

Life after crime and punishment? Lifestyles changes and quaternary desistance

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Abstract

Studies of why people stop offending have been one of the considerable growth areas of criminology and life-course studies since the early-1990s. Initially the research focused on assessing the extent to which people who had offending *did* cease offending. Having established this, the field then sought to account for *why* and *how* they ceased. Of late, a new question has come to the fore: what sort of lifestyles develop for people after they have desisted? This question, in some respects, begs another about the legitimacy of asking or encouraging people to desist and, by implication, the promotion of academic studies which conceive of and represent desistance as a goal in and of itself. This paper's contribution to these debates is to assess the lives of people not *as* they desist or in the immediate aftermath of their desisting, but several years *after* they have stopped offending. Using longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of British people born in 1970, this paper finds that, by their early 40s, the lifestyles of people who have desisted start to differ from those of people who have persisted in offending, and have started to take on some of the characteristics of non-offenders' lifestyles.

Keywords: Desistance from Crime; Offenders; Longitudinal; British Cohort Study 1970; Quaternary desistance

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I. Introduction

Criminal careers research remains a key plank of criminological work around the world. Although the focus of research from the 1930s through to the 1960s was mainly on explaining why people started to offend or persisted in offending, since the mid- to late-1990s, the field has become pre-occupied with explaining why people cease and refrain from offending. Numerous theories of desistance have been put forward (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990, Sampson and Laub, 1993, Moffitt, 1993, Maruna 2001, Giordano et al 2002, Bottoms et al 2004, Vaughan, 2007, Paternoster and Bushway, 2009 and Farrall et al 2014, for example). In the period since some of the initial forays into the field (such as by Blumstein et al 1985), studies of desistance have focused on *why* and *how* people desist. In terms of substantive findings, desistance has been found to be related to processes of internal change (whereby values and priorities consistent with offending are replaced with those more consistent with legal compliance; see, e.g., Vaughan 2007), often provoked by engagement with a drugs or alcohol key worker (Maruna, 2001), and sometimes progressed via a ‘rebuilding’ of the self in various ways and to varying extents (Maruna, 2001, Gadd and Farrall, 2004, Farrall, 2005). Researchers have found that desistance is often associated with engagement with key social institutions (such as marriage, family or employment; e.g., see Sampson and Laub, 1993). Evidence of the impact of the criminal justice system’s potential role in promoting desistance is less clear, but any such impact would appear to take several years to emerge (Farrall et al 2014); in particular, periods of imprisonment seem most likely and most commonly to hinder rather than enable desistance (Burnett and Maruna, 2004). Desistance processes have also been found to be related to age, such that the age at which the process starts is crucial to its success (Uggen, 2000), and these processes also seem to vary by ethnicity (Calverley, 2013) and gender (Rodermond et al 2016). In some cases, leaving places associated with offending was a key part of the process (Osborn, 1980, Kirk, 2009). Desistance also appears to be related to increases in engagement in democratic institutions (Farrall et al, 2014), to entail an emotional trajectory (Farrall and Calverley, 2006) and, in some instances, to be associated with a change in religious values (Mohammed, 2019). Different economic, social and cultural arrangements

may act upon these processes such that they vary between countries and cultures (Segev, 2019, Calverley, 2013, Osterman, 2018). A range of policy and practice prescriptions have been developed, although the degree to which these can be or have been operationalised is contested, particularly within systems preoccupied with punishment and/or risk (McNeill, et al., 2012, Farrall 2021).

Despite the advances made by the above studies, there are still many issues on which opinion is divided or the knowledge base insufficiently developed. In this paper, we address one of these areas in which our collective knowledge is far from complete. This concerns the question of the sorts of lives which desisters lead after they have ceased to offend and, relatedly, of the extent to which they become fully integrated within society - socially, economically and politically. This paper seeks to put some flesh on to the bones of these concerns via the examination of the post-offending lives, life-courses and life-styles of people with histories of offending who were included in a nationally-representative sample of people born in 1970 and followed up into their early-40s. The paper starts by reviewing what we know about the lives of desisters *after* they have desisted, before outlining the dataset on which we rely. As well as introducing the dataset, we explore its limitations before presenting the results of our analyses. Having presented the findings, we discuss what they mean for our understanding of the lives of people in the first decade or so after they have desisted from offending.

What do we know about the lives of people who have offended?

The exploration of why people initially stop offending and then maintain crime-free lives has been a major part of criminological work since the turn of the 21st century. As well as numerous theories of desistance, developing knowledge about the precursors to desistance has been reported extensively. So, for example, we know that marriage, employment, child-rearing and developing a 'new' identity are all key factors in why many people cease offending (see Laub and Sampson, 2003, or Farrall, et al., 2014 for overviews). We also know that these processes can involve reconstructing narratives of

one's earlier life (Maruna, 2001), engaging in reflection and an 'internal conversation' (Vaughan, 2007), changes in daily routines (Farrall, et al., 2014), moving away from 'old haunts' (Osborn, 1980, Kirk 2009), shifting emotions (Farrall, et al., 2014, Nugent and Schinkel, 2016), and changes in the goals people desire (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2005). Several studies have pointed to the many obstacles that would-be desisters need to address and overcome in order to successfully desist (Burnett, 1992, Farrall, 2002). It is also clear that these efforts are often themselves fraught with risk and with material and emotional hardships (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016, Hunter and Farrall, 2018).

Initial studies of desistance from crime implicitly assumed that desisting was a 'good thing' for those so involved. After all, to desist from crime seemed likely to mean no more (or at least, reducing) contact with the criminal justice system, less fractured familial relationships, better employment chances and less risk of serious victimisation. However, as the field developed, scholars started to question what is 'was' that potential desisters were being invited to desist into or corralled towards. Was it automatically the case that ceasing to be involved in crime was associated with more positive life-courses, life experiences and lifestyles? For example, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) provided evidence from Scotland that processes of desistance were characterised by pains of isolation, experiences of goal failure and feelings of hopelessness. Similarly, Hunter and Farrall (2018) reported that some English desisters in their sample felt that their decision to refrain from offending in some instances provoked feelings of frustration and of having let others down (p299-301). De Giorgi (2017:93), using data from an ethnography of people released from Californian prisons back to one community in Oakland (a former industrial base in California) notes how the US criminal justice system now views 'successful' re-entry as the absence of any further offending, rather than the adoption of a meaningful and worthwhile life. However, for those De Giorgi spoke to, employment was hard to come by, violent victimisation a constant threat, housing was insecure and developing a stable lifestyle seemed almost impossible to achieve. As both Calverley (2013) and Appleton (2010) note, the post-offending lives of some members of society are characterised by loneliness and fraught with efforts to stay away from former associates and family members involved in crime (on which, see also Bottoms, 2006, on 'diachronic self-control').

Similarly, whilst Farrall and colleagues (2014:223-224) reported that desisters who had ceased offending for more than four years were less likely to be victimised, they found that those who had desisted for shorter periods had similar victimisation experiences to those still involved in persistent offending. It is hardly surprising, then, that some would-be desisters experience “‘Fuck it” moments’, throwing in the towel and giving up (Halsey et al, 2016). Whilst such emotions and the observations about them may be transitory and part of the process of change, they nevertheless raise the question of what happens to people and to their lives and life-courses after they have desisted.

However, it ought to be remembered that De Giorgi’s ethnography studied recently released prisoners (in one of the world’s most punitive criminal justice systems embedded in one of the world’s most neo-liberal economies), and that the studies by Schinkel and Nugent, Farrall and colleagues, Calverley and Appleton all dealt with people *desisting*, rather than those who had *desisted* and may, in part, reflect the experiences of change. Change, it must be remembered, is never easy for individuals (see Ebaugh’s account of her leaving the monastery where she had lived as a nun, or her examination of ‘becoming an ex-’, Ebaugh 1984, 1988). Similarly, the process of desistance might be likened to a process of delayed gratification; immediate rewards are postponed for greater anticipated rewards at a later date.

Leaving this point aside, these studies nevertheless raise the question of what it is which desisters are expected to desist ‘into’, how long it might take them to achieve such goals and the extent to which these are attainable? Do they ever attain the legal, social and economic status of other non-offending or never-offending citizens; or do their lives end up looking much like they had done previously (i.e., personally troubled and socially marginalised) but without the engagement in crime? Perhaps they are to be found somewhere between these poles. There are almost no studies of what happens to people in the years and decades *after* they have ceased offending. Most studies focus on those *desisting* or who have only recently *desisted*. This is the gap that we hope to begin to address in this paper.

II. Methods

Data and research strategy

The data we rely on here comes from the British Cohort Study (hereafter BSC70). All members of the cohort were born in one week of April 1970. In all, 16,135 babies were born and recruited into the BCS70 (98% of all births in that week). At the outset of the study, and at a time when the categorisation of ethnicity was rather crude, some 93% were categorised as 'UK European' or 'Other European' (which, in effect means 'white'), 1% as West Indian, 1.5% as Indian or Pakistani, and the remainder as either unknown or other.

The BCS70 allows us to explore the offending careers of cohort members and their subsequent life-course. In 1970, the babies' mothers were interviewed, providing some background data on them, with further interviews with mothers in 1975 and 1980. From 1980 onwards, the children were interviewed and questions relating to crime were first fielded. In 1986 the cohort was re-interviewed, and the questions on offending expanded to include contact with the police and convictions in court. These topics were revisited in 1996 when the cohort was 26, and again in 2000 when they were 30. The survey has regularly fielded questions on cohort members' social and economic circumstances (type of housing, neighbourhood characteristics, schooling and employment experiences, household composition, home leaving, homelessness, relationship formation, marriage and child-rearing, peer relations, and medical experiences), as well as social attitudes, political affiliation, alcohol consumption, and psychological wellbeing. In 2004, when the sample was aged 34, the ethnic composition was 97% white (British, Irish and 'other'), 0.5% Black British, 1% Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, and the remainder were of dual heritage or other ethnicities.

In terms of the representativeness of the sample at age 34 (in 2004), when compared to the sample when they were recruited (in 1970), the sample retains a high degree of representativeness (see Table A1). For example, at birth, some 52% of the sample were male (and 48% female); at the follow-up in 2004 the gender balance had changed so that 46% were male and 54% female (in keeping with the common observation that males tend to be lost in

follow-up studies). In 1970, 82% of the sample were interviewed in England, 5% in Wales, 9% in Scotland and 4% in Northern Ireland. Fieldwork was not undertaken in Northern Ireland after the first round, meaning that the country at the time of interview in 2004 is biased toward the three countries which make up Britain. In terms of the overall countries of interview in 2004, of these 85% were undertaken in England, 6% in Wales and 10% in Scotland. These were equally spread across the three offending trajectories that we discuss below ('non-offenders', 'persisters' and 'desisters'). In terms of their father's social class, this too exhibited reasonable retention rates over time and by offending trajectory (see Table A1).

In order to classify respondents as 'desisters', 'persisters' and 'non-offenders', we relied on self-report data collected at ages 16, 30 and 34 (questions on offending were not asked in 1996, when the sample was 26, but at that point a decision was made to interview only 10% of the sample anyway). Although the cohort was asked a number of questions relating to their contact with the criminal justice system at each of these three points (namely, being 'moved on' by the police, being stopped and questioned by the police, being let off with just a warning, being arrested and taken to a police station, being formally cautioned at a police station, and being found guilty in a criminal court *since the previous interview*) we rely on the item relating to being arrested and taken to a police station. We do so since the items prior to this (being moved on, questioned or being let off) do not necessarily imply wrongdoing, whilst the items relating to being cautioned or found guilty at a court would exclude those who had offended but where there was insufficient evidence to secure a conviction. The item used ("Been arrested by a police officer and taken to a police station") captures those moments when a police officer had sufficient reason to arrest even if there was insufficient evidence to charge and convict.¹ There was a very high degree of association between being arrested and taken to a police station and being given a warning,

1 This approach differs from more conventional ways of defining persistence and desistance (i.e. via conviction data), but is defensible given that self-reported data has advantages over officially-recorded data. One possible downside is that it risks importing biases linked to policing (such as, for example, greater arrests rates for some ethnic minority groups). However, as noted above, this is a sample which has very few minority respondents in it, and so such biases are unlikely to be present to any significant degree.

cautioned or convicted. For example, of those who reported being arrested and taken to a police station when aged between the age of 26 and 30 (reported at age 30 in 2000), some 67% were given a warning, 69% were formally cautioned and 52% were convicted. We recoded the data to form the following groups of responses:

Table 1: Frequency of persisters, desisters and non-offenders

Offending Career	Number	Percentage
Persistent Offenders (arrested at 16, 30 and 34, or at 16 and 34, or 30 and 34)	96	.5
Desisters (arrested at 16, but not 30 or 34, or arrested at 16 and 30 but not 34, or arrested at 30 but not 34).	1252	6.6
Non-Offenders (no arrests)	7522	39.6
Not seen enough to code	8561	45.0
System missing cases (no data)	1575	8.3
TOTAL	19006	100.0

Thus the ‘persisters’ group includes those who reported being arrested at least twice, with at least one of those arrests being reported at age 34, whereas the ‘desisters’ group includes those who reported arrests at 16 and/or 30 but not at 34. We use the terms non-offender, persister and desister hereafter simply for clarity, consistency and ease of reference; we do not intend to suggest that people themselves can or should be reduced to such labels.

There were a relatively small number of persisters (less than 100, or half a percentage point), and some 1,252 desisters (just over six percent), with 7,522 non-offenders (49.6%). It is important to note that there were 8,561 cohort members who could not be classified for some reason (for example, they may have been interviewed at only one age point), and some 1,575 for whom there was no data at all. Nevertheless, this dataset provides us with evidence about the lives of desisters in the first ten or so years after they have ceased to offend (up to the age of 42).

It is important not to overlook the limitations of the data available to us. The data relates to one cohort of people born in one week of 1970, and whilst there is nothing to suggest that this birth cohort is not a nationally representative sample, it could well be that for earlier or later birth cohorts these findings do not hold. Certainly, other analyses using this cohort and a cohort born 12 years *earlier* suggest some significant differences in their experiences as the UK economy changed from one of a high degree of state-ownership to one characterised by neo-liberal economic management (Farrall et al 2019). That said, given that neo-liberalism has become even more entrenched since the 1970s, the findings we present herein are likely to remain more or less the same for subsequent cohorts. Because the BCS70 surveys did not ask about engagement in crime after the cohort was aged 34 (in 2004), we are unable to assess the nature of their offending careers after this point. However, given that most people who start to offend will have started to desist by around this age, it is likely that there would have been little shifting from the persisters to the desisters group (or *vice versa*) and that most of the non-offenders would have remained in that category. Given also the numbers of both desisters and non-offenders, any changes in category membership would have had to be extremely large for the substantive findings to be invalidated. Finally, there is a large number of cases which we were unable to categorise. Some of these cases were simply cases which offended at one time-point (say at age 30), and which we were therefore incapable of categorising into our threefold classification. Others were lost to follow-up (cases living in Northern Ireland were not re-contacted after the first sweep for example) and others were individuals born in countries outside of the UK in the same week as the cohort and who were included in follow-up interviews. These cases might have joined the cohort after the questions on offending at age 16 were fielded and/or 'left' the cohort before the follow-ups at ages 30 and 34 (either because they left the UK or were just not as engaged with the cohort as those recruited at birth). Nevertheless, given the scarcity of studies of the lives of former-offenders in the decades after they have ceased offending, our paper still provides new insights into this phenomenon. Due to the fact that >95% of the sample are white, it is impossible to assess the extent to which ethnicity may interact with the processes we uncover.

Because the nature of this paper is exploratory, the research strategy which was employed involved what might be called ‘basic’ analyses relying on cross-tabulations of data and the comparison of means (via ANOVA tests). This enables us to appreciate the unique contribution, role or relationship of each variable *in absentia* of others. This however, does not mean that the insights which can be derived from these analyses are themselves ‘basic’, since it allows us the opportunity to assess the contours of any differences in the later life outcomes of desisters and persisters when compared to non-offenders. Since many studies of desistance have sampled from within the criminal justice system (e.g. Maruna 2001, Farrall 2002, Burnett 1992) few such studies have included non-offenders. Those studies which do contain representative samples of non-offenders (e.g. Graham and Bowling, 1994) were cross-sectional and hence longer-term follow data about the sample members was not available for analysis.

III. Results

Table 2 reports on 31 3x2 cross-tabulation tables, and reports the percentage of (for example) those who owned their own homes at age 34 by the three groups of offending career types. The N column reports the number of those cases who owned their own homes for all groups summed. The P value reports the Pearson Chi-Sq test of significance for that table.

One can see then that whilst 51% of those who were persistent offenders up to age 30 (in 2000) owned their own homes (or were buying them with a mortgage) when aged 34, this figure was higher for both non-offenders (78%) and desisters (66%). These figures had increased for all groups by about four percentage points when interviewed at age 38 (2008), although the desisters had experienced a slightly greater increase (of seven percentage points from 66% to 73%). In general, the persisters had the *lowest* rates of home ownership, employment, cohabiting and living with children at home, and the *highest* rates of claiming income support and divorce (although at age 38, rates of divorce were not statistically significantly different from one another). Receiving benefits is partly about child care (Child Benefit was universal at

**Table 2: Summarising variables associated with offending career
(Socio-demographics)**

Topic (age in brackets)	Persisters	Desisters	Non- Offenders	N	P Value
Owens own home (34)	51%	66%	78%	6334	.000
Owens own home (38)	55%	73%	82%	5691	.000
Owens own home (42)	53%	69%	83%	5634	.000
Employed (etc.) (34)	83%	92%	95%	7918	.000
Employed (etc.) (38)	83%	92%	96%	6757	.000
Employed (etc.) (42)	80%	91%	96%	6825	.000
Receiving Benefits (34)	56%	62%	63%	5225	.387
Receiving Benefits (38)	65%	67%	71%	5028	.010
Receiving Benefits (42)	67%	69%	72%	7193	.046
Claiming Income Support (34)	19%	16%	9%	3488	.000
Claiming Income Support (38)	23%	9%	7%	534	.000
Claiming Income Support (42)	5%	4%	2%	7193	.000
Single and never married (34)	77%	57%	46%	8356	.000
Single and never married (38)	52%	34%	24%	8427	.000
Single and never married (42)	48%	29%	21%	7185	.000
Divorced (34)	8%	6%	6%	471	.000
Divorced (38)	12%	13%	11%	817	.522
Divorced (42)	49%	29%	22%	1679	.000
Cohabiting (34)	60%	72%	76%	8343	.000
Cohabiting (38)	59%	76%	79%	5585	.000
Cohabiting (42)	56%	77%	79%	7195	.000
Children in household (34)	40%	57%	61%	8343	.000
Children in household (38)	63%	69%	73%	5161	.008
Children in household (42)	57%	71%	75%	7196	.000
Theft victim in past yr (34)	25%	14%	10%	857	.000
Violence victim in past yr (34)	19%	6%	3%	310	.000
Fraud victim in past yr (34)	13%	5%	4%	378	.000
Other victim in past yr (34)	17%	7%	5%	461	.000
Voted in 2001 GE (31)	47%	56%	66%	5351	.000
Voted in 2005 GE (35)	60%	67%	78%	4848	.000
Voted in 2010 GE (40)	56%	69%	78%	4918	.000
Died between 2005 and 2014	3%	1%	<1%	8856	.000

this stage), but is also about engagement with the State and the successful completion of an application for welfare assistance. Over time, some markers of social integration (such as home ownership, or employment) increased for all groups, but the persisters always lagged behind the desisters (who in turned lagged behind the non-offenders). The persisters also had the greatest levels of victimisation. Desisters were more engaged with democratic processes such as voting than were persisters, although less engaged than non-offenders. Generally speaking, desisters fell between the persisters and the non-offenders, although they tended to be closer to the non-offenders than they were the persisters on many measures. For example, at age 38, 83% of persisters were employed, compared to 92% of desisters and 95% of non-offenders. Interestingly, some 3% of persisters died between 2004 and 2014, whilst this was lower for desisters (1%) and non-offenders (.5%). No details as to the cause of death are available for analysis.

Table 3 compares these three groups again, this time for non-binary scores. The first column lists the variable and the age at which the data was collected (34, 38 or 42). The second, third and fourth columns provide the mean scores for, respectively, the persisters, the desisters and the non-offenders. The fifth column gives the score when the desisters' mean is subtracted from that of the persisters. The sixth subtracts the non-offenders' mean from the desisters', and the seventh subtracts the mean of the persisters from the mean of the non-offenders. These last three also have the p-value in brackets, with p-values below .05 being shaded for ease of identification.

Again, in keeping with Table 2, we find the desisters located 'between' the persisters and the non-offenders (see columns two to four in Table 3). For 24 of the 34 comparisons in Table 3, the arithmetic mean for the desisters is between those for the persisters and the non-offenders. That is, in itself, hardly surprising, since this group was once involved in crime, but appears to have given up offending. Further insights are to be found in the analyses of the differences between the three groups. Below we both outline the measurement of the variables in Table 3, and discuss our interpretation of these data.

Income and wealth

Assessments of personal finances (asked at ages 34, 38 and 42) ranged from 1 (living comfortably) to 5 (finding it difficult); so, lower scores indicate someone who is better-off. The average savings question at age 34 collected £ values (with several collection bins at £X5 and £X0 points, and ranged from £1 to £9,999. The median was £150. At age 42 the question was changed slightly to include investments as well, but was again recorded from £0 to £1m or more. The median was £3,000 at age 42. At age 38 total gross pay was coded from £21 to £745,000, with a median response of £1,998. At age 42, a similar question was fielded which referred to take homes in the last year. This was recorded from £0 to £500,000. The median response at age 42 was £19,000. The number of rooms in the house (asked at age 38) ranged from 1 to 12 (“or more”).

Let us focus on the data in the fifth column of Table 3, for this compares the persisters’ mean scores for their assessment of their management of their finances with those for the desisters. In this first block of items, we see that, on the whole, desisters feel that they are managing their personal finances better than persisters, but not as well as non-offenders (column six), and in keeping with this, have more savings and investments than the persisters, but not as much as the non-offenders. However, looking at the mean differences between the groups (columns five to seven), we see that the desisters start to rate their management of their finances as similar to that of the persisters. The non-offenders, however, whilst over time felt that they were managing their finances slightly less well than they had in the past, did not decline to the same degree as the persisters. So, over time, differences which existed at the outset became larger, with the desisters starting to share more in common with the persisters with regards to the management of their finances.

Leaving aside their assessments of their finances, the more objective data (relating to their incomes at age 38 and 42, and their savings at age 34 and 42) suggest no real differences (in that the P values in columns five to seven are non-significant) except for the issue of savings at age 42 (at which point the desisters and the non-offenders have started to increase their savings and investments (possibly in housing, which appears to have been more

prevalent in these groups at these ages, see Table 2). Possibly in keeping with this is an increase in the N of rooms in their houses for the desisters and non-offenders relative to those of the persisters. These differences are consistent with the increase in children living in the homes of desisters and non-offenders relative to the homes of the persisters (see Table 2 again). This might also explain the unexpected finding that the desisters and non-offenders were more likely to be in receipt of welfare benefits than were the persisters (since Child Benefit would have been universal at that point in time, in 2008).

Life satisfaction

Satisfaction with life ranged from 0 to 10 (with higher scores equating with greater levels of life satisfaction). Satisfaction with one's current home was scored from 1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied. Job satisfaction (asked at ages 34, 38 and 42) ranged from 1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied (so lower scores indicate greater levels of satisfaction). The data here suggests that the desisters and non-offenders were more satisfied with their lives and homes than were the persisters. However, non-offenders still remained more satisfied than the desisters. There were no consistent differences in terms of job satisfaction – although the desisters reported being less satisfied than the non-offenders.

Table 3: Summarising variables associated with offending career
(Self-assessments)

Topic (age)	Persisters' Mean Score	Desisters' Mean Score	Non-Offenders' Mean Score	Ps-Ds (P value)	Ds-N-Os (P value)	N-Os-Ps (P value)
Finances & Wealth						
Personal finances (34)	2.49	2.05	1.90	.435 (.002)	.155 (.000)	-.590 (.000)
Personal finances (38)	2.55	2.27	2.06	.272 (NS)	.215 (.000)	-.488 (.008)
Personal finances (42)	2.52	2.26	2.07	.263 (NS)	.184 (.000)	-.447 (.001)
Gross Pay (£) (38)	2,849	4,068	5,114	-.1218 (NS)	-.1046 (NS)	.2265 (NS)
Take home Pay (£) (42)	42,418	26,946	28,841	15,471 (NS)	-.1895 (NS)	-.13,576 (NS)
Monthly Savings (£S) (34)	339	295	272	44 (NS)	22 (NS)	-.66 (NS)
Total savings/investments (£) (42)	6,895	22,257	26,465	-.15,362 (.000)	-.4,208 (NS)	.19,570 (.000)
N rooms in house (38)	4.32	4.82	5.15	-.501 (.035)	-.325 (.000)	.826 (.000)
Life Satisfaction						
Life Satisfaction (34)	6.45	7.14	7.52	-.697 (.008)	-.380 (.000)	1.076 (.000)
Satisfaction with home (42)	2.03	1.69	1.61	.334 (.035)	.083 (.011)	-.417 (.005)
Satisfaction with Job (34)	1.94	1.98	1.88	-.048 (NS)	.099 (.008)	-.051 (NS)
Satisfaction with Job (42)	1.91	2.02	1.91	-.110 (NS)	.118 (.002)	.009 (NS)
Mid-Life Health						
Assessment of Own Health (34)	2.26	2.02	1.93	.236 (NS)	.096 (.001)	-.331 (.004)
Assessment of Own Health (38)	2.85	2.41	2.21	.436 (.004)	.206 (.000)	-.641 (.000)
Assessment of Own Health (42)	3.00	2.54	2.29	.457 (.006)	.253 (.000)	-.709 (.000)
Political Attitudes						
Interest in Politics (34)	2.65	2.72	2.70	-.071 (NS)	.019 (NS)	.052 (NS)
Interest in Politics (42)	2.73	2.67	2.68	.059 (NS)	-.013 (NS)	-.046 (NS)
Politicians Self-Interested (42)	2.40	2.48	2.71	-.077 (NS)	-.232 (.000)	.309 (.024)

Topic (age)	Persisters' Mean Score	Desisters' Mean Score	Non-Offenders' Mean Score	Ps-Ds (P value)	Ds-N-Os (P value)	N-Os-Ps (P value)
Pol Parties would not help me (42)	2.75	2.93	3.09	-.189 (NS)	-.153 (.000)	.342 (.042)
Pol Parties make no difference (42)	2.49	2.72	2.87	-.228 (NS)	-.147 (.001)	.375 (.025)
Tolerate ethnicities N'Bours (42)	2.18	2.23	1.97	-.052 (NS)	.262 (.000)	-.210 (NS)
Tolerate ethnicities Schools (42)	2.58	2.75	2.50	-.172 (NS)	.251 (.000)	-.079 (NS)
Support for Death Penalty (42)	2.17	2.20	2.54	-.028 (NS)	-.341 (.000)	.369 (NS)
Important to Obey Law (42)	2.98	2.87	2.62	.113 (NS)	.253 (.000)	-.366 (.018)
Fear of Crime						
Fear walking (34)	1.88	1.94	2.09	-.058 (NS)	-.157 (.000)	.216 (.023)
Caring Duties						
Hrs caring for parents (38)	3.22	3.02	3.20	.201 (NS)	-.174 (NS)	-.027 (NS)
Hrs caring for parents (42)	3.56	3.23	3.37	.331 (NS)	-.145 (NS)	-.186 (NS)
Life better with Kids (42)	2.45	2.70	2.95	-.243 (NS)	-.257 (.009)	.500 (.000)
Mid-Life Feelings						
Feeling optimistic of late (42)	2.87	3.25	3.37	-.376 (.004)	-.126 (.000)	.503 (.001)
Feeling good about myself (42)	3.07	3.40	3.42	-.331 (.017)	-.018 (NS)	.350 (.009)
Feeling close to other people (42)	3.03	3.54	3.70	-.511 (.001)	-.160 (.000)	.670 (.000)
Feeling confident (42)	3.22	3.50	3.47	-.279 (NS)	-.025 (NS)	.254 (NS)
Feeling loved (42)	3.34	3.89	4.04	-.555 (.001)	-.144 (.035)	.700 (.000)
The Wider Picture						
Economic Restructuring 1980s (42)	.0721	.0676	.0656	.004 (NS)	.001 (.049)	-.006 (.046)

Games-Howell tests. Ns typically around 5059 to 8356.

Health ratings

Assessments of one's own health ranged from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor), and, again, lower scores indicated better health. This suggested decreases in health for all groups over time. However, the differences at the outset were magnified over time (see columns five to seven), and in keeping with the evidence about personal finances. Whilst all groups reported declining health over time, the persisters started to differentiate themselves from the desisters (initially the differences were not statistically significant at age 34, but this changed at 38, and had grown by age 42). Although all groups saw declines in their health (by their own assessments), there was also evidence (columns five to seven) to suggest that the desisters' health declined *less* than that of the persisters, but *more* than that of the non-offenders. As such, the differences (identified here in the fifth to seventh columns) increased over time between groups.

Political attitudes

Interest in politics (asked at ages 34 and 42) ranged from 1 = very interested to 4 = not at all interested. The statements *politicians are mainly in politics for their own benefit; political parties make no difference; none of the political parties would do anything to benefit me; I would not mind if a family of another race moved in next door; I wouldn't mind if my child's school was mostly another race; for some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence; the law should be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong* were all coded 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Lower scores indicate greater degrees of tolerance of other ethnicities, but greater degrees of political cynicism. With regards to interest in politics, there were no differences between the three groups (although persisters became slightly less interested, but desisters and non-offenders became slightly more interested). The statements relating to political cynicism (*politicians are mainly in politics for their own benefit; political parties make no difference; none of the political parties would do anything to benefit me*) suggest that persisters are more cynical than desisters, who are themselves more cynical than non-offenders. However, given that these

differences are not statistically difference for the persisters and desisters, but they are for the desisters and non-offenders, the data suggest that the desisters remain as cynical as the persisters. The same trend is found when one considers tolerance of ethnic minorities and support for harsh punishment (where non-offenders remain most tolerant of ethnic minorities). There were also no differences between persisters and desisters in terms of their support for harsh punishment (here lower scores indicated greater degrees of support). Interestingly, when it came to political attitudes, there were very few differences between the persisters and the desisters (column five), but there were differences between both the desisters and the non-offenders.

Fear of crime

The fear of crime question was the 'safety' walking question (1 = very safe; 4 = very unsafe). Here there were no differences between the persisters and the desisters (the two groups of the three who felt safest), whilst non-offenders felt least safe of all (and statistically significantly more so than persisters or desisters).

Caring duties

Hours caring for parents each week was coded from 0 to 70 (for the data collected at age 38), and 0 to 168 (for that collected at age 42). The modal responses were 1 hour at both time points, but there was a distinct increase in the time spent looking after parents at age 42. The statement *people who never have children miss an important part of life* was coded 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree); so that lower scores indicate that having children is an important aspect of life. There were no differences in terms of the time spent looking after parents. When compared to both persisters and desisters, non-offenders were more likely to disagree with the statement that people without children had missed out on an important part of life; persisters and desisters both tended to agree with this statement more, but were not statistically different from one another.

Mid-life feelings

The statements *Over the last two weeks I've been feeling optimistic about the future*; *Over the last two weeks, I've been feeling good about myself*; *Over the last two weeks, I've been feelings close to other people*; *Over the last two weeks, I've been feelings confident* and *Over the last two weeks I've been feelings loved* were all coded on a scale from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time); so here higher scores indicate a more positive outlook. With the exception of the item about feeling more confident, taken as a whole, these items suggest that persisters tended to be least positive in terms of their outlook on life, whilst the desisters tended to be slightly less positive than the non-offenders.

The wider picture

In order to avoid overly-individualising our analyses, we incorporate a variable which captures the degree of economic restructuring experienced by the community in which each BSC70 cohort member was living when they were aged 16 (in 1986). Our measure of *Economic Change (1971-1981)* uses data from the 1971 and 1981 Censuses and is the sum of:

- a) the proportion of the economically active population employed in mining in 1971, and
- b) the proportion of economically active unemployed males in 1981.

These proportions were summed at the county-level, but appended to each cohort member. We chose this data since coal mining in 1971 was a good barometer of local industrial activity (since mining was co-located with steel production and processing in South Wales, South Yorkshire, Central Belt Scotland and Teesside, and ship-building (in and around Glasgow, in particular), and the maintenance of locomotives and railway distribution centres in Derby, Doncaster, Nottingham, Sheffield, York, and Central Belt Scotland)). In 1970 there were around 290,000 people (mainly men) working in 293 mines. By 1986, this had reduced to approximately 91,000 working in

110 mines.² By summing this with the percentage of unemployed males in the same areas in 1981, we created an area measure of heavily industrial at t1 (1971) and which at t2 (1981) had been eroded, leaving communities with high levels of unemployment 10 years later. This measure describes the economic trajectories of industrial areas over 10 years.

The analyses suggest that persisters and desisters tended to live in areas which had experienced greater levels of economic restructuring when they had been 16 years old (in keeping with the idea that economic adversity might drive some people towards engagement in crime), but that non-offenders tended not to have lived in such areas when aged 16 years old. The analysis of this variable suggests that there were no differences in terms of the levels of economic restructuring in the areas in which desisters and persisters lived (column five), but that there were between desisters and non-offenders and between where persisters and non-offenders lived (see columns six and seven).

IV. Discussion

Let us start with an overview of the strengths and limitations of this paper. The dataset itself is almost unique globally in that it is a long-term follow-up of a nationally representative sample with good retention rates. However, the key limitation is the reliance on self-reported arrest data, which may be subject to various biases, including biases related to policing. The item we relied upon (see above) to create our groups nevertheless captures those moments when a police officer felt that he or she had sufficient reason to arrest an individual and take them to a police station. In the cases in which individuals were later released without charge, this may have been as a consequence of being given a warning or due to the Procurator Fiscal or Crown Prosecution Service deciding that securing a conviction was unlikely; just as arrest does not mean that offending has occurred, not being charged or convicted does not mean that no offending had occurred. While it is possible that biases in criminal justice processing at each stage may have exaggerated

2 Our data comes from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption-1853-to-2011>. Last accessed 23rd April 2020.

differences in offending between the three groups, we have had to work within the limitations of the dataset. More positively, the dataset has allowed us to do what no other studies have been able to do: to explore quantitatively the issues surrounding the lifestyles into which people desist and to compare the circumstances and life trajectories of those with different experiences of criminal justice involvement.

In many ways, the results reported above are not terribly surprising; the desisters are in the main ‘located’ between the persisters and the non-offenders. In terms of their offending trajectories, they ‘started’ as offenders (i.e., as similar to the persisters), but have started to move towards the non-offenders (in that at age 34, they were not engaged in criminal activities). The question then becomes ‘in terms of their wider life circumstances and trajectories, who are they getting closer to, the persisters or the non-offenders?’. Figure 1 summaries the key messages from the above analyses with regards to this matter where the data enables analyses of trends.

Figure 1 confirms that the desisters remain, despite any shifts in the data over the eight years for which analyses are available (from ages 34 to 42), in the main the relative positions of these three groups remain unchanged. However, divorce rates remained much lower for the desisters and non-offenders, and these two groups also converged when it came to rates of cohabitation, rates of living with children and rates of voting.

Where does this leave us? Let us start by repeating that initial forays into the study of desistance assumed that desistance was *per se*, in and of itself, a ‘good thing’ for the desisters. The persisters and desisters, in many respects, started in objectively similarly socially and economically deprived social contexts (Table 3) in which the economic restructuring of the 1980s had both encouraged offending (Farrall et al 2020) and made finding work all the harder. But the desisters had improved their relative position by the age of 34 and were already more likely to have obtained some of the markers of success. These included home ownership, cohabiting, lasting marriages (assessed here by lower rates of being single/never married and divorce), child-rearing and better assessments of their health. Alongside this we see lower rates of victimisation, increases engagement in voting and decreased mortality. When

Topic	Desisters' Trends Over Time
Home Ownership	Increases for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Employment	Stable for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Receiving Benefits	Increases for desisters who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Claiming Income Support	All converge to much lower rates; down by about a fifth
Single and Never Married	Decreases for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Divorced	All increase, but desisters and non-offenders by much lower rates
Cohabiting	Increases for desisters and non-offenders, who start to converge
Children in Household	All increase, but desisters and non-offenders start to converge
Voting	Increases for desisters, who grow slightly closer to non-offenders
Finances	Desisters remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Assessment of Health	All diverge, desisters remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Political Attitudes	No differences between the three groups

Figure 1: Summarising trends in desisters' life-course trajectories

compared to persisters, desisters were happier with their lives and homes, and felt more optimistic about the future, felt better about themselves, closer to others and more loved. However, they felt as (dis)satisfied with their jobs as persisters (Table 3). Given their origins in (generally) less advantageous social positions, the desisters could be considered to have done well to have improved their conditions as much as they have. This is not, of course, to justify the rampant levels of economic inequality which the UK has experienced since the 1970s (when this cohort was born), nor to exonerate the governments which have successively failed to address it, but rather to locate

the trajectories of both the desisters and the persisters in the wider social and economic contexts. Whilst it is true that the desisters did not achieve the conventional markers of 'life-success' to the same degree as the non-offenders, given their different starting points, this was unlikely ever to be the case. What these analyses suggest, however, is that in desisting from crime, they have *started* to enjoy many of the things which non-offenders take for granted (such as lower rates of victimisation and mortality, and greater rates of optimism).

Maruna and Farrall (2004) introduced the terms primary and secondary desistance to refer to 1) crime-free lulls in the lives of offenders and 2) changes in self-perception. To this McNeill (2016) added tertiary desistance to highlight the importance of recognition of change by others and of the development of an associated sense of belonging within a community. Though, as others have pointed out (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016), the relationship between the three types of desistance need not be sequential (for example, sometimes being welcomed into a new social group where offending is not normative might *trigger* a shift in identity and behaviour), perhaps it makes sense to suggest a fourth aspect to or stage of desistance; or better still its culmination in the point at which 'desisters' are no longer objectively (and perhaps subjectively) different from those who have never offended. We sketch this below in Figure 2.

Figure 2 suggests (based on the evidence above) that quaternary desistance is very hard to achieve; the desisters in the BSC70 sample were converging on the status and experiences of the non-offenders, but, even though they may have ceased offending (possibly as much as some eight or so years previously), they were not (yet) on an equal footing with them. This time-period is in line with a recent review of 'time to redemption' studies undertaken by Weaver (2018). The accomplishment of the quaternary stage of desistance might require desisters to move geographically to locations in which they were not previously known (and hence did not directly experience the recognition of change, as experienced in tertiary desistance, since no one knew of their past offending). This is supported by other studies based on qualitative data. Farrall, et al. (2014:191-192) report that the emotional trajectories of their desisters fell into five groups. The Early Hopes and

Starting to Break Away groups (both n=15) are similar to the Primary Desistance and Secondary Desistance categories above. The Becoming Accepted (n=18) and the Feeling Accepted (n=11) groups are perhaps closest to the Tertiary Desistance category. However, it is the smallest group (Acceptance Achieved, n=10) which is closest to the Quaternary Desistance category outlined above. Of those they studied, this last group of 10 represent just 14% of Farrall, et al.’s sample of desisters.

Forms of Desistance	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary
Aspects	Crime-free lulls; not always consciously motivated shifts in behaviour	Extended periods of non-offending; changes in self-perception and identity	Recognition of change by others and development of a sense of belonging	Assumption of ‘ordinariness’ by others; no recognition of change by others since no awareness of earlier offending
Frequency/ Ease of Accomplishment	Common; relatively easy	Common; requires desire to change	Takes longer to emerge; based on ‘regained’ trust	Much less commonly achieved; may need total reconfiguration of relationships and geographical relocation

Figure 2: Forms of desistance

Our analysis leads us to pose two very important questions: Firstly, *how might we re-imagine our society, communities and social and criminal justice systems to increase the proportion of people achieving quaternary desistance?* Secondly, *how might we help them achieve it more swiftly?* As we have already noted above, much has been written about how to rethink criminal justice through the lens of desistance research. But with respect to the operation of the justice system, one obvious part of the answer might be for

us to stop decelerating and stalling desistance through counter-productive processes of criminalisation and penalisation. Schinkel, Atkinson and Anderson (2019) have argued convincingly that the over-policing of ‘well-kent faces’ (i.e., of the ‘usual suspects’) derails desistance efforts. It might be that desistance from criminalisation matters as much as, or even more than, desistance from crime; indeed, it might be that the differences in outcomes between our three groups are as much about declining police and justice involvement as they are about changes in offending.

More broadly, many others have argued that the hostility and stigmatisation that would-be desisters encounter must be addressed if we are to clear the many other obstacles strewn on the pathway towards desistance (e.g., Burke, Collett and McNeill, 2018; Urie, et al., 2019). With this broader project of social and cultural change in mind, and drawing from dialogue among people with diverse forms of relevant expertise, Rubio Arnal (2021:235) has begun to outline the characteristics of a more re/integrative society:

A re/integrative society would also require re/integrative communities and re/integrative citizens. As citizens and collectives, we should realise how our individual and collective reaction to people released produces and exacerbates certain adversities well beyond the sentence; consequences which, in some cases, are worse than the sentence itself. We need to realise that when stigmatising and discriminating against releasees [i.e. people released from prison], we are also hurting ourselves as individuals, as a community and as a society in two ways. Firstly, from a political-philosophical and axiological point, we are contributing to the creation of a dis-integrative environment in which people experience suffering. By creating a dis-integrative environment, we are constituting an unjust society. Secondly, from a more pragmatic view, citizens should understand that a hostile societal response to a potentially imprisonable act is criminogenic.

Rather than ‘locking-down’ the incapacitating, debilitating effects of

cumulative disadvantage, we urgently need to invest in creating opportunities and building people's capacities to live good lives. If we all want the benefits of swifter and more secure criminal desistance, then perhaps it is the state, its crime control agencies and the supposedly 'law-abiding' majority who may need to look to amend their attitudes and conduct.

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Table A1: Sample representativeness birth (1970) to age 34 (2004)

Gender					
	At Birth (1970)		At 34 (2004)		
Male	52%		46%		
Female	48%		54%		

Country of Interview					
	Birth	Persisters	Desisters	Non-Offs	All (2004)
England	82%	83%	85%	85%	85%
Wales	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Scotland	9%	10%	10%	10%	10%
N Ireland	4%	-	-	-	-

Father's Social Class					
	Birth	Persisters	Desisters	Non-Offs	All (2004)
I	5%	1%	4%	6%	6%
II	11%	6%	9%	13%	13%
IIIa	11%	7%	12%	14%	13%
IIIb	44%	54%	46%	44%	44%
IV	14%	18%	14%	13%	13%
V	6%	6%	7%	4%	5%
Other	9%	7%	6%	9%	7%