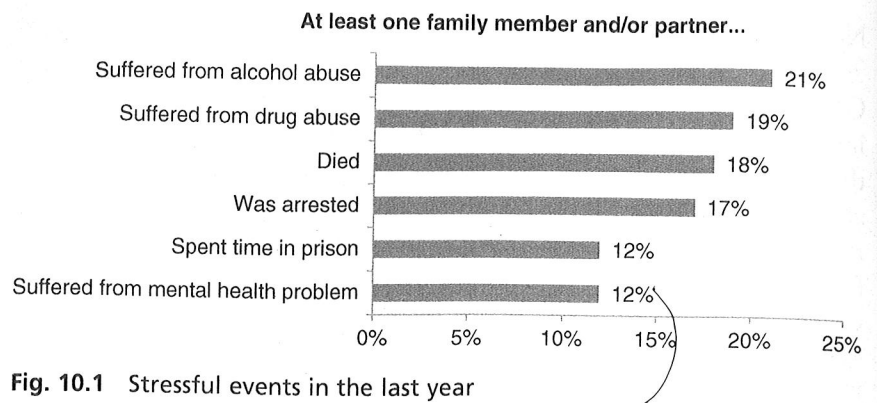
At least one family member and/or partner...

Suffered from alcohol abuse	21%
Suffered from drug abuse	19%
Died	18%
Was arrested	17%
Spent time in prison	12%
Suffered from mental health problem	12%

Fig. 10.1 Stressful events in the last year

Indeed, the individuals in the study only remained powerful in terms of gender and crime, and crime operated as a strategy to preserve power, bravery and independence, in a context of complete decontrol (Messerschmidt 1986; Hayward 2002).

Fear, Ambivalence and Self-Protection

Fear is a forbidden sentiment in the masculine culture of crime; it is believed to be an 'inferior feminine emotion' (Mosher and Tomkins 1988, 67) that brings failure and dishonour. Accordingly, when desistance started to emerge among the participants, fear started to surface as well. They were mostly afraid of failing in conformist settings and for several offenders it was easier to live a life of failures than to try to succeed and fail. The guilt and shame of what was believed to be an unmerited success was so strong, that some interviewees sabotaged themselves in their attempts to change (see Fenichel 1946). Since being recognised as a *conventional/normal* person is one of the main indicators of success in the desistance process (Maruna 2001; Maruna et al. 2009; Martinez 2009; Barry 2012), ambivalence operated here as a self-protection strategy in order to avoid the sense of failure that would arrive from their failed attempts to become integrated into society.

Conformist Persisters: I Commit Crimes, but I Am Normal as Well

Perhaps the most stereotypical idea that one has of a desister is a person who has completely reformed his/her life. Heroic stories, conversions and broad and deep internal changes come to one's mind when we think about individuals who have stopped committing crimes. In contrast, when we think about the ones who persist in crime, one immediately thinks of individuals who identify themselves with antisocial values and aspirations, and who are strongly involved in a delinquent culture.

The differences between persisters and desisters in terms of their identity, values and aspirations were explored through a set of questions and scales. Consistently with the above, independent t-tests and logistic regression analysis showed that, even when controlling for relevant variables, the two groups differed. Persisters had lower moral standards, less conventional aspirations and saw themselves more as delinquents than desisters (Droppelmann forthcoming).

Nevertheless, when looking into these issues in more detail, it is interesting to point out that despite these differences, there was a group of persisters who performed in a very conformist way. Indeed, it was observed that half (50%) of the persisters did not see themselves as delinquents (see Fig. 10.2) and when asking them about the future, 74% did not see themselves as offenders in the long term.

Moreover, the vast majority of the persisters had conventional future aspirations (see Fig. 10.3). And almost half of them (47%) believed that people should follow the law, with only 23% of them arguing instrumental reasons.

Although counterintuitive, these findings are neither new in criminology nor in research on desistance (Gibbons 1965; Irwin 1970; Presser 2008; Murray 2009; Healy 2010). As Sykes and Matza (1957, 666) pointed out more than five decades ago:

> one of the most fascinating problems about human behaviour is when men violate the laws in which they believe. This is the problem that confronts us when we attempt to explain why delinquency occurs despite a greater or lesser commitment to the usages of conformity.
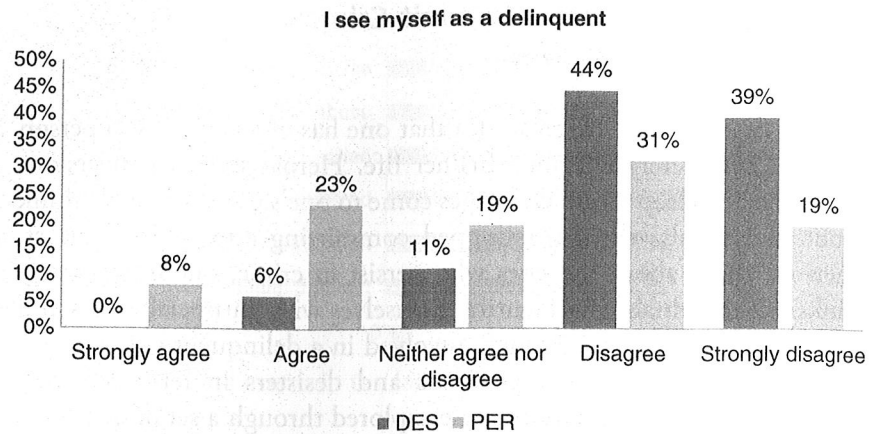
I see myself as a delinquent

Bar chart data (DES, PER):
- Strongly agree: 0%, 8%
- Agree: 6%, 23%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 11%, 19%
- Disagree: 44%, 31%
- Strongly disagree: 39%, 19%

Legend: ■ DES ■ PER

Fig. 10.2 Delinquent identity

How important is it for you?

Bar chart data (DES, PER):
- Finishing school: 98%, 85%
- Having a college education: 96%, 78%
- Have my own house: 98%, 98%
- Have a job that satisfies me: 98%, 93%
- Have a happy family life: 99%, 96%
- Work hard to get ahead: 94%, 82%
- Attend university: 80%, 65%

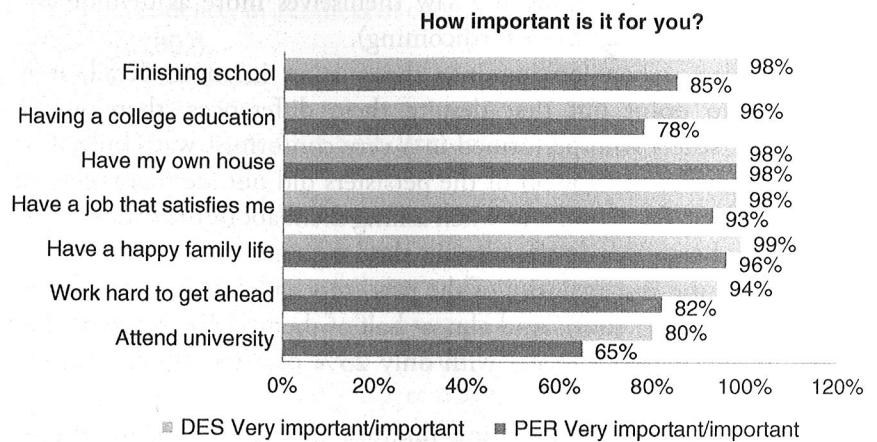Legend: ▨ DES Very important/important ■ PER Very important/important

Fig. 10.3 Future aspirations

Although this study did not test and explore neutralisation techniques specifically, some of these mechanisms were found in the interviewees' narratives. Nevertheless, they were mainly present when justifying crimes that did not involve violence or direct contact and harm to

victims, such as store theft, fraud, selling stolen goods etc. So, how does this group of conformist persisters manage the inconsistencies between their internal dispositions towards crime and their behaviour? One plausible explanation could be that these individuals would be engaged in the initial process of crime abandonment and were experiencing a process that Merton (1957) described as 'anticipatory socialisation', where individuals identify themselves with values, norms and orientations of social groups from which they aspire to participate in, but are not yet members. Another plausible explanation, which is consistent with the narratives of the interviewees, can be found in Shapland and Bottoms' (2011) study in which they observed that many offenders did not believe that their antisocial behaviour shaped their whole lives. Indeed, when exploring identity issues in the in-depth interviews, persisters felt quite uncomfortable with the *delinquent* label and their immediate reaction was to defy it. However, when confronting them with the fact that they were still committing crimes, several individuals recanted: 'Yes, I guess that I am a delinquent... but I am a good person as well.' Instead of using justifications and denials (i.e. *I have to steal because I am poor*), as Neutralisation Theory (Sykes and Matza 1957) would have predicted, here it was observed that these individuals tried to resist *secondary deviance* (Lemert 1967) by rejecting the delinquent label as their only and single identity, and by incorporating other aspects around which they could organise a sense of self (Uggen et al. 2004). Essentially, they tried to symbolically erase or balance the bad (being a delinquent) with the good (being a good person). This process, that Maruna (2001) called the *redemption script* and Healy (2010) described as an *integrated narrative*, has always been found among desisters as an attempt to connect past and present experiences, presenting the current self as the consequence of prosocial past behaviour. Nevertheless, here it was observed that even persisters experienced such a process, not in order to reconstruct their self, but to construct or maintain a current self that made sense for inconsistent forms of being at the present, in order to align themselves with their future conformist aspirations.

Consistent with the above, a final possible explanation can be found in the nature of their aspirations. According to the results of

the questionnaire (see Fig. 10.3), persisters wanted to achieve the same mainstream societal goals as a 'normal' person would like to achieve (Farrall et al. 2010). More than 80% believed that it is important to work hard to get ahead, to finish school and to have a happy family life. When exploring the very nature of these aspirations, it was apparent that they were mainly embedded in materialistic accumulation. Indeed, when asking them in the in-depth interviews 'how do you want to be in the future?', only a few individuals answered using the verb 'to be', saying for example that they 'wanted to be a businessman, a father, a student, etc.' Most of the interviewees phrased their answers using the *to have mode* (see Fromm 1979), arguing that they 'wanted to have a house, money, a car, a business, etc.' As the following narrative makes evident, in the post-modern consumer culture individuals no longer exist as workers or citizens, but as consumers (McIntyre 1992).

I: Regarding your future. How would you like to be in the future?
Michael: I don't know, just having everything. To have all what you need to live a peaceful and quiet life.
I: What does this mean?
Michael: Having everything that one must have, a car, a house, a refrigerator, a washing machine. (Michael, persister, age 17)

Structural changes experienced in Chile since the 1980s, such as economic growth accompanied by high levels of income inequality have changed the social mobility strategy used by lower classes. The consolidation of a liberal welfare regime that promotes social stratification and does not protect citizens from the market dynamics has weakened the informal social control mechanisms provided by the attachment to non-economic institutions, and has diminished the attractiveness of the social roles that these institutions can offer (Savolainen 2000). The above, along with the rise of consumerism made possible by an increasing access to credit, may explain why individuals' aspirations are not centred on occupational status or social roles anymore, but on their consumer capacity and lifestyles (Franco et al. 2011). The symbolic value of material goods had a compensatory effect among the interviewees; it alleviated them from the humilia-

tion and disrespect that arises from the dynamics of deprivation (Van Bavel and Sell Trujillo 2003; Young 2007) and it helped them to be integrated in mainstream society.

Conclusion

Drawing on panel data of young offenders in Chile, it was shown how the process of _othering_ with its sharp and arbitrary demarcations between crime/no-crime, desistance/persistence and primary/secondary desistance boundaries, significantly biases the real understanding of the process of crime abandonment.

Firstly, it was argued that the division between _primary_ and _secondary_ desistance imposes an artificial distinction and a temporal order to the process of crime abandonment that might not represent the way in which it occurs. _Secondary desistance_ is not necessarily a long-term achievement that arises as a consequence of crime abandonment, and several persisters do not see themselves as offenders.

Secondly, it was shown that operationalising desistance as only considering crime-free gaps hides crucial changes that occur during the process of leaving crime behind. Indeed, 43% of the youths who persisted in crime in the second wave decreased the seriousness of their offences and 36% of them committed crimes less frequently than in the first wave. Although these downward trends sometimes do not occur as a consequence of a definite decision to stop crime and can be triggered by instrumental reasons, they activate several processes that might sustain desistance in the long term.

Thirdly, it can be concluded that desistance and persistence categories are far from absolute and that several individuals were vacillating between crime and conformity. Indeed, 34% of the interviewees changed categories between the first and the second wave, following a zig-zag pattern rather than a linear path. Ambivalent desisters and conformist offenders who persisted in order to align themselves with mainstream society, emerged as new categories that challenge the traditional stereotypical ways to understand desistance and persistence from crime.

The above has several implications in the way in which we understand, theorise and research desistance, which are relevant beyond the Chilean context and could be easily extrapolated to other societies with similar market-based economic systems and liberal welfare regimes. Perhaps the most crucial one is that by moving forward from the binary categorisation of the process of crime abandonment, we turn our focus on the liminal space, on the ambivalences and inconsistencies that most individuals experience who are trying to desist from crime. In this research, the nature of these inconsistencies was found to be strongly related to consumerism, attachment and masculinity, as factors that pull them away from crime and push them back towards it. Leaving behind compulsive forms of consumerism allowed them to start exploring new ways of identity reassurance and differentiation, and to develop aspirations more centred on self-development rather than on the accumulation of material goods. This transition could resemble a shift from expressive crime, caused by humiliation and the pursuit of identity and status; towards instrumental crime, prompted by material needs. Moreover, through the changing process they learnt new forms of doing masculinities, by exerting control over themselves and restraining from violence.

Nevertheless, overcoming ambivalence does not occur in a vacuum; it needs a social context that provides the opportunities for this to happen. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, this was not the case for most of the interviewees. Their marginalisation from mainstream society and lack of opportunities allowed them to display power only through aggression, risk-taking and thrill seeking and to acquire status and differentiation through conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1967). Several interviewees could not establish a firm foothold outside crime because their emotional attachment to offending and their fear of failing in conformist settings impeded them from leaving the safe and comfortable space between crime and conformity.

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