“I live a half-life now”: Negotiating the label of ‘sex offender’ on release from prison

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Declaration

I declare that:

1. (i) This thesis is not one for which a degree has been or will be, conferred by any other university;
2. (ii) This thesis is not one for which a degree has already been conferred by this university;
3. (iii) The work within this thesis is the candidate's own.

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Thesis Abstract

The balance between supporting those who have committed offences to reintegrate into the community and public protection can be difficult. In the case of those who have committed sexual offences, restrictions can increase stigma for this population and may be disproportionate or even counter-productive to their impact on desistance. A systematic review of literature was conducted on what men with convictions for sexual offences[i] see as the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending. While literature specific to this question was limited, the review found that experiences of being on a register were largely negative and not seen as useful, while work, agency, treatment and support had been beneficial. Suggestions were made for application of these themes to practice. The thesis research studies added to the literature on the experiences of men on the 'sex offender' register once they have served prison sentences. Nine men were interviewed, and the subsequent IPA analysis identified the most salient theme as 'negotiating identity as a 'sex offender', along with themes of the register and restrictions having a negative impact, and the experience of living with stigma and restrictions. Repertory grids were also completed with the nine participants, which provided further detail as to how they negotiated their identity, particularly how they saw themselves now compared to in the past and future, and in relation to those around them. This thesis has added to the knowledge about experiences of men on the 'sex offender' register and how they manage the stigma associated with this. Recommendations have been made as to how this knowledge can be incorporated into practice, with the aim of improving the resettlement experience of men in this situation, which can in turn support their desistance from offending.

Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction and Overview

There are increasing numbers of people who have been convicted of sexual offences and are on the 'Sex Offender' Register; on 31/03/2019, there were 60,294 (MOJ Statistics Bulletin, 2019). There are also increasing numbers of sexual offences being reported, for example the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reported an increase of 29% in police recorded rape in 2017. In addition, there is evidence that many offences go unreported: 121,187 sexual offences were reported to the police between April 2016-March 2017 (Office for National Statistics) while self-report data estimates that 510,000 women and 138,000 men aged 16-59 experienced a sexual assault during the same time period, and this is not including offences against children (Crime Survey, 2017). Even reported offences may not make it to the prosecution stage; rape cases making it to court have more than halved in the past five years (CPS, 2017). While the number of sexual offence convictions are much lower than other types of offences, the impact of these types of offences can be severe and long-lasting (e.g. Dube et al., 2005; Wood, 1996).

Having either served prison sentences, or while serving community sentences, those convicted of sexual offences are subject to a variety of restrictions in the community (Home Office, 2018). These restrictions tend to be over and above those faced by people convicted of other types of offences, including violent offences, described by Hamilton (2017) as 'residual punishment' (p.13). These restrictions reflect the serious impact of sexual offences on their victims, but also the fear that the majority of those who have committed sexual offences are at high risk of reoffending and can never change (Lester, 2008; Levenson, 2008).

Restrictions vary between countries and jurisdictions. For example, some US states publish the identities of 'sex offenders' within their communities, require them to introduce themselves to neighbours and disclose their offences, have 'registered sex offender' on the side of their car, or even wear a badge identifying them as a 'sex offender' (Matson & Lieb, 1997, review some of the registration requirements). In England and Wales, registration requirements are not as public or as arduous as these: those with sexual offence convictions are placed on the 'sex offender register' which involves registering with the police annually and notifying them of any address changes as well as providing their bank account details. It also impacts on what employment someone is eligible to apply for. The requirement to be

on the register can be for a specified number of years, up to life, depending on the person's convictions. Those with sexual offence convictions are also subject to licence conditions, and SOPO (sexual offence prevention order; now Sexual Harm Prevention Order, SHPO) conditions, all of which impose different restrictions such as around employment, accommodation, and disclosure of offending and relationships.

Attitudes towards those who have committed sexual offences tend to be extremely negative (Hogue, 1993, cited in Day et al., 2014; King & Roberts, 2017; Levenson, Brannon, et al., 2007; Willis et al., 2010) as does their portrayal in the media (Radley, 2001) and these factors may contribute towards the stigma experienced by this group. The label of 'sex offender' is said to be the 'most damning label in modern society' (Lester, 2008); society tends to consider all those registered with sexual offences as being violent, dangerous and 'child molesters' (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), and community notification policies may unintentionally have increased public misperceptions (Cruan & Theriot, 2009).

Clinical experience as a forensic psychologist working with men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs) indicates that reintegrating into the community is a major concern for this group. Many men are worried about their ability to gain employment and accommodation, as well as how they will negotiate existing and developing relationships with others. There is also fear about managing the stigma they will face as a result of their conviction. So, MCOSOs are leaving prison with shame and stigma and being released into the community where people generally have very negative opinions of them. As a practitioner, this raises concerns for a number of reasons, for the men themselves in being able to reintegrate and build a meaningful and productive life in the community, and for the public at large; as will be discussed later, men who cannot reintegrate into society or who are unable to form relationships or gain employment can be at higher risk of committing further offences (e.g. Tewksbury, 2007). The stated purpose of the Prison Service is to 'keep those sentenced to prison in custody, helping them lead law-abiding and useful lives, both while they are in prison and after they are released' (Prison Service, 1988). It is important that this aim includes those with sexual offence convictions as well. This thesis aims to further increase knowledge about the experience of men in this situation, and subsequently consider improvements that could be made to policy and working with this client group.

Aim and structure of the thesis

The overarching aim of this thesis is to increase understanding of the experiences of men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs), when released from prison back into the community, with a view to considering how these individuals could be better supported to live an offence-free life but also a life that is more meaningful for them. The thesis will also include reflections on the development of the research practitioner completing it.

Chapter 2 introduces some key definitions, the background to the topic being investigated and a literature review of relevant research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for both original research projects, including the rationale for design and analysis chosen.

Chapter 4 is a structured review, considering existing literature on the role that stigma plays in desistance for MCOSOs. Suggestions are made for change based on the research findings, and gaps in the literature are considered.

Chapter 5 contains the first original research study, which builds on previous literature, and includes the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for the nine research participants, and themes from their lived experiences.

Chapter 6 considers the second study, repertory grid analyses obtained from participants, and comments on the potential implications of the results.

Chapter 7 provides a summary and discussion of the thesis as a whole, the key results and makes suggestions for applications in practice and for further research.

Chapter 2: literature review

This chapter considers the existing literature around men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs), including what impact their conviction has on their resettlement into the community and their experiences of stigma, shame and labelling. It considers how people desist from offending, particularly sexual offending, and if the restrictions placed on these individuals aid their desistance and reintegration or hinder them.

'Sex offender' registration

In England and Wales, people convicted of sexual offences are required to sign the 'sex offender' register. This can be for a specified period of time or for life. Being on the register means having to sign in at their local police station annually, restrictions on the types of employment they can do, and needing to provide their bank details to the police (Home Office, 2018). Those given custodial sentences for their offences will also usually have licence conditions on release and breaching any of these can lead to recall back to prison. Licence conditions could include not associating with other MCOSOs, not going to areas where the offences took place or where the victim(s) live, sticking to a curfew at an Approved Premises or attending appointments with Probation.

Stigma associated with sexual offence convictions

Having a conviction for a sexual offence carries stigma. Goffman's (1963) definition of stigma fits well with how this type of behaviour is perceived. He defined stigma as an attribute which 'spoils' a person's identity, and means others see them as 'less than'; it is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting", reducing the individual with it 'in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p.3). Elliot et al. (1982) emphasised that stigma is when deviance is ascribed to an individual. Stigmas are generally well-known within a particular culture and can lead to those who are stigmatized being excluded, avoided or discriminated against (Goffman, 1963).

Pryor and Reeder, (2011, cited in Bos et al., 2013) describe a model depicting four types of stigma: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. Factors which impact on public stigma are onset controllability (can the stigmatized person control the condition?), perceived severity of the condition, perceived dangerousness, and perceptions of norm violation (Bos et al., 2013). Those who have been convicted, or even

just suspected, of sexual offences, would likely be at the extreme end of these scales. Jahnke, Imhoff and Hoyer (2015) found that many people believe that those attracted to children are in control of their sexual interests and are extremely dangerous, often referred to as 'predators' (Quinn et al., 2004). The 'condition' of sexual offending is likely to be seen as severe, and violates societal norms (Benson et al., 2011). Public stigma then impacts on the self in three different ways: through enacted stigma (being treated negatively), through felt stigma (experiencing or anticipating stigmatization) or internalised stigma (experiencing a reduction in self-worth as well as psychological distress, Herek, 2007, 2009).

Goffman (1963) described three different types of stigma: tribal, abominations of the body and blemishes of individual character. Having committed a sexual offence would arguably meet this last definition and would be classed as a 'discreditable stigma': the label is not visible during social interactions but could be discovered. For example, registration and notification processes linked to sexual offences can make the stigma more 'visible' to the public (Harris, 2014). Evans and Cubellis (2015) describe the link between stigma and being a 'registered sex offender' ('RSO') as follows: '*Stigma is an informal mechanism of oppression that strips an individual of his or her identity while giving that person a new social identity. As members of a stigmatized group, RSOs undergo some degree of identity change following their conviction and subsequent registration. The law is powerful in its ability to transform the identities of those convicted of a sexual offense'* (p.596).

Men on registries described being stigmatized and persistent feelings of vulnerability (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). They believed that the public considered all 'sex offenders' in the same way, as violent and dangerous. They reported feeling publicly labelled and stigmatized, and courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) being attached to their families. Participants felt there was always a risk of being recognised and exposed publicly, which limited their activities and interactions; nearly all reported being unable to ever forget their registration status or to do anything which was not impacted by this status.

Experiencing stigma has been linked to negative cognitive, emotional and behavioural outcomes (Hatzenbuehler, 2009), including stigma associated with sexual behaviour (Smolenski et al., 2011) and stigmatization has been identified as a "*central driver of morbidity and mortality at a population level"* (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013, p.813) because of the stress and social disadvantage that result from it. Some of these effects in turn may

impact on reoffending risk. Stigmatized individuals often show higher rates of mental health or emotional difficulties (Meyer, 2003) including low self-esteem (Corrigan et al., 2006) and problems with coping and emotion regulation (Hatzenbuehler, 2009).

Pinel and Bosson (2013) highlight that public stigma leads to negative emotional consequences for the stigmatized person (including e.g. African Americans, and sexual minorities). On days that people experience stigma-related stressors, they report more psychological distress, and increases in either suppression or rumination of related thoughts mediate the stressor-distress link (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009); both these strategies keep difficult thoughts at the front of an individual's mind (Wegner, 1992, cited in Pinel & Bosson, 2013) and lead to a greater awareness of the stigma they face. In unpublished research by the thesis author (Hill, 2013), MCOSOs who were hiding their offences from others in prison reported thinking about their offending less than those segregated on a vulnerable prisoners' unit (VPU); those on the VPU were more preoccupied about others finding out about their location and being stigmatized as a 'sex offender'. In a prison setting, not disclosing offences could be problematic as it prevented engagement in treatment programmes. However, in a community setting, the benefits of hiding an offence from those who do not need to know may potentially outweigh the disadvantages.

Labelling

The negative stigma and public disapproval attached to sexual offence convictions can also lead to labelling; being a registered 'sexual offender' can become someone's 'master status' (Becker, 1963/2018), particularly when interacting with new people since being assigned the label (Edwards & Hensley, 2001; Uggen et al., 2004). Jenkins (1992, 1998, cited in Boone & van de Bunt, 2016) referred to those convicted of sexual offences as the 'folk devils' of society, and few other crimes perhaps lead to such a total identity change. Hamilton (2017) also emphasised how the enduring nature of the 'sex offender' label, alongside the regulations they must adhere to, impact on the identities of those convicted of sexual offences, including their views of themselves. The restrictions they face can be constant reminders of their label, and an awareness of how the public sees them may be incorporated into their own self-perceptions (Crocker & Major, 1989). Negative labelling, such as the 'sex offender' label can increase isolation, make reintegration harder, and could increase risk of reoffending; individuals may choose to associate with others with similar

convictions or to even ’go underground’ and take on the ‘delinquent identity’ (McAlinden, 2005). Robbers (2009) found that less than 3% of their participants cited being labelled a ‘sex offender’ as motivating them to understand and change their behaviour.

Coping with stigma and labelling

People use a variety of coping strategies to attempt to mitigate the negative impacts of psychological stigmatization such as depression and anxiety, and social stigmatization such as limited social support and isolation (Bos et al., 2013). Some will hide the truth about themselves and try to ‘pass’ (Goffman, 1963) as someone who is non-stigmatized (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). Schwaebe (2005) found this was the case for some MCOSOs in prison who were well aware of the stigma of their offence label, but who were integrated with the main population. This strategy may be less viable in the community, however, with publicity and public notification measures. Evans and Cubellis (2015) also identified concealment as a strategy: MCOSOs in the community often chose to avoid revealing information (as opposed to actively deceiving others) as they felt there was no good time to tell someone without losing the relationship.

Some people attempt to change their environment (problem-focused coping). They may do this by disclosing their stigma to selected people, for example pre-emptively telling others before they can find out (Link et al., 2004), seeing honesty as showing the other person respect (Evans & Cubellis, 2015). They may overcompensate by being more extroverted, avoiding particular situations, affiliating with others with the same stigmatized condition, seeking social support, and getting involved in relevant activism (Bos et al., 2013). Some of these strategies are not easily available to those with sexual offence convictions. For example, it is common for someone on a ‘sex offender’ register to have a licence condition regarding not associating with people with similar offences other than in a hostel or treatment programme (Prison Reform Trust, 2015), however Evans and Cubellis (2015) found that grouping i.e. seeking out people similar to them so they could feel like equals was a strategy used by some. Getting involved in activism could be potentially risky for those with convictions, unless done anonymously via social media, which may be prohibited by licence conditions.

Others try to manage the emotions experienced as a result of the stigma (emotion-focused coping). This can include downward social comparison, seeing those stigmatizing them as

ignorant or in denial, reframing their experiences of stigmatization as positive (Bos et al., 2013), and detaching themselves from the stereotyped or stigmatized identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Evans and Cubellis (2015) called this denial: some of their participants rejected the label of 'sex offender' and distanced themselves from 'real' sex offenders' (e.g. '*I caught a sex case but I'm not a sex offender'*, p.610) or justified the circumstances of their offending. They tried to rebuild their identity separate from their conviction instead; denying the label can be protective but cannot eliminate stigma completely, so long as information about them is publicly available.

Finally, people may withdraw socially to reduce the chance of being 'discovered' (Evans & Cubellis, 2015; Link et al., 1989), or isolate themselves. Isolation is a way to avoid feeling stigmatized but can also contribute to loneliness and low self-esteem, as well as other potentially harmful implications which can impact on parole restrictions, such as substance use.

Those who commit sexual offences against children tend to rely more on ineffective emotion-focused coping strategies than those who commit non-sexual offences (Feelgood et al., 2005; Marshall et al., 2000). Perceived stigma is also associated with problems with social functioning and withdrawal (Link et al., 1997). An individual who is aware that their sexual interests are unacceptable to society may avoid these being discovered through self-isolation, however this also reduces the opportunity for them to gain an understanding of themselves or to consider alternative ways of managing these interests without offending (Holt et al., 2010). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) could also be applied to this population, particularly if considering those with paedophilia who are non-offending: hiding a discreditable attribute comes with significant costs, including expecting stressful events and internalising negative attitudes. In addition to the potential impact on reoffending and reintegration, there may be a public health impact from individuals coping with stigmatized identities such as on substance use and mental health (Evans & Cubellis, 2015).

Impact of being on a 'sex offender' register

In addition to the impact of stigma and labelling, some researchers have also considered the impact of being on a 'sex offender' register itself. While the effects overlap, there are some factors which link specifically to being on a register.

Burchfield and Mingus (2008) categorised the barriers to social capital networks faced by 'registered sexual offenders' into four types. Individual barriers included individuals limiting interactions with others, to minimise the risk of their offending being discovered, and their family's reputation being damaged. They sought to minimise the stigma of the label of 'sex offender', which had caused them shame, embarrassment and disgust. They worried about losing employment or housing, being harassed, potential conflicts with their parole officers and violating parole conditions. Community barriers concerned fear of people finding out about their offences. While a minority of participants had experienced direct harassment, many experienced fear and anxiety due to expecting it. Some acknowledged the benefits that public registration could have in promoting public awareness of safety, and encouraging accountability for their own behaviour. Structural barriers concerned limited financial resources, which impacted on already limited accommodation options. Tewksbury (2007) also demonstrated that rules about where MCOSOs could live led to them being concentrated in economically disadvantaged communities. While most participants described a positive working relationship with their parole officers, formal barriers included how 'sex offender' parole policy affected the ability to reintegrate into the community, such as needing permission to travel, or electronic monitoring, impacting on their job. Formal restrictions led to far more barriers to local social capital than informal restrictions (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008).

Employment is one particular area of difficulty. Men report problems finding work when they have a felony/sexual offence conviction as well as if colleagues discover their registration status (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Lasher and McGrath (2012) conducted a review of studies considering the impact of community notification in the US. Although the studies cited differed in method, population and response rates, the results were broadly similar, finding that a substantial minority of participants reported losing a job after being publicly identified as a 'sex offender'. This could discourage some on registers from disclosing their convictions.

Psychosocial impact of being on a 'sex offender' register

Another key area affected by registration is relationships. Difficulties include attempting to overcome/cope with rejection, stress and conflict, and losing some relationships completely (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). These consequences may have the opposite effect of the

intended goals of the notification laws, for example stress for family members can impede their ability to help with successful reintegration (Farkas and Miller, 2007).

Men on registers anticipated and were fearful of harassment, particularly being recognised in public and being rejected or labelled as a 'rapist' or 'paedophile' (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Only a few had experienced harassment, usually when details from their registry page were posted in their (US) neighbourhood; Lasher and McGrath (2012) also found that reports of vigilante attacks were rare, although a substantial minority had been excluded from a place of residence. The fear of harassment, however, led many to severely limit the social interactions they had as well as time spent out of their home. Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) also cite consequences of community notification as fear for safety, and some experience of vigilantism including property damage, harassment and even assault (e.g. Levenson, Brannon et al., 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008, Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006).

Lasher and McGrath (2012) reported that approximately 50% of the men in their review experienced negative consequences including stress, shame, hopelessness and losing social supports (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora et al., 2007; McGrath et al., 2009; Mercado et al., 2008). The highest rate of negative psychological consequences was 60% of participants reporting that community notification hindered their recovery, although interestingly the same studies also found a benefit of notification to be increased motivation to control behaviour as others were monitoring them. This suggests that some aspects of notification were effective but perhaps not the way in which it was carried out; further increasing social isolation and shame among those being monitored may actually reduce their ability to desist; Tangney et al. (2014) found that shame had a direct negative effect on recidivism.

Impact of being on a 'sex offender' register on shame and desistance

Blair (2004) argued that 'sex offender' registries and notification procedures are created to promote public shaming; those on a 'sex offender' register do report high levels of shame about their registration status (Tewksbury, 2004, 2005). Shame can be both an emotion and a process (Benson et al., 2011). The emotion involves negative feelings towards oneself. Shame is dependent on the individual's interpretation of their behaviour and events, however it can often arise out of their awareness/belief of others perceiving them to have violated

societal or cultural norms (Benson et al., 2011); Blagden et al. (2017) describe shame as a discrepancy between who a person wants to be and the way that they are identified socially. Shaming is also a process, through which people express their disapproval of a person's actions and attempt to make them feel shame (Braithwaite, 1989). This would be external shame, based on our perceptions of how others see us, as opposed to internal shame i.e. how we judge and feel about ourselves (Gilbert, 2003).

Disintegrative shaming refers to publicly exposing an offence so the public can respond with shaming (Braithwaite, 1989). This would include media 'naming and shaming' of sexual offence convictions, as well as registration and public notification schemes. Reintegrative shaming, however, involves overtly disapproving of an act whilst seeking to reintegrate the person responsible. This can help prevent the person from adopting a 'master status' (Becker, 1963/2018) based on their offending. An example would be the Circles of Support (COSA) movement in the UK, and North America (McAlinden, 2005); COSA can help with the process of 'delabeling' through developing a more prosocial self-identity (Fox (2015).

The role of shame in desistance is complicated. Some people report shame as a reason they stop reoffending (Leibrich, 1993, 1996, cited in Maruna, 2001). Tangney et al. (2014) found that while shame proneness positively predicted recidivism, shame had a direct negative effect on recidivism. They suggest that shame can either be destructive or constructive. As Maruna stated: "being ashamed of an isolated act or two is one thing, but it is quite a different thing to be ashamed of one's entire past identity, of *who* one used to be (for stretches sometimes lasting as long as 10 years or more)" (2001, p.143). This is important for desistance too, as regret for actions and self-identification as a 'family-man' i.e. a positive self-identity were factors shown to predict successful re-entry into the community after prison but shame and feeling stigmatized impaired rehabilitation (LeBel et al., 2008).

Benson et al. (2011) surveyed adult men in a US boot camp programme, over 98% of whom had never been to prison. Interestingly, they found that most participants did not anticipate stigma following their convictions, but expected to be reintegrated. Whilst it is generally assumed that those who have committed offences will feel stigmatized following formal punishment, there is debate over how this experience impacts on reoffending. Deterrence theorists such as Williams and Hawkins (1986) argue that embarrassment and shame following offending inhibit repeating the behaviour. Reintegrative shaming and labelling

theories, however, (Braithwaite, 1989; Sherman, 1993) propose that punishment elicits anger and rejection of stigmatization which can increase offending; some will reject shame and choose defiance instead (Sherman, 1993). This is most likely to occur when sanctions are perceived as unfair, or when an individual's bonds with people who accept their behaviour are greater than their bonds with conventional others (Sherman, 1993). Reacting with defiance rather than shame can lead to reoffending however both negative emotions (Giordano et al., 2007) and hostility (Mann et al., 2010) have been linked with an increased chance of recidivism. Sherman argues that treating all citizens with dignity and respect, rather than increasing punishments, could reduce crime. Reintegrative shaming and defiance theory, then, both emphasise the importance of how people are treated, not just what punishment is given (Benson et al., 2011).

An online survey with men identifying as having paedophilia, the majority of whom reported never having been convicted of sexual offences, found they were fearful of their sexual interests being discovered and subsequently experienced distress. They used strategies to avoid coming under suspicion, such as avoiding related topics. These strategies could have reduced their opportunities to test out assumptions about other's perceptions of them, and meant they relied instead on media reporting and thus continued to over-estimate the levels of stigma directed towards them from the public, although levels of public stigma are still high even if over-estimated (Jahnke, Imhoff & Hoyer, 2015). Jahnke, Schmidt et al., (2015) developed a framework to outline the consequences of stigma in terms of psychological functioning, but they also considered how these consequences may indirectly affect individuals' risks of sexual offending, mediated by people's perceptions of and reaction to stigma. The framework had not yet been tested but posits that public stigma leads to stigma-related stress among people with paedophilia. This impacts on emotional and social functioning, cognitive distortions and motivation levels to seek support from healthcare services, with the result being a higher risk of sexual offences against children.

Impact of registries on reoffending

There is some public support for measures such as publicising details of people on registries, for example Megan's Law in the US (Levenson, D'Amora et al., 2007) with the intention of protecting families. Some may therefore argue that the impacts of registries on employment and relationship opportunities for this group are justifiable. However, there is little evidence for the types of restrictions placed on those with sexual offence convictions actually

preventing reoffending (e.g. Bowen et al., 2016; Tewksbury, 2007), and both employment and relationships, which can be impacted by restrictions, have links to desistance: *'While legislators and policymakers have intended to curtail sex offending through the registration process, available evidence does not suggest such an achievement. Rather, what is supported by research is that sex offender registration has effectively extended and intensified the consequences of a sex offense conviction'* (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006, p.333). The base rate for sexual reoffending has also been shown to be relatively low, with a meta-analysis by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2006) finding a recidivism rate of 13.7%. Furthermore, most sexual offences are committed against known/family victims where restrictions may have less of an impact. For example, the 2017 Crime Survey found that only 11% of rapes and assaults by penetration, including attempts, were committed by people unknown to the victims (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Kahn et al. (2017) also emphasise that risk for reoffending among those who have committed sexual offences is not enduring and decreases predictably with age. Hanson et al. (2018) modelled the long-term (25 year) risk of further sexual recidivism in a large sample and found that the likelihood of new sexual offences decreased the longer that individuals were desisting in the community, and after 10-15 years, most with a history of sexual offences were no more likely to commit a further sexual offence than those with general criminal (non-sexual offence) histories.

Seidler (2010) found that information collected about men on the Australian 'sex offender' register did not lead to a reduction in reoffending but made relationships with police even harder. The register was seen as a further punishment, one which people with other conviction types were not subject to, and partly driven by political motives; there were implications for identity as well as reintegration due to being labelled as predatory and unable to change (which can also negatively impact on risk of reoffending, Hudson, 2005, cited in Seidler, 2010). The register was experienced as a constant reminder of being an 'offender' and outside of society, and was assumed to manage all offending risks despite not focusing on rehabilitation. The restrictions also impact on the well-being of family members as well, who have not committed any offences.

So registries have not had the desired impact on reducing reoffending. In fact, previous research has suggested that difficulties in reintegrating can impact on risk of reoffending

(e.g. Tewksbury, 2007). In this context, it is more important than ever to understand what can promote reintegration, specifically what is supported by evidence as opposed to what is simply intuitive or desired by the public or staff working with this population. Tewksbury and Mustaine (2013) found that 81.5% of law enforcement officers endorsed residence restrictions for MCOSOs, even in the absence of empirical evidence to support them, although pointed out that it is also important to consider who the officers pictured when asked about 'sex offenders'. Tewksbury and Jennings (2010) found that the trajectory for recidivism was similar for those subject to 'sex offender' registration and notification, and those who were not, whether desisting, low-rate recidivists or high-rate recidivists. There needs to at least be a balance however between satisfying the public demand for registries with policy that considers what actually works in reducing sexual offending (Lasher & McGrath, 2012).

The registration process can exacerbate feelings of embarrassment and stigmatization and can lead individuals to isolate themselves from social networks and/or resources which might actually help them to reintegrate more successfully, and avoid reoffending (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000). Some may even choose to withdraw completely from the authorities involved with them, and 'disappear' which could increase risk of reoffending, either because of the lack of external restrictions, or the stress and hopelessness associated with isolation (e.g. Edwards & Hensley, 2001).

Baumeister et al. (2005) suggested that social exclusion can decrease an individual's ability to self-regulate. This is relevant as self-regulation is important in identity transformation (Adams & Marshall, 1996), such as in being able to take the risk to say 'no' to aspects of their past and move towards a different future (Marcia, 1980, cited in Campbell, 1990) but also because social exclusion can remove one of the motivations for behaving in a socially acceptable manner, or may mean that an individual uses their self-regulation capacity to manage the emotions associated with rejection rather than in trying to modify their behaviour.

These studies, taken together, indicate that there is a serious negative impact of registration laws on those convicted of sexual offences, but no associated positive impact on reducing reoffending.

How do people desist from offending?

Desistance has been used to refer to either slowing down, reducing or stopping offending behaviour (Kazemian, 2007). Some definitions have included the absence of official charges or convictions; however this does not take into account the low levels of reporting, prosecution and convictions for sexual offences. On the other hand, some definitions posit that someone can never be said to truly be desisting, at least until death, as they may simply have paused offending for a period of time (Kazemian, 2007); this approach does not leave any room for personal agency or even change. The definition used here is in line with Ward and Laws (2010): desistance is not an event but a dynamic, ongoing, process that includes refraining from a particular behaviour, and staying stopped (Maruna, 2001). The studies cited here have operationalised desistance in different ways, and these definitions are given in footnotes.

Policies ostensibly designed to reduce sexual reoffending including community registration and notification, residence restrictions, and lifetime electronic GPS monitoring, appear to ignore the fact that most people will not be reconvicted for a similar offence (Jeglic et al., 2012). Harris (2014) stated "none of these initiatives accommodate, encourage or even acknowledge the possibility of desistance*"* (p.4). As has been discussed, registers for people with sexual offences have little impact on reducing reoffending (Bowen et al., 2016; Tewksbury, 2007), and can indeed have the opposite effect. Unemployment, being isolated, bored, and experiencing stigma can all be risk factors for individuals and can increase the likelihood of reoffending (Brown et al., 2007; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Willis et al., 2010). It is important, therefore, to consider what factors do help people desist from sexual offending. This could benefit not only those who have committed offences but also, importantly, their victims and any potential further victims too (Harris, 2014).

Healy (2010, cited in Harris, 2014) argued that there are three prominent theories on desistance. These are summarised here, with reference to work by Harris (2014) and McAlinden et al. (2016) who explored how well their findings fit with existing perspectives. Natural desistance/maturation theory states that offending reduces as someone ages,

regardless of other factors (Gobbels et al., 2012). Harris' (2014) sample[1] included 'natural desisters', however some still identified feeling permanently stigmatized as 'sex offenders'.

Cognitive transformation concerns the power of an individual's conscious decision to change, or separate their criminal past from their non-criminal future (Giordano et al., 2002). Giordano et al. (2002) proposed four parts to desistance: cognitive openness to change, turning points ('hooks for change'), developing a replacement self, and a transformation in their view of delinquent behaviour. Maruna (2001) argues that desisters use a number of narratives to reconcile their past behaviour with their 'true' selves and a positive identity. They may use a 'redemption script' to help rewrite past actions they are ashamed of into something that was necessary to get them to their current circumstances, thus managing their shame instead of it overwhelming them. Seeing their actions in this way allows them to excuse their past behaviour but also to take responsibility for fixing current problems and behaving in a prosocial way moving forward; those who desist tend to be more future-focused. In Harris' (2014) study, some participants spoke of 'turning points' when they had accepted what they had done and taken responsibility for their offending. Those who reported having experienced redemption, and who were optimistic about their futures, were also the most confident in their ability to not reoffend. Some in this group also reported negative themes about resigning themselves to the permanent label of 'sex offender', however this was mediated by a sense of acceptance and internal control over their behaviour, and hope for the future.

The third desistance theory is achievement of informal social controls, usually through a stable marriage and good job (Laub & Sampson, 1993) but can also include joining the military, and changing neighbourhood (Sampson & Laub, 2001). Employment has been identified as a possible 'turning point' for those convicted of general offending, as it can provide a routine, purpose, financial stability, and access to prosocial peers (Laub & Sampson, 1993, 2001). Brown et al. (2007) found that sexual recidivists were more likely to be unemployed than those who were desisting. Kruttschnitt et al. (2000) found that those with stable employment at the time of sentencing were 37% less likely to reoffend. The need to be meaningfully occupied and have an income are as important for MCOSOs as anyone

[1] Harris' (2014) sample all denied offending since their last release from prison, which varied from 4-180 months prior to the research.

else (Harris, 2014). Relationships are important in desistance from general offending, with Giordano et al. (2002) referring to relationships as the other half of the 'respectability package' (alongside employment); a relationship can provide something to potentially lose as well as another informal social control. These factors can provide both a divide between the past and present and an opportunity for identity transformation (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2005).

Work (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Van den Berg et al., 2014) and relationships (McAlinden et al., 2016) have also previously been shown to be important in desistance from sexual offending and to play a role in imagined future selves (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) which help create an identity inconsistent with reoffending (Maruna, 2001). However, Harris' (2014) research did not support the perspective of informal social control. Many participants had been in employment before offending, and only lost their work after conviction; many also highlighted the opposite of this theme i.e. facing obstacles to gaining work or a relationship. McAlinden et al. (2016) also found that while interviewees emphasised 'keeping busy' and linked this to managing offending risk, such as those with internet offence convictions, employment was not directly related to a change in identity or a 'turning point'; they had often had steady careers before offending, and some participants in this study were still desisting, despite losing jobs. McAlinden et al. (2016) found that many of the desisters in their sample[2] had lengthy relationship histories which were very important for their sense of self. Their partners played a significant role in the reintegration and desistance process, for example not wanting to lose these relationships. The offence itself had been shamed rather than the individual, which fits with reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989).

When considering what desistance actually looks like, Maruna (2001) proposed two separate phases: primary desistance when there is a gap in offending, and secondary desistance when the person adopts the role of a changed person and this is recognised by wider society. It is difficult to apply this to MCOSOs as the labelling and stigmatization of these individuals could be argued to prevent moving on to secondary desistance (Harris & Cudmore, 2015).

[2] McAlinden et al (2016) considered those who had been living in the community for at least 3 years, without further charges or investigations as desisting; their comparison sample were individuals whose most recent offence had been within 12 months prior to the research.

The public has a more negative attitude towards those who have committed sexual offences than other types (Willis et al., 2010). This would suggest that they could experience greater difficulty in desisting. However, there is a relatively low rate of recidivism for sexual offences (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2006); many people are managing to desist despite the labelling and stigma that takes place. Farmer et al. (2012) applied Maruna's framework to desistance from sexual offending, and considered themes from interviews with desisters and those considered to be 'actively'[3] offending. They found more positive themes in the desisting group, including rewriting their past as necessary for them to get to where they were now (redemption), finding a sense of unity with others (communion) and developing a sense of control (agency). Farmer et al. (2012) argue that being able to create a new identity through making sense of the past is an important part of change, as are psychological and social support. Having a greater sense of agency may be important in confidence in being able to desist from offending. Farmer et al. considered that these themes fit well with "making good" (Maruna, 2001) as well as the Good Lives Model (Ward & Maruna, 2007).

Maruna (2001) identified three vital ways in which narratives of desisting 'offenders' differ from active 'offenders': establishing core beliefs which characterise an individual's 'true self', optimism over being able to control their own destiny, and wanting to be productive and give something back to the next generation.

Willis et al. (2010) emphasise that those being released following sentences for sexual offences need environments which will support them in re-entering and reintegrating into the community. If they can access stable accommodation, employment, pro-social networks, and develop intimate relationships, they are less likely to commit further sexual offences (Hanson & Harris, 2000, Hepburn & Griffin, 2004, Willis & Grace, 2008). So long as public attitudes towards those convicted of sexual offences remain largely negative, and they are not seen as people with intrinsic value and potential, the opportunities for these basic social and psychological goods are likely to remain elusive to many: 'addressing the public's negative attitudes and responses to released sex offenders is of fundamental importance in ensuring that they can be successfully reintegrated into the community' (Willis et al., 2010, p.546). Harris and Cudmore (2015) highlight how low rates of recidivism for those convicted

[3] Rated by Offender Supervisors on insight, associations and behaviour – See appendix in Farmer et al., 2012, p.946.

of sexual offences are emphasised, rather than high rates of success or desistance for this group, which suggests that even a positive aspect for this group is not communicated as such.

Identity and desistance

Identity can be defined as a sense of who someone is; how an individual behaves is generally consistent with who they think they are. Their actions therefore also project an identity of who they are to others (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), however identity can change, and people can hold multiple identities at the same time. Murphy et al. (2011) propose that reliance on electronic criminal records contribute to a perpetual spoiled identity; an 'ex-offender' cannot escape their records by moving, may be banned from certain jobs or accommodation or may choose not to apply if they know vetting will be completed. While these checks may be designed to protect the public, the effects will be long-lasting, for example if someone is on a register for life or is unable to start a relationship due to their restrictions. There are therefore implications around whether an individual can ever move on from their past offences, and if there is truly any room for redemption or rehabilitation.

Weaver (2014) considered and applied different models of the desistance process within the UK and identified that hope was a key part of the change process, for example in taking up social opportunities, and building resilience. Conversely, personal shame, stigma, and restrictions which reduce the chance of integration for those deemed high risk, communicate to them that they will always pose a risk, are 'irredeemable' and cannot change this (Kemshall, 2008). Murphy et al. (2011) suggest that high rates of general reconviction indicate that people are not effectively managing their spoiled identity. Perhaps some choose to return to prison where they may feel more accepted than outside; in these cases the label they carry has become internalized and other aspects of their identity are no longer experienced as fully (Murphy et al., 2011). It is important to reiterate, however, that rates of recidivism for sexual offences are already low, with a meta-analysis by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2006) finding a rate of 13.7%.

Theorists have differentiated between the 'working self' (Markus & Kunda, 1986) i.e. the part of the self that can be accessed in the present moment and based on present experiences, the 'possible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) i.e. who the self wants to be, and the self they do not want to be/'feared self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) or 'undesired self' (Ogilvie, 1987). Movement out of a deviant or 'spoiled identity' is initially more likely to be based on what

someone does not want to become rather than what they do (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Identity transformation can be important to the desistance process, as people can come to see themselves as having something to offer, rather than being a risk or threat (Maruna & LeBel, 2009).

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) see identity change as a gradual process and occurring when an individual has a balance between their possible selves and feared selves. However, once their identity has changed, they 'break with the past' (p.1106) and their views and priorities change. They point out that this differs from Maruna's theory, where people reinterpret their past actions as being consistent with and necessary to get to who they are today. Beike and Landoll (2000) state that people strive for a life story that is consistent, even if there is occasional information which does not fit with the whole. They found that people may therefore use cognitive processes to resolve such inconsistent information i.e. justification, considering additional events which are consistent with their overall story, and putting outlier events behind them. This reduces cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957, cited in Maruna & Copes, 2005): by changing thinking around or dismissing/minimising an event, a person can reduce discomfort associated with acting in a way that is inconsistent with how they see themselves. This also fits with self-verification theory (Swann & Read, 1981) which emphasises the need for a consistent view of the self, even if it is an unflattering view (Beike & Landoll, 2000). Self-concept clarity, which can be seen as one aspect of identity, is defined as 'the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept (e.g. perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable' (Campbell et al., 1996, p.141). Campbell (1990) found that self-esteem is positively associated with how complex and flexible an individual's self-concept is, also emphasising the importance of how individuals see themselves in relation to their offending as well as more holistically.

Desistance research has focused on what aids people in choosing to continue not to reoffend, as opposed to focusing on risk factors which contribute to them reoffending. Historically, those who had committed offences were encouraged to see their identity in terms of 'old me' and 'new me', for example in the HMPPS 'Sex Offender' Treatment Programme. This required developing a new identity separate from offending and to see their past offending self as fundamentally different from their current self (referred to as 'knifing off' e.g. Elder, 1998), and a self they should now reject (Rotenberg, 1978, cited in Maruna, 2001). Loftland

(1969, cited in Maruna, 2001) described being stripped of identity as a 'fate worse than death' (p.288); sometimes sticking to old patterns of behaviour was a way to protect the 'self' (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978, cited in Maruna, 2001).

Evans and Cubellis (2015) interviewed twenty US 'registered sex offenders', to explore how they managed their identities when faced with stigma and social condemnation (anticipated or experienced) and suggested that they underwent an identity change when they became registered. Participants saw their offence as overshadowing any of their positive attributes and had difficulty distinguishing between how they saw themselves and how others would see them. One participant described himself as '*a sex offender first'* (quote from 'Bruce', p.601). They persistently thought about their RSO status despite 'only' having to register one to four times a year. Some thought about it most days, and others said it was even more often than that. This focus on their status and the associated stigma led to a generally negative outlook on life and themselves (Evans & Cubellis, 2015).

As described previously, Maruna argued that 'ex-offenders' use narratives to reconcile their past and future selves. He described this as a 'wilful cognitive distortion' of their past, as 'making good' (p.9-10) and a way of reframing desistance as "maintaining one's sense of self or one's personal identity" (Waldorf et al., 1991, p.222, cited in Maruna, 2001). This is similar to Goffman's (1963) idea of reverting to an unspoiled identity, such as the role of a father rather than the role of a thief. Using a redemption script means there is no need to cast off an old identity for a new one; there is also no explanation needed for why someone became disillusioned with their criminal identity, what drew them to a new identity, or how they can develop this (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Paternoster and Bushway (2009) however emphasise a decision being made by someone who wants to make a change: 'desistance comes about as a result of the offender *willfully* changing his identity and both working toward something positive in the future and steering away from something feared' (p.1108).

Those convicted of offences, particularly those in prison, may see themselves as having been treated unfairly by authorities (Shover, 1996, cited in Maruna, 2001). This may help them to come to terms with their identity as it allows them to see themselves, whether consciously or not, as a victim, and someone who did not have autonomy over their choices (Maruna, 2001).

Using neutralisations to explain away behaviour is normal and not only something done by those convicted of offences. Maruna and Copes (2005) argue that different types of neutralisations perform different functions in relation to offending: excuses and justifications which relate to highly stable and global attributions are most likely to be associated with persistent offending, whereas neutralisations which allow an 'ex-offender' to separate their offending behaviour from their core self are more likely to be associated with continued desistance from offending. Different neutralisation techniques have been described by different researchers; Sykes and Matza (1957) identified denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties.

Hochstetler et al. (2010) identified strategies used by men convicted of violence, to preserve their identity as non-violent people, and to avoid being assigned a spoiled identity (Sandberg, 2009). One strategy was to differentiate between committing violence and 'being' violent, so that despite carrying out repeated acts of violence, they could state "that's not who I am" (p.492) and could rationalise their own acts of violence. They also created an outgroup of people who are 'authentically violent'. This meant they could distance themselves from the 'violent' group and avoid the shame, condemnation and disrespectability which they associated with it.

The current research

The above literature has highlighted that those leaving prison with sexual offence convictions and attempting to reintegrate into the community face a large number of barriers, both practical such as employment and accommodation, and psychological such as stigma, shame and the impact on identity. It is of importance to society to try to improve this situation; as well as trying to improve the wellbeing of those who have served their sentences and are trying to desist, there can also be an impact on reoffending rates and therefore protecting the public.

The current study aims to build upon previous literature, to further explore the experiences of MCOSOs who are trying to reintegrate into the community, adding to the knowledge base about the UK experience specifically. Participants were asked for their perspectives on reintegration, desistance and managing their own identity, with the aims of sharing this information with relevant prisoners and staff in the future.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will set out the methodology for this thesis. Firstly a structured review was completed to consider the existing literature and where the gaps were. Further information on the methodology for this is given in chapter 4. Two original research studies were then conducted: nine semi-structured interviews were completed, and nine repertory grids. While these complement each other in answering the research questions, the results are presented separately, in chapters 5 and 6, as they also explore different aspects and allow for different levels of analysis. This chapter will set out the rationale for both of these methods and the analysis used. It will also consider ethical issues around data collection.

Research questions

The empirical chapters that follow both try to answer the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of men who have served sentences for sexual offences who are now back living in the community?
- What is the impact of their conviction and being on the 'Sex Offender' Register on their view of themselves and their identity?

The IPA analysis also considers these additional questions:

- How do they negotiate the label of 'sex offender'?
- How do they manage disclosing their conviction to others and what impact does this have on their identity?

These research questions were devised based on the researcher's experience from clinical practice, and the literature review, to explore whether what had been found elsewhere held in a UK context, as well as any findings that might be unique to this setting.

Methodological Approach

Methodological foundations and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

A key aim of this research was to hear from men on the 'sex offender' register, following release from prison. It was important that participants could tell their stories in their own words and describe aspects of their experiences which were important to them, so qualitative methodology was the most appropriate. IPA was chosen for gathering and analysing the interview data. IPA is based on three fundamental principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics

and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology, developed by Husserl ([1931] 2004), and later by Heidegger (1962, cited in Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) is a method of study which pays attention to how individuals experience things, i.e. identifying what makes an experience unique by exploring how an individual perceives or talks about it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Hermeneutics is about gaining "an understanding of an individual's perceptions and experiences of an issue" (Smith and Osborn (2008); also see Willig, 2001) but also considering wider questions such as how the participant is interpreting their experience. Using IPA involves double hermeneutics: the participants are meaning making and the researcher tries to interpret and make sense of that meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Finally, ideography refers to completing in-depth analysis of individual cases and perspectives, within their unique contexts, before making any generalised statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The rationale for choosing IPA for this study therefore was the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' own experiences and not making assumptions about what these might be. This is done through using semi-structured interviewing, allowing flexibility for participants to share what is most meaningful to them. The participant is the expert on their own life and experiences, and it is their story that is important. IPA can achieve detailed information about individuals' experiences that cannot be obtained through questionnaires and allows for the participant to focus on what is important to them, rather than relying on assumptions made by the researcher. Smith and Osborn (2008) emphasised how IPA is suited to research questions about the experiences of a particular group of people and focused on a particular topic; for this research, only those with experience of trying to reintegrate into the community, having served a prison sentence for a sexual offence, can really understand what this experience means and help a researcher to try to understand it too.

Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) and repertory grids

Repertory grids were chosen for the second part of the study, to potentially complement, challenge or build on the findings of the IPA analysis. The repertory grid technique is underpinned by personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955/1991). PCP posits that we all use our own individual psychological framework to interpret ourselves, others and situations we encounter. This framework is built around the meaning we have attached to our previous experiences, and constantly adapted and changed during the course of our lives.

As everyone's framework is different, there is no one objective reality in a given situation. Kelly (1955/1991) suggested that these frameworks contain our personal constructs, which we then use to interpret situations in our lives, past, present and future. Kelly saw constructs as bi-polar i.e. when we state that a person is e.g. isolated, we are also implicitly stating that they are not well integrated. As Kitson-Boyce et al. (2020) point out, an important part of PCP is that constructs can be loosened and tightened. Tight construing can lead to unvarying predictions, whereas loose construing can lead to varying ones (Smith, 2000); these can then be tightened again into a more definite view (Kelly, 1955/1991; Walker & Winter, 2007). We use our construct system to set our expectations of and evaluate the world around us, and then modify our framework accordingly (Fransella et al., 2004).

The repertory grid technique aims to provide access to the subjective realities of participants and to access the sense-making framework of an individual; repertory grids are "personal construct theory in action", a chance to explore an individual's personal construct system (Fransella et al., 2004, p.1). The repertory grid is derived from Kelly's (1995/1991) Role Construct Repertory Test. It is the most commonly used method within PCP (Burr et al., 2012) as it can provide a richer understanding of a participant's experiences, but can also be used for research using different epistemological standpoints. There is precedent for using repertory grids with those convicted of offences, such as Horley (1996), Blagden et al. (2012, 2014), Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018), Kitson-Boyce et al. (2020) and Wheatley et al. (2020).

Repertory grids consist of elements, constructs and ratings. An element can be defined as an example of a topic e.g. a person or a role (Jankowicz, 2004). A construct is used to describe a way in which individuals make sense out of something; a way in which two or more things are alike and therefore different from a third thing (Kelly, 1955/1991). Rating elements on each of these constructs provides insight into how participants are construing the world around them, and the relationships between constructs.

One benefit of this technique is that it is more opaque when compared with the semi-structured interview or other methods i.e. it is not necessarily clear what the outcome of the technique will be so is less susceptible to drawing on socially acceptable responses (Burr et al., 2012). For this research, it was considered beneficial for exploring both the participants' views of themselves in relation to others, but also to minimise interviewer bias when trying to understand and interpret these views (Goffin, 2002). From a practical point of view,

completing grids with participants was also beneficial in maintaining engagement and interest, since all of the research data needed to be collected in two consecutive sessions due to logistics.

Combining the IPA analysis and repertory grid analysis provides the opportunity to explore how participants interpret and make meaning out of their experiences through the way they discuss them in interview, as well as how they rate the constructs and elements which are important to them. Both the phenomenological approach and personal construct theory allow for individuals to show how they make sense of their experiences (Blagden, 2011).

Reliability and Validity

Achieving and/or demonstrating reliability and validity in qualitative research is less straightforward than for quantitative. Reliability in quantitative research refers to being able to replicate the processes and results, whereas for qualitative research, the focus is on consistency (Leung, 2015). The methodology used and approach should consistently obtain similar data. If the identical research was repeated with the same participants, it is unlikely the results would be identical as they would have reflected on the original interview, had other experiences in between and so on. However, if a similar study were carried out with care, the findings would likely not be completely different (Carcary, 2009).

Validity in qualitative research refers to whether tools, processes and data are 'appropriate' i.e. are the research question, methodology, design, sampling, analysis and results/conclusions valid for the research sample and context (Leung, 2015). Validity can be enhanced by using participants' own words to name categories or themes (Grossoehme, 2014); while it was not possible to do this for the IPA analysis, the constructs in the repertory grids were mostly elicited from participants.

Alternative criteria have been proposed with which to assess qualitative research, to account for the differences in methods and theoretical frameworks, for example the criteria set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994, both cited in Cope, 2014) who used the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity. Yardley (2000) proposed looking at sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance and these were considered here. Sensitivity to context refers to awareness of relevant literature and theory, as well as the socio-cultural setting of the research. This

includes awareness of the potential influences on participants and as reflexivity issues for the researcher. Swinton and Mowat (2006, cited in Grossoehme, 2014) suggested documenting research decisions made and accepting the possible role of the researcher in influencing what is being studied. Details here are given in the Reflexivity section in chapter 7. Commitment refers to prolonged engagement with the topic being studied, as was the case for this researcher through clinical practice and previous research activity, and rigour to how adequate the sample and interpretation is in gaining an understanding of the topic. Transparency and coherence include detailing and disclosing all aspects of the data collection process, as has been done here in chapters 5 and 6, as well as the reflexivity section. Finally, impact and importance concern whether the research adds to existing knowledge and can usefully be applied, in this instance whether the results can impact on MCOSOs and those working with them, which will be easier to judge following dissemination to relevant stakeholders.

Another key difference between qualitative research such as this, and large-scale quantitative research is generalisability. Being able to generalise the results from nine participants to all men with sexual offence convictions was not one of the aims of this study, but rather the intent was to complete an in-depth exploration of the experiences of a small number of people and to consider any common themes among them. Swinton and Mowat (2006, cited in Grossoehme, 2014) emphasise the data being trustworthy, whereby the researchers have done a credible job of describing and understanding the topic at hand. By providing detailed information about the methods used and questions asked, however, it could of course be possible to include data from this study with other qualitative studies through meta-synthesis.

For repertory grids specifically, Fransella et al. (2004) highlight that when exploring how people make meaning of themselves and those around them, ‘the idea of a static mind is a contradiction in terms’ (p.133) and therefore the concept of reliability for repertory grids may be less meaningful; if a grid were to be repeated with the same person, and different results obtained, this change would be worthy of study in itself. Fransella et al. (2004) also highlight that reliability of ‘the grid’ cannot be examined, as there is no one grid. All grids are different depending on their design, the context, the constructs and elements elicited and so on.

With regards to validity of repertory grids, Fransella et al. (2004) advocate for thinking more in terms of 'usefulness' and whether the grid effectively 'reveal(s) patterns and relationships' (p.144) in the data. They argue that the idea that constructs relate to each other, and that grids measure the relationship between them, is not disputable, but acknowledge that grids can still be unhelpful if there are problems with its design or the way it is carried out, for example if elements are unfamiliar to the person completing the grid. They cite studies where grids have been able to predict behaviour, such as voting behaviour (Fransella & Bannister, 1967).

Ethics

Research approvals were obtained from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) regional Probation research committee, and Nottingham Trent University research ethics committee. The research was designed and carried out in line with British Psychological Society codes of ethics and conduct, and the Health and Care Professions Council standards.

A number of ethical considerations were particular to this research. There was a possibility that participants could disclose information that indicated their risks of reoffending had increased, or that they were engaging in behaviour that contradicted their licence conditions. It was made clear to participants that any information relating to their own safety or potential safety of others would be passed on to the appropriate authorities, whether this be police or Probation. However, participants were also made aware that, other than these possible exceptions, their data would be fully anonymised, and not shared with anyone else working with them. Participants were not asked to disclose their full names, to further reassure them of the confidentiality of their data, and other service users at the place where interviews took place were not told the researcher's purpose for being there. The information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendices 4 and 5. Another consideration was the participants' welfare; it was possible that discussing the impact of being on the 'sex offender' register or recounting stories about potentially negative feedback they had received from others, could be distressing, and it was important not to leave participants feeling worse than when they started the interview. To mitigate these concerns, question order was considered carefully, as was which ratings to end the repertory grid on. Participants were asked how they were feeling at the end of the interview and provided with details of avenues for additional support should they need it. It was also proposed that participants may find it

rewarding to have the space to tell their story, which could balance out any potential negative effects of being interviewed. To protect the welfare of the researcher, interviews were held in venues where other staff were present and support could be sought quickly, for example through using a personal alarm.

The interview data was transferred onto a password protected laptop, and interview records and written notes will be destroyed once the research has been written up for publication and or presented at a conference. Audio recordings will then also be erased from the computer memory.

Participants

Sampling

The emphasis in this study was to provide an in-depth analysis about the experiences of participants, rather than a more general account about a specific population. Smith et al. (2009) highlight that there is no set sample size for IPA studies, as it depends on how committed a researcher is to the case study level of analysis and reporting, how rich the data from individuals is, and any organisational or resource constraints. For professional doctorate level, they suggest between 4 and 10 interviews (not necessarily participants). The same nine participants took part in both studies here. Examples of related published qualitative research using similar samples include Farmer et al. (2012; n = 10), Russell et al. (2013; n = 9) and Seidler (2010; n = 8).

Another consideration was the issue of saturation. Saunders et al. (2018) differentiated between four approaches to saturation in research and the theoretical or logical underpinnings of these: theoretical saturation, inductive thematic saturation, a priori thematic saturation and data saturation. The model which applies best to this study is 'data saturation' i.e. where new data is repeating what was expressed in previous data. It became clear as the IPA analysis progressed that the three main themes were found in the data from all transcripts and that new themes were not emerging. It is important however to note that the decision that saturation had been reached was in itself a judgement made by the researcher, not a certainty that no new data would have been collected if interviews had continued (Saunders et al., 2018).

For repertory grids, a sample of around 10 participants is also common (e.g. Blagden et al., 2014; Dillon & McKnight, 1990; Hassenzahl & Trautmann, 2001). Turpin et al. (2009) also used a sample of 10 when combining IPA and repertory grids as in this research.

Participant Recruitment

The participants were recruited through professionals supporting them in the community. This included Probation Officers, psychologists and other mental health professionals, and a charity co-ordinator. Initially, recruitment was planned for one city, however due to difficulties with recruitment, two participants were recruited in a second city, following resubmission of ethics and approvals. Recruitment was done via professionals in order to access men who would meet the research criteria, whilst maintaining a focus on safety issues for both participants and the researcher i.e. no contact details needed to be shared on either side as all contact was made through the professional, there would be a safe and confidential place in which to conduct interviews, and there would be no indication to others attending for an interview what the specific nature of participants' offences or the research was.

Probation Officers and other professionals such as Approved Premises (AP) managers were approached in a number of ways and asked if they could help to suggest potential participants. Short presentations were given at team meetings including for a specific Probation office, for AP managers and for the 'sex offender unit' (SOU). An advert was placed in a Probation newsletter, and emails were sent to Probation leads within the region, as well as to contacts through other work that had previously been completed. Two participants were recruited via a charity supporting those who had committed sexual offences, with the project co-ordinator making the initial contact and arranging a suitable location to meet (at the charity offices). The relevant professionals were asked to give potential participants an information sheet. This detailed why the research was being conducted, what it involved, how data was to be collected, stored, and used, and how the analysed data would be disseminated. If the individual was interested, the professional then contacted the researcher to arrange a face-to-face meeting to gain informed consent and carry out the interview if appropriate.

Recruitment took much longer than anticipated, primarily due to difficulties getting responses from the professionals who had been contacted. The workload of Probation Officers, in particular, may have impacted on their ability and/or willingness to complete an

extra task, even if the time commitment in aiding recruitment was designed to be as minimal as possible.

Demographics

Nine participants took part in both parts of this study. The participants were a fairly homogenous sample in terms of being men who had been convicted of (any) sexual offence, had served a prison sentence for this, and had since been released back into the community. However, there were also differences in participants' backgrounds, offence types and current living situations. Some had served more than one prison sentence. The rationale for only interviewing men was that they make up the majority of those convicted of sexual offences and it could therefore be argued that the public are more aware of this group and have formed views/stereotypes of this group. It also impacted on access to potential participants. The decision to interview those with any length of sentence/time back in the community was partly a pragmatic one i.e. increasing the potential participant pool. It was also of interest whether being back in the community for different lengths of time may have contributed to or impacted on participants' different experiences. Labelling may occur due to the conviction/having been in prison regardless of the details, there are arguments as to why length of time in prison can impact on future offending positively or negatively (Rhodes et al., 2018) and even a short prison sentence can affect an individual's personality (Meijers et al., 2018).

The participants were aged between 24 and 62, with a mean age of 42. Their offences included possession of indecent images of children, attempted rape, and rape. Victims included children and adults, both known and unknown to the participants. Participants were not asked to disclose their sexuality, however one participant disclosed that he was gay during the interview discussion, and another spoke of being sexually attracted to both men and women. Participants were not specifically asked if English was their first language, however their Probation Officers had confirmed that they would be able to participate fully in the research; one participant disclosed being a foreign national but that he only spoke English and related his nationality to his experiences of being stigmatized and stereotyped in the community. Three participants mentioned also having accessed Circles of Support, which supports those with convictions for sexual offences.

Data collection

The interview location depended on how the participants were recruited, but included rooms in local Probation offices, an approved premises hostel, an outpatient mental health centre and a charity office. In all cases, the rooms were private and had access to alarms or equivalent in case of emergency during the interview. In the hostel interview, a member of staff unfortunately had to come through the room at one point so the interview was halted until they had left again.

Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews, as opposed to for example open-ended questionnaires or focus groups, were chosen due to wanting to explore individual experiences in depth, in a space where participants could feel comfortable to be open about their past and present, and to be able to ask follow-up questions relevant to each participant to try to really understand their perspective or to resolve potentially conflicting information (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). This makes the interview a more collaborative approach to data collection, as the participant themselves can change or direct the focus of the questions. Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) refer to one-to-one interviews as allowing rapport to be developed, as well as allowing participants to 'think, speak and be heard'. An interview protocol was designed following a literature review of relevant research as well as knowledge from clinical practice. The introduction included a reminder of the purpose of the research and any practical considerations such as time constraints. Question topics then included experiences of being on the 'sex offender' register, disclosing offending, views of self, what helps/hinders reintegration and identity management. A full list of questions can be found in Appendix 6. Consideration was given to whether the questions should be provided to participants in advance; this could have helped them to feel more comfortable with what they would be asked to discuss or to think about their experiences beforehand, however it was decided that their initial thoughts would be more authentic than if participants had spent time thinking about what answers might be expected or required of them. In line with IPA processes, not all questions were necessarily asked of each participant, for example if it had already been answered, or in the same order; this also meant that questions could be rephrased to be more responsive to the participant as needed, and that discussions could flow more organically. For each topic, funnel protocols were applied, with broader questions being asked first, then asking more pointed questions and for more detail (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

An important part of gathering useful data, and the experience being a positive one for participants, is the ability of the interviewer to build rapport as otherwise even well-thought-out questions may still elicit uninformative answers (Leech, 2002). Active listening skills are also essential. The researcher for this study had 12 years of experience of interviewing men convicted of offences, including sexual offences, as well as experience in delivering 'sex offender' treatment programmes. This was beneficial in remaining neutral when hearing offence-related information, in being able to be sensitive and empathic when participants were disclosing difficult experiences, in being aware of their own verbal and nonverbal cues and not leading the respondent to believe there were right or wrong answers, and in being familiar with regimes in prison and terms used, so that participants did not need to explain these and lose the flow of what they were saying.

Repertory grids

Elements i.e. the roles/people being considered can be either supplied or elicited. Here, elements were supplied, but there was flexibility if these were not relevant to the individuals, or they did not wish to consider certain elements. Views also differ on whether constructs i.e. the characteristics or traits of the elements should be provided or elicited and when these should be discussed within the process. Here, three constructs were provided for participants. Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018) state that it is best practice to provide supplied constructs after the participant decides on their own however, in this case, it was decided to give them at the beginning. This helped to explain what the exercise consisted of and illustrate the different poles of a construct.

The majority of constructs were elicited using the triadic sort method (minimum context form; Tan & Hunter, 2002). This means that participants were asked to consider which two out of three elements were more similar or different than the third, and asked to describe and give a label to how/in what way. This process is repeated a number of times. 'Laddering' was used when needed to further elaborate on the elicited construct (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) i.e. further probing questions were asked to understand the assumptions behind and the interpretation of the label, as the terms used could mean different things to different people, such as 'what does that mean to you?' and 'why is that important to you?' Through this discussion, constructs were elicited which described the people important to them, as well as themselves, to various extents. Reger (1990, cited in Tan & Hunter, 2002) identified

seven to ten triads as being sufficient to elicit constructs, as at that point saturation became evident.

Procedure and Materials

Participants had been given the information sheet in advance of the research meeting, however this was read through again and an opportunity given for any questions. The consent form was also read through and discussed, and any questions and concerns answered fully. It was reinforced that involvement was purely voluntary, and that there were no incentives to participate, nor any negative consequences of choosing not to. Participants were made aware that the information they shared would not be given to those working with them, other than in very specific situations: if a participant disclosed information that suggested risk of harm to themselves or others, if they disclosed an offence they had not been convicted for, or information linked to any terrorist actions. This was not considered to be a significant risk, however it was possible and so was planned for. In the event, there was no need to share any risk-related information from the interviews.

The semi-structured interview and repertory grid had to be completed consecutively. This was largely due to difficulties in arranging times and spaces to see participants, as well as not being able to reimburse them for any travel or time costs incurred to attend the interview, but breaks were offered and given to participants as required. Semi-structured interviews and repertory grids were conducted with each participant. The research meetings lasted between 1.5 and 3 hours, and were audio recorded and transcribed, with identifying names or details removed, and participants assigned numbers. The semi-structured interview tended to take around 60% of the time, with the repertory grid taking the rest.

For the repertory grids, firstly the premise and aim of this part of the study was reiterated to participants, and they were shown the materials. Each participant had a piece of flipchart paper with the grid drawn on it, along with the three supplied constructs. Elements were then agreed together. Up to 12 elements were used for each participant: ‘me at time of conviction’, ‘me in prison’, ‘me now’ and ‘me in the future’ (participants could choose what time periods they wished to consider, for example if they had been in prison for many years, they chose which time they wanted to look at).

The remaining elements were obtained by suggesting roles to participants and asking who would be relevant for them: parent, friend, partner/ex-partner, Police Officer, Probation Officer, another prisoner, another man on the register, and another significant person of their choice. Not all participants wished to look at all of the chosen roles, for example participant 6 was uncomfortable considering a parent, and participant 9 could not identify a further significant person in addition to those suggested. However, having the majority of elements in common between participants was beneficial when considering any comparisons across the sample.

Then, constructs were discussed. The constructs provided were:

Isolated to integrated

Restricted to free

Stigmatized to accepted

The remaining constructs (up to 9 additional ones per participant) were generated through the repertory grid discussion.

A triadic elicitation approach was used to compare and contrast elements, with one of the 'me' elements always being included in the comparison. For example, participant 3 was asked "how are 'me now', 'Mum' and 'Probation Officer' similar? How are they different?" to elicit a characteristic; in this case he stated that he and his mum were both supportive people and that this was an important quality for him. After some further discussion around this, supportive and unsupportive were added to the grid as two ends of one construct. This process was continued, comparing different groupings of elements, until 10-12 constructs were identified.

Finally, participants were asked to rate each element on each construct, on a scale from 1-7, with 1 meaning that the implicit construct completely described that person, and 7 meaning that the emergent construct completely described that person. For example, participant 1 described 'me at time of conviction' as 1 (isolated), 'Mum' as 7 (integrated), with various elements such as 'me now' and 'friend' as 4 on this scale.

Debrief procedure

Following the interview and repertory grid, interviewees were thanked for taking part, and given a debrief form. This included contact details for the researcher's supervisor in case of queries or complaints. Participants were reminded that if they wished to withdraw their data,

they could do so within a month by asking the relevant professional to contact the researcher. While it was not considered to be a significant risk, there was the potential for participants to be psychologically distressed by participating in this research, for example through discussing the stigma they felt and any associated negative emotions. The debrief sheet also therefore contained a number of avenues of support available to the participant, including the Samaritans and support helplines. Efforts were made to end the interview by considering more positive aspects of the individual's experiences, such as rating 'future me' last in the repertory grid. Where it was felt that this was also demotivating for the individual participant, a further discussion was had with them to consider positive aspects of their situation so that the interview was ended on a more positive note. The debrief form is in Appendix 7.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The IPA analysis process used was as described by Smith and Osborn (2008). Firstly, the transcripts were read and re-read multiple times, making notes of anything that stood out on each reading to try and learn about the participant's own psychological world. This part of the process helped to be immersed in the data and the setting in which it was conducted (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and a similar amount of time was spent on each transcript.
Coding of the data was then completed in three stages: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). Descriptive coding included making notes summarising what had been said, or which topics the participant had raised. This then progressed to more in-depth interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Linguistic coding was used to consider the choice of words, repetition of particular words, or how similes and metaphors were used. Conceptual coding was completed to try to develop an understanding of the participant's meaning making, and key concepts that may be emerging from the analysis (Cooper et al., 2012). All levels of the coding needed to be directly related to/grounded in the data.

Following on from coding, emerging themes were decided upon. These were devised by considering the coding notes and deciding on a phrase or descriptor which portrayed common threads and connections in how the participant had interpreted their experiences. For each theme, it was important to check that it reflected the source material (Pietkiewicz

& Smith, 2014). Some themes clustered together, and some emerged as superordinate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This process was repeated for each individual transcript.

While IPA is primarily concerned with obtaining in-depth and rich data about the experience of individuals, once all of the individual transcripts had been analysed, there were superordinate themes identified which were common to the whole sample, so the final stage was to consider themes for all participants. The participants in this study are clearly not intended to be representative of all men who have served prison sentences for sexual offences and who are now living in the community. Even within this small sample, there are large differences in the experiences of the participants, therefore any generalisations made are tentative but can provide insight into some common experiences and patterns, and the construing of these experiences, amongst the sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Repertory grids

Idiogrid (Grice, 2002) was used to analyse the grids, looking at, firstly, structural analysis. This included considering cognitive complexity i.e. how complex the participants' cognitive structures were, and how able they were to construe their experiences from other points of view. This was assessed through the percentage of total variance accounted for by the first component (Garcia-Mieres et al., 2016), with a lower PVAFF figure indicating a more loosely organised construct system.

Principal components analysis (PCA) was used to identify how participants construed their concepts of their self in relation to other elements. This is illustrated statistically and pictorially thorough a PCA grid. Implicative dilemmas were assessed for each participant; these indicated cognitive conflicts, where there was a discrepancy between how a person sees themselves now, how they would like to be in the future, and what cost might be associated with becoming this ideal self (e.g. Feixas & Saul, 2004). Self-identity plots were also used. These are a visual way of representing standardized Euclidean distances between pairs of elements, in this case the distance between 'me now' and 'me future' i.e. how close or distant these two self-concepts are.

The data from these different analyses were considered in light of the themes found in the IPA analysis, to assess where the repertory grid data complemented or differed from those findings. Data from the repertory grid interviews were also used to highlight or illustrate

how participants were sense-making. Further details on analysis of the repertory grids is given in chapter 6.

Chapter 4: Structured Review

Abstract

Background: While recidivism rates for those convicted of sexual offences are low, there is currently limited research on what promotes desistance amongst this group. Having a conviction for a sexual offence is associated with high levels of stigma but there is little information available on if this stigma promotes or hinders desistance and reintegration into the community. This review considers the question: What do men who have convictions for sexual offences see as the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending?

Method**:** A systematic search was conducted on three databases (Criminal Justice Abstract, Psycharticles, and Psychinfo) in September 2018. Studies that met the inclusion criteria (e.g. qualitative research, where the participants were men in the community who had convictions for sexual offences) were included in the review.

Results: This systematic review considered 3021 papers, with 28 full texts being reviewed, and a final eight meeting the inclusion criteria. These included papers from the UK (three), USA (three), Australia (one) and New Zealand (one). The common themes were that experiences of being on a register were largely negative and not seen as useful, work, agency, treatment they had accessed around sexual offending had been beneficial, and support. The results are discussed with reference to existing theories of desistance.

Conclusion: It is important to understand what helps men convicted of sexual offences to desist from reoffending. There are implications for the men themselves, those working with them, and potential victims. Increasing access to support structures, work and treatment could be beneficial in reducing the negative impact of being on a 'sex offender' register, and thus the associated stigma, as well as potentially supporting desistance as well. Specific recommendations are made for each theme identified in this review.

Introduction

It is often assumed that those convicted of sexual offences will persist in offending across their lifetime, and public policies and attitudes tend to reflect this (e.g. Lussier et al., 2016) such as 'sex offender' registration policies and the investment into 'sex offender' treatment. Research has tended to focus on risk factors for sexual offending when in fact the majority of those with sexual offence convictions do not come back to the attention of the criminal justice system for a subsequent similar offence (Lussier et al., 2016) and recidivism rates for these types of offences are low (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2006).

Desistance research has found that those who desist tend to be more future-focused (Maruna, 2001) and to reject the 'offender' identity, but relatively little research has been completed on factors involved in desistance from sexual offending specifically (Farmer et al., 2016; Lussier et al., 2016). Men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs) can try to distance themselves from the label of 'sex offender', both in prison and the community (e.g. Winder & Gough, 2010) and Paternoster and Bushway (2009) proposed that people desist from offending when they can imagine a 'feared future self' as a consequence of their offending behaviour, and so develop a more positive future identity. Knowing more about which factors contribute to this development of a non-offending identity in this population would be beneficial, in addition to understanding how this then impacts on desistance from further offending.

Having piloted preliminary searches, there was minimal previous research in the area of desistance from sexual offending, however it was still beneficial to select a more specific topic for this review, to focus on one key area. The possible role of stigma was selected. One of the reported consequences of being on the 'sex offender' register is stigma associated with being labelled as a 'sex offender' (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006); it is important to consider whether this is beneficial in terms of reducing reoffending/increasing desistance, or if the register and associated labelling and stigma can be counterproductive (McAlinden, 2005). The purpose of this structured review was to identify what the role of stigma, if any, might be in desistance for MCOSOs, from their perspective. Qualitative papers were chosen for review, in order to learn from the men actually in this situation, as opposed to theorising or making assumptions about their thinking and behaviour. Seers (2015) highlighted that while reviews of quantitative studies

can usefully bring together evidence on for example effectiveness of a treatment, reviews of qualitative studies can really add to our understanding of a topic, and can help build theory.

The focus of this systematic review has been developed in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) and PICo approach for qualitative research to ensure a focused review question (NICE guidelines manual, 2012).

Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Development of review question in line with PICo approach

Population	For men convicted of sexual offences,
Interest	what is the role of stigma in desistance from further offending,
Context	and what helps them reintegrate into community when released from prison, amongst stigma and negative attitudes from the public?

The specific review question developed through this approach was therefore:

What do men who have convictions for sexual offences see as the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending?

Identification of studies

Prior to conducting the literature search, searches were performed on the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, the Joanna Briggs Institute database, Prospero, the National Health Service (NHS) and NICE structured review databases, to confirm that a similar review was not already under way. No relevant results were found.

Three databases were searched (Criminal Justice Abstract, Psycharticles, Psychinfo) in September 2018, using the same search strategy for each of the databases. This search was repeated in October 2020 (see the end of this chapter for details). The search terms were piloted and reviewed to ensure that relevant studies were being included. The following search terms were used, including Boolean operators to increase the sensitivity of the search:

Table 3.2

Table 3.2: Search terms

Concept	Synonyms	Search terms
Stigma	Labelling	Stigm* OR
	Disgrace	Label* OR
	Shame	Disgrac* OR
	Tainted	Sham*OR
	Dishonour	Taint* OR
		Dishono*
		AND
Desistance	Protective factors	Desist* OR
	Success factors	Protect* OR
	Reoffending (not)	success OR
	Reconviction (lack of)	Reoffend* OR
		Reconvict*
		AND
Sexual offending	Sexual crimes	'sex* offen*' OR
	Child sexual abuse	'sex* crim*' OR
		p?edophil*

Three additional studies were added in to be reviewed, which the author was aware of from previous literature searches, but which had not been located using the search protocol.

Study eligibility criteria were chosen to ensure that the studies selected could contribute to answering the structured review question. The studies included in the review had to:

- be written/available in English
- have used a recognised research method
- to have reported experiences or outcomes related to desistance, reconviction or reoffending
- to have used a community (as opposed to institution) sample comprised of adult men convicted of any types of sexual offences.

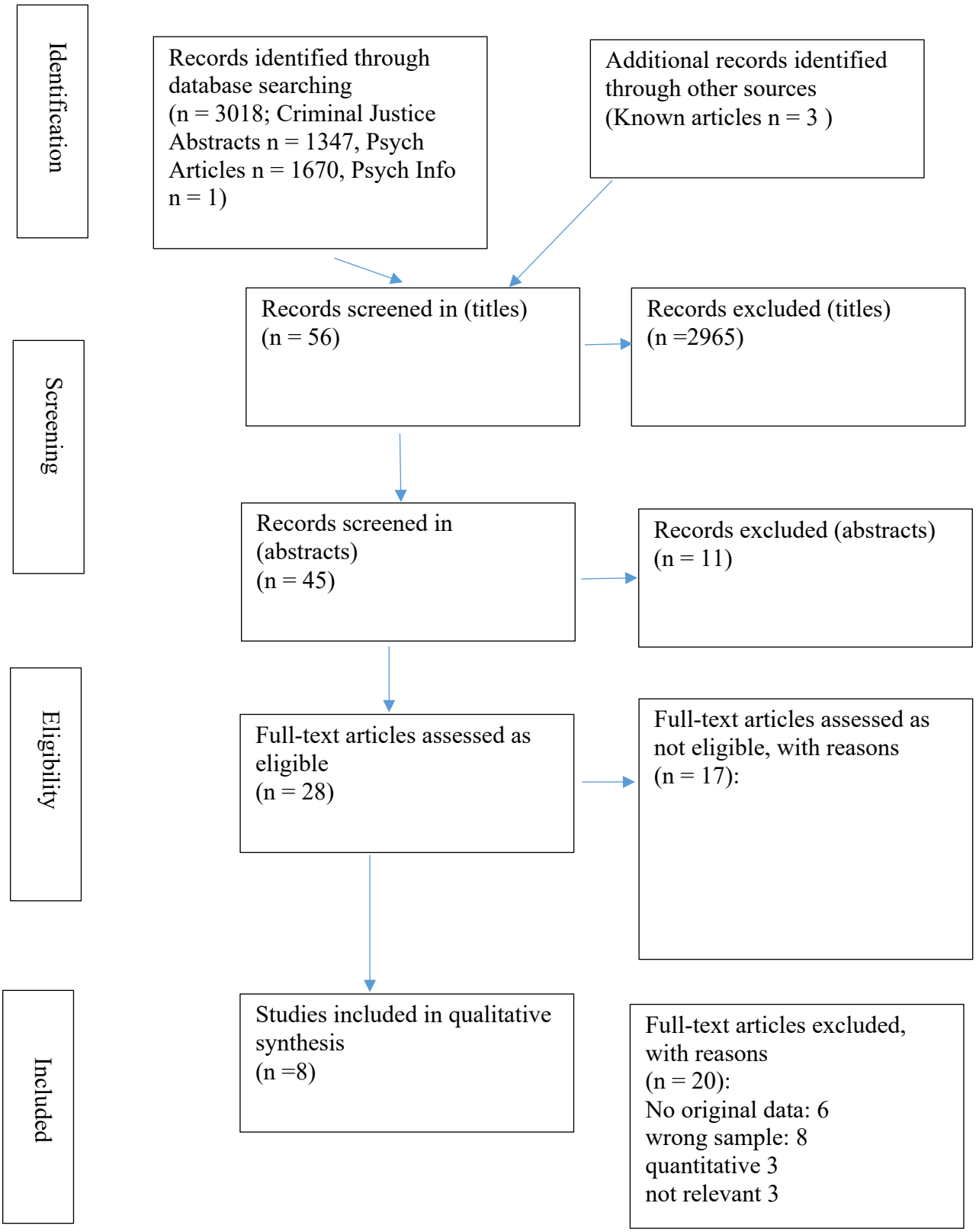
As preliminary searches had indicated a relatively small number of studies in this area, studies from any year of publication were included.

Specific exclusion criteria were:

- studies where participants identified as ‘paedophiles’ but had not offended
- studies with female participants
- prison-based samples
- books

Figure 1 shows the process of the review, and the numbers of records retrieved at each stage.

Structured review



Quality appraisal

Once the studies to include in the review were determined, quality appraisal was completed. This was done using a proforma (Appendix 1; Appendix 2 shows an example completed form), which was developed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) criteria for evaluating qualitative research, as a guide. A total of 13 quality criteria were used to assess the eight identified papers. The criteria were scored as 1 (fully addressed/included), 0.5 (partially addressed/unclear) and 0 (not addressed) and a total score obtained for each paper.

Quality of included studies

Quality ratings ranged from 73% to 96% (mean = 88%); all criteria were weighted equally for the purpose of the quality assessment. It was clear why each of the studies had used qualitative research methods, and the research aims were clearly stated. There was less detail given on sampling techniques in some cases, and not all studies reported participant demographics, or gave much information on ethical considerations or how these were resolved. However, the overall quality ratings gave confidence in being able to include the studies in this review.

Results

Studies identified

Searching identified 3021 initial records; this included three records added in by the review author due to personal knowledge. Only 56 of these remained once duplicates were removed, and the titles had been screened to ascertain if the topic of the paper was relevant to the review, and if it appeared to meet the search criteria. Where it was not clear, papers were then also reviewed by abstract. Detailed inspection of the abstracts resulted in 28 full texts being screened for eligibility. A further 20 papers were removed after reading the full text; they had appeared to meet the search criteria from the abstracts but on closer inspection, six had no original data, eight did not have an exclusively community-based sample, three used quantitative methods and a further three were not fully relevant (Blagden, 2011, was a doctoral thesis focused on denial in those convicted of sexual offences; Crocilla, 2015, was about identity development more broadly; Farmer et al., 2016 sought to explain past offending rather than desistance and used a duplicate sample to McAlinden et al., 2016).

This left eight studies relevant to the review (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Farmer et al., 2012; Harris, 2014; Harris, 2017; Hulley, 2016; McAlinden et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2013; Seidler, 2010). Of these, three were from the UK, three from the USA, one from Australia, and one from New Zealand. Sample sizes ranged from eight to 45 (mean = 20). Studies were published between 2008 and 2017. All the studies used semi-structured interviews and were analysed using qualitative methods. Five of the seven studies used life story interviews and were analysed using a narrative framework; one used modified analytic induction analysis.

Data extraction method

Each paper was thoroughly reviewed, and a data extraction form was used to extract information such as date, country, research methods and sample (see Appendix 3 for example extraction form). Details of the included studies are in the below table.

Table 3.3

Table 3.3: Key details for included studies

Study Authors	Date/ Country	Sample size and population	Comparator group where applicable	Research method and analysis
1.Burchfield, K.B., & Mingus, W.	2008 U.S.A	23 men on 'sex offender' register		Semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis
2.Farmer, M., Beech, A.R., Ward, T.	2012 U.K	5 'desisting' men who had sexually offended against children	5 potentially 'active offenders' whose sexual offences were against children	Life Story Interviews
3.Harris, D.A.	2014 U.S.A	21 men convicted of sexual offences and released from custody		Life history interview protocol Qualitative narrative analysis
4.Harris, D.A.	2017 U.S.A	45 men convicted of sexual offences and living in the community		Life history interview protocol (adapted for use with those with sexual offences)
5.Hulley, J.L.	2016 England and Wales	15 men convicted of sexual offence and living in community		Narrative interviews Thematic analysis
6.McAlinden, A.M, Farmer, M., & Maruna, S.	2016 England and Wales	25 men convicted of sexual offences against children who desisting	7 men who still within 12 months of their last offence	Life story interviews Thematic analysis – narrative framework
7.Russell, G., Seymour, F., & Lambie, I.	2013 New Zealand	9 men convicted of sexual offences against children, and who had previously been in prison		Semi-structured interviews. Longitudinal design
8.Seidler, K.	2010 Australia	8 convicted and registered 'sex offenders' in community		Interviews Modified Analytic Induction (MAI) analysis

Analysis

Extracting findings and meta-aggregation

Meta-aggregation was chosen for this review. This allows for consideration of the findings from the original studies, without reinterpreting them or seeking to generate theories as is the case in some other approaches to qualitative synthesis. Essential components of meta-aggregation include:

- an a priori protocol which describes all the steps to be taken in the review (Appendix 1)
- comprehensive searching, critical appraisal and standardised data extraction
- Presentation of a meta-aggregative schematic (table 3.4) that represents how the findings have been aggregated into categories (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). Meta-aggregation also importantly includes making recommendations for practical applications, to guide practitioners and policy makers (Hannes & Lockwood, 2011).

Themes from different levels cannot be combined; here the major themes, and not sub-themes, from each study were extracted; where studies had a 'desisting' group and a 'potentially active group', only the themes from the desisting group were extracted for this review (except for the discussion on links to theories of desistance at the end of this chapter). These themes were then compared and where at least two studies shared a similar theme, these were grouped together. This resulted in five themes, grouping together 23 from the eight studies. These are presented and discussed below, along with their relevance to existing theories of desistance.

Table 3.4

Table 3.4 Themes in papers included in this review

Study	1.Burchfield & Mingus (2008)	2.Farmer, Beech & Ward (2012)	3.Harris (2014)	4. Harris (2017)	5.Hulley (2016)	6.McAlinden, Farmer, & Maruna (2016)	7.Russell, Seymour, & Lambie (2013)	8.Seidler (2010)
Theme								
Theme 1 Experiences of being on a register were largely negative and not useful	Participation in local social controls Barriers to local social capital		Negative themes of informal social control				negative community reactions were stressful Accommodation problems	"It's more window dressing than substance" "but the register is not going to do a thing for him except penalise him" "I think psychologically that doesn't help the rehabilitation and reintegration of that person in society"
Theme 2		Belonging Alienation		Desistance occurred		Importance of social support	Social support important	

Impact of Support		despite loneliness, isolation and exclusion	through very difficult circumstances	Probation officers unsupportive	
Theme 3 Identity through work		Not offending was their life/job now	Work identities	Obtaining employment important	
Theme 4 Agency	Agency			Cultural accountability	"They're the perpetrators and they…shoulder all responsibility, there's no question about it"
Theme 5 Treatment accessed around sexual offending had been beneficial		Only a minority had wanted help initially	SOTP useful		"I think the rehabilitation process is just really important"

Theme 1: Experiences of being on a register were largely negative and not useful

This was the theme with the strongest evidence, across four of the papers (Burchfield & Mingus 2008; Harris, 2014; Russell et al., 2013; Seidler, 2010). An example of the type of restrictions experienced for someone with sexual offence convictions on parole, in this case in Illinois, USA (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008) included being on house arrest, other than for work, church or grocery shopping. This study divided the barriers to local social capital faced by registered 'sex offenders' into different types, and these are reflected in the other papers finding this theme as well:

- 'individual barriers' e.g. self-imposed isolation to minimise the stigma they already felt and reduce possible risk to themselves e.g. fear of losing employment or housing or fear of harassment. Many participants described regularly experiencing shame, embarrassment and even disgust as a result of the stigma associated with the 'sex offender' label, and some explained that the stigma had even altered their views of themselves.
- 'community barriers' meant fear impacting on levels of social interaction in their communities, although only a few participants reported local residents having taken action against them.
- 'structural barriers' related to participants having limited finances and housing options, partly due to residency restrictions, meaning that they were often located in communities which have a lack of social capital generally.
- 'formal barriers' included parole policy impeding the ability to reintegrate into the community and get work, such as significant restrictions on their movements and time.

The experiences of being on a Child Protection register were reported on a range from neutral to very negative. Participants did not see the register as having any meaningful impact on their risk of reoffending but felt that it was largely a means of controlling those with sexual offences, and further marginalising and demonising them. Specific themes, from Seidler (2010), included:

- "It's more window dressing than substance" – participants did not feel that the Register impacted on reducing offending, although it would help to catch an

'offender' more quickly. They also felt it exacerbated already difficult interactions with police.

- "but the register is not going to do a thing for him except penalise him" – the Register was seen as an extension of their punishment rather than a way to promote public safety.
- "I think psychologically that doesn't help the rehabilitation and reintegration of that person in society" – the Register serves to constantly remind those who have committed offences that they are still seen as an 'offender' and are on the outside of their community.

Participants felt that reintegration planning focused on managing risk factors rather than promoting reintegration, and prioritised avoidance goals over approach ones. Those who had committed sexual offences against children found it difficult to reintegrate, with formal restrictions impacting more negatively on participants' lives than informal restrictions or ostracism from those around them. Policies such as community registration and notification, and residence restrictions, affected participants' lives by hindering their ability to find housing, work and relationships. The reaction from other community members was also stressful, however, with participants reporting having been persecuted, especially in workplaces or when trying to find accommodation. In addition, the stigma associated with the label of 'sex offender' had the longer term, more damaging, effects. This led some participants to withdraw from positive relationships, to reduce their feelings of shame and prevent more people finding out about their offence history.

The above studies indicate that being on a register for MCOSOs negatively impacted on reintegration into the community. For some, this then also had an effect on their views of themselves and the level of stigma they felt. The practical impacts of the restrictions, alongside the effect on their view of themselves, could also have potentially negative effects on desistance.

Theme 1 – Conclusions and Application to Practice

Men registered as 'sex offenders' often experience the register as punitive and not rehabilitative. Professionals should be transparent about the purpose and limitations of 'sex

offender' registers. Consideration should be given to how to manage practical issues such as appointments for signing the register and how this can be done without further shaming.

Men on a register should be supported in identifying strategies to manage the negative impact of registration, including psychological strategies to cope with stigma and shame, and practical strategies to support their reintegration.

Theme 2: Impact of Support

The second strongest theme identified, in four of the papers (Farmer et al., 2012; Harris, 2017; McAlinden et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2013) was the impact of support or lack thereof.

Social support was important for participants and this appeared to have also had an impact on desistance. The desisting group had found their place socially and identified themes of belonging whereas those who were potentially still actively offending reported isolation. This is extremely important as it indicates a relationship between having positive support and desisting and, as described above, Burchfield and Mingus (2008) found that the numerous barriers which exist for those with sexual offence convictions can impact on the ability to build up a positive support network.

In contrast, Harris (2017) found that participants were desisting, even despite being isolated and having a lack of support, and emphasised that in this sample, behavioural change was happening without cognitive transformation. Having increased support could still have impacted on their own wellbeing even if not necessary for desistance.

McAlinden et al. (2016) also found that desistance narratives in their sample were strongly characterised by forgiveness, and the importance of social support through difficult times. Some participants identified that their partner's love was a key preventative measure against escalation of offending. Several others were concerned about the impact of their offending on their family, particularly a partner, which could have been a deterrent for them to reoffend. This may also link to concerns about the potential for those people they love to be stigmatized by association.

In terms of professional support, participants described Probation officers as unsupportive, due to their relationships with them being inflexible and not feeling that they were being

treated as individuals. As indicated here, a lack of support from professionals can hinder someone's willingness or ability to share openly what is going on in their lives. This could have serious implications when considering that these men may need support to solve problems early on, rather than letting issues escalate and potentially reverting back to unhelpful, or offence-related, coping strategies.

Theme 2 – Conclusions and Application to Practice

Further consideration should be given to how to select, recruit and retain the most appropriate staff for working with this client group. This could include further information being made available on the reconviction rates for this group as well as on the benefits of support from professionals.

Specific support around developing and maintaining a support network should be available to men with sexual offence convictions. This is done via groups such as Circles of Support and Accountability (see e.g. Thomas et al., 2014) but is not available for all.

Support should be offered to MCOSOs around how to disclose their convictions to a (potential) partner.

Theme 3: Importance of employment

The importance of work was highlighted in three of the papers (Harris, 2017; McAlinden et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2013). Having a career was extremely important within identity narratives and was linked to both purpose and clear life goals. Obtaining employment was important for participants in a number of ways: they experienced financial problems if they were not working, it was hard to get employment due to their conviction, and it was also difficult to get employment which was flexible enough to fit around their parole conditions. There can be stigma attached to someone not working and being able to provide for themselves and any family, which could compound the stigma of having a conviction.

For men who have previously worked and had success in their careers, being unemployed could impact on their self-esteem. Some participants had gained satisfaction and reward from building successful careers, many stated that getting employment was a 'high point' for them in life, and some defined themselves purely in relation to their work lives.

While work itself was not directly related to identity change or a turning point away from offending, being meaningfully occupied was a coping mechanism for participants, particularly those with internet-based offences. Therefore gaining and maintaining employment was relevant to desisting from offending.

A different angle on this theme was found by Harris (2017) who found that some participants saw not offending as their job and life now, and that this was where they had to maintain their focus to ensure they did not reoffend or return to prison.

Theme 3 – Conclusions and Application to Practice

Support with gaining and maintaining employment, or other purposeful activity, is extremely important for MCOSOs. Work has a positive impact on desistance, self-esteem, and developing a support network.

Theme 4: Agency

Another theme is agency, with this being discussed in some form in two of the papers (Farmer et al., 2012; Seidler, 2010). Seidler (2010) identified a theme of "They're the perpetrators and they…shoulder all responsibility, there's no question about it". This related to some participants' responses leading to questions about whether being on a child protection register impacted on individuals' responsibility and accountability for managing their own risks. Having external controls on their behaviour could potentially absolve some of their responsibility. It could also perhaps give false hope about the ability of a register to prevent reoffending.

Men who were desisting were moderately more confident in their ability to control actions and events in their lives than those in a potentially active group. They accepted responsibility for their actions, rather than blaming external circumstances, even though they were also more likely to report having had a 'hard early life' than the potentially active group. They were able to 'rewrite' a shameful past into something necessary to get them to where they are today. Shame management has previously been identified as critical to reintegration into the community (Ahmed et al., 2001, cited in Farmer et al., 2016) as well as desistance from offending (Maruna & Mann, 2006).

Theme 4 – Conclusions and Application to Practice

Supervision through Probation and other relevant agencies should include a focus on supporting individuals to find a balance between accepting responsibility for their own actions and developing confidence in their ability to work towards their future goals.

Continued training and awareness building is needed for professionals working with this population on the purpose of neutralisations and justifications and how to work with these effectively, without further increasing shame.

Theme 5: Treatment accessed around sexual offending had been beneficial

This theme was found in three of the reviewed studies (Harris, 2017; Hulley, 2016; Seidler, 2010). Participants asked about sexual offending treatment in this review stated that the treatment they had accessed had benefited them; they had wanted to understand their offending behaviour and found that treatment helped achieve this. While only a minority of Harris' (2017) sample had wanted to do treatment initially, they reported it being beneficial when they did. Those who regard treatment positively are more likely to maintain motivation for desistance, having internalised the messages from treatment (Beech et al., 1998). It could be argued that completing treatment, alongside other men who have also been convicted of similar offences, could help with reducing stigma as they realise that they are not alone in their thoughts or behaviours.

Related to the issue of treatment, a theme in Seidler's (2010) work is "I think the rehabilitation process is just really important" with participants identifying that greater access to therapeutic services would help promote their risk management skills. Seidler wonders whether the Register could be used in a different way, where therapeutic interventions play a part.

Theme 5 – Conclusions and Application to Practice

Continue to offer treatment to MCOSOs, when appropriate to their risk and need profile.

Links to general theories of desistance

A number of the research papers considered whether their findings were in line with wider themes found in those desisting from other types of offending and it is useful to review these

findings here too. Consideration was given to whether the results of the studies were in line with the major perspectives in desistance for general offending: natural desistance, informal social control (e.g. a stable marriage and career), and cognitive transformation. Natural desistance was relevant for a small group in one study, with participants stating that they were too old to commit crime or to go to prison.

Two of the studies in this review presented data that were inconsistent with the theory of informal social control, including marriage not being a 'turning point' and narratives of 'settling down' as a way of transitioning out of criminal involvement being largely absent. It is worth noting, however, that participants did express a desire for a partner and employment, and relationships were still clearly significant for participants' sense of self, with many of one desisting sample describing lengthy relationship histories. However there were significant barriers to them achieving these goals. Emergent themes mostly related to how recent policies had negatively impacted on the participants' ability to find housing, work and relationships. The way in which relationships impacted on them was more in line with Braithwaite's (1989) idea of reintegrative shaming, where significant others shame the behaviour of the individual, rather than them as a person. Those who were desisting from offending were able to accept a non-offending identity and move on from their past actions. Alienation was more prevalent in a potentially active group; this reflected the lack of connections the men had with other people, which again links back to social support and its importance.

Cognitive transformation was important within the context of treatment for the majority of participants. The themes of redemption, communion and agency, from Maruna's (2001) work, were particularly prevalent in desisters. Neutralisations were shown to assist desistance from sexual offending by allowing for the negotiation of stigma and rejection of the 'sex offender' label, allowing for a non-offending, prosocial identity to develop. In Hulley (2016), seven narratives showed evidence of neutralisation techniques e.g. one showed removal of responsibility, and 'condemnation of the condemners'. The other six showed denial of responsibility, and blamed offending on various psychological/mental health issues, which they saw as no longer relevant for them. Neutralisations provided participants with a way to negotiate stigma and achieve a positive self-identity. They also prevented the 'sex offender' label being adopted as their master status (Becker, 1963/2018).

In contrast, for the majority of Harris' (2017) sample, long-term desistance from sexual offending was occurring in the absence of cognitive transformation, or a desire to get help and change their behaviour. Six of the eight men who had been released less than nine years ago were neutralising their offending behaviour; only one of seven released for longer than nine years was doing so, and two of this group indicated that neutralisations had been part of their past. This suggests that time may eliminate the need for neutralisations, however desistance is described by Hulley (2016) as a lengthy process; only one participant in this study, who had been released almost 15 years ago, was identified as having achieved secondary desistance i.e. having assumed a role or identity of a 'changed person' (Maruna et al., 2004, p.274). It may be more difficult to use neutralisations if there are constant reminders of why MCOSOs cannot or do not fit into society, such as the problems with accommodation and employment that have been described. It would also be harder to see offending as being in the past and separate from a current identity, if other people in the community are labelling individuals as being currently risky.

In those studies which used comparison groups of men who could not yet be said to be desisting, due to the shorter period of time since their offending, negative themes such as contamination and external locus of control were themes that clearly identified the potentially active group, compared with more positive themes of redemption, communion and agency (Maruna, 2001) in the desisting group. Alienation was also more prevalent in the potentially active men; this reflected the lack of connections they had with others, which again links back to social support and its importance. In summary, the above studies suggest that the pathways to desistance for those convicted of sexual offending can be different to those convicted of other types of offences.

Discussion

This review synthesised qualitative research relevant to the question: what do MCOSOs see as the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending? No other similar reviews were found prior to completing it and the aim was to consider what is currently known about this topic. There are clearly gaps in terms of answering the specific research question. None of the studies directly aimed to address this question, and participants did not necessarily explicitly speak about stigma, however the review has yielded useful results about the experiences of men in this situation, many of which are relevant to stigma as well.

The findings of these studies indicate that there are numerous barriers to those with sexual offence convictions reintegrating into society. These barriers can all impact on their identity as well as potentially on their ability to continue to desist from reoffending. What helps these individuals is treatment services, support from partners, family and relevant professionals, the ability to work, their behaviour being shamed rather than their identity, and having agency over their own choices. Being on a 'sex offender' register in itself was reported to have some benefits but mostly costs, associated with obtaining many of the above.

In terms of applying this information to supporting MCOSOs, there are some additional ideas given within these papers. Seidler (2010) advocates for ensuring that the resettlement needs of 'offenders' as well as the protection of the public are considered when assessing current systems, and argues that neither of these needs are currently being met. This would appear to be supported by the research described here. Russell et al. (2013) suggests increasing the focus on reintegration planning into treatment programmes. It is clear that increasing access to work, and social support networks, in particular, would be beneficial in supporting 'ex-offenders' to build and maintain their desisting identities. Harris' (2017) study indicates that there is further work to be done on exploring what helps MCOSOs to desist; Harris' sample were desisting despite not fitting theories of internal desistance, and may have been using other ways to maintain their emotional wellbeing in the face of the stigma they experienced (Giordano et al., 2002).

Limitations of this review

In terms of definitions, there are of course inherent problems with defining anyone as 'desisting' as this will be always be based partly on self-report. In the studies cited here, desisting participants were those who had been conviction-free for five years or more (McAlinden et al., 2016) or who were rated on a number of situational dynamic risk items (Farmer et al., 2012). However, what is clear is that those described as desisting had not been convicted of further offences.

Three out of eight studies (Farmer et al., 2012, McAlinden et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2013) specified that all participants had offended against children, the majority of Harris' (2017) sample had offended against children, and the other four simply described their participants as having committed sexual offences. It is therefore unclear whether there would be

significant differences between those who had offended against adults, or had a variety of victims, and if this impacted on the stigma they felt or their intentions to desist.

All the studies included in the review were from English-speaking countries, and only covered four different countries. The treatment of MCOSOs and how stigma affects them and desistance may be very different elsewhere. Even within these four places, the restrictions on participants varied significantly. Further reviews should therefore include literature written in languages other than English and search a wider range of databases than the ones used here.

All of the studies in this review were from published articles. This was done due to time constraints, as the articles which were located on initial pilots which were unpublished were all thesis documents and so contained substantially more information. There is therefore the danger of publication bias; studies finding nothing significant can be less likely to be published.

This review, and indeed the research that follows, only included the experiences of men. It will also be important to consider if the factors involved in desistance and reintegration differ for other genders. If legislation changes in the future, for example rules around the 'sex offender' register, it would also be important to consider how this impacts on those managed via this tool, and any benefits or hindrances to their remaining offence-free.

Implications for further research

Given the large numbers of MCOSOs who are/will be returning to live in the community following a prison sentence, it is vital to understand what helps them to desist from reoffending, and how they can be supported in resettling after release. This has implications for not only the individuals, but also potential victims, and professionals supporting them, in custody and the community. While this study sought to consider one aspect of this experience, i.e. the role of stigma in desistance, it is important that other factors are also investigated. In particular, asking men who are themselves in this situation will aid in considering their actual experiences, and what would be beneficial for them, rather than imposing ideas onto them. The following chapter includes results from interviews with men with convictions for sexual offences, living in the community, and attempts to do just that.

Update to structured review

An identical search was run again in October 2020, for articles published in the two preceding years, to ensure that any more recent publications were not missed. This yielded an additional 95 results, one on Psych Articles, one on Psych Info and 93 on Criminal Justice Abstracts. After reviewing the titles, 67 were excluded. On reviewing the remaining 28 abstracts, a further 25 were removed, leaving three full additional texts to be added to this review: Cooley and Sample (2018), Richards et al. (2020) and ten Bensel and Sample (2019).

Richards et al. (2020) emphasised the importance of cultural factors in narratives of desistance and identity, and Maruna's (2016) assertion that 'redemption scripts are not written in a vacuum' (p.294). Their Australian sample were 11 Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islanders, who were participating in a cultural mentoring programme for those convicted of sexual offending. Using thematic analysis, Richards et al. (2020) identified the following narratives of desistance: 'reconnecting to the true warrior self', 'trauma, loss and the bad 'it'', and personal efficacy and projectivity. With regards to stigma specifically, they suggest that for this group of men, it may be extremely difficult to claim an individual good or unspoiled self following conviction; instead they have chosen a mythical version of this which fits with their cultural identity, therefore making use of available cultural scripts.

The study by ten Bensel and Sample (2019) used thematic analysis to consider how 112 men on a 'sex offender' register in Nebraska, USA, use social media to create informal social networks, reduce loneliness and feel more empowered by, for example, being able to find out information they need themselves. This was an important finding since social media has more commonly been cited as facilitating sexual offending, and in Nebraska the law had changed various times to prohibit, and then allow, access to the internet for those with sexual offence convictions. The authors advocate for helping those who are on registers to increase their social networking, such as having more self-help groups online, further empowering them but also increasing social capital for a marginalised group.

Cooley and Sample (2018) used qualitative comparative analysis on two longitudinal case studies to consider the difference between desistance from sexual offending and just not reoffending. The participant who they considered had experienced cognitive transformation and was truly 'desisting' had reportedly embraced his identity as a 'sex offender' and

disclosed it to people he met rather than them find out on their own, and talks as if he is in recovery from sexual offending. The participant who was not reoffending also likened his offending to an addiction but had not accessed any 'sex offender' treatment, instead stating that he had 'retrained' his mind. He did not talk to others about his offences and saw himself as returning to the life he had before they happened. He did not identify as a 'sex offender' but as a 'registered citizen' who was increasingly frustrated with his lifetime registration status.

Applications to practice

- An individual's cultural background should be taken into account when supporting them post release, such as how they may choose to see their experiences and tell their story, as well as what desistance looks like to them.
- Consideration should be given to the benefits of internet access and social networking, alongside the potential risks or concerns.
- Further research could consider whether it 'matters' if someone is desisting or not reoffending, if the outcome is the same in terms of no further offences, as well as what supports each of these different processes.

Chapter 5 – "I live a half-life now": Negotiating the 'sex offender' label. An interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Introduction

Increasing numbers of people in the United Kingdom are on the 'Sex Offender' Register, having been convicted of sexual offences, 60,294 on 31/03/2019 (MOJ Statistics Bulletin, 2019). Those on the register are subject to a variety of restrictions (Home Office, 2018), including having to notify the police of their address and bank details, disclosing their offending to people they are in contact with, and their employment options and movements being limited. Being on a 'sex offender' register can contribute to a variety of collateral consequences, including problems finding work, losing relationships, anticipating and in some cases experiencing harassment (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), as well as negative emotional consequences such as stress, shame and hopelessness (Lasher & McGrath, 2012).

Men on registers have also described being publicly labelled and stigmatized and believing the public saw all 'sex offenders' as violent and dangerous (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) was also applied to their families. Being labelled and publicly vilified can change a person's view of their own self. An area of exploration for this study was how individuals experiencing stigma and negative labelling were still able to build and or maintain a positive sense of self, while also having lots of restrictions on their lives. Previous research exploring the experiences of those on 'sex offender' registers has been limited, with many of the studies completed having focused on the practical and psychological impacts of the associated restrictions (Burchfield & Mingus 2008; Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Tewskbury & Lees, 2006; Tewksbury 2007). There has been a lack of research with this participant group in the UK particularly, with more published studies focusing on US samples where restrictions can be quite different (Matson & Lieb, 1997 provide an overview of some of the registration requirements). Public attitudes towards those with sexual offence convictions are largely negative (Hogue, 1993, cited in Day et al., 2014; King & Roberts, 2017; Levenson, Brannon et al., 2007; Willis et al., 2010) so exploring their experiences may not be a priority for many researchers. However, even without considering the well-being of individuals on 'sex offender' registries and their families, there is little evidence that the types of restrictions placed on those on registries actually prevent

reoffending (e.g. Bowen et al., 2016; Tewksbury, 2007) and difficulties reintegrating can in fact impact on risk of reoffending (e.g. Tewksbury, 2007).

Aim

This study therefore aimed to explore the experiences of men who have served prison sentences for sexual offences, following their release into the community in England, with particular emphasis on the impact of being on a 'sex offender' register on their sense of identity and how they viewed themselves.

Method

Participants

As described in chapter 4, nine participants took part in this study (see table 5.1 for details). All were men who had been convicted of a sexual offence (MCOSOs), served a prison sentence for this, and had since been released back into the community. Access to participants was granted by the London National Probation Services Research Committee and the Safer Living Foundation, a charity which supports those convicted of/at risk of committing sexual offences. Participants were recruited via Probation Officers and other relevant mental health or support professionals working with this population.

The participants were aged between 24 and 62, with a mean age of 42. Their offences included possession of indecent images of children, attempted rape, and rape. Their victims included children and adults, both known and unknown. Participants were not asked to disclose their sexuality, however one disclosed that he was gay, and another spoke of sexual attraction towards both men and women. One participant disclosed being a foreign national. Three participants mentioned having accessed Circles of Support, a charity which supports those with convictions for sexual offences.

Table 5.1

Table 5.1: Participant Information

Participant number	Age	Ethnicity	Conviction(s)	Time spent in prison	Time since release
1	52	British Asian	2 counts of rape, against stranger adult females	Just over 18 years in prison. IPP	Unknown
2	26	Black British	Attempted rape against adult known woman	2.5 years	Unknown
3	24	White British	Sexual assault and attempted rape – stranger - adult woman	4.5 years including 1 recall	4 months
4	32	White British	One count rape and nine counts inciting a minor to engage in sexual activity – male victim	7 years 2 months in prison. IPP	1 year 4 months
5	62	White British	Indecent assault against male child and female child	8 years total in prison, including one recall	4 years
6	58	White Irish gypsy	Sexual assault, committing a sexual act in the presence of a child, inciting a child to engage in sexual activity Three female child victims (one family member)	IPP 9-year tariff	Been out under a year
7	35	White British	Breach SOPO Previously: indecent assault, indecent images Female children	Most recently 18 months in prison. Previously 3-year community sentence	Been out a year
8	35	White British	Rape, 1x sexual assault, 3 x digital penetration Known female child (cousin), 12 years old	3 years 9mths in prison	Been out for over a year
9	55	White British	Indecent images. Previous convictions for attempted rape and indecent assault against known child victims	Did 9 years in prison. IPP	Been out 2.5 years

Data collection

The data were collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews, which lasted 1-2 hours. Interviews were conducted in private rooms, in a Probation Office, Approved Premises hostel, forensic mental health facility or charity office. All data were recorded via Dictaphone then stored securely on a password protected computer. As part of gaining informed consent, participants were made aware that any risk of harm to themselves or others, or any disclosure of non-convicted offending would be reported to police or Probation as appropriate. They were also informed that, other than these exceptions, their interview data would not be shared outside of the research team, and would be fully anonymised when written up for this thesis and any associated publications.

The purpose of the interviews was to learn about participants' experiences since being released from prison with a sexual offence conviction. Question topics included experiences of being on the 'sex offender' register, disclosing offending, views of self, and what helps/hinders reintegration and identity management. A full list of questions is in Appendix 6. Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss anything else which they felt was important or relevant.

Ethics and consent

Research approvals were obtained from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) regional Probation research committee, and Nottingham Trent University research ethics committee. The research was designed and carried out in accordance with British Psychological Society codes of ethics and conduct, and the Health and Care Professions Council standards.

Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1995) was chosen because its fundamental principles fit well with the study aims: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology (Husserl [1931], 2004, then Heidegger, 1962, cited in Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) refers to paying attention to the experiences of individuals, as they perceive or talk about them, and what makes those experiences unique (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Hermeneutics emphasises understanding an individual's perceptions and how they experience an

issue (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2001) and considering how the participant themselves are interpreting their experience, which the researcher then also tries to interpret (double hermeneutics, Smith & Osborn, 2008). Finally, ideography refers to completing in-depth analysis of individual cases and perspectives, within their unique contexts, before making any generalised statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This study aimed to explore the unique experiences of MCOSOs living in the community and to look at how they interpreted these experiences in-depth, within the context they were in. The rationale for using IPA for this section of the analysis was described in chapter 4.

Results

This chapter will present and explore the three superordinate themes derived from the IPA analysis. These are shown in table 5.2 along with the subordinate themes. The superordinate themes described were largely meaningful to all of the participants; all participants described how being on the 'sex offender' register had impacted on what they were able to do, alongside affecting their interactions with others and in some cases their views of themselves. Each theme identified will be reviewed separately.

Table 5.2

Table 5.2: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Negotiating identity as a 'sex offender'	Battling with the label of 'sex offender'
	Sex offenders are the worse cases on earth
	Fear of identity being exposed
	Acceptance of self
Negative impact of register/restrictions	It's a hurdle
	There's no way to build up trust
	Restrictions are not fit for purpose
	Negative psychological impact
Living with stigma and restrictions	Having a purpose
	Avoiding 'risky' situations
	Support from others can help

Superordinate theme one: Negotiating identity as a 'sex offender'

A particularly salient superordinate theme for participants was negotiating their identity: who they were, who they are now and how others see them. Maruna (2001) stated that those who are desisting may reject their offending identity and consider themselves to have been 'good' all along ('making good'); they can then reconcile their past behaviour with who they are now, and still maintain a positive identity. Some of the participants here were still really struggling with working out where their offending fit with their current identity, suggesting that they needed more support with this.

Battling with the label of 'sex offender'

Participants had thought about how they saw themselves, and how others saw them, and considered whether the label 'sex offender' fit with this.

> *I view myself as somebody that's committed a sex offence…which happened to be against (pause) children…Ok, so that's that…right? I don't view myself as a sex offender and I don't view myself as a paedophile…* (Ptpt 6, extract 1)

> *Well yeah, you know I am (a 'sex offender')…yeah you know I committed a crime, no point in hiding it or sugar coating it…if you want to get the treatment, you know, you want to try and help yourself…you've got to come to terms with what you've done and…what you are…if you don't come to terms with what you've done and what you are, no matter how much you do, it just won't help…you're still in denial…*
> *Interviewer: Yeah that's a good point, but would you think of yourself as someone who's committed a sexual offence or someone who is a 'sex offender' or was a 'sex offender'?*
> *Ptpt: Er, I would say someone that has committed a sexual offence and a recovering sex offender…you know it's like alcoholism…you're never fully recovered, you're still recovering* (Ptpt 7, extract 2)

Participants had battled with this issue, with some going back and forth on whether they considered themselves to be 'sex offenders' still, if they recognised that label at all, or what it meant for them. Both participants 6 and 7 made a distinction between someone who had committed a sexual offence and someone who *was* a 'sex

offender'. Distancing themselves from the label (Winder & Gough, 2010) may have helped to avoid internalising the shame associated with their offences. Participant 7 however then referred to himself as a 'recovering sex offender' indicating that 'sex offender' was still part of his identity, albeit one 'in recovery.

> *Well I'm a fucking rapist, aren't I?*
> *Interviewer: Is that how you think of yourself?*
> *Ptpt: Erm sometimes yeah…sometimes yeah, if I'm really negative towards myself do you know what I mean, yeah, and I think it separates me, I mean I am different do you know what I mean, I do have a lot more conditions on my life do you know what I mean…you know I have to do this thing, you know you read the papers do you know what I mean and you get your view on what sex offenders are and stuff like this, you speak to people, you know someone told me that if son grew up to be a sex offender they'd kill 'em, hearing stuff like this* (Ptpt 8, extract 3)

Participant 8 had particularly struggled with considering how to think of himself and what that meant to him and he expressed a lot of negative emotions about his view of himself and his situation. As he states in extract 3, he felt separated from others by the label, including the media perception of 'sex offenders' as well as the restrictions on him. This separation made it difficult not to think about himself negatively, as he was very aware that people saw him in this way. When asked what he had learned about himself through his experiences, he stated:

> *that I didn't do enough therapy, and that I can't cope with being a sex offender, do you know what I mean, I couldn't, that's what I've learned really, and that like obviously it didn't go down far enough do you know what I mean, the level of depravity when I was in prison, going to prison because when I came out I went back onto heroin, do you know what I mean, so I learned that obviously going to prison for raping a child still isn't rock bottom for me…and there's still much further places I can travel, go down to, do you know what I mean I can use to ruin my life even more (crying) and to hurt people around me you know…I suppose I learned that you know* (Ptpt 8, extract 4)

As evidenced in extract 4, participant 8 found it particularly upsetting to realise that for him, his offence had still not been 'rock bottom', but this realisation in itself had been an important reflection for him. Although not explored in the interview, it would be interesting to know if he saw a connection between his feelings about this

offending and relapsing back into substance use when he left prison. Also notable in this extract is the use of the word 'depravity', an extremely emotive word which illustrates the strength of feeling participant 8 had about his experiences in prison as well as his realisation that he still had even worse places he could go.

> *if I continually think of myself as a rapist I'm going to feel bad about it but at the end of the day I did commit rape so I am a rapist…so I don't really mind…but yeah someone who's committed a sexual offence is probably the best way of saying it do you know what I mean…cos I wouldn't consider myself a paedophile or a rapist moving forward…or anything like that, you know I would consider myself just somebody who's done something that was fucking ..unbelievably…er anyway do you know what I mean…so I don't, but I understand that those views can and do do have an impact…you know if I really, if I sit and tear myself apart do you know what I mean, calling myself a rapist and you know all things that come with it…that is going to impact on me, so I don't do that…but yeah someone who's committed a sex offence is probably the best way of labelling myself* (Ptpt 8, extract 5)

Participant 8 was trying to be pragmatic about the labels used for himself and to not let them affect him. However, this was clearly still difficult for him, particularly when, as can be seen in extract 5, he could not even bring himself to describe his offence out loud and had to move on.

> *I find it difficult to understand that there are people about that erm don't ignore what I've done…Ok? But don't actually see that as the whole picture of me…they take me for me…because I wouldn't and I I I'll just talk straight here, if it was me, if I was in their position…I would have nothing to do with me…yeah yeah so I would have nothing to do with me so it's a good job there are (laughs) people about that are actually erm I don't know more forgiving more understanding…erm because otherwise (laughs) I'd have no-one to talk to, would I* (Ptpt 6, extract 6)

Participant 6 talked about how being on the register made him different from other people and admitted that he would not accept himself if in someone else's shoes. He did not consider himself worthy of acceptance but was glad that not everyone was like him and could see the disadvantages of his approach. However, those he referred to as being understanding of him and willing to talk to him were professionals. He was perhaps choosing not to focus on part of their job being to interact with him positively, but nonetheless the acceptance from them was important to him.

well it makes you different because you have to sign and they don't…when you move, so yes from that perspective, but in general thinking, no…no, it's only because of the things that you have to do…yeah that makes it different, but I don't feel any different because I'm on the register, from yourself for example (Ptpt 9, extract 7)

In contrast, participant 9 emphasised how being on the register did not make him different from anyone else. He identified only the practical aspects of being on the register as different, rather than any psychological differences between him and others.

most things I can forgive erm I can't forgive myself for what I've done…Ok I'll never forgive myself, when people say oh well like that means you're dragging yourself down and you won't get on with your life, no it doesn't…no it doesn't as I say I'm not define, I will define myself by…six months of my life…Ok I won't define myself and I'll do my best that other people won't define me that way neither…Ok and most people don't…cos a lot of people I talk to don't know and those who do know me know and they're not defining me by it so I'm not going to define myself by it but there's a difference between defining yourself and going this is me…and like saying oh well I can forgive myself for what I've done, I can't forgive myself for what I've done…no I can't and so yeah it probably has a lot to do with that yeah (Ptpt 6, extract 8)

Linked to the issue of identity as an 'offender' or 'ex-offender', two participants talked about forgiveness. Both participants 6 and 7 felt it was important not to forgive themselves for their actions, as that would equal acceptance of their actions. Nonetheless, they wanted to give themselves a second chance, not define themselves by their actions, and were able to maintain a balance between these two positions.

I don't care what you've been in for, I look to you, as you know the person you are…I don't care if you raped or murdered a two year old…you know, as long as you're willing to show remorse and you're willing to get treatment for it…you know and you're working on it,…then I will take you as you are…you can't forgive the person for what they've done, and stuff, but you've gotta give them that chance
Interviewer: Do you think, you know you were saying about giving yourself a second chance,…do you think you have forgiven yourself for things that you regret?
Ptpt: Oh no, no, I'll never forgive myself for what I've done…yeah you never forgive yourself for what you've done…people say you've got to forgive yourself, no…cos has the victim forgiven you? No, you've ruined that victim's life potentially…You know so you can't forgive yourself but you gotta have it

> *there, it's gotta be there to help you…No, cos if you forgive yourself you could go and do it again tomorrow* (Ptpt 7, extract 9)

Participant 7 used a very extreme example of being willing to accept anyone as they are, perhaps to be a contrast to his own offending. However, the underlying message was the same as participant 6: people should be given a chance but forgiveness for such actions was inappropriate. He had however reconciled these feelings; even though he did not think he could be forgiven, he did nonetheless think people should be accepted for who they are. He saw forgiveness and acceptance of the person as a whole as two very different things.

> *Er I didn't realise straight away about myself but I recognise now, and before then, that I'm always going to have sexual urges towards children…but I'm learning how to cope with them, deal with them…you know, cos you'll always have those urges…against children, I'll always have those urges, so you've gotta recognise them* (Ptpt 7, extract 10)

> *You know because I had that interest (in children) …and it doesn't go away…it's being able to control it* (Participant 9, extract 11).

Participants 7 and 9 also referred to their risks of offending being ongoing, despite desisting and having no plans to reoffend. Participant 7 interestingly referred to always having urges 'against' children; this could indicate an understanding of the link between his urges and potential sexual violence, or that he saw himself and children on opposite sides of a battle he was still trying to win. Stigma and restrictions which affect integration can communicate a message of 'irredeemability' and remaining at risk of reoffending always (Kemshall, 2008). Seeing risk as life-long or ongoing could be contrary to having a new desisting identity, as it assumes ongoing 'deviant' interests. However, it could instead be seen as complementary: sexual interests are part of the individual's history and makeup, however they are managing this effectively and therefore desisting. This approach is often encouraged in treatment programmes i.e. accepting ongoing risk so it can then be managed. The usefulness of this approach will vary depending on the individual's offending history and type.

> *No cos you live a life of misery, not misery, loneliness…I'm glad I'm not 20 or 30…Do you know what I mean? Cos they've got no chance, they can never*

> *have a kid…Cos they think they're gonna fiddle with their own kid, it's just…But you go and murder someone, you can get married and have kids yourself…But you know, they took a life, it's but it happens doesn't it, they come out after, we let 'em out and murderers reoffend you know what I mean…so there's good people who wants to try and go straight and there's bad people who don't wanna go straight…That's why I think they should look at different people and say…Right we're gonna give him some slack because he's doing quite well, you're always on the radar* (Ptpt 5, extract 12)

In extract 12, participant 5 distinguishes between 'good people' who want to try to desist, and 'bad people' who will continue offending, and in doing so established himself as one of the 'good' ones who actually wanted to change. Hochstetler et al. (2010) similarly found that those had committed violent offences tended to define others as 'authentically' violent, but saw themselves as having acted violently for other reasons.

> *They call us sex offenders but you don't have sex no more because of it, cos you can't get a relationship, unless you go and get a prostitute or something…which you know, that's even breaking your licence condition…so you're living like a monk sort of thing…cos of the fear …*
> *I think to be honest with you, I've been inside and out and a lot of sex offenders who reoffended couldn't get relationships so they want sex so they go back to touching a kid up*
> *Interviewer: Back to offending?*
> *Participant: Back to offending, because we're all like animals, we all wanna have sex life…* (Ptpt 5, extract 13)

Participant 5 focused on the impact of his conviction and the label of 'sex offender' on his ability to have future sexual relationships. It is interesting that he talked about fear impacting on his decisions; he feared breaking his licence conditions by seeking a sexual relationship, but also believed that having no opportunities for sex had led to others he knew reoffending. This suggests that perhaps he was worried that whatever he decided, there was a risk of reoffending, a feared possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This way of thinking could also be a way to absolve those who had reoffended of responsibility for their actions; if they are animals, could they truly control themselves? More than that though, he felt a loss of identity due to not being able to have sex anymore, as he saw this as a basic human need, one he was no longer entitled to. It is also interesting that he referred to everyone as 'animals' here; while the context is different, it was the same participant who really appreciated being

treated as a 'human being' (described in extract 38). Perhaps he had divided those who had not changed (animals) and those who had, like himself (human beings), as another way to separate himself from his past actions. However, he worried about reverting to his 'animal' instincts.

> *it's erm it's just kind of like punctuation really isn't it, the moment you get sentenced...that's it…you've been convicted, it's not conviction it's convicted…it's already passed, and same as ex-offender…I'm not an offender…I'm an ex-offender…we're here to be rehabilitated but you keep reminding us that this is what we were (*Ptpt 4, extract 14)

Participant 4 felt that he should not be treated according to his offending. As well as linking to how others should see him, he spoke about having asked prison staff to change paperwork, such as application forms, to require a 'name' rather than 'offender name'. This would have benefited him in his own self-perception as well as perhaps how he thought others related to him. This is a valid point; paperwork in prison often refers to 'offender'. In recent years, there has been more of an emphasis on a 'rehabilitative culture' within prisons (Mann et al., 2018), with establishments reviewing their procedures and paperwork to recognise that labelling people as the thing they do not want to be is counterproductive. The above suggestion by participant 4 would be a good example of a way to help people develop or maintain a desisting identity, as well as to encourage staff to also see them more holistically than just 'offenders'.

> *(regarding people finding out) Erm I wouldn't say concerns, I just think it's irrelevant erm but you know I've got a few mates from work that we all go out for a drink or a meal as a group…and I don't feel that I cou-, that they need to know…erm, you know that's something that I've done in my past…they've only got to know me from who I am now…erm so I've chose not to bring my past up…*
> *Interviewer: do you ever worry that they would find out even if you don't disclose?*
> *Ptpt: Oh yeah I mean it's always on my mind you know for those I haven't told, erm but I just hope that kind of by that point they kind of know me for a while…and got to know me as a person, and if it comes up I just hope they'll give me a benefit of the doubt…erm let me explain and I'll just simply say it you know that's my past…you kind of met me now…didn't feel like my past of any relevance* (Ptpt 4, extract 15)

Participant 4 had also decided not to let his new friends know about his past; Winnick & Bodkin (2009) referred to this as a secrecy strategy, 'passing' as non-stigmatized. Interestingly, participant 4 appeared to start to say that he did not feel that he could tell his friends, but then revised it to feeling that they do not need to know. To protect himself against potentially losing these friends, it makes sense for him to tell himself that they do not need to know and that he is a different person now. However, he did acknowledge that it was 'always on (his) mind' whether they might find out another way. These friendships were therefore difficult to navigate, getting closer to people but always with a barrier that cannot be crossed for fear of losing the relationship.

> *when I'm, when I'm, when I'm at work or going to work, I don't get people stopping or asking me questions…so I feel like I'm fitting in…but it does in a way like, knowing that I'm on the register…like, it's just it's just like a little tag innit…yeah I know inside but other people ain't aware of* (Ptpt 3, extract 16)

Work, for participant 3 who had been able to gain employment since leaving prison, helped maintain a positive self-identity, even if underneath he still felt different from others.

> *obviously as soon as you say you're an ex-sex offender, that's it (laughs)…you most probably won't get the job, but luckily erm I just tried everything, like I applied for any job, erm, and luckily I found a place that accepted me as a (*profession redacted for anonymity*)* (Ptpt 4, extract 17)

Participant 4 had also found work to be really helpful, after struggling to get a job initially. The evidence for whether work plays a role in desistance from sexual reoffending is mixed. Some MCOSOs were in employment when they offended so work was not a protective factor for them (Harris, 2014), and in some cases will have been linked to access to victims. However, as participants 3 and 4 highlighted above, work was important in their self-identity and feeling accepted. These factors may have a knock-on effect in desistance in terms of having an identity which is inconsistent with reoffending (Maruna, 2001).

> *I think er a big hurdle can be when people are erm (pause) letting you know one way or the other that look, you know, I'm being nice and professional to you but ultimately erm (pause) again for want of a better terms, you're not worthy, you're not this or whatever…well I am…if you can't take me for who I am today at this moment then that's wrong…I think it's just I think it's*

wrong (labelling) and erm you know, doesn't allow people to grow and move on (Ptpt 1, extract 18)

Consistent with his narrative across the interview, participant 1 felt people should treat him based on his present, not his past, but had experienced felt stigma from others (Herek, 2007, 2009) and saw this as a 'hurdle' he had to overcome (extract 39). He wanted the opportunity to move on.

I mean I'm asking them to judge me for who I am…and hopefully they're judging me and hopefully what I'm showing them and <u>am</u> is a positive person…yeah, ok, that goes hand in hand with whatever they're gonna have read up about me…and what I've been telling them… I hope they are thinking well that's a bit horrific that's a bit mad, I hope they are…because if they're not then I'm gonna be questioning them and thinking… did that not disturb you? (Ptpt 1, extract 19)

While participant 1 described others as seeing him as not worthy, he referred to his offence as horrific, rather than himself. This approach again emphasises his offence as a mistake but it just being one aspect of him as an individual, thus detaching himself from a stigmatized identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). He presented his offence as something he had done but not a defining feature, or master status (Becker, 1963/2018) which likely helped him to maintain his self-esteem. He also positioned himself here as similar to professionals, i.e. they should both find his offence disturbing.

"Sex offenders are the worse cases on earth"

While participant 5 had developed his views on 'sex offenders' over time, having believed/believing that they, and by extension he, were the 'worse cases on earth' was difficult for him to deal with.

unfortunately sex offenders are the worse cases on earth, people look at 'em
Interviewer - do you think that though? Or is that just what people say?
Ptpt: everyone does, everyone, you talk to
Interviewer - yeah
Ptpt: we're the worst lot, we're worse off than anyone
Interviewer - but I mean do you think that they're the worst case on earth?
Ptpt: I don't so much now, but I used to (Ptpt 5, extract 20)

Participant 5's admission that he does not think of himself as the worst case 'so much' now indicates that he still does sometimes; this was another ongoing battle, to maintain a positive view of himself and not let other's perceptions influence his own self-perception. There appears to be hope here, however, that he was currently winning this battle more often than not. Lester (2008) stated that the label of 'sex offender' is the 'most damning label in modern society'; the public has more negative attitudes towards those who have committed sexual offences than other types (Willis et al., 2010). A number of participants were clearly aware of this and some referenced the fact that those who have killed someone are not seen as negatively as those who have committed sexual offences. Indeed, there is no register for those who have committed violent offences or offences against intimate partners, where rates of reconviction are higher. The fact that only those with sexual offences are monitored in this way sends a message to the public, but also the 'ex-offenders' themselves, that they are the 'worst' 'offenders', and need to be closely monitored so that they do not reoffend. Seidler (2010) also found that Australian MCOSOs highlighted how they were the only types of 'ex-offenders' subject to a register and saw this as an additional punishment. By comparing themselves to those who had killed someone, perhaps participants were also trying to establish another outgroup, which they considered to be 'worse' than them (Hochstetler et al., 2010).

> *people hate us more, I think people can tolerate a lifer who's killed someone…than someone who's touched a kid up or something, raped a woman…or someone who you know does any sex offence…people wanna burn us by the slate (sic) like witches and kill us all* (Ptpt 5, extract 21)

> *someone told me that if son grew up to be a sex offender they'd kill 'em, hearing stuff like this…you know so it's like even my own mother said she'd rather I murdered (the victim)* (Ptpt 8, extract 22)

Both participants 5 and 8 had internalised the idea that people would want them dead due to their offending, and that they could have done nothing worse than their offences. The comparison with witches is an interesting one. It perhaps conveys not only the way in which suspected witches were treated but also the modern-day meaning of a 'witch hunt' implying a targeted attack which can be disproportionate with the actions of the person being 'hunted'.

> *So when someone says oh you're a sex offender, you're a child fiddler, you're a thing…that kind of knocks you for six…because you know you are and that'll be with you for the rest of your life…but you don't wanna be thinking (inaudible) of it especially when you're trying to get on with your life…you don't wanna keep coming back to that, I mean you can never get away from it, you can never, you can never stop saying sorry…there's a time comes when you gotta stop saying sorry...and live a better life, so you're not gonna say sorry to anyone else…yeah if people kept saying to me you're a sex offender…it would get on my tits… I don't call myself sex offender now but I am a sex offender* (Ptpt 5, extract 23)

Participant 5 illustrated the difficulties in managing his identity and his changing view of it. He was distressed at being labelled a 'sex offender' and not being able to escape this label, but also irritated that other people kept relating to him in that way even when he agreed with them. This was a lot of conflicting views to hold at one time. Knowing how MCOSOs are viewed, and even thinking about himself in the same way to a certain extent, just made it more difficult for him to deal with being thought of in this way. Crocker and Major (1989) suggest that people can incorporate attitudes of how others see them into their view of themselves.

Fear of identity being exposed

Participants were concerned about others finding out about their offending, both the general public and people who were closer to them; this would be a community barrier as described by Burchfield and Mingus (2008). Consistent with other research (Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), participants were fearful of repercussions of their offending being discovered, even when the majority of then had not personally experienced victimisation. Information on the likelihood of reprisal is something that would be important to share with MCOSOs about to be released from prison, to put their worries into context and perhaps allay some of their fears.

> *I see it from both point of views why there is a register, and at the same time you know whereas I understand the rest of European doesn't acknowledge the sex offender register…erm, and I pers-my personal opinion, I kind of think like it could erm put me at risk…if the information leaked somehow…how are you going to protect us all? If that information leaks…* (Ptpt 4, extract 24)

Participant 4's question here was a valid concern, and a fear that he had no way to dispel. While he was trying to understand why others might want a register, he was understandably also focused on the risk to himself.

> *at the moment I feel like I'm exposed, I'm not far off the streets, you know the pavement, in the building…and I'm conscious, you know I've got to keep looking over my shoulder, is someone standing there…looking this direction, I have to be careful how I slide the forms back under…yeah, you know, just like you really feel dirty…nasty, you know you don't feel like a human, er you know you feel dehumanised…I've got to sort of like stake the area out, make sure no-one's around…we don't keep tracks on murderers, you know, and there's no list for murderers register* (Ptpt 4, extract 25)

Participant 4 also focused on a specific moment of fear, when having to attend the police station to sign the 'sex offender' register. While this was something he only had to do occasionally (usually once a year for those on the register), he made it clear that the fear of people finding out was something that bothered him 'all the time', illustrating the disproportionate amount of time he spent worrying about being found out. It would have been difficult to feel confident in his new identity with this fear hanging over him. It is also of interest that participant 4 described not feeling like a human during these times; perhaps his use of language here i.e. staking the area out, and 'keeping tracks' suggests he felt more like an animal and one who was being hunted.

> *I'm not really scared about people finding out as such erm but it does bother me all the time…you know what I mean, I'm not worried about them finding out because I know they can't find out…unless I tell them, you know what I mean, but I am worried about what will happen if I tell them, do you know what I mean like that sort of thing* (Ptpt 8, extract 26)

Similarly, participant 8 explained the complicated nature of his worries and how this preoccupied him.

> *you always gonna have fear that someone's gonna spot you, so that's always there…because you think oh something's gonna happen because I'm too happy, so that's always there but that's just me* (Ptpt 5, extract 27)

Likewise, participant 5 not only had a constant fear that someone would 'spot' him, he had also linked this to his happiness; if he was too happy, he would be punished

by someone exposing him for what he had done. Evans and Cubellis (2015) suggested that registered 'sex offenders' who thought about their registration status often, some even more than most days, also had a generally negative outlook on life and themselves.

> *it does concern me that erm people away from my inner circle…become aware of my, my offences, and I'm gonna change my name…I am fearful, erm for my life…that is the truth and that is not…(Probation Officer) will tell you that I'm not being disproportionate…cos of the area that I was from* (Ptpt 6, extract 28)

One of participant 6's ways to deal with the fear he had, for his life, was planning on changing his name when he was able to. This is not an unusual idea for people convicted of high-profile offences but does require a willingness to leave a big part of their identity behind, perhaps particularly for someone older, like participant 6 who was in his late 50s. On the other hand, changing his name may make it easier to separate out the part of himself who offended with who he is today.

Participant 2 was specifically worried about being accused of a further offence, even if he was not doing anything wrong and was making significant changes to his everyday life to try to avoid this.

> *I cannot even walk in the road, being nervous…er, like say I'm walking, there are two ladies next to each other…that's in the pavement and they're walking towards me, they're not gonna move, I have to move to other side of the road, or I have to stop and stand in the side to just let them, I be like a gate or somewhere standing next to the wall…to let them go, because they're not gonna move, because they own the road*
> *Interviewer: And why does that make you nervous?*
> *Ptpt: No, because if I push them I'll be arrested*
> *Interviewer: Ok, so you're sort of wary that*
> *Ptpt: There's no rights for me, say now if you fainted, you think I'm gonna come and help you? No! I'll stand here near the camera and say hi! My hands are empty, because I know what's gonna happen next* (Ptpt 2, extract 29)

Participant 2 gave a few examples of this in extract 29 and went as far as saying he had 'no rights'. His concerns in this area were partly linked to others trying to get him arrested, because they knew his history:

Let me tell you this, once you get shamed, you don't wanna stand in a mosque (crying),…it's like, one it just needs one person to know your case to fuck up your mosque day prayer
Interviewer: Right, what would happen, like what if someone knew
Ptpt: They'd think ah he done this, he done this, they can make up shit…because it's easy and you fight back, police officer will come arrest you
Interviewer: Right so you think people would challenge you on it or talk to you about it if they knew?
Ptpt: No of course if they wanna talk I will talk…I've got a big mouth (laughs) I can defend myself…I don't need no help, but even in a fight I can defend myself
Interviewer: Yeah but you worry about then the police getting called
Ptpt: Consequences is clear, crystal clear
Interviewer: Do you think you can have those conversations without it turning into a fight though?
Ptpt: No! because at the end of the day they will give you a cheap shot…because your hand is tied behind your back
Interviewer: Because they know your restrictions you mean?
Ptpt: Of course! (Ptpt 2, extract 30)

As well as believing that those around him may lie to get him arrested, participant 2 also emphasised his inability to do anything about it. Where he had earlier referenced his life as a fight, here he explained that his 'hand (was) tied behind his back' leaving him helpless to defend himself. The example below concerned participant 2 having asked his Offender Manager to check the cameras in our interview room were working before he agreed to participate:

She said why? I said just make sure 'cos I'm scared for myself…it's not because you're gonna abuse your power, nah nah nah nah, it's just my paranoia
Interviewer: Ok, so that must make it really difficult
Ptpt: To live!
Interviewer: Yeah cos there's not cameras everywhere are there or
Ptpt: That's the problem…that's why I don't leave my room
Interviewer: Ok so you tend to stay at home mostly
Ptpt: Not just at home, its locked up inside my room (Ptpt 2, extract 31)

This is an example of an interaction where participant 2 felt he had to raise an issue to allay his fears about further accusations being made against him, or to show that he was mindful of his risks and trying to manage them. Either way, being concerned

about further allegations was clearly impacting on his life and well-being. He had withdrawn socially as a result (Evans & Cubellis, 2015; Link et al., 1989) and was isolating himself to the point of spending most of his time alone in his room. This left no opportunities to reintegrate into the community, or improve his life, and likely only gave him more time to dwell on his fears and concerns. As he said here, it was difficult for him to live at all anymore.

Acceptance of self

One specific strategy used by participants, when considering how they were seen now, was acceptance of their past and using this as a way to keep moving forward.

> *I'm sorry for what I did, let it go (laughs), let's move on* (Ptpt 1, extract 32)

> *I don't forget where I've come from and all the stuff, er, before I go to sleep, when I wake up, I don't forget, I'm grateful for the fact that I'm out here, that I'm living again, people have given me an opportunity, another chance in life and things like that* (Ptpt 1, extract 33)

Participant 1 was asking to be allowed to move on as he regretted his offences; he had committed two rapes against adult strangers, so this is a difficult position to make in terms of the severity and rarity of these types of crimes, but he appreciated the positive aspects of his life and those people who had let him move on.

> *the fact is that people are what they are, they're gonna judge, they're gonna box you in, they're gonna stereotype you, they're gonna label you, they're gonna do whatever they've gotta do, that's their issue* (Ptpt 1, extract 34)

He also, however, accepted the fact that others are unlikely to see him in the same way and may continue to stereotype him. This is similar to some participants in Harris' (2014) study who had reported desisting due to their age; they did not see themselves as 'sex offenders' but had resigned themselves to continued stigma from others. They however tended to be pessimistic about their future, whereas participant 1 focused more on gratitude for finally being out of prison:

> *...I'm not saying I should go around erm with a monkey on my back, feeling guilty all the time because that would just be wrong and negative and could*

> *be dangerous too…but er yeah definitely I feel erm moments or erm if I look back on things and been regretful and remorseful…and er feeling I wish I had made better decisions at the time, I wish I knew then what I know now, that sort of attitude and things like that, erm, but again I look at that as a positive as it keeps me grounded, keeps me sort of aware of where I've come from, erm and how, when I wasn't so focused or whatever, that you know I did make mistakes, and therefore it's right that I keep myself a bit more careful, and you know, I tell everybody I say look, I'm glad you set these standards, but no my standards are higher anyway* (Ptpt 1, extract 35)

The way in which participant 1 described looking back at his past indicates that he regretted his decisions but was able to still see himself in an overall positive light. This is an example of participant 1 'making good' (Maruna, 2001) as it meant he could reconcile his past behaviour with who he is now; if he had known then what he knows now he would not have acted in the same way.

Participant 6 also maintained some optimism about the possibility of the public being positive towards him, in a clear example of looking on the bright side:

> *I remember seeing a statistic somewhere that one in 5 people believe that a erm convicted paedophile deserves a second chance…I remember seeing that statistic somewhere…and one in 5, that's quite a lot…that's like a fifth of the country, isn't it, you stand at a bus stop, there's 10 people at the bus stop…right 11 including me…so that means that amongst those 10 people there are erm 2 people that believe that because of the nature of my offences…I I erm deserve a second chance* (Ptpt 6, extract 36)

It is interesting that participant 6 chose to see even such small numbers in a positive light; as described below, he did not think what he had done was forgivable but still really appreciated others taking this stance. He appears to have cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957, cited in Maruna & Copes, 2005) about forgiveness meaning an acceptance of sexual offending, but still wanting acceptance himself. He therefore interpreted this statistic as positive and as there being hope for acceptance from others. Attitudes towards those with sexual offence convictions tend to be extremely negative (e.g. King & Roberts, 2017), however this extract does highlight the idea that there is potential for views to change if further information were available. Brown (1999), for example, found that the public were largely in favour of 'sex offender' treatment, when completed in prison rather than in their own community

which could suggest a belief in the ability of someone with a sexual offence conviction to change. Harris (2014) found that those participants who reported most optimism about their futures were those also most confident in their ability to not reoffend.

> *...I do have bad days but I always try to look at things positively, erm, and erm I can look at it oh my god they're picking on me and this that and the other…or I can say well hold on a minute, if I've moved into an area and they've got concerns, they may not have concerns about me, but it's the welfare of people around me…Ok, and I know what I've done and I'm ashamed of what I've done, erm, but I'm still a family man…and erm children and grandchildren, and if I was in that position, then I would want to know…there's certain things in life that are not forgivable…and what I did was one of those things…right? So I got through it two ways- the first way was by just sort of, I'm upset that they don't wanna know me but I'm proud at the same time that like what they're doing is they're following…the moral code and everything else that erm that I lived* (Ptpt 6, extract 37)

Participant 6 accepted responsibility for his actions and why society would feel negatively towards him, and therefore also the need to comply with the rules placed upon him. He had used perspective taking to consider what he would think about someone with a sexual offence being around his family. One of his victims was a family member but family was still important to him, and he could even see his rejection by them in a positive light. This seemed to be an effective way to deal with negative feelings about being isolated from his family, as even that was proof that he had raised his family in the right way. It perhaps also helped him to remember that he had lived by a 'moral code' at least at one time, and had not always been the person he was when he committed his offences.

Participant 5 was able to consider the positive aspects of his life but also, importantly, himself:

> *I like myself now…where I used to beat myself up for what I'd done, for what had happened to me, for hating the world…for looking the way I used to look, er I look at myself now, I've got a lovely flat, I've got money, I dress well, I s-everyone tells me I smell nice! (laughs) and every time I go to an AA meeting, everyone's there talking to me…And I, "I love the way you talk"*

and it's nice because you're treated like a human being…you know…accept each other and like (Ptpt 5, extract 38)

It is significant that participant 5 found it unusual to be treated like a 'human being' as this could be seen as the bare minimum of how someone could be treated, however this had clearly not always been his experience since his conviction.

Superordinate theme two: Negative Impact of 'Sex Offender' Register/Restrictions

Another particularly salient theme for participants was around the restrictions in place for them following their release from prison, and how these impact significantly on their daily life.

It's a hurdle

Participant 1 described the restrictions associated with being on the 'sex offender' register as a 'hurdle'. *"*

…it impacts your life obviously…it's erm one of those things that, when you're looking for jobs or anything else in life…whatever kind of thing you're trying to do, whether it's erm financially, if you're trying to look for something, if you're trying to get some insurance, if you're looking for erm erm a passport, if you're looking for anything…then you've got to declare it, and it's, it's a hurdle…it's a big hurdle (Ptpt 1, extract 39)

A hurdle indicates a possibility of getting over these restrictions as opposed to, for example, a barrier which might prevent moving forward. However, it also implies that action is needed; managing to get over the hurdles was proving difficult for participant 1 and the hurdles were largely out of his control. This applied to 'anything', so was a constant problem when trying to achieve things in his life.

the actual register hasn't really been any of a hindrance
Interviewer: Hmm hmm, what has been then, sort of implied there maybe in that answer?
Ptpt: Yeah (laughs) licence conditions
Interviewer: Ok yeah so what's your experience been of being on licence and the conditions you have?

> *Ptpt: Argh (sighs)…I'm trying to go on holiday…and trying to get where I want, you know a place, 'cos one of my conditions is I have to let them know where I'm going…and seek permission…getting that approval has been, having one place has been turned down, not that they turned it down, the place where I was staying wouldn't, doesn't, in their terms and conditions stated that they don't have sex offenders…that are on the register. …It's so slow…that's the frustration* (Ptpt 9, extract 40)

Participant 9 wanted to go to a caravan site; he understood why this might be a concern and wanted to go to an adult-only site, but the restriction still applied across the board, and every step of the process took a long time. This is another example of a hurdle, which appeared possible to overcome on initial investigation, but in reality was not.

The questions had been focused around the 'sex offender' register, based on previous literature indicating that this impacted on people both practically and psychologically (e.g. Burchfield and Mingus, 2008; Tewksbury, 2007) and an interest in whether being on the register was experienced as an additional label which impacted on those on it. However, some participants emphasised that it was not the register which had the largest impact for them, but the Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO, now Sexual Harm Prevention Order, SHPO) and licence conditions as this specified the restrictions on what they could do. As indicated by participant 9, it was these conditions, and not being on a register that reduced his opportunities to have a normal life:

> *I got another place, a council flat, which again you know Probation and the police have to approve, they both did…and then the day before I was due to move in, the council said no, cos…the supervisor of the area decided that it was too close to a school, even though the police were happy…so that was a bit of a knock back, so it's things like that which you know, we face…and it is sometimes hard to understand when, you know, for example, the people in authorities, who you know know you claiming something and then someone who doesn't know you just do a general*
> *Interviewer: override it higher up or something?*
> *Ptpt: Yeah that's quite frustrating* (Ptpt 9, extract 41)

Having got his hopes up about a potential new home, participant 9 found it difficult to understand that a supervisor of the accommodation who did not know him or his

circumstances could override the decision of the police involved in his case, and take this hope away at the last moment. This extract illustrates the extent of the lack of control that participant 9 had over his situation, even over a decision as personal as where he would live, the impact this had on his life, and what he was able to do. Participant 9 was trying to be patient with this situation but was finding it frustrating.

The types of consequences of registration and restrictions cited by participants were very similar to those identified in previous research, such as Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) who also found an impact on employment and housing options, depression, hopelessness, and fear for personal safety. These types of hurdles would be closest to what Burchfield and Mingus (2008) described as formal barriers to social capital networks.

> *I always quote Timpsons…who do so much work with ex-offenders, working with offenders in prison…which is brilliant but won't touch a sex offender…and I'm feeling, you know well why? Everybody has, I guess their own, it's up to them…but to me, that's discrimination* (Ptpt 9, extract 42)

Participant 9 found it frustrating that even employers who ostensibly support 'ex-offenders' do not include those convicted of sexual offences and he felt discriminated against by employers twice as a result, once for having a conviction, and then again by more inclusive employers, for having a sexual offence conviction. This is an example of 'intersectional' stigma (Turan et al., 2019); participant 9 had two stigmatized identities, which resulted in additional negative perceptions and treatment. Discrimination usually refers to unfair treatment against someone because of a protected characteristic i.e. who they are/something they did not choose, so it is interesting that participant 9 uses it to explain how he has been treated unfairly due to his offending history. This was not explored further in the interview, but one hypothesis for this line of thinking is that participant 9 felt his sexual interest in children was also something he did not choose, although he had chosen to act on it.

> *I went twice to a coffee morning at a church…and I can't go anymore, until it's been cleared…even though you know it's during term time and school time kind of thing…you know it's all got to go through certain channels…and er I sort of said well that's not quite on my licence and then they come and say it says etc…and they use that…once it's cleared I will go*

> *Interviewer: …how long does it take them to get back to you normally on clearing things like that?*
> *Ptpt: Well it's been a month already…it takes months sometimes…yeah it really does take a long time, I mean you probably know, the wheels do not move very quickly in these organisations* (Ptpt 9, extract 43)

Finally, participant 9 expressed his frustration at goal posts moving, and the length of time it could take to get answers on proposed activities; even when he identified opportunities for integration, there was a lot of waiting to see if this would be approved, and often the answer was no. In the meantime, he was further isolated and not able to integrate into his community, while his life was on hold and he waited for decisions to be made by those in authority about who he could see and what he could do. This appears to have been particularly hard when knowing the answer would likely be a no anyway, and to have been experienced as unfair, as new rules were added to those already agreed. The types of situations described by participant 9 could also contribute to feeling that he is not accepted anywhere, even in places he expected he could be. The range of restrictions associated with his conditions and being on the register were a constant reminder that the label of 'sex offender' was now attached to him and was the overriding factor in any decisions concerning him: his identity had been 'spoiled' (Goffman, 1963) and 'sex offender' was now his 'master status' (Becker, 1963/2018).

Participant 2 focused on how he felt being on the register meant he could get shamed at any time, that it was an indignity, and that a sexual offence was the only offence which meant someone was still being punished after they had served their sentence:

> *The worst thing is your indignity…it means you have to go to the police station once a year…er the police officer can come any time to your house…er they can arrest you for no reason…obviously they got their own back-up, they can say yep you breached…any time, it doesn't matter if your time even runs out, even you spent your time, it's the only conviction you can do time for, the time, and you still do more time* (Ptpt 2, extract 44)

Extract 44 also appears to be related to control; whatever participant 2 did, he knew the police could arrest him or return him to prison. He did not see this as being dependent on his behaviour so could never relax or let his guard down, he would

always be ‘do(ing) more time’ and could have his freedom taken away again at any time. Like participant 9, he was aware that the restrictions on him were directly related to his offence having been sexual in nature, and this had led to a feeling of helplessness about anything being able to change in the future. This also indicates a sense of helplessness, and lack of control over his own life. This whole extract suggests that participant 2 was living with these worries hanging over him, and he had decided to isolate himself completely as a way to manage these concerns. Constantly worrying about these issues could be having a long-term negative impact on him. Hatzenbuehler et al. (2009) found that when people experience stigma-related stressors, they report more psychological distress.

> *Interviewer: …what do you think is the purpose of the sex offender register?*
> *Ptpt: Er, it’s just to say we got you and we never leaving it, it’s like a terrorist, never leaves you*
> *Interviewer: Like a terrorist, did you say?*
> *Ptpt: Yeah*
> *Interviewer: Yeah, what like it sends you a message do you mean?*
> *Ptpt: No it’s not sending you a message, just they own you*
> *Interviewer: Ok*
> *Ptpt: It’s ownership* (Ptpt 2, extract 45)

Participant 2 had had some negative experiences with authority, relating to his religious and cultural background as well as his ethnicity, which may be why he made the interesting comparison between having a sexual offence conviction and being a ‘terrorist’. Both groups have significant restrictions placed upon them on release from prison and may not be able to lose the label or stigma associated with their offence. Participant 2 had multiple stigmatized identities or ‘intersectional stigma’ too (Turan et al., 2019). It is interesting that participant 2 referred to himself as being ‘owned’ by authorities. Having strict restrictions had led him to feel he had no control over his own actions. Another significant part of extract 45 is that the label and impact of being on the register ‘never leaves you’ so participant 2 felt he could never be free from this and would have to deal with it for the rest of his life; he saw himself as having a perpetual spoiled identity (Murphy et al., 2011), and for him being on the register played an important part in that.

Participant 8 went even further in how he described his current situation:

> *I would say that I live a half-life now…yeah…I don't do anything really you know I don't do a lot of things, I go to the gym and that's it, my life is very lonely* (Ptpt 8, extract 46)

It is interesting to consider what a 'half-life' meant to participant 8. He saw his life as being diminished in some way; he was very limited in the activities he could do and the relationships he could have and did not feel he was living his life to its full potential. He had reported engaging in other things, such as attending a community project for MCOSOs, meeting with Probation, and even going on dates. However, he only mentioned going to the gym when considering what his life consisted of; he may have not included the other activities because he was trying to illustrate how stark his life now seemed, or perhaps he already saw these other activities as directly related to or impacted on by his offences, whereas the gym may have been the one place he could just be another member of the public. A 'half-life' also indicates that participant 8 did not feel fully alive at this time and had blocked off much of his emotional experience until he could come off the 'sex offender register'.

It is also of note that participant 8 stated 'my life is very lonely' as opposed to 'I am very lonely' or 'I feel very lonely'. The latter options are more emotive to speak out loud so referring to his life rather than himself allowed him some distance from the sentiment while still sharing it with the researcher. He may also find it easier to separate himself and his feelings from his life generally, in terms of being able to cope with this daily. Extract 47 below gives another example of participant 8 initially distancing himself from what he was saying, using 'you' to describe his feelings before acknowledging he was speaking about himself:

> *Interviewer: How do you feel knowing that you're on the register?*
> *Ptpt: I mean it's heart-breaking isn't it, it crushes you inside…it kills me inside* (Ptpt 8, extract 47)

While participant 8 appreciated why others may have little sympathy for him, he did not feel he was able/deserved to complain about what he was going through, or that there was even anything that could be done to improve his situation. There was nothing he could do about the label of 'sex offender' or what came with it:

> *it's a difficult line to sort of think and talk about because obviously I know the conditions are there for a purpose…do you know what I mean so it's hard to you know like when I argue with people I say like look I know I've created this situation for myself…but I still am unhappy with it…you know even though I've done it doesn't mean I can't you know I can't be ok with it, …you know I have to be ok with the conditions of my life* (Ptpt 8, extract 48)

However, this did not mean that he was happy with the consequences he had created for himself; in fact people tend to feel greater regret over decisions where they feel responsible for the outcome (Nicolle, 2010; Zeelenberg et al., 1998). Linked to this, Weaver (2011) argued that personalising risk management plans, and making them more collaborative between professional and service user, could increase their effectiveness. Agreeing a plan together could increase the level of responsibility that a service user feels for following it, and they may also see it as fairer.

There's no way to build up trust

Even when the men had been out of prison for a prolonged period of time and had not given any cause for concern, they felt there was no recognition of this development of trust or demonstration of managing their risks effectively; the stigma attached to them remained the same.

> *…obviously they're very helpful in the fact that you know they're not just there to be awkward…you know I don't believe that for one minute, you know they're there for a reason…erm, I don't always know that reason… it's about protecting me as much as others, you know it's not just about protecting the public you know it's protecting me…erm so I do understand that, but like I say, er as time goes on you know you've got you know it's it's up to me to earn that trust again, and then they're telling you how well you're doing and how you know you've progressed and everything…but then you ask for something, you know and it's 'no'…they keep telling me how well I'm doing and how forward I've changed, you know things have moved on…but I don't see any evidence from their side where they're trusting me anymore* (Ptpt 9, extract 49)

Whilst participant 9 was receiving support and praise for progress made, he had not been given the opportunity to prove that he had moved on since release from prison and professionals' trust in him had not increased over time. This gives the overall

impression of hopelessness; no matter what he did, he could not make his situation any better as he could not make them trust him. Hope has been identified as a key part of the process for change (Weaver, 2014) and participant 9 appeared to have little hope here. He believed he was trustworthy and should be given a chance, but had no evidence that professionals thought the same nor any indication of what he could do to persuade them. As above, this could have additional negative long-term consequences for him. Weaver and McNeill (2015) emphasised that the impact of a social relationship on an individual's behaviour is not just dependent on the influence of one on the other, but on the bond between people and the exchange between them. Loftland (1969, cited in Maruna, 2001) emphasised the importance of 'normal-smiths' i.e. people who can see 'ex-offenders' as 'normal' and recognise that they have been doing well. This can be significant for people who do not expect society to recognise the progress they have made. For participant 9, this element was missing to a certain extent; he received verbal praise that he was doing well but no corresponding changes in how he was managed. Caspi (1993, cited in Maruna, 2001) highlighted how performance accomplishments can increase a 'person's sense of self-efficacy and appraisal of internal control' (p.366); participant 9 was not receiving much recognition of the positive goals he had achieved or his desistance and the focus was still more on things he was not allowed to do to prevent him re-offending.

> *I'm not minimising it but it's like trying, you don't know what to say, like what do you want me to say, a rapist? Do you want me to say that I'm never gonna rape anyone again…and that it was a stupid decision or do you want me to say that like I've learned from my mistakes and that I'm do you know what I mean, or like what do you want me to do?... I mean where do you want me to, you know it's not like I'm a drug addict I can say well I had loads of drugs, I was arrested and I spent five years in prison cos I had those drugs, now I'm three years clean… You know, now I don't take drugs anymore – what am I going to say to you? If I'm never going to be a rapist again, do you know what I mean*
> *Interviewer: Yeah, do you mean like you can't prove it in the same way?*
> *Ptpt: Yes, there's no like you know I can't say to you I've no interest in raping children… And you know that that's the truth… Whereas if I said here's three years of drug tests…Do you know what I mean? So it's hard to be able to put into context what you're explaining* (Ptpt 8, extract 50)

The comparison participant 8 makes raises the question of whether he considered his substance use and sexual offending to have other similarities, such as whether he saw them both as addictive behaviours that he had to manage indefinitely. Extract 50 suggests that he did not consider himself to be a future risk of sexual offending at all, but acknowledged that others would not be able to have the same certainty without any 'proof'. Interestingly, in a study considering the stigma associated with paedophilia compared with other conditions, Jahnke, Imhoff and Hoyer (2015) found that those who abuse alcohol are considered to be more in control of their condition than those with paedophilia. Participant 8's comments could also be a minimisation of the impact of his offending; using substances and committing a sexual offence would clearly not have the same negative impact on others.

In terms of participant 8's other point, it is true that desistance from sexual offending can never be 'proved'; the message being communicated to 'ex-offenders' may therefore be that others believe they could reoffend at any time and will need monitoring indefinitely, indeed some will be on the 'sex offender' register for life. Loftland (1969, cited in Maruna, 2001) stated that "even outstanding conformity is likely always to be greeted by…suspicion and fear" (p.210). This is certainly the message sent by a lot of media coverage of sexual offences, and research shows that the general public tend to believe people who have committed sexual offences reoffend at high rates (Levenson, Brannon et al., 2007). In fact, the base rate for sexual reoffending has been shown to be relatively low, with a meta-analysis by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2006) finding a recidivism rate of 13.7%. Knowing that the public consider MCOSOs to be likely to reoffend, despite evidence to the contrary, could make it difficult to move forward or to consider oneself truly to be desisting.

The restrictions are not fit for purpose

Restrictions not being individual enough was a common thread amongst participants and referred to individual circumstances, motivations and offences not being taken into account when setting licence restrictions.

Participant 1 described the restrictions as:

> *too many, they're too cold, too blind, erm, at the end of the day, they're not very individual* (Ptpt 1, extract 51)

It is interesting to consider what the different elements of this statement mean. Clearly participant 1 saw the restrictions on him as excessive, but the words he used also indicate he felt that not enough attention was paid to how the individual on the register feels, that restrictions were harsh, and that they were set without taking the whole picture into account.

> *they've got to do checks…for like underage kids that are living there…and I think that's like unfair…with me anyway like I haven't committed no offence against kids or nothing* (Ptpt 3, extract 52)

Participant 3's example related to trying to get permission to visit a relative with children, despite his offence having been committed against an adult and there being no indication of him posing any risk towards children. The overall picture from these extracts is that restrictions were not fit for purpose, were unfair, and had not been carefully thought through, with any MCOSOs being seen and treated in the same way. The restriction mentioned by participant 3, in particular, does suggest a potential misunderstanding of an individual's offending and risk factors, and for him this meant not being able to have contact with his family, as well as the stigma of being considered risky to his nieces/nephews with no evidence to support this. Weaver (2011) proposed involving service users in decisions around their management; ensuring restrictions are more personalised could also help in developing agency, which has been linked to desistance (Farmer et al., 2012). Licence conditions must be proportionate to a person's risk, but some of the additional restrictions placed on these participants appear to be less so. The literature is mixed, however, on whether it is reasonable to impose restrictions related to any group of potential victims. Cann et al. (2007) found that only 8% of their sample of 1,345 had committed sexual offences against both adults and children; Sim and Proeve (2010) had a much smaller sample of 128 but found that 48% reported child and adult victims, and Kleban et al. (2013) found a crossover between age of victims of 5% when excluding adolescent victims, but 40% when they were included, in a sample of 789.

Another example around restrictions not being fit for purpose concerned who participants could associate with.

> *The SOPO, you've got loads of restrictions on it…and that's what causes a lot of the problems…you know like if you've got friends, you've known for years, and all of a sudden you can't talk to them because you've just found out they're on the register… that's really hard to go through* (Ptpt 7, extract 53)

It is interesting that participant 7 used the word 'sudden' regarding finding out that long-term friends of his were also on the 'sex offender' register. This could have been a hypothetical statement, however he then said 'that's really hard to go through' suggesting he had experienced it at least once. In his case, he was still expressing sexual thoughts about children so it may not have been beneficial for him to associate with others who could perhaps normalise these thoughts. However MCOSOs do tend to have restrictions on associating with others with sexual offence convictions. This is not necessarily based on individual risk assessments and is despite large numbers of MCOSOs having offended alone and there being little evidence that having a friend with a similar conviction would increase their risk of reoffending. It could be argued that, for some, social support from a peer (as in the 12-step approach) could be more helpful than staying away from other 'ex-offenders' and being socially isolated, although there is a need for research in this area. Furthermore, if restrictions prevent people from associating with those who may be more accepting of their past, as well as making it harder to meet or be accepted by new people, who is left for them to get support from? This is important when considering the evidence showing that being able to create pro-social networks and intimate relationships can lead to a reduction in recidivism (Willis et al., 2010), while social isolation increases likelihood of reoffending (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000).

Participants also highlighted that the register alone would not necessarily stop someone from reoffending if they wished to.

> *if I was going to abuse somebody…I'm not you know I'm not going to do something…then tell you where I'm going* (Ptpt 8, extract 54)

Participant 8 had spoken about how he needed permission to engage in any hobbies or social activities and asked why someone would do this and then offend in the place where they have told Probation they are going to be. From his point of view, some of the restrictions were therefore illogical and did not necessarily protect potential victims, adding to the sense of unfairness he felt.

The issue of fairness was raised by a number of participants, regarding restrictions or the way they were applied being unfair, or employment opportunities being unfair. While some participants acknowledged that others may not see their situation in the same way, due to their offending, there may still be a mismatch between what a member of the general public and the participants would consider unfair in the situations cited here. There is perhaps a wider discussion here around the role of punishment as opposed to rehabilitation or public protection. The Ministry of Justice Green Paper (2010) stated that 'criminals should face the robust and demanding punishments which the public expects. There must be consequences for breaking the law' (p.9). Some of the restrictions on MCOSOs which do not appear to contribute to reducing reoffending or aiding reintegration may more accurately be described as punishments, or 'residual punishment(s)' (Hamilton, 2017). Barnett and Fitzalan Howard's (2018) review of meta-analyses and systematic reviews exploring what does not work in reducing reoffending found that punishment-based interventions are less likely to reduce reoffending and, without rehabilitative support, can actually increase it. People also need to understand why a particular punishment is being received and to perceive it as fair (Fitzalan Howard & Wakeling, 2020). Linked to this, while participants did not express any plans to ignore their restrictions, and were fearful of being returned to prison, it is worth noting that previous research has shown that 'ex-offenders' can be less likely to comply with laws they view as unfair (Makkai & Braithwaite, 1994; Sherman, 1993). It is important therefore that those on the 'sex offender' register see their restrictions as relevant to them and their offending, rather than a blanket rule which does not impact on their individual risks.

Negative Psychological impact

As well as the physical restrictions on behaviour, participants talked about the psychological implications of knowing they are on a 'sex offender' register and the difficulties of coping with the associated feelings.

> *Interviewer: How do you feel knowing that you're on the register?*
> *Ptpt: I mean it's heart-breaking isn't it, it crushes you inside…it kills me inside, yeah, if I'm honest, I can't really cope with it, I find it really difficult…you know I find it, that it's like a continuous reminder, reminder of punishment, of the incident that I've done…things I've done and I know a lot of that's probably me internally, you know it's not necessarily that, it's what the pressure I put on myself…you know how I feel about my offending you know…being on the register, I mean to me it just frustrates me that I can't do loads of things I want to do, do you know what I mean…that's the main main thing you know…and it's frustrating, it's life limiting, you know and I understand why because I've limited somebody else's life do you know what I mean…but I just feel that it it shouldn't be continuous punishment* (Ptpt 8, extract 55)

Participant 8 used extremely emotive metaphors to describe his feelings about being on the 'sex offender' register: 'heart-breaking', 'crushes you inside', 'kills me inside' and the tense he used indicated that these feelings were ongoing. He described these feelings as being more relevant to his remorse over what he had done, and being on the register being a constant reminder of that, but the feelings he spoke about were all ones that are related to his life ending. Once he had committed his sexual offence, he saw his life as effectively over. Participant 8 used this as a metaphor to describe how he felt psychologically, that what he had hoped his life would be was no longer possible. He felt unable to cope with the feelings of acknowledging what he had done and was being 'crushed' as a result. He was trying to move away from a past self as he found it so difficult to accept his actions, and perhaps in doing so he was also trying to avoid a 'feared future self' (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) or at least others perceiving that this was who he still was. In this way, he was attempting to transform his identity, which can be important to the desistance process (Maruna & LeBel, 2009). However, the idea of continuous punishment is in opposition to the idea of there being a chance for redemption, and the possibility for redemption narratives (Maruna, 2001), and measures which are purely punitive are likely to damage social

relationships, rather than promote desistance (Weaver & McNeill, 2015). Participant 8 also referred to being on the register as 'life-limiting'; he understood why this was the case as he had limited his victim's life, however he did not feel that this punishment should be forever. He was experiencing public stigma in all of the ways described by Herek (2007, 2009): enacted stigma (being treated negatively), felt stigma (he experienced and anticipated stigmatization) and internalised stigma (he felt less worthy and was distressed by this).

> *I try not to let it worry me but it does…because you're always having police at your door to check on ya…you know, you've gotta go sign the register and if you wanna go away you gotta ask permission…and so it's a bit, I can understand it…but you know, you feel like you're a little boy, you've gotta report all the time* (Ptpt 5, extract 56)

Participant 5, on the other hand, compared the experience of being on the register to being infantilised. This is perhaps expressing a similar sentiment to participant 8 but in a different way; due to being on the register, he had lost his adult life where he made his own decisions and had more freedom, and instead had to rely on others to make choices for him. This was another consequence of his sexual offence conviction and being on the 'sex offender' register.

> *You've always got that concern that the police are gonna turn up and ruin everything…you've got nice steady life going now…do you know, you're keeping out of trouble, keep yourself safe so you've always got that…Yeah, and you always find as well, I'm gonna go to an AA meeting, someone recognise you, someone tell their, they're all looking at ya..there's always that in your mind…you know, your life is going so, with me when my life was going good, it went downhill and then it was good, and that's what it, for three years now my life was going good…but you always got that fear, that one fear...that someone might recognise ya…* (Ptpt 5, extract 57)

A concern for some participants was the speed with which the life they had tried to rebuild for themselves could come crashing down. Participant 5 knew what it felt like to have this experience and dreaded it happening again; he used the words 'always' and 'all the time', so these worries were constant. He was concerned about the police ruining things for him, but also simply about being recognised by somebody. The implication here, then, is that there would be nothing he could do to

prevent his life being ruined, despite trying to keep 'out of trouble', if a catalyst for this happening could just be someone seeing his face. The world was therefore a scary place for him now.

Participants did not generally express worries about reoffending, but they were worried about being accused of another offence, or that the police could suspect them of something, and word would then get out to friends and neighbours. This was a very difficult concern to cope with, given that the perceptions and actions of others were out of their control. This led to the use of various different ways to attempt to manage these concerns, discussed further in the next superordinate theme but included having to consider the potential consequences of starting a new relationship:

> *so you can never get married if you're in a relationship or fall in love cos you've always got that fear that one day you're gonna come home from work or come home (inaudible) found out…and then you've lost another home* (Ptpt 5, extract 58)

The fact that this implies that participant 5 had already lost at least one home in the past is particularly emotive. Because he was talking about relationships, rather than a physical home, he was speaking more about having a place where he belonged, and with people he felt at home with; he did not want to make or find a family in case he lost them. While this strategy may protect him from that particular hurt, it also meant he limited himself in what kind of life he saw for himself or pursued, to avoid what he saw as the potential inevitability of losing it. Belonging socially has been identified as important for desistance from offending (Farmer et al., 2012).

> *I think it stops me from (sighs) sort of er pursuing friendships more...erm, like I say I don't mind general chit chat…but getting you know closer to someone* (Ptpt 9, extract 59)

Because participant 9 worried about people finding out about his offending and so avoided getting close to people, his relationships were therefore mostly superficial, and he did not allow himself to develop new, deeper, friendships. This worry and subsequent avoidance served as both an individual barrier and a community barrier (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008) to him seeking and having support as well as integrating into the community through these relationships. As above, Willis et al.

(2010) highlighted that being able to create pro-social networks and intimate relationships can lead to a reduction in recidivism.

On a related note, participants knew that they would have to disclose their offending to anyone they developed a relationship with, which also impacted on their decision on whether to try to develop one:

> *I mean if I got a relationship today, within 3 weeks it could be called serious, I gotta tell the police, the police will talk to them and blab, blab, everything, he's not allowed this, he's not allowed there, blah, blah, blah they add things on…they make you sound like this big monster* (Ptpt 5, extract 60)

'Big monster' is another emotive phrase to use. While participant 5 did not see himself in this way, he had an awareness of how others may portray him and saw this type of description as inevitable. The other language he used here was interesting, the choice of the word 'blab' for the police sharing his conviction with others, when this word is often used in the context of someone sharing information they should not. Also, his use of 'blah blah blah' to explain how he thought the police would say this could suggest that he has heard their concerns so many times he now tunes them out.

Participant 2 had decided to tell everyone up front about his offending, so was using disclosure as one method of coping (Link et al., 2004) but with potential consequences including physical attack and ostracization:

> *Interviewer: So now you're back in the community, how many people are actually aware of what your conviction was?*
> *Ptpt: Everyone!*
> *Interviewer: Everyone?*
> *Ptpt: Yeah…You know why I told them?*
> *Interviewer: Why?*
> *Ptpt: One guy advised me, one of the guys who beat me up, he said it's better to just tell them…so they all find out*
> *Interviewer: So is that what you did when you came home, you just told people*
> *Ptpt: Yes*
> *Interviewer: Up front?*

> *Ptpt: Yes because one, I said there's not, nothing I can do about it…it's like fighting a wave and you try to swim in front of it…that wave will crush you, like this nation did*
> *Interviewer: So, can you give me an example of somebody you disclosed your offence to?*
> *Ptpt: Yeah…one of the people didn't even talk to me again* (Ptpt 2, extract 61)

Participant 2 only referenced one of the people mentioned not talking to him again; it appears he generalised that negative experience into assuming everyone he knew would react to him in the same way. He used evocative language, comparing people finding out about his conviction to 'fighting a wave' which he can try to swim in front of, but which will still 'crush' him i.e. harm him or potentially end his life. This choice of language demonstrates the extent to which he saw the reaction to him as negative, inevitable and out of his control. Deciding to get this process started by disclosing his conviction himself, rather than wait for others to find out, was his way to get it over with, and try to have a small amount of control over the process after all. This was despite him knowing that disclosure would bring him further rejection and isolate him even further from those around him. Comparing this to how he had been 'crushed' by the nation due to discriminatory treatment that he had faced due to his ethnicity and background also indicates he felt small in comparison to the waves of negative views, and treatment of him, coming his way with nothing he could do to stop it.

Some participants described thinking often about their situation and worrying about what might happen if someone found out about their past; others perhaps tried not to think about it. This aligns with Evans and Cubellis (2015) who found that some 'registered sex offenders' thought about their status on most days, and some thought about it even more than that. Evans and Cubellis (2008) suggested that this focus led their participants to have a negative outlook on their life and themselves. This was certainly the case for participant 2.

Superordinate theme three: Living with stigma and restrictions

Stigmatized people use a variety of different methods to try to cope with or reduce the negative impacts of both psychological and social stigma (Bos et al., 2013). For example, problem-focused coping can include disclosing their stigma to others and seeking social support, and participants in this study identified using some of these strategies. Emotion-focused coping can include seeing those stigmatizing them as ignorant or in denial and detaching themselves from the stigmatized identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001), as was also discussed in the first theme of negotiating the label of 'sex offender'. Some of these methods were also identified by the participants here when talking about how they dealt with aspects of being on the register or potential reactions towards them. Evans and Cubellis (2015) identified that methods used by their participants (twenty 'registered sex offenders' in the US) to manage stigma and social condemnation were: honesty, concealment, isolation, denial and grouping. These first four approaches were also discussed by participants here, with grouping being desired in some cases but harder to achieve due to restrictions.

Having a purpose

A number of participants emphasised the importance of a routine and structure to their days, particularly employment, and how this had helped them cope since being released from prison.

> *Having a focus cos even in prison I always did something, what I did to be part of the community I would always do something to help other people…but it's the nature of the beast, because I've committed offences against the vulnerable sector of the community, ok? So until I build a trust and show a trust and what have you…you can't take, you can't take, you cannot take a risk on an unknown quantity…Ok? You just can't you can't afford to do it…and I understand that* (Ptpt 6, extract 62)

It was difficult for participant 6 to accept that he was no longer able to help others or be part of the community; while he understood people not being able to trust him, this was a challenge as he had previously prided himself on making a contribution.

He did talk of building up and showing trust, so he thought there was still the potential for that to happen but was doubtful that it would.

Work has been shown to play a role in imagined future selves (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) which help to create an identity that is inconsistent with reoffending (Maruna, 2001). Work can also therefore aid desistance. Brown et al. (2007) found that recidivists with sexual offences are more likely to be unemployed than those who did not reoffend.

> *I went to Probation with about 30 young Probation officers…and I had to talk to them about my life and changing it…and erm do you know what I felt good…I felt embarrassed when I had to say what I'd been in prison for, they kept looking at ya…but afterwards everyone come up to you, saying we learnt really a lot you know what you said…and it just gives that little bit back…and that makes that little bit makes you feel better* (Ptpt 5, extract 63)

Doing things to give back to the community also gave participant 5 a purpose. Sharing his experiences with others, including taking part in this research, and receiving positive feedback for doing so increased his self-esteem and allowed him to see himself in a more positive light, as someone who contributes to society. This also fit with how he had seen himself in the past, so he was returning to a former self which he had felt better about. Being able to be accepted by people he worried were judging him was also clearly important to him; he had been embarrassed to disclose his offending but overcoming this was beneficial for him. This is an example of 'generative activities' (Maruna, 2001) which can help people accept their past mistakes and move forward; Braithwaite and Mugford (1994) stated that even if a 'gesture of restoration' (p.148) is small in comparison to the severity of the offence, it can still help an 'ex-offender' to feel pride and contribute to a 'law-respecting, other-respecting and self-respecting identity' (p.148).

Avoiding 'risky' situations

There was an understanding amongst participants that there needed to be some restrictions in place, to protect both themselves and the public, and that there were some benefits of this.

> *It means like I've got to be on my best behaviour really…when there's rules…when there's rules, it can help you, er ,yeah, knowing what you can do, and knowing what you can't do* (Ptpt 3, extract 64)

Participant 3 suggested that having rules meant he behaved better than if he did not have them indicating a benefit of these external controls.

> *what is useful with those restrictions is that if I was to resort to my old coping styles…erm e.g. using sex and alcohol…and put my head in the sand and not talking to people…Ok erm if I was to start doing that then the useful thing from those restrictions is that I I haven't got access to harm anybody…cos I haven't got, I can't go on the internet…Ok? And erm I'm not in a relationship with somebody who's got children…so…I mean I'm not saying I'm going to resort to my old behaviours…what I'm saying is…it's just having the awareness that that is useful from that point of view…because it is still it is still early days* (Ptpt 6, extract 65)

Participant 6 thought about how his restrictions meant there was a barrier to resorting to old coping strategies, which he knew in turn helped him to desist from further offending. He considered this to be a positive, as he was aware that he needed to be vigilant about his potential risks.

A final strategy adopted by participants was avoiding situations which might either draw suspicion to them, put them at risk of being exposed as a 'sex offender' or where they might need to disclose their offending and thus risk rejection and further stigma. This fits with the approaches of concealment and isolation, found by Evans and Cubellis (2015).

> *I just don't want to put myself in any situation in anything so if something happen, they'll say well he was there…so I try to police myself, try to think…what they would think if I was going there*
> *Interviewer: Yeah, so that's not a restriction you've got, you could go to places like*
> *Ptpt: I could go yeah but I'd be frightened to go in case the police say oh why'd you go there? You knew there were gonna be kids there…so it's just questions, I avoid them…it's like the plague, you avoid thing… so you deny yourself, to be happy* (Ptpt 5, extract 66)

Extract 66 related to a wedding invite participant 5 had declined in case people wondered if he had ulterior motives for attending. He was 'policing' himself more than professionals were, and while this was an attempt to protect himself in the long run, it also meant he could not take opportunities to be happy. He was sacrificing his current happiness for what he hoped would bring longer term peace of mind.

> *I'm avoiding going swimming, I can't swim but I would learn, like to learn to swim…but I've avoided that but when I spoke to again the girl last week, the swimming baths near there have adult only sessions…erm and erm I just asked her a direct question, I said I'll ask you a direct question, give me a direct answer…I said me as a single bloke, going to an adult only…swimming session, (sighs) I just put it straight I said would it be like putting a sign on my forehead 'sex offender'…cos I don't wanna do, I mean if that's the case, a case of oh well local people know that people who go to there are…only go to there because…no she said no no like I tried to go once she said but she had someone with her that wasn't old, so I'm going to look at learning to swim…but what I do is trying to focus on what I know that I can't, I would be able to do without any problems…so I try to focus on age appropriate areas…and like there's lots of them* (Ptpt 6, extract 67)

Similarly, participant 6's thought process around whether attending an adult-only swimming session would signal that he was a 'sex offender' illustrates the level of second-guessing that participants engaged in, to avoid being identified as having a sexual offence conviction, and keep themselves safe. Avoidance for these two participants meant their lives were further limited as a result, as they even avoided situations which they had not been told to avoid, which could have been beneficial for them in terms of social connections and or leisure activities/wellbeing. Burchfield and Mungus (2008) also found that almost one quarter of their sample reported limiting interactions with others to minimise the risk of people finding out they were on a register, and to limit the stigma they felt. These were classed as individual barriers to social capital networks.

> *they told me restriction you have to tell whatever girl you going out with…excuse me, I'm not going out with no-one…I don't wanna going out with no-one, my sister tried to hook me up 3 times, 4 times, I told the girls I'm a rapist, I'm so horrible, leave me alone*
> *Interviewer: Is that what you said?*
> *Ptpt: Yes*

Interviewer: To just kind of avoid the situation?
Ptpt: Yes…who can do that? I don't have no, no shame. …I'm unshameless right now, it's not like I wanna do shame, no no I'm ashamed of ev-, no, no-one can shame me…it's like whatever happen happen to me. …
Interviewer: Do you often avoid situations …so you don't have to talk to people?
Ptpt: Yes, most times even I go to the shop, music on, give the (?) card, don't talk,…say two pounds fifty loudly and I just listen to my music…when I walk, look at the floor
Interviewer: so your headphones are almost like a barrier between?
Ptpt: My rings(?), when I get nervous, er, when I walk, er when I'm in the gym, I don't even wanna walk and get my weight, because the mirror reflects, I don't wanna look at them, they disgust me…they can be the beautiful woman in the world, they disgust me…I will start vomiting when I look at them because of what I lost…and man'dem I don't trust them with my life (Ptpt 2, extract 68)

Participant 2 had gone even further than other participants in restricting himself, including avoiding relationships completely and stopping going to the gym. Not only that though, the actions he was taking and the way he spoke about them indicated how negatively he perceived both himself and others. In describing himself as someone with no shame, he gives the opposite impression, that he is deeply ashamed of being seen as someone who has committed a sexual offence, but dealing with this by totally cutting himself off from others in society, and not allowing them to shame him further. At the same time, he also described being physically repulsed by women because of how he had been treated. He blamed the victim of his offence for accusing him and it appears he had then generalised his feelings about her to all women.

No, I don't want nothing to do with no people, I wanna be a lonely, and live my life, work, only thing I would succeed in that be working and can go on holidays, that's it
Interviewer: Yeah, what kind of work would you wanna do? Do you know?
Ptpt: I, I wanna do electrician…or mechanic…or do underground, in night, working underground…I wanna bury myself in underground actually (Ptpt 2, extract 69)

Participant 2 also spoke about wanting a solitary job where he did not have to talk to anyone. The strength of his feelings about wanting to be left alone can be seen here with his statement about wanting to be buried underground. As with participant 8,

this is another example of someone feeling their life, at least as they knew it, was over, but in participant 2's case, he was expressing a wish to accelerate this process himself, by being the one to 'bury' himself. As well as referring to his life ending, participant 2 also wanted to literally be underground; by taking a job at night or underground, he thought he could hide from society and be even more isolated. His experiences of arrest and prison had reinforced his negative views of society and strengthened his identity of being someone who is mistreated and misjudged, rather than causing him to reconsider this identity (Maruna, 2001).

> *My best mate in AA, …he and I go out a lot together and I, he knows I've been in prison, he knows but I think if I told him, (inaudible) I think I'll lose a friend…You know what I mean, maybe he won't accept it…you make up, you gotta make this little lie, then you pray to God, I'm gonna be good, I'm not gonna lie no more but you gotta lie, you gotta tell these little white lies along the line* (Ptpt 5, extract 70)

This avoidance of 'risky' situations also included avoiding disclosure of their offending i.e. the risk of being rejected or shamed by those in their lives. In some cases, participants told new friends that they had been in prison but not why; others did not speak about their offending at all. Participant 5 spoke about his Christian faith during the interview; he struggled with wanting to be honest as that was the right thing to do, but believing that there were some situations where he had to lie.

> *I will not be on the sex offender register for the rest of my life, you know…in 2037 I can apply to come off and hopefully I will come off cos I'm not going to commit any more offences…you know so I don't want people to know, cos I've got a thing like if I come off that well in 40 years' time, that person might be my neighbour do you know what I mean, that person might…so it's really, it's really difficult to know who to tell when…and you know and then what impact that's gonna have on your life moving forwards you know cos I have a right to a life, do you know what I mean…just cos I've done this doesn't necessarily mean you know that I have to be punished for the rest of my life* (Ptpt 8, extract 71)

The fact that participant 8 would rather wait 18 years before trying to build his life up in any meaningful way, than disclose his past offending, shows that, regardless of the views of others, he could not cope with anyone knowing about his offending as he would never be able to take this knowledge back. He was prioritising having future

relationships where he could be accepted and not have to disclose actions he felt a great deal of shame about, over being isolated or unhappy for the next 18 years. It also indicates that he believed that others would see his offending identity, and risks of reoffending, as constant and that affecting their perception of him now would be long-lasting.

> *you know erm I might be ashamed of what I've done...but what I've done is done…and I can't alter that…so, I think sometimes when you talk to them, you've got to be quite open…so hopefully they can understand a bit better* (Ptpt 9, extract 72)

On the contrary, participant 9 was of the opinion that being as open as possible with people was beneficial in them understanding him. However, he only described being in contact with a small number of people, suggesting that he too had found this difficult to achieve, or that others were not so happy to be on the receiving end of his honesty about his offending.

Support can help

Support was another important factor for participants in managing their situation. For most, there were just a few people in their lives who were still supportive of them, perhaps a family member or two and one friend. Participants, perhaps as a result of this, really appreciated the support they had available to them, whether from family, friends or professionals.

> *my family have been very supportive…erm, and the keyworkers from the hostel that I was at, they were more helpful, erm, in getting some answers for me like for example, er how to get onto benefits* (Ptpt 4, extract 73)

> *professionals obviously have helped erm because they sort of provide, I mean the word they love is tools, but it's up to me to use them* (Ptpt 9, extract 74)

Participant 9 emphasised how ultimately it is up to him if he uses the support he is given, placing the responsibility and perhaps also the credit back on himself for progress he has made.

> *Only time I, when I came out, (OM) helped me out…to cope with myself, at least she showed me there's a way to fight back* (Ptpt 2, extract 75)

Participant 2 characterised the support he was given as having a way to 'fight back'' indicating he saw his life since coming out of prison as a battle.

> *Interviewer: how would you describe your relationship with her as your Offender Manager?*
> *Ptpt: Nah, I find her as a older sister, or mother wise…she just stopping me bout harming myself, not killing myself* (Ptpt 2, extract 76)

Participant 2 generally described being alone without support, so it was clear that his Offender Manager's support meant a lot to him, particularly in his context of having had very difficult interactions with others in authority. This again emphasises the importance of the role of the Probation Officer in an 'ex-offender's' life, particularly since it can be so important in desistance (Burnett & McNeill, 2005). Participant 2 was willing to take advice from his Probation Officer as he knew she was concerned about his wellbeing (Rex, 1999). He referred to her as family, either an older sister or a mother, indicating the importance she played in his life. It was also notable that he felt he could speak to her, whereas he did not feel able to speak to his mother:

> *my mum has helped me as much as she can…but how can you speak to woman who raised you from dirt?...from the rubbish, she raised me from nothing…*
> *Interviewer:…how can you talk to her though?*
> *Ptpt: I can't! Whatever problem I got, I've got to keep it in…I don't wanna open that box*
> *Interviewer: Ok, you don't wanna put that on her?*
> *Ptpt: No! I wouldn't because she's got enough on her plate* (Participant 2, extract 77)

Although participant 2 was very isolated, he did not want to cause his mother any further stress by telling her about his problems. In his situation, the relationship with his Probation Officer became even more important.

Participant 5 emphasised the importance of making use of the support available and not being afraid to speak to those who are there to help, including Probation and the Police.

> *talk to your Probation officer as well…they're there to help you, they're not there, cos when you look at prison, 'Probation don't help you, all they wanna do is recall you', it's not…they don't wanna recall you, it's a lot of paperwork, of hassle, the prisons are overcrowded anyway…so talk to your Probation, nothing going right, ask her and see what she can do for you or he, say I've got this problem, blah, blah, blah and see what they can do…because sometimes they got their little willpower to do something for you but only, I think only, if they know you're gonna do something for yourself. … and don't be frightened of the police because sometimes you go talk to them … they're there to help you as much as you're there to help yourself because I don't think anyone wanna put you back in prison…because there's overcrowding, but if they have to they will* (Ptpt 5, extract 78)

It is interesting that participant 5 thought there was some flexibility for professionals to go above what would be expected, but that this would only be done for those seen to be helping themselves first. He appears to be describing a positive working alliance (Bottoms, 2001, cited in Burnett & McNeill, 2005). He was also very aware of the potential impact if he did not have support, based on his previous experience of release from prison. As above, the relationship between Probation Officer and those on Probation is a really important one for desistance (Burnett & McNeill, 2005). Rex (1999) found that probationers appreciated the effort that those supervising them were putting in, were willing to take guidance from them if they thought they were concerned about their wellbeing, and tried harder to desist from further offending. Bottoms' (2001, cited in Burnett & McNeill, 2005) framework posited that a positive working alliance would encourage 'normative compliance' based on moral obligation and wanting to keep the alliance going, as opposed to 'instrumental compliance' which is based on incentives and deterrents but does not actually change the person's values.

Finally, there was a desire for more support by some, some of this was practical such as information or finances as in extract 79 below from participant 5:

> *you ain't gonna go straight on the dole, it's gonna take 4 weeks sometimes for you to get your dole money so if they've got no money in prison and they're getting their £43 when they come out, they've gotta pay their hostel or that goes into arrears straight away… some hostels don't do food so you gotta buy food…and I think they should know all that as well cos I wasn't told that* (Ptpt 5, extract 79)

> *I think sometimes the police should be a bit more, when they come and see you, instead of putting you down all the time…I think they should help you out more because surely they know where to get help for that, they must have* contacts (Ptpt 5, extract 80)

Tellingly, when discussing wanting more support from the police, participant 5 talked about this being instead of them 'putting (him) down' all the time; it was not just practical support he wanted but moral support as well, and less judgement.

> *…they* (the hostel) *had a psychologist for the staff…but not for the residents…you know even if it's just once a fortnight a psychologist comes in...and say I'll see the first 10 rooms today and I'll see another 10 next fortnight…so you got someone to talk to, and they could give you their number, or a number that you can phone…and you'd say I'm looking out my window at the moment at some kids and I'm getting really turned on, can you give me any advice please on how I can (pause) work through it?...You know, change it, even just calling them, can help diffuse the situation* (Ptpt 7, extract 81)

Participant 7 specified wanting more support in the hostel he lived in, including from psychologists, and more training for hostel staff on how best to support residents. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) highlighted the importance of 'ex-offenders' associating with more pro-social others, considering that identity change brings with it a preference to be with the kind of people who are more likely to support this new identity.

> *if you've got more integration, erm then you won't have the problem of people erm actually separating themselves away from society erm becoming insular and if you're insular and you're separating yourself away from society, there's a greater chance, in my opinion, that you're gonna resort to your old behaviour* (Ptpt 6, extract 82)

Participant 6 references people 'separating themselves' as opposed to being separated from society, indicating a level of choice in becoming isolated. He also linked lack of integration into the community to reoffending. This view is supported by previous research; factors such as stigma, isolation, boredom and unemployment increase likelihood of reoffending (Brown et al., 2007; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000). Willis et al. (2010) highlight that numerous studies (e.g. Hanson & Harris, 2000; Hepburn & Griffin, 2004; Willis & Grace, 2008) show that if 'ex-offenders' are able to access stable housing, employment, pro-social networks, and create intimate relationships, they are less likely to commit further sexual offences.

Discussion

This study has attempted to understand the idiographic perspectives of men on the 'sex offender' register and what their experiences have meant for them and their identities. When negotiating their new identity as a 'sex offender', participants were very aware of how negatively they were seen by others and found this difficult to manage. Some had reconciled their offending with their new identities, and 'made good' (Maruna, 2001); some no longer saw themselves as a 'sex offender' and had detached themselves from this identity (as in Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001) but even so they struggled to maintain this view in the face of public opinion. Participants also spoke about being fearful of others finding out about their offending and registration status; some feared this may lead to physical reprisals or had experienced this already. They were also afraid of being falsely accused of doing something wrong or committing another offence. This theme adds to the picture of participants' sentences or punishment not yet being over, and perhaps never being able to feel that it is over. This leaves questions about the message that is communicated to those who have committed sexual offences, and whether they can ever move on from this.

The superordinate theme of 'negative impact of register/restrictions' highlighted the number of difficulties faced by participants on the register, such as the restrictions not being fit for purpose and preventing individuals from progressing. This fits with previous research such as Levenson (2008) who found being on a register impacted

on employment and housing, and Burchfield and Mungus (2008) who described barriers to social capital networks for those on a register. There was also a clear negative psychological impact on participants, including constantly worrying about their lives falling apart again, and not being able to be honest with those around them. This fits with previous research such as Hatzenbuehler et al. (2009), who found that when people experience stigma-related stressors, they report more psychological distress.

Participants attempted to live with the restrictions on them as best they could. Some focused on gaining purpose from, for example, employment or generative activities (Maruna, 2001); others avoided developing relationships and going anywhere they thought might put them at risk, much as in Bos et al.'s (2013) work. These were also in line with some of the approaches identified by Evans and Cubellis (2015) as being used by 'registered sex offenders' to manage stigma, particularly honesty, concealment and isolation but also denial for participant 2. Grouping was not easy for participants to achieve due to restrictions. Participants appreciated the support they had, whether this was from their Probation Officer, or those who still had support from some family or friends. However, they advocated for needing more support as well. More needs to be done to provide accessible, meaningful, support for those who are limited in services they can access.

The overriding conclusion from this study is that being on the register and bearing the label of 'sex offender' is extremely hard, both practically and psychologically. Being on the 'sex offender' register was reported to have less practical implications than other licence restrictions or orders in place, however participants knowing they were on the register did have a significant impact on their view of themselves and how they thought they were perceived by others. There are daily challenges in managing relationships, employment and accommodation, as well as longer term challenges such as reconciling a past offence with a current identity. This data also raises questions about the possible impact of these challenges on desistance or reoffending. While clearly this study did not consider reconviction or seek to verify information from participants about their offending, previous research has highlighted a potential link between not being able to reintegrate into the community, and risk of reoffending (e.g. Tewksbury, 2007).

Chapter 6 – Using Repertory grids to further explore negotiation of 'sex offender' identity

Introduction

While chapter 5 explored the interpretative phenomenological analysis of participants' experiences, this chapter will use a personal construct approach (Kelly, 1955/1991) to further explore their accounts through the use of repertory grid interviews and analysis. Repertory grids are an exploratory "cognitive mapping technique that attempt(s) to describe how people think about the phenomena in their world" (Tan & Hunter, 2002, p.2). Kelly (1955/1991) proposed that each of us tries to make sense of and give meaning to the world around us, ourselves and any situations we find ourselves in. We therefore develop our own theoretical framework, our personal construct system, and use this to set our expectations of and evaluate the world around us, and then modify our framework accordingly (Fransella et al., 2004). Repertory grids are "personal construct theory in action", a chance to explore an individual's personal construct system (Fransella et al., 2004, p.1). The technique is therefore idiographic in nature. Repertory grids have been described as promising "accurate measurement of subtle perceptions while being based on a technique which appears to be quite simple" (Easterby-Smith, 1980, p.3). However, Easterby-Smith (1980) also advises caution: if not designed in line with how the grid can be analysed and interpreted, the grid may not actually provide any useful information.

This chapter will present the repertory grids analysis as a way of further illuminating the participants' understanding of their experiences; as stated in chapter 4, repertory grids have the benefit of being more opaque, is less susceptible to socially desirable responding, and can therefore allow for a deeper exploration of how participants are sense-making. There is precedence for using repertory grids to complement and supplement results from IPA analysis. Previous research using these dual methods in forensic settings includes Horley (1996), Blagden et al. (2014), Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018) and Wheatley et al. (2020).

This chapter will consider the practicalities of completing repertory grids as part of a research interview. It will then go on to explore themes evident in the repertory grid analysis, using participants' grids and repertory grid interview data to illustrate

these, explaining the different types of analysis used and what these demonstrate. Links will also be made with IPA themes from the previous chapter as appropriate. The grids aim to provide a richer understanding of the experiences of the participants; they each have their own individual psychological framework from which they interpret their experiences but there were some similarities which will also be discussed.

The main components of repertory grids, which will be referred to throughout this chapter, are elements, constructs and ratings. An **element** can be defined as an example of a topic e.g. a person or a role (Jankowicz, 2004). Here, examples would be 'parent', 'friend' and 'Probation Officer'. A **construct** is used to describe a way in which individuals make sense out of something; a way in which two or more things are alike and therefore different from a third thing (Kelly, 1955/1991). Kelly saw constructs as bi-polar i.e. when we state that a person is e.g. isolated, we are also implicitly stating that they are not well integrated. Considering different points along this continuum within a grid allows us to explore relationships between constructs. In this study, other examples of constructs are 'supported' versus 'unsupported' and 'restricted' versus 'free'. Another helpful way of considering these terms comes from Smith (1978, cited in Easterby-Smith, 1980) who defined elements as being the objects of people's thoughts, and constructs as the qualities which people attribute to those objects. It is important to remember that the label used by participants for a construct does not mean that the label is the same as the construct. Once constructs and elements have been decided upon, **ratings** are used to link between the two. In this case, participants were asked to rate each element on each construct, on a scale of 1 to 7. For example, if one construct was supportive (1) to unsupportive (7), each element e.g. parent or friend was rated somewhere between 1 to 7 on this scale.

Method

Participants

The emphasis in this study was to provide an in-depth analysis about the experiences of participants, rather than a more general account about a specific population. For repertory grids, a sample of around 10 participants is common (e.g. Blagden et al., 2014; Dillon & McKnight, 1990; Hassenzahl & Trautmann, 2001). Turpin et al.

(2009) also used a sample of 10 when combining IPA and repertory grids as was done in this research.

Nine participants took part in this study, the same men as took part in the IPA interviews (see table 5.1 for details). The participants were all men who had been convicted of (any) sexual offence, had served a prison sentence for this, and had since been released back into the community. Details of the circumstances of individual participants will be given alongside data from their grid to help provide context for the results and interpretation.

Procedure and Materials

The consent form explained the repertory grid as part of the research interview, so this had already been discussed at the beginning of the meeting but prior to starting the repertory grid part of the session, it was explained again. Participants tended to be unsure what was expected of them but were content to give it a go and work out what the grid would look like as it progressed. For each participant, a piece of flipchart paper was used which had the grid drawn on it, along with the three supplied constructs (see Appendix 9 for blank grid). Elements were then agreed together. Up to 12 elements were used for each participant: 'me at time of conviction', 'me in prison', 'me now' and 'me in the future' (participants could choose what time periods they wished to consider, for example if they had been in prison for many years, they chose which time they wanted to look at). The remaining elements were obtained by suggesting roles to participants and they decided who would be relevant for them: parent, friend, partner/ex-partner, Police Officer, Probation Officer, another man in prison, another man on the 'Sex Offender' Register (SOR), and another significant person of their choice. All elements had to be adults. These elements were chosen as providing representative coverage of the topic of this research (Easterby-Smith, 1980) and to explore how the participants saw themselves at different points of time, as well as in relation to significant people in their lives. Not all participants wished to look at all of the chosen roles, for example participant 6 was uncomfortable considering a parent, and participant 9 could not identify a further significant person in addition to those suggested. However, having the majority of elements in common between participants was beneficial when considering any comparisons across the sample. Then, constructs were discussed. The constructs provided were: isolated to

integrated, restricted to free, and stigmatized to accepted. The remaining constructs (up to 9 additional ones per participant) were generated through the repertory grid discussion.

A triadic elicitation approach was used to compare and contrast elements, with one of the 'me' elements always being included in the comparison. For example, a participant could be asked "how are 'me now', 'parent' and 'friend' similar? How are they different?" to elicit a characteristic, with follow on questions including "what qualities do they share?" "would you describe yourself like that too?" and "is that something that's important to you?" This process produces two contrasting poles for the construct; Easterby-Smith (1980) cautioned that eliciting logical opposites does not necessarily elicit opposites in meaning. Efforts were therefore made to encourage participants to create their own opposites that were meaningful to them. For example, participant 1 decided that for him the opposite pole for 'family-orientated' should be 'self-centred'. This elicitation procedure was continued, comparing different groupings of elements, until 10-12 constructs were identified.

Finally, participants were asked to rate each element on each construct, on a scale from 1-7, with 1 meaning that the implicit construct completely described that person, and 7 meaning that the emergent construct completely described that person. For example, participant 1 described 'me at time of conviction' as 1 (isolated), 'Mum' as 7 (integrated), with various elements such as 'me now' and 'friend' as 4 on this scale. An example of a completed grid is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Table 6.1 Repertory grid for participant 1

	me now	me prison	me conviction	me conviction on reflection	me future	parent	prisoner	ex	friend	police	PO	brother	SOR	
isolated	5	6	7	1	6	7	6	7	5	6	6	6	4	integrated
stigmatized	3	6	4	1	7	7	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	accepted
restricted	4	4	3	3	7	4	4	5	6	5	6	5	5	free
careless	4	6	7	1	7	7	4	3	5	6	7	6	3	principled
reckless/gung-ho	6	6	4	1	7	7	1	6	5	7	7	6	3	cautious
stubborn	6	5	7	5	7	3	6	6	6	4	5	3	5	easy-going/flexible
impractical	5	5	6	5	6	4	3	3	6	7	6	7	5	pragmatic/methodical
right wing	6	5	5	4	7	6	5	6	6	2	6	2	5	left-wing
self-centred	7	7	5	7	7	7	3	6	5	6	7	7	3	family oriented
poor emotional wellbeing	5	6	7	1	7	4	3	5	5	6	6	7	5	steady/assertive in recognising emotions
head in sand/in denial	5	7	7	1	7	4	5	4	4	5	6	4	4	reflective in honest way
care-free	3	5	1	7	1	7	4	2	4	6	6	5	5	overly sensitive/controlling

Debrief procedure

Following the interview and repertory grid, interviewees were thanked for taking part, and given a debrief form. This included contact details for the researcher's supervisor in case of any queries or complaints. Efforts were made to end the interview by considering more positive aspects of the individual's experiences, such as rating 'future me' last in the repertory grid. Where it was felt that this was also demotivating for the individual participant, a further discussion was had with them to consider positive aspects of their situation so that the interview was ended on a more positive note. The debrief form is in Appendix 7.

Ethics

Research approvals were obtained from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) regional Probation research committee, and from Nottingham Trent University research ethics committee. The research was designed and carried out in line with British Psychological Society codes of ethics and conduct, and the Health and Care Professions Council standards.

<u>Completing repertory grids as part of research interview</u>

One benefit of using a repertory grid, alongside a semi-structured interview, was in keeping the participants engaged throughout the process. Due to logistical reasons (including the difficulties in recruiting participants, not being able to compensate

them for their time/travel and finding an appropriate space in which to interview them) all participants were only seen for two sessions, firstly the IPA interview and then the repertory grid session, for a total time of between 2 and 3 hours. This put pressure on being able to gather all the data needed in these two sessions but having a mix of activities aided in keeping participants interested and breaking up the session. Another benefit was suggested by participant 8 who explained that he had taken part in other research previously but had felt like he got nothing back from doing so; he stated that doing this interview and grid felt 'more like a conversation' and that he had got something out of it too.

Repertory grid interviews

The repertory grid interviews are also a source of meaningful data in themselves, for example participants may have insights during the process of completing the grid, or when it is complete (Fromm, 2004). Participant 8 commented on looking over his grid "now and future, that's quite good". In the course of a participant explaining why they see one person in the triad as different from the others, or why different constructs are rated in a certain way, they can give further information about how they are construing themselves and others. For example, participant 1 stated that 'me conviction' and 'me future' were more similar than the police officer he was in contact with through the Jigsaw team. He initially suggested that 'the easy answer' would be to say 'me future' and police are more similar but then added 'but I don't know…I think it's gotta be that, you know, it just fortunately there's been a lot of changes from there to there, but lots of similarities still there…it's me'. Hearing how he had made his decision, and not just what it was, was really useful.

Additional data from the interview itself will be referred to alongside the grid data, where it supports in explaining or understanding how a participant is making meaning of their world.

Results

Each repertory grid contains a large amount of data concerning the relationships between different elements and constructs within the individual's personal framework. Idiogrid software (version 2.4, Grice, 2008) was used to quantitatively

analyse the grid data. Each type of analysis used will be explained when first referred to within the following case studies.

Descriptive statistics

Table 6.2 shows the correlations which were positively and negatively correlated with self for each participant; where participants rated an element the same on all constructs, or all elements as the same rating for a construct, these were not included in the correlation scores.

Table 6.2

Table 6.2 Correlations for participants

Participant	Elements positively correlated with self now	Elements negatively correlated with self now
1	Me conviction 0.42, me future 0.48, ex 0.62, me prison 0.30, me conviction on reflection 0.21, friend 0.12, PO 0.15	SOR -0.39, prisoner -0.28, police -0.24, parent -0.15, brother -0.12
2	SOR 0.23, parent 0.10, me future 0.07, probation 0.05	Police -0.69, prisoner -0.56, lawyer -0.39, friend -0.33, ex -0.21
3	Me future 0.82, friend 0.78, ex 0.78, brother 0.75, parent 0.74, probation 0.73, police 0.67, SOR 0.34, me prison 0.29	Me conviction -0.38
4	Me future 0.89, police 0.89, friend 0.87, SOR 0.39, probation 0.17, prisoner 0.16	Me conviction -0.87, Me prison -0.29, Partner -0.02
5	Church friend 0.50, me conviction 0.45, police 0.33	Ex -0.33, friend -0.19, me future -0.06, prisoner/SOR -0.04
6	Police 0.79, Me future 0.70, friend 0.62, ex 0.51, parent 0.51, probation 0.39, me prison 0.36, prisoner 0.12	me conviction –0.17
7	Me future 0.96, me prison 0.73, prisoner 0.63	Brother -0.11
8	Me future 0.88, probation 0.88, me prison 0.80, police 0.83, therapist 0.79, parent 0.78, prisoner 0.70, friend 0.70, ex 0.51, SOR 0.08	Me conviction -0.65
9	Me prison 0.92, Me conviction 0.76, Me future 0.75, probation 0.74, friend 0.74, SOR 0.55, prisoner 0.48, police 0.38	Ex -0.33, parent -0.27

It is of note that, for the majority of participants, most elements were positively correlated with 'me now' indicating a level of consistency for themselves across time, as well as between them and those around them. Four participants had negative correlations between 'me now' and 'me (at time of) conviction' indicating a change in who they were, since the time that they were offending.

Some of the correlations will be referred to, alongside the structural analysis of the grids, as additional evidence of interpretations of the data. However, an example of what these correlations indicate is for participant 8. He was a 35-year-old white British man, convicted of rape, sexual assault and digital penetration of a known female child. He served three years and nine months in prison and had been out for over a year at the time of interview. Participant 8 had many highly positive correlations between 'me now' and other elements: 'me prison' (0.80), 'me future' (0.88), probation (0.88), police (0.83), therapist (0.79), parent (0.78), prisoner (0.70) and friend (0.70). The only negative correlation was between 'me now' and 'me conviction' (-0.65). These correlations indicate that participant 8 saw himself as similar to those around him but that he distanced himself from who he was at the time of conviction i.e. before he had started to change. He had rated all of the constructs for 'me conviction' at the extreme poles i.e. either 1 or 7. All of these were at the negative ends of the poles, as he described them, other than 'responsible'. These ratings suggest that by seeing himself at the time as almost wholly different to who he is now or who he would like to be, he also found it difficult to see any positives about his character then or to have any nuance in his view of himself in the past. Extreme ratings like this suggest that participant 8 perceived himself as 'deviant' at the time of conviction, in relation to other people in his life (Ryle and Breen, 1972).

Structural analysis

Cognitive complexity

Cognitive differentiation is about to what extent an individual can construe their social experiences from different points of view. The more differentiated, or the more complex, their cognitive structure is, the more meaningful options are available to them to identify and understand other people's behaviour, and the more they are able

to construe their own experiences from other points of view (Garcia-Mieres et al., 2016). One way to assess the level of cognitive complexity is the percentage of total variance accounted for by the first component (PVAFF); Garcia-Mieres et al. (2016) state that PVAFF is the method with the strongest reputation. It is however important to note that there have been mixed results as to whether PVAFF is a reliable measure. It was found to be one of the less stable of the structural measures derived from repertory grids, when measures were repeated a month later by Feixas et al. (1992) but Smith (2000) found that PVAFF did prove to be stable over a 12-month period.

The more variance accounted for by the first component, or by a small number of constructs, the less complex the grid is, which can indicate tight construing. Conversely, the lower the PVAFF figure, the more loosely organised the construct system. Kelly (1955/1991) used the terms 'tight' and 'loose' to describe the extent to which ratings of an element on one construct can predict the rating for the same element on other constructs (Smith, 2000). A tight construct system will lead to unvarying predictions, whereas a loose construct system leads to varying ones (Smith, 2000). Tight construing/an inflexible view of the world can prove maladaptive (Ryle & Breen, 1972) whereas a looser construct system can be predictive of greater levels of change (Gaines Hardison & Neimeyer, 2011).

Table 6.3

Table 6.3: PVAFF for participants

Participant	% total variance by Axis 1 (rotated) (cumulative variance)
1	40.86
2	43.91
3	43.89
4	75.57
5	51.68
6	43.44
7	52.93
8	63.27
9	60.03

Table 6.3 gives the PVAFF figures for the participants in this study, which range from 40.86% (participant 1) right up to 75.57% (participant 4). There is disparity in what level of PVAFF is considered complex or otherwise, however as stated above, lower scores indicate greater complexity (Smith, 2000). Ryle and Breen (1972) stated that in large grids, 39% of PVAFF and below indicates complex construing; Garcia-Mieres et al. (2016) found that someone with 56% PVAFF indicates less complex construing. Kitson-Boyce et al. (2020) concluded that grids over 55% are indicative of less complex i.e. tighter construing. PVAFF is not related to grid size, however Feixas et al. (1992) reported a significant trend for smaller PVAFF for larger grids (12 constructs x 8 elements) when compared with smaller grids (8 constructs x 6 elements).

For the participants in this study, where there were larger grids (10-13 constructs x 11-13 elements), it is notable that the complexity of construing is mixed; approximately half of the participants' PVAFF scores indicate fairly loose construing, with the other half indicating tighter construing. There are periods in individuals' lives when they might be expected to show greater instability in construing (Gaines Hardison & Neimeyer, 2011) and it is interesting to consider whether by virtue of the participants' day to day experiences, and the time they had spent in prison, some participants were less certain of what to expect from themselves and those around them.

Campbell (1990) found that self-esteem is positively associated with how complex and flexible an individual's self-concept is and, when asked to describe themselves on bipolar adjectives, those with lower self-esteem tended to give responses nearer the midpoint of the scales.

For those participants with less well elaborated grids, i.e. tighter construing, it is not appropriate to put as much weight on the individual grid results, however it is a useful finding in itself that half of this sample were having difficulties in making sense of their identity. Tight construing could be adaptive for some; there could be some comfort and security in knowing what to expect of themselves and others, even if those expectations are negative. Two examples of participants' grids will be used later in this chapter to illustrate the difficulties in making sense of identity.

Implicative dilemmas

Implicative dilemmas are cognitive conflicts, where there is a discrepancy between how a person see themselves now, how they would like to be in the future, and what cost might be associated with becoming this ideal self (e.g. Feixas & Saul, 2004). Dorough et al. (2007) used the example of someone who construes themselves as pessimistic and their ideal self as optimistic, but the implicative dilemma is that they construe optimistic people as foolish. Implicative dilemmas are common in both non-clinical populations and clinical populations (Feixas & Saul, 2004). Feixas et al. (2009) found that 34% of a nonclinical sample (volunteers), and 53% of a clinical sample (people receiving psychotherapy) had implicative dilemmas. In this forensic sample, 44% of participants had implicative dilemmas, while 66% did not. No implicative dilemmas were found for participants 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8.

The requisite correlation required for a dilemma is r=0.2 (Grice, 2002). Implicative dilemmas are another way to consider how participants are making meaning of themselves and others. Implicative dilemmas can also be barriers to change. An individual may resist making a change if they perceive the negative implications as threatening their identity, and reducing the usefulness of their construct system, or they may simply be uncertain about what action to take (Feixas & Saul, 2004). Four of the participants had implicative dilemmas. Three of these will be discussed here. The fourth, participant 3, had four implicative dilemmas but on revisiting the interview data, it appeared that he had rated some constructs differently from his explanations for the scoring, such as stating that someone would score higher than him on a rating but picking a lower rating, and it is possible that there were therefore some errors. The implicative dilemmas were formulated using Idiogrid (version 2.4, Grice, 2008) and written in sentence form by the programme.

For participant 9, the implicative dilemma was as follows:

Me Now is construed as “isolated”
…whereas Me Future is construed as “integrated”
The dilemma is a(n) “integrated” person tends to be a(n) “not accepting of me as a person” person (r = 0.38)

Looking at the original data, there was one element/person discussed who participant 9 described as integrated, but not accepting of him as a person, and this was his ex-partner which was clearly a significant relationship for him. The majority of people who he construed as integrated were also accepting of him, such as his mother and his Offender Manager.

The implicative dilemmas for participant 1 were as follows:

Me Now is construed as “stigmatized”
…whereas Me Future is construed as “accepted”
The dilemma is a(n) “accepted” person tends to be a(n) “stubborn” person (r =0.22).

Looking at participant 1’s grid, he rated both his mother and brother as ‘accepted’ but also ‘stubborn’. At face value, this would appear to be a ‘negative’ personality trait, however while rating his mother on the grid, he had commented ‘oh she’s very stubborn, she’s had to be’ indicating that he construes being stubborn as necessary at times. The other end of this pole was ‘easy-going’ and while he rated himself as being easy-going in the future, it appears that he could see benefits of both ends of this scale.

For participant 6, there were 2 implicative dilemmas:

Me Now is construed as “accepted”
…whereas Me Future is construed as “stigmatized”
The dilemma is a(n) “stigmatized” person tends to be a(n) “on their own” person (r = 0.75)

Me Now is construed as “accepted”
…whereas Me Future is construed as “stigmatized”
The dilemma is a(n) “stigmatized” person tends to be a(n) “judgemental” person (r = 0.35)

Participant 6 spoke about himself in the future if others knew about his offending, or if they did not. The above data relates to if people knew. He sees himself in the future more negatively than now, in terms of how stigmatized he imagines he will be. The

other constructs he associates with someone who is stigmatized are characteristics which he sees as generally negative but which he thinks are realistic for him. Participant 6 was realistic about not being able to be with his family in future, although he was very sad about this, and interpreted this as meaning that he had taught his family well, that they would not accept someone like him. Participant 6 also rated himself and most of the people he knew as being relatively judgemental and saw this as a trait of his which was unlikely to change in the future. Participants in this study were asked to consider 'Me Future' in whichever way they wished, meaning that some considered this element in a more positive light than others; in hindsight it would have been useful to separate out 'ideal self' from 'Me Future' to also consider differences between how these two elements were construed.

Making sense of/adding to IPA themes

As identified in the previous chapter, one of the superordinate themes in the IPA analysis was 'negotiating identity as a 'sex offender'. This theme was present in the repertory grid analysis too, albeit with a slightly different emphasis, with key findings being around their offending making them different from other people, and that they had changed. This will be discussed along with examples from individual participants' analysis.

Negotiating identity as a 'sex offender'

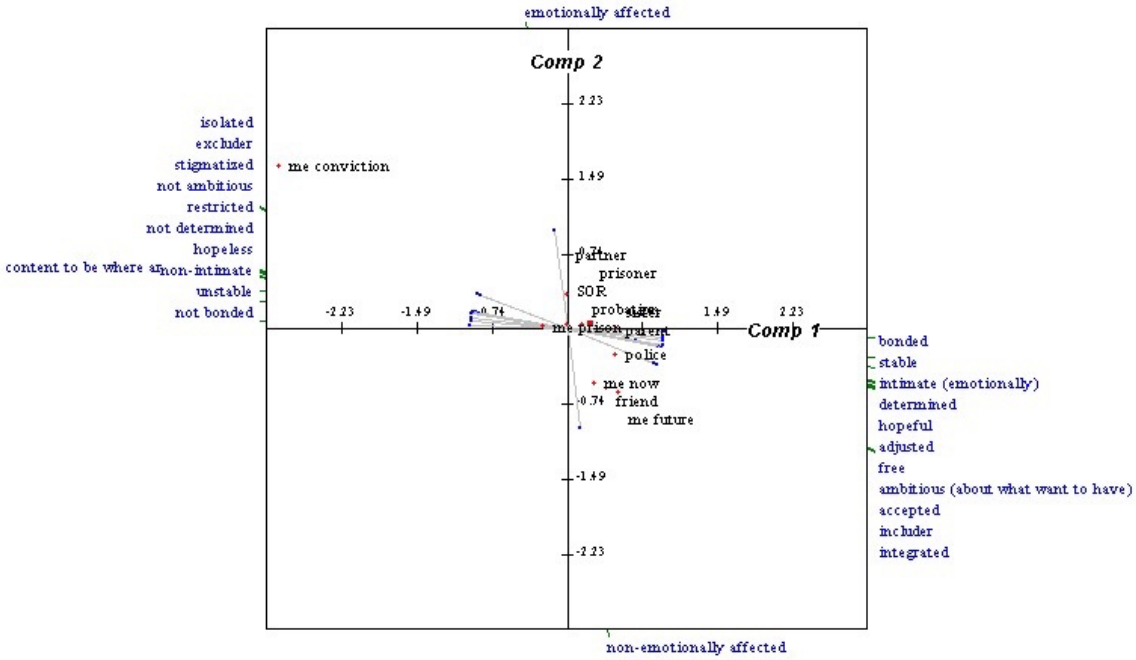
Making sense of identity

As stated above, while less weight can be put on individual grid results for those participants with less well elaborated grids, i.e. tighter construing, it is useful to consider the difficulties that participants may have been having with making sense of their identity. The first example is participant 4, a 32-year-old white British man. He had served seven years of an indeterminate prison sentence, for rape and inciting a minor to engage in sexual activity against a male victim.

Principal Components Analysis (PCA) grid data (PCA) is a data analysis technique which helps to identify meaningful underlying variables and ascertain linear relationships between the variables (Mason & Young, 2005). PCA demonstrates the internal relationship between elements and constructs for an individual i.e. how an

individual participant construes their concepts of their self in relation to other elements along the construct continuum, for example from ‘isolated’ to ‘integrated’. This is represented pictorially in the PCA grids generated by Idiogrid (Grice, 2002).

Participant 4: PCA grid

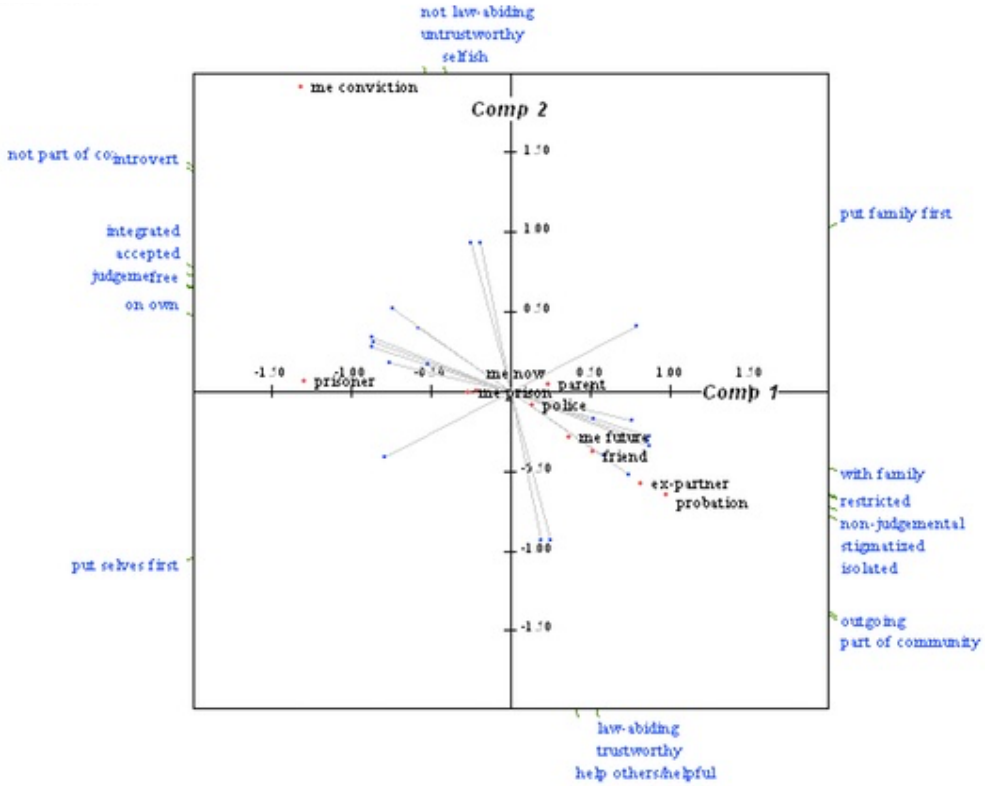


As can be seen above, the grid for participant 4 is not well-defined. The vector lines are small, with many elements close to the point of origin, and the majority of the elements are only in two of the quadrants. This all indicates tight construing so being relatively certain and inflexible about those around him/being able to predict how they will act. In considering why so many elements are close to the point of origin, it could be too difficult for participant 4 to think about or make sense of his current identity and his offending, so not doing so protects himself and his self-esteem. He is therefore unable to clearly define the key elements in his life, including himself at any time periods other than at time of conviction. Kelly (1955/1991) considered that a person can experience threat if their constructions or reality are challenged i.e. if they expect significant change or challenge to the way they see and organise the world around them. Participant 4 could be dealing with this threat to his reality by avoiding thinking about his construct system.

‘Me conviction’ is the only element which is more clearly defined; this is in the opposite quadrant and separated from all other elements and construed in mostly negative terms, with everyone else being construed in mostly positive terms. Reviewing his original grid, it is notable that these positive traits were also rated at the extreme end. It is also interesting that himself at the other time points, but especially when in prison, is not clearly defined at all, which can be seen by how close this is to the point of origin (centre of the grid). Participant 4 described himself as having changed since the time he was convicted. For example, he stated that when convicted he ‘kind of gave up’ and ‘didn’t really bond with anyone’ whereas now he described himself as ‘adjusted’ less ‘emotionally affected’ and bonded ‘majority of times’. It appears from this grid that although he knew he had changed, he was still not too certain on his current identity. This would fit with him wanting to move away from and having broken off from his past (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) and ‘feared self’, but not being as clear on what his ‘possible self’ was going to be (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Given the negative portrayal of those who have committed sexual offences in the media (Radley, 2001), it may be difficult for men in this situation to imagine who they could be; there are no obvious role models of those desisting from sexual offending in the public eye.

Participant 6 was a 58-year-old man who described his ethnicity as white Irish gypsy. He had convictions for sexual assault, committing a sexual act in the presence of a child and incited a child to engage in sexual activity. These offences were committed against three female children, one of whom was a family member. He had received an indeterminate sentence, with a tariff of nine years, and had been out of prison for a year.

Participant 6: PCA grid



The grid for participant 6 is more well-defined; the elements are in all four quadrants and the vector lines are moderate, however there are a number of elements very close to the point of origin; 'me now', 'me prison', 'parent' and 'police'. Participant 6 found this task quite difficult and took a while to understand what it required. He was also concerned about making another appointment after our interview so may have been rushing his answers somewhat. These factors may have affected the reliability of these results. However, 'me now' being so close to the point of origin (centre of the grid) can also indicate that participant 6's self was not well-defined or that, like participant 4, he was still struggling to make sense of what his identity was and how he saw himself. Burchfield and Mingus (2008) found that many of the men they interviewed described experiencing stigma, shame and embarrassment associated with the 'sex offender' label, and some stated that the stigma had even altered their views of themselves. Participant 6 construed himself differently depending on the views of others. He emphasised that how accepted he felt depended on if others knew about his conviction or not: 'depends who knows, if people don't know then I'm accepted, if people do know…it's about 2 isn't it' (out of 7, with 7 being totally

accepted, and 1 being stigmatized). This also makes sense considered alongside comments he had made in the IPA interview, concerning being afraid of retaliation from others if they knew about his offending. Being unsure of who he was, how much he should share with others, and how they might react if he did, will all have contributed to participant 6 finding it more difficult to reintegrate into the community. Swann et al. (1987) suggested that people with low self-esteem can get caught in 'cognitive-affective crossfire', where they are more accepting of negative feedback as it fits with their existing views, but it is still emotionally difficult to accept so they are left with a degree of uncertainty, which may be easier than seeking out information to confirm their negative views (Berglas & Jones, 1978). This aligns with Makhlouf-Norris and Norris (1972) who stated that "the need for self-certainty may be such as to lead to construing the self in a way which predicts undesirable outcomes which are certain to be validated, rather than predict desirable outcomes which are open to test and to the risk of invalidation" (p.285).

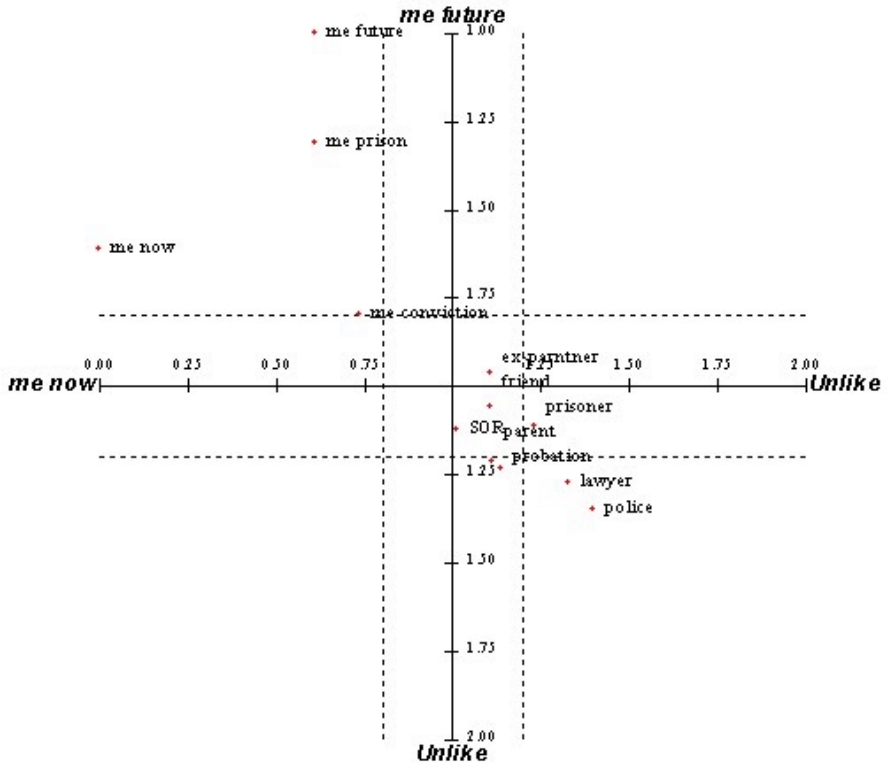
Seeing their identity as distinct from others

A number of participants indicated that they saw themselves, and others who had committed sexual offences, as fundamentally different from those around them. This was in terms of both the constructs they suggested to describe other people in their lives, but also which end of the spectrum of these constructs they rated them at. They not only saw themselves as different, but this was also to their detriment i.e. they assigned themselves more negative constructs or rated themselves more negatively. This may fit with the subordinate theme found in the IPA analysis of 'sex offenders are the worse cases on earth'.

Participant 2 was a 26-year-old Black British man (although he said partway through his interview that he did not want to be considered British anymore due to the way he had been treated by UK authorities). He had been convicted of attempted rape against an adult woman he knew. He had served two and a half years in prison. The analysis of his repertory grid indicated that he saw himself as different from those who had not offended, but in his case he also emphasised that there was nothing he could do to change how he was perceived.

Self-identity plots are a visual way of representing standardized Euclidean distances between pairs of elements. In this research, the plots represent the distance between 'me now' and 'me future' i.e. how close or distant these two self-concepts are. This can also be used as a measure of how respondents value themselves in their own terms (Gaines Hardison & Neimeyer, 2011).

Participant 2: Self-identity plot

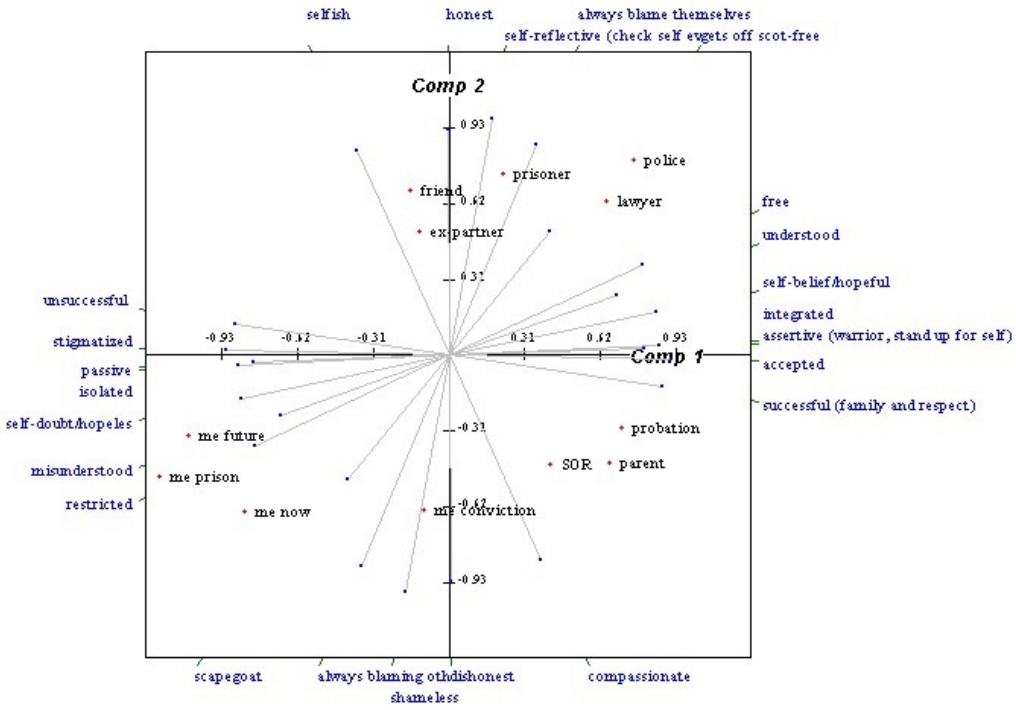


Participant 2's self-identity plot emphasises the distance between him, at various time periods, and the other people in his life. This can also be seen in the correlations between participant 2 now and the other elements. The highest positive correlation for participant 2 was 0.23 for someone else on the SOR; this also supports the idea that he saw himself as separate from others and was isolated. The most notable correlation for him was the negative correlation of -0.69 between him and the police, which was also evident in the way he spoke in the IPA interview about the police and how they had mistreated him. Norris and Makhlouf-Norris (1976) described a plot in which no non-self elements are similar to the actual self (i.e. 'me now') as illustrating actual self-isolation, meaning that participant 2 sees himself as being unlike everyone else he knows (assuming the constructs used represent a good range

of people in his life) and 'having no basis for personal-social interaction' (p.86) which fits with how participant 2 described his life.

Participant 2 viewed himself as being similar across the time periods 'me now', 'me in prison' and 'me future'. He indicated that he was misunderstood, isolated, unsuccessful, stigmatized and restricted at each of these time points, as can also be seen in his grid below.

Participant 2: PCA grid



This grid is really meaningful, indicated by the distances of the elements from point of origin, and how they are spread out, in all quadrants. Participant 2 saw himself as separate from, and isolated from those around him; everyone is construed as very different from himself, and in more positive terms, which 'serves to emphasize the undesirable nature of the actual-self (Makhlouf-Norris and Norris (1972). This was supported by the data from his IPA interview in chapter 5, where he expressed extremely negative views about himself and his life. This included how he construed himself in the future as well. Ryle and Breen (1972) stated that when an individual places themselves at the extreme poles of principal components to significant figures

in their lives, or isolates themselves from other elements, that this suggests they perceive themselves as 'deviant'. For participant 2, 'sex offender' has become his 'master status' (Becker, 1963/2018), the primary way that he defines himself. This supports the correlation data for participant 2, discussed above. Johnston (2016) investigated Maruna's (2001) assertion that 'ex-offenders' can feel a lack of control over the future and 'doomed to deviance'; Johnston found that their perceptions about their ability to stay out of trouble did impact on whether they reoffended or not. While Maruna was focusing on people feeling unable to change their behaviour, for participant 2, his lack of control and hopelessness was more focused on those in authority not letting him move on.

As discussed in chapter 2, those with sexual offence convictions anticipate being recognised and exposed publicly and believe that the general public see them as violent and dangerous (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Being aware of the stigma assigned to oneself and taking it on can have a major impact on well-being, self-esteem and view of self (Corrigan et al., 2006; Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Pinel & Bosson, 2013).

Participant 2 also saw himself as 'passive' and having 'self-doubt/(being)hopeless' across these times. This reiterates his interview data where he indicated that he thought he would always be seen negatively by those around him, that there was nothing he could do to change this, and that trying to challenge his situation would only make things worse for him. One of the negative emotional consequences identified from being on a 'sex offender' register is hopelessness (Lasher & McGrath, 2012) and this certainly came across from participant 2; hope has been identified as a key part of the process for change (Weaver, 2014) which would raise concerns for participant 2's future, and the consequences for him and others of him feeling this way long-term.

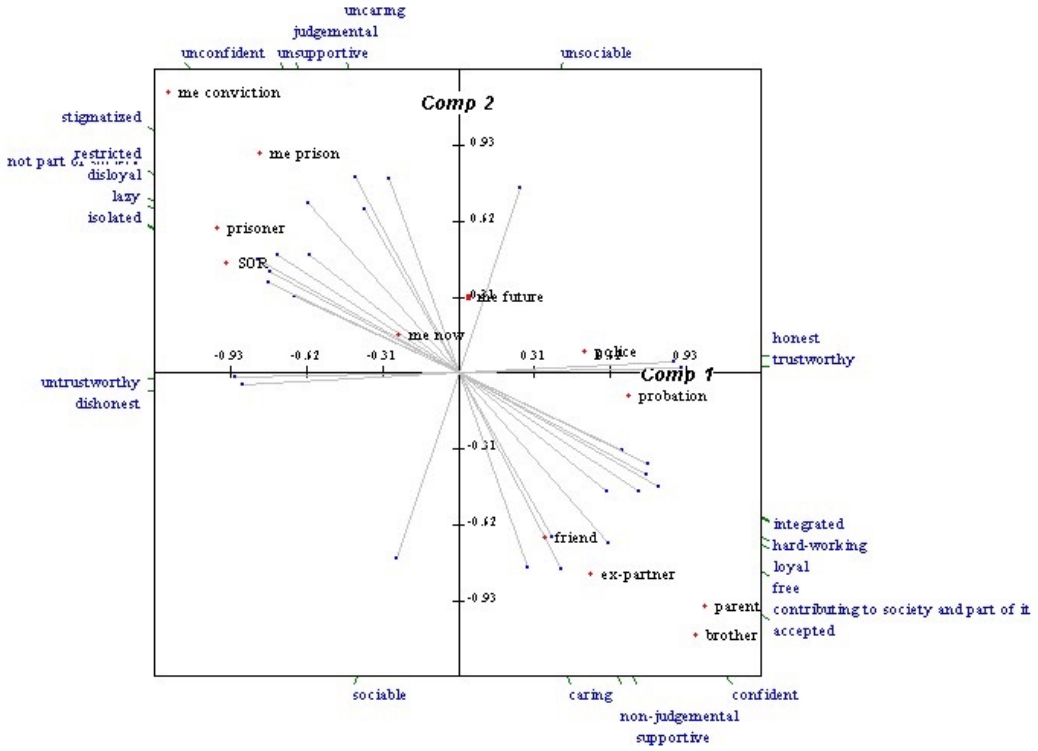
Participant 2 appeared more rigid in his thinking, as demonstrated in his IPA interview in chapter 5, assigning blame and negative intentions to many of the people he discussed. Interestingly, he ascribed more 'positive' constructs to these same people within his repertory grid, including the police and his lawyer. However, whether a construct (or trait) is 'positive' or not can depend on individual

perspective, and what this means to the person. For example, participant 2 described both his Probation officer, who he had found to be very supportive, and the police who he saw as having scapegoated him, as 'integrated' and 'successful'. In the former case, these positive traits could reflect his approval of his Probation officer, or perhaps having over-idealised them, whereas for the latter, he could still describe someone in this way but feel negative or resentful about this being true. While seeing himself as a victim of the authorities, and someone who did not have autonomy over his choices could have helped him to come to terms with his identity (Shover, 1996, cited in Maruna, 2001), in participant's 2 case, he was still focused on how unfairly he had been treated and so it would have been difficult for him to get to that stage yet.

Participant 2's grid, in terms of the other people in his life, is generally very well defined, as can be seen by the large distance of the constructs and elements from the centre (Grice, 2002). This indicates 'looser' construing, which at first may appear counterintuitive to him having set, negative, opinions, about how people around him might behave towards him. However, looser construing could also relate to being less sure himself of how those in his life might act. The expectation would be that the construing of himself would be tighter; our core sense of ourselves tends to be tightly construed, as we like to know what type of person we are fundamentally. For participant 2 this is not the case other than for 'me conviction'; the other 'me' elements are also loosely construed, which can cause anxiety and suggests that participant 2 may not know what to expect of himself. Baumeister et al. (2005) suggest that social exclusion and rejection can impact on the ability to self-regulate, one aspect of which could be ruminating and being unsure on how to act in stressful situations, being unsure on who they are (Hofer et al., 2011). This could be relevant for participant 2, who certainly felt rejected by society.

This separation between those who had offended, and those who had not can also be seen in participant 3's PCA grid. Participant 3 was a 24-year-old white British man, who had been convicted of sexual assault and attempted rape of an adult woman stranger. He had been in prison for four years and had also been recalled once prior to being back out in the community this time.

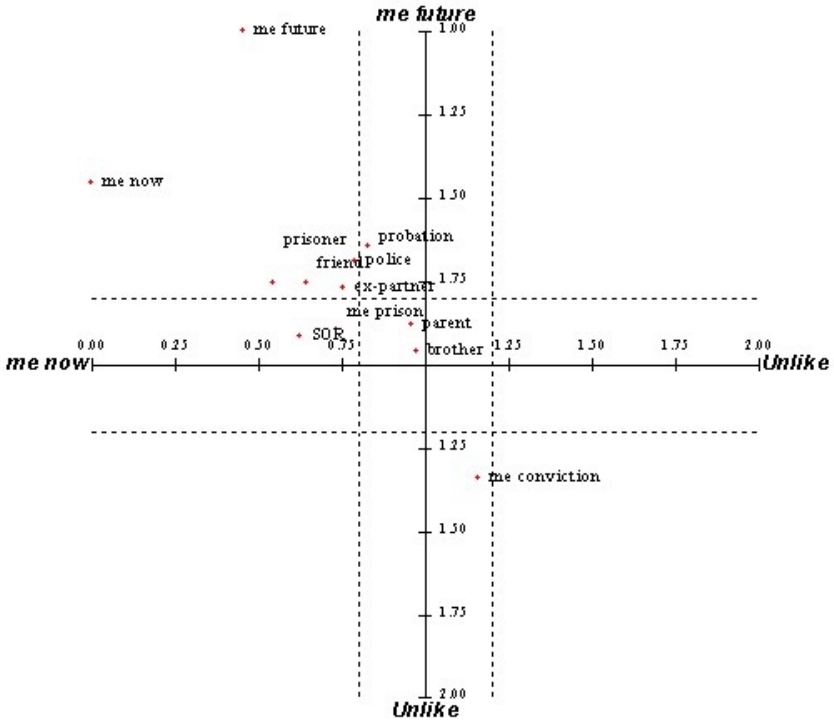
Participant 3: PCA grid



Participant 3's grid is meaningful, with most constructs and elements at a distance from the centre which indicates loose construing i.e. a degree of flexibility in how he interprets those around him. The constructs which are more clearly defined are mostly in two quadrants, indicating that 'friend' and 'partner' are construed positively, and diametrically opposed to 'me prison' 'prisoner' 'someone on sex offender register' and 'me conviction' which are all construed in negative terms. It is also worth noting that 'me now' and 'me future' are closer to the point of origin (as represented by being close to the centre of the grid) suggesting that participant 3's sense of self now and for the future is less well defined than himself at other time periods and those around him; perhaps he is still working out who he is now in relation to who he was, and who he can or will be.

Other participants emphasised another aspect of negotiating their identity as a 'sex offender', highlighting that they have changed since their offending. As can be seen in participant 3's grid above, while 'me conviction' and 'me prison' for participant 3 are construed as distant from others in his life who are not involved in the criminal justice system, 'me now' is much closer to them.

Participant 3: Self-identity plot



Participant 3's self-identity plot supports this further, with his family, friends and those not involved in the criminal justice system being at a distance from himself. Another indicator of participant 3 considering himself now almost as positively as those around him were the positive correlations between 'me now' and the majority of other elements: friend (0.78), ex-partner (0.78), brother (0.75), parent (0.74), probation (0.73) and police (0.67). When asked about differences between people in the police or probation and himself, in the repertory grid interview, he commented that 'don't think that different, just jobs doing'. The correlation between 'me now' and 'me future' was also 0.82.

Taken together, these results indicate that participant 3 construed himself and others with a similar history as having been different to those around him when he was convicted and in prison, but that over time he had moved closer to them and was now largely similar in terms of characteristics. This suggests both that he construed those convicted of offences (including himself) as 'other' but also that he was able to recognise change in himself and had improved his view of himself as time had progressed. He stated that he did not see himself being further integrated into the

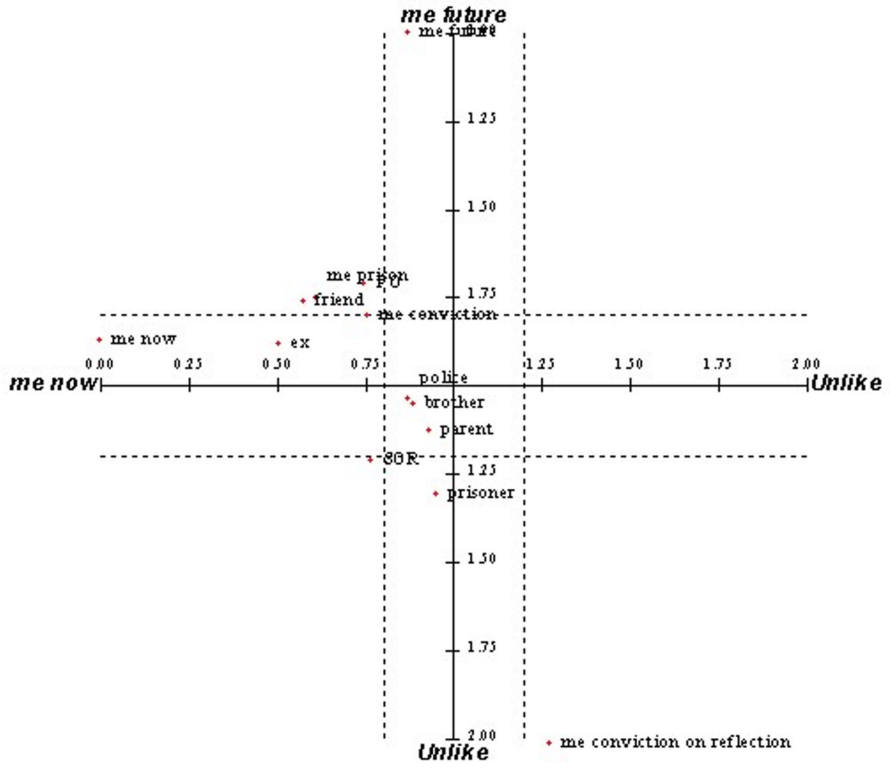
community in the future, however, and would stay as he was, which was 5 out of 7 (with 1 being isolated and 7 being fully integrated).

Identity change since conviction

A number of other participants also saw themselves as being different now to how they were in the past. This fits with the subordinate theme from the IPA analysis of 'am I still a 'sex offender'?' and indicates that participants did see themselves as different even if others did not perceive them to be so. Farmer et al. (2012) state that being able to create a new identity, through making sense of the past, is an important part of change. Rather than 'making good' of the past (Maruna, 2001) and seeing their past as necessary to get them to where they are today, the above participants appeared to be construing their past selves as separate to themselves now. They had worked to change their identity already, often during their time in prison, and had broken with their past (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). This also fits with 'knifing off' their past (Elder, 1998) and seeing themselves as fundamentally different now to in the past. It is positive that participants had been able to consider themselves in this way. This would perhaps not be expected given the stigma they were facing, and the difficulties associated with the restrictions placed upon them, however it shows their ability to separate out their offending to their identity on some level at least.

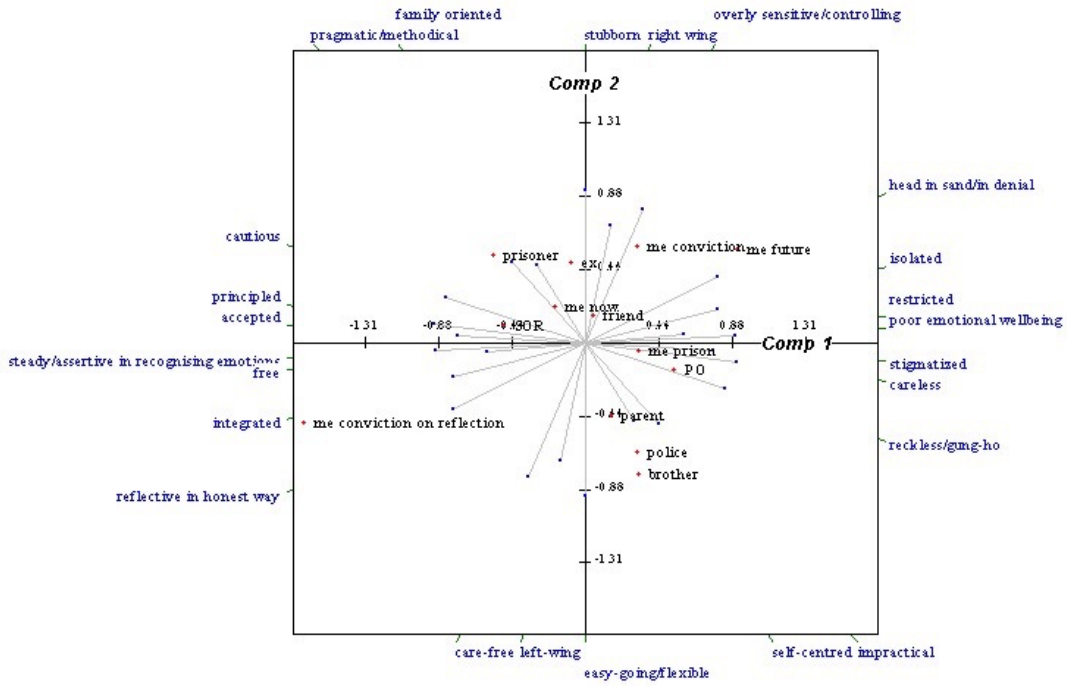
Participant 1's self-identity plot suggests that he saw 'me now' as different from 'me' at all other time periods discussed. Participant 1 was a 52-year-old British Asian man who had received an indeterminate sentence for the rape of two stranger adult women. He had spent over 18 years in prison before his release.

Participant 1: Self-identity plot



Participant 1 had wanted to consider 'me at time of conviction' as separate from 'me at time of conviction, on reflection' to account for how his thinking had developed over time. For example, when completing some of his ratings he stated that 'at the time I felt I was very principled, obviously looking back I was very careless…I don't (didn't) think I was reckless or anything like that but looking back I was completely reckless and gung-ho'. He also acknowledged that 'denial's easy to be in' and that at the time of conviction, 'of course I was in denial! Massively'. 'Me at time of conviction', interestingly, is scored as neither like nor unlike 'me in the future' in the self-identity plot, whereas 'me at time of conviction, on reflection' is much further from 'me in the future'. This indicates that Participant 1 was construing himself in a more positive light when first convicted, but in hindsight he realises there are aspects of him which have changed for the better over time.

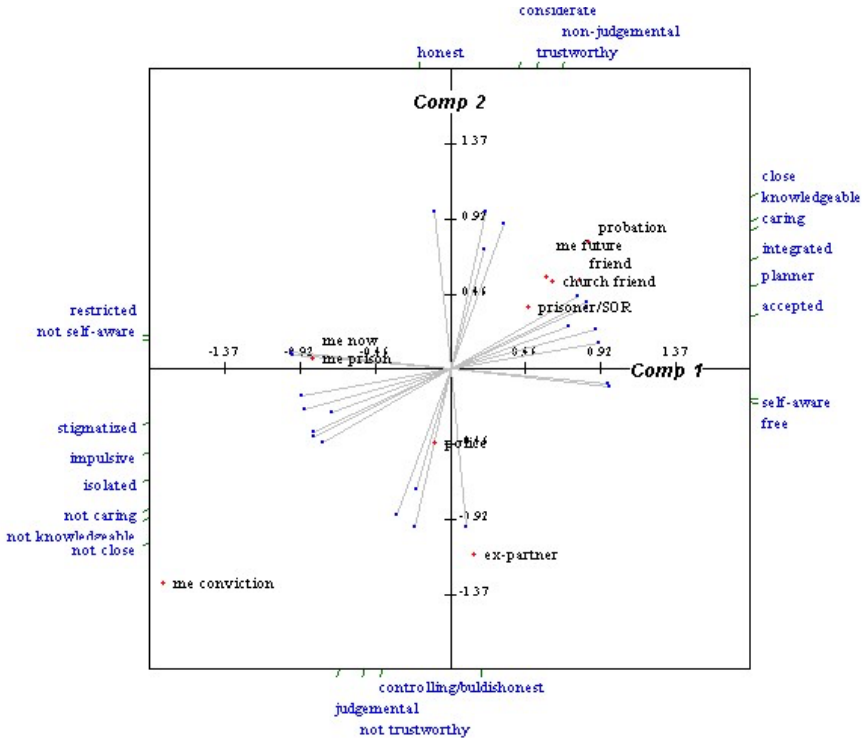
Participant 1: PCA grid



Participant 1's 'me now' was also close to the point of origin on the PCA grid, indicating that this element was not well defined by the grid. This could suggest that participant 1 was ambivalent about his construing of himself now, that he did not want to think about himself, or that he was going through a period of change so was not sure how to rate himself on different constructs currently. Participant 1's comments about being no different from anyone else could help to distance himself from negative feelings about himself. He commented after finishing the grid that 'you've gotta have hope and you've gotta have realistic hope and you've gotta have people sort of like appreciating it as well so if every day all you ever hear is negatives, people coming up to you saying you've done this wrong, you've done that wrong, eventually you're just going to get numb to it or all sorts of other negative things might happen, so you need the compliments, you need the praise, you need the encouragement'. Keeping himself encouraged could also have therefore been important to him. This fits with Weaver's (2014) assertion that hope is a key part of the process of change and maintaining resilience.

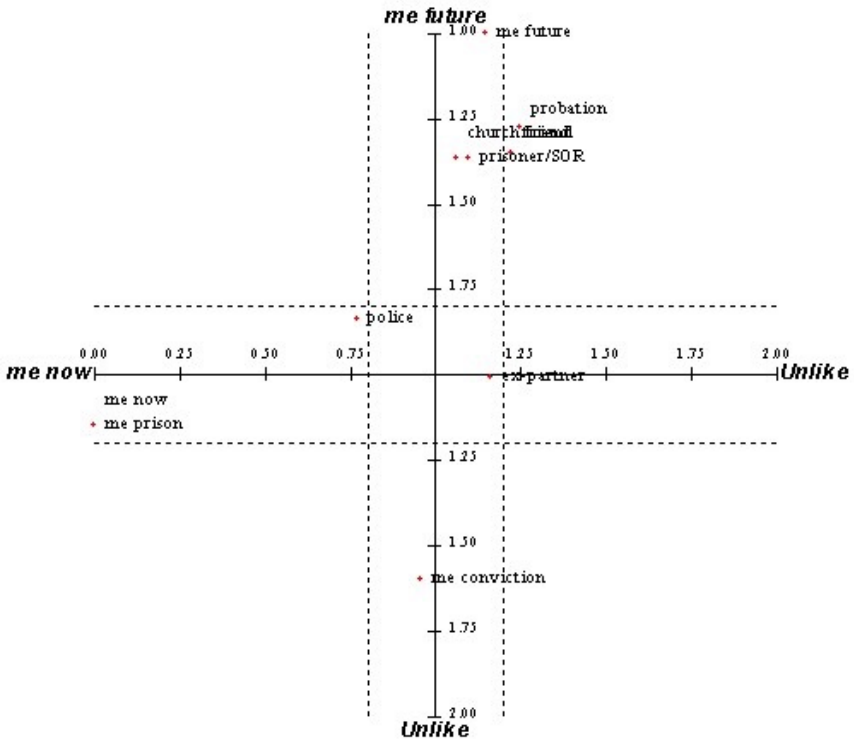
There were also indications of participants having hope for things to be different. Participant 5 was a 62-year-old white British man, convicted of indecent assault against a male and female child. He had been in prison for eight years, which included one period on recall. Participant 5 appeared to have been developing his self-esteem since coming out of prison, particularly through his involvement with 12-step groups and his church.

Participant 5: PCA grid



Whereas, in common with other participants, he had construed 'me (at time of) conviction' at the extreme negative end of the majority of constructs discussed, he saw his 'me future' as being more closely aligned with people he thought highly of such as 'friend', 'church friend', 'another ex-prisoner/man on the 'Sex Offender' Register' and 'Probation'. Participant 5's grid also has well-defined constructs and elements, indicating that he was able to view those around him with a degree of flexibility.

Participant 5: Self-identity plot



The self-identity plot for participant 5 also emphasises that he construed 'me (at time of) conviction' as isolated from others in his life, as well as 'me now' and 'me prison'. 'Me now' and 'me prison' are close together, but are both distant from 'me conviction', indicating that participant 5 saw himself as changing once he was in prison and that being consistent with how he is now. As in the above PCA grid, participant 5 identifies more closely with the positive people in his life and sees 'me future' as being more similar to them than his own past self. Distance between 'me now' and 'me future' i.e. self and ideal self indicates greater self-dissatisfaction; participant 5 was not yet where he wanted to be. This is consistent with his IPA interview, where he particularly talked about feeling like 'a little boy' due to his experiences of being on the 'sex offender' register. The level of control others had over his life is one way in which 'me now' and 'me prison' are more similar still.

Conclusion

There are a number of main findings from the repertory grid analysis which contribute to a personal construct model for these participants who had spent time in prison for sexual offences, and are now back in the community.

Firstly, a number of participants were struggling to define their current identity and how this fit with their identity at different time periods, as well as those around them. This was indicated by the lack of complexity in their construing, as well as grids not being well elaborated, demonstrating tight construing. The difficulties that they experienced when trying to reintegrate into the community, as described by many of the participants in chapter 5 in the IPA interview, were clearly impacting on their ability to understand who they were and how they fit in anymore.

The majority of participants showed challenges with negotiating their identity as a 'sex offender'. They construed themselves as very differently to how they were in the past, and yet still also as very different to those around them. While some participants were still unclear on who they would be in the future, most participants' grids, however, also indicated that they thought that in the future, they would be more like those around them, despite the challenges they were facing now. While the participants were having difficulties negotiating their identity, these findings also show their resilience in being able to maintain a positive view of themselves, in at least some aspects. This may be a protective coping strategy which aids in their acceptance of self, but this process of cognitive transformation (Giordano et al., 2002) is one which has also been shown to be important in desisting from further offending (e.g. Hulley, 2016).

The repertory grid analysis has therefore added to and enhanced the understanding of the participants from chapter 5. Completing repertory grids gave an opportunity to explore some of the participants' views which they were perhaps less willing to, or less able, to discuss explicitly. In practical terms, it was also a chance for participants to engage in something different to an interview, and reflect on how they saw themselves as having changed over time.

Using repertory grids with this population at intervals could assist in exploring changes in identity over time, and provide an opportunity for them to reflect and discuss on further support needed with, for example, their Probation Officers. Following completing the repertory grid, participant 7 actually suggested that he would find it helpful to complete the task ‘at beginning of group, in middle and at the end’. Completing this task would provide a structure and a space for exploring issues of identity and help to see where progress has been, or needs to be, made.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions and Applications

This thesis sought to increase understanding of the experiences of men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs), when released back into the community. In particular, the research aimed to examine how these individuals could be better supported to live an offence-free life but also a life with more meaning for them. This chapter will provide an overview of how this was achieved, how the research added to existing knowledge, and recommendations for future research and applications.

This thesis used three different methods to investigate the research aims. A structured review was completed examining the role that stigma plays in desistance for MCOSOs. A combination of IPA, via semi-structured interviews, and personal construct theory, via repertory grids, allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the participants, and what these meant for them about themselves and their identity. These two original studies combined provide a unique perspective of the experiences on men on the 'sex offender' register, therefore adding to the existing literature.

Structured review

The structured review on the role that stigma plays in desistance was the first review on this topic. From an initial 3020 results, 7 papers were included in the final review. Five themes were found:

Experiences of being on a register were largely negative and not useful: The register was not seen as having any meaningful impact on reoffending risk but was experienced as a means of control and further marginalisation. Associated restrictions made reintegration harder, impacting on accommodation, employment, relationships, and views of self.

Support: Social support from family and partners was important and appeared to impact on desistance, while professional support was not experienced similarly.

Work: Work was important for individuals' sense of purpose and identity but finding employment was difficult due to their convictions, which affected finances, stigma and self-esteem. Working was a coping mechanism for some and therefore also relevant to desistance.

Agency: Having external controls via a register could potentially remove the need for people to control their own behaviour or give false hope to the public about the ability of registers to prevent reoffending. Desisting men were moderately more confident in their self-efficacy than those potentially still actively offending.

Treatment accessed around sexual offending had been beneficial: Treatment had helped participants to understand their offending, and those who viewed treatment positively were more likely to remain motivated to desist.

Recommendations from the review included: more information and training for professionals, transparency about the purpose and limitations of registers, and supporting identification of practical and psychological strategies to manage the negative impact of registration such as support through voluntary groups and help with employment.

IPA and repertory grids

IPA was used to consider the lived experiences of nine participants. In common with the structured review, one superordinate theme was the 'negative impact of register/restrictions' (with sub themes including it's a hurdle, there's no way to build up trust, negative psychological impact). This is in line with previous research such as Levenson (2008) who found being on a register impacted on employment and housing, and Burchfield and Mungus (2008) who described barriers to social capital networks. The negative psychological impact on participants included constantly worrying about losing the lives they had built, and not being able to be honest with people around them. This fits with previous research such as Hatzenbuehler et al. (2009), who found that when people experience stigma-related stressors, they report more psychological distress.

Another sub-theme was that the restrictions for people with sexual offence convictions were not fit for purpose, with participants reporting that the restrictions are applied indiscriminately, and not necessarily according to their individual offending history and/or risks. This fit with the findings of the structured review. Interestingly, it was general licence conditions and SOPOs which were described as causing the most problems, not being on the 'sex offender' register itself as was assumed would be the case prior to commencing this research. More flexible

arrangements, tailored to the person and their particular needs, could help with understanding the register's purpose, and being more willing to comply; previous research has found that 'ex-offenders' can be less likely to comply with laws they view as unfair (Makkai & Braithwaite, 1994; Sherman, 1993). In addition, being treated as an individual rather than a 'sex offender' could help with relationships between those on the register and staff managing them, as well as helping individuals to reconcile the different parts of their self. Evans and Cubellis (2015) recommended applying restrictions for those with sexual offence convictions on a sliding scale. They also suggest implementing incentives/ways to earn being removed from the registry, alongside increased public education campaigns and training.

The most salient superordinate theme was 'negotiating identity as a 'sex offender'' (sub-themes of battling with the label of 'sex offender', sex offenders are the worse cases on earth, fear of identity being exposed, acceptance of self). Participants spoke about how negatively they were seen by others and how they attempted to manage this, with some dismissing the label as being relevant for them anymore (as in Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001) but finding it hard to maintain this position, and others trying to reconcile their past with their new identity and 'making good' (Maruna, 2001). Whereas being on the register was not reported to be the primary cause of practical issues, it did impact on the participants' views of themselves and as a reminder of how they were perceived by others.

This was also a key finding of the repertory grid analysis, which added to and expanded upon the 'negotiating identity' theme. The repertory grids for around half of the participants indicated tight construing; this leads to unvarying predictions (Smith, 2000) about self and others, but could be adaptive for some. Having negative expectations may feel safer than not knowing what to expect. Alternatively, it may have been too difficult for some participants to think about their identity due to the potential impact on their self-esteem or threat to how they saw reality (Kelly, 1955/1991).

Some participants were able to construe themselves more complexly, however still saw themselves as quite different from others, as seen in the constructs they used to

describe other people or how they rated themselves in comparison to them, which was usually at the more negative end of the spectrum as they saw it.

These perceived differences were despite some participants also recognising that they had changed significantly since their offending. There was more focus on them having 'knifed off' their past (Elder, 1998) and having changed their identity since offending, than was perhaps apparent in the IPA analysis.

It was positive that some participants also had hope for continued change and their future self being more closely aligned with those people who were important to them, although it was not necessarily clear how they thought this change would happen. It was evident from a number of the participants' interviews that they had the social skills and ability to make new friends and rebuild a support network, however this was primarily reported as being done in the absence of full disclosure about their convictions. Participants therefore expressed fear at losing these relationships if they were to be truly honest with their friends, leaving some constantly in a state of anxiety about their fears coming true. Some also feared being accused of further offending. Although their prison sentences were finished, their lives were very much still subject to restrictions and dependent on the decisions made by those in authority.

The remaining superordinate theme from the IPA analysis was living with stigma and restrictions (having a purpose, avoiding risky situations, support from others can help). Some of the approaches used by the participants here were in line with ones identified by Evans and Cubellis (2015) as being used by 'registered sex offenders' to manage stigma, particularly honesty, concealment and isolation but also denial for one participant. As has been found elsewhere (e.g. McAlinden et al., 2016), participants emphasised the importance of work and activity, as well as the difficulties in achieving these things whilst being on the 'sex offender' register. Participants wanted more opportunities for engaging in meaningful and purposeful activity, for example employment or generative activities (Maruna, 2001). They also wanted more support from professionals in securing this.

These studies have achieved the aim of increasing understanding of the experiences of MCOSOs when released back into the community, particularly in a UK context.

Participants were able to explain their perceptions of who they were, in comparison to when they offended, and what this meant for their identity and how others saw them too. Some suggestions for how to better support this population are given towards the end of this chapter.

Reflexivity

It is acknowledged that when completing qualitative research, the researcher is not completely objective and brings their own experiences to the research. The questions asked in interview are borne out of their research interests and sometimes experiences and opinions on a particular topic, and the interaction between themselves and the participant may also impact on the data gathered. This subjectivity is not necessarily a disadvantage, however it is important to remain aware of it and to record this process, such as how any experiences in earlier interviews may have impacted on subsequent ones, or any barriers in discussing particular topics with specific participants. This process of considering the impact of and interaction between researcher and research is called reflexivity (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2013; Forbes, 2008).

For this study, the researcher kept notes following each interview, capturing reflections on the relationship dynamic with the participant, any interpretations made during the interview itself, and any decisions made about how to progress the conversation or questions not to pursue. This process was beneficial in seeing the data from a wider angle and considering any researcher biases which may have affected the study, such as pre-existing knowledge from clinical and practitioner experience.

One of the main frustrations for the researcher was the difficulties in recruiting participants as it was necessary to rely on other professionals to invite potential participants to be involved. While it was understandable that their time was limited and the research was not a priority for them, it took many months longer than planned to collect the data, and this impacted on momentum and motivation at times. The time waiting for more participants was spent trying to establish further contacts and

recruit in other ways, as well as concentrating on literature reviews and transcription of the existing interviews in the meantime.

It was evident from the reflexivity notes that a larger proportion of time was spent discussing practical implications of being on a 'sex offender' register and licence conditions than the psychological implications or effects on identity. This highlighted how important these practical issues were for participants, which then, in turn, impacted on their views of themselves and others. These concerns have been represented in the analysis as one of the primary concerns for participants.

It was important to consider whether initially focusing on the 'sex offender' register in the research, and interview, questions, as opposed to for example, having a conviction for a sexual offence, could have impacted on the participants' accounts. While the interview schedule was based on relevant literature, it will also have been influenced by the researcher's own perceptions and is a good example of how personal constructs can affect interpretations, and the importance of making sure it is the participants' experiences which are the focus. Having said that, the choice to ask questions about the register specifically did allow for interesting discussions about which aspects of their conditions actually impacted on participants the most practically (e.g. licence conditions as opposed to being on the register), which would perhaps not have been covered otherwise, as well as a consideration of how knowing they were on the register impacted how they saw themselves or thought others did. Because a semi-structured interview approach was used, participants also had the opportunity to discuss what was meaningful to them, rather than just answering questions based on the interviewer's preconceptions.

While the researcher had clinical experience of assessment and intervention work with those who have committed sexual offences, it was a different skill to simply listen to participants' experiences without challenging or questioning any cognitive distortions or justifications. Clarification was still sought as appropriate, but a conscious effort was made to listen to their stories rather than direct the interview too much. One example of where it was useful to consider the researcher's own world view and biases was with participant 2. He strongly believed that feminism was a negative force, in his life personally and in society more widely. He wanted to know

whether the research had a 'feminist agenda', so a discussion was had with him about the motivation for the research being completed and the researcher's own experience but he was reminded that he could speak about whatever was important for him. It was useful to ask this question of the research as well, and to consider any underlying biases which may have affected the design and or interpretation. In particular, as a research-practitioner, it is acknowledged from the start that there was a pre-existing view that MCOSOs may have restrictions that are disproportionate to their individual risk of re-offending, that the negative impact of registration and restrictions could be detrimental to the individuals as well as potentially reoffending rates, and that all individuals should be given the opportunity to reintegrate into the community when ready. Within the interviews, it was important to ask participants about both positive and negative experiences since release to try to get a balanced view.

Keeping a reflexivity record was also useful in ensuring that researcher views on individuals did not overly influence interpretation of their meaning-making. There were participants with whom building a rapport was less easy than others, and it was good to acknowledge this and possible reasons for it.

Approaching this research using a personal construct perspective was a different way of conducting research for the researcher, as was combining the two different complementary research methods to investigate the research questions. It was beneficial to consider common themes amongst the participants, whilst also always maintaining a focus on individual experiences, and how individuals made sense of themselves and those around them. Using a personal construct psychology approach meant that consideration was given to how individuals were making meaning, and how their constructs were related to each other, but it was also important to remember that these constructs were elicited at one particular period in time and were not set in stone.

Limitations

A limitation of this research was the time constraints when completing the interviews and repertory grids. The participants had all given up their time for no extrinsic reward and the IPA interview and repertory grid sessions needed to be completed on

the same day, due to difficulties in recruitment and finding a suitable space to meet participants. Some participants disclosed, on arriving at the meeting, that they needed to leave earlier than planned due to other commitments, which impacted on the level of discussion that could be had within the time available. In particular, one participant had very little time to complete the repertory grid so discussion about the elements and constructs chosen was also limited. Ideally, the two sessions would have been held on different days. This would also have allowed for participant verification or otherwise on the interview and grid analysis, and perhaps led to further discussion and insights as a result. If it were possible, it would be really interesting to interview the same participants at a later time period, perhaps a few years later, to explore whether there has been any progress in their reintegration, or if they have since disclosed their offending to any of the people they were in relationships with.

All participants in this study were living in one of two big UK cities. While there is no intention to generalise from these men to all MCOSOs in a similar situation, it would have been interesting to also interview those living in a more rural setting, as this could potentially impact on both anonymity when returning to the community but also the support available.

Participants were initially approached by professionals working with them, such as Probation Officers or a community support project. It is therefore likely that the sample included participants who were generally engaging well with other professionals and perhaps happier to discuss their experiences. If the individuals here were expressing such concerns about their integration and a lack of support, it could be theorised that even more challenges or isolation are experienced by those who would not even have been approached to take part in a voluntary research interview. One benefit of the researcher being flexible about time and location for participant interviews was that the sample included those who were in employment as well as those who were not.

Further research

Two potential participants who were due to meet with the researcher were recalled unexpectedly, due to alleged further offences. Some who did participate had been recalled to prison previously and so could speak to those experiences, but it was not the focus of the interviews. It would be interesting to also interview people who have

been recalled and are back in custody. Recalls to prison can be due to breach of licence conditions, such as contact with someone they are not allowed to speak to, or breach of curfew, but when no further offending has occurred. It would be useful to speak to participants in this situation and explore whether their experience reinforced or contradicted their thoughts about their time in the community so far. This could provide additional information about the impact of a further period in custody on identity issues, such as how it feels to be labelled as a 'repeat offender' and if this impacts on views of self. It would also be useful to consider whether those who reoffended and were recalled had experienced different or additional difficulties with negotiating the label of 'sex offender' and if they thought this had impacted on their decision making in returning to offending.

All participants in this research were men. It would be beneficial to extend this research to women who have been convicted of sexual offences, as there can be both more empathy towards this group (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012), and more stigma (Hayes & Baker, 2014) depending on offending types (Tozdan et al., 2019). Similarly, participants who are transgender or nonbinary could potentially have different experiences of trying to reintegrate, particularly if they had presented as the gender assigned to them at birth prior to going into custody. Investigating how other experiences of stigma interact with the label of 'sex offender', for example someone who is a minority within a minority, could provide additional ideas on how this can be managed or what support is helpful.

As was discussed in chapters 5 and 6, the data indicated that despite difficulties in negotiating their identity, participants were still largely able to consider themselves as separate to their offence, it was other people who they did not see as being able to make this distinction. Participants indicated some of the strategies which helped them to maintain a positive view of themselves, at least at times, such as support from family, friends and professionals, and an ability to work or have purposeful activity. They also spoke about aspects which made it more difficult to maintain self-esteem, such as particular restrictions due to being on the register, or media attitudes. Further research into other strategies which help people to adjust when leaving prison, having served a sentence for sexual offences, could be beneficial in adapting support and interventions available to them.

A more longitudinal study, i.e. interviewing and completing repertory grids with the same participants at a later date or dates would also be interesting. This could allow for exploration of how participants have progressed with reintegrating into the community, or whether the same barriers have persisted, and what has made the difference in their trajectories.

Application and implications

Sharing results with MCOSOs

One of the follow-on actions from this research is to share the findings with MCOSOs who are due to be released from custody. This is with the aim of raising awareness about issues they may face on release, both practical and psychological, but also to allay some of their potential fears, for example about the likelihood of reprisals from others in the community. For those who are pessimistic about the chances of having any semblance of a life on release, it could be beneficial to see that people are able to develop new relationships and be employed; for those who are perhaps overly optimistic, it could help in identifying issues that they may wish to give some thought to planning how to manage. The hope is that the stories of the participants here can help others with their own planning and preparations, and this was something that participants thought would have been useful to them.

Sharing results with professionals

The findings will also be shared with staff working with MCOSOs, both in custody and the community, to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of their clients through learning about their experiences. As has been indicated, public attitudes towards MCOSOs are largely negative (e.g. King & Roberts, 2017), but professionals who had greater and more direct contact with those convicted of sexual offences, such as Probation officers and psychologists as opposed to police or correctional officers had less negative attitudes towards them (Hogue, 1993, cited in Day et al., 2014). Day et al. (2014) also found that police officers in their Australian study held more negative attitudes than those delivering treatment or support to MCOSOs. Continuing to increase awareness and empathy of the difficulties faced by MCOSOs in reintegrating, as well as the potential impact of this, could support

developing more effective working relationships, particularly with police officers involved with those on the register.

Conclusions and implications for policy

In conclusion, this thesis has met the aim of further understanding the experiences of MCOSOs. It has also added to the existing literature in confirming the difficulties that those on the 'sex offender' register can have. This includes practical challenges such as managing employment, relationships and accommodation, as well as trying to manage their identity and move forward in their lives with the knowledge that they were capable of committing such an offence and the negative views that others have of them as a result. This study was done in a UK context where there is less existing literature considering the experiences of the men in this situation in their own words. An additional aim of the research was to consider how these individuals could be better supported to live an offence-free life but also a life which was more meaningful for them. Key areas for policy makers to consider, based on this research, would be around how restrictions are set and reviewed for individuals, particularly the impact on their ability to access housing, employment and build up pro-social networks, all of which can impact on desistance (Willis et al., 2010). Participants suggested that there was a need for more support from professionals in achieving these goals too. Professionals may be inclined to be more risk-averse due to understandably being concerned about risks of further offending as well as the repercussions for them if someone they are managing does commit a further offence; they may therefore need more support in weighing up the potential risks posed by MCOSOs, against the impact on them and others if they are not supported in reintegrating into the community.

In terms of support for individuals in managing their identity, firstly the challenges associated with having a sexual offence conviction and the labelling and stigma associated with this should be discussed openly; MCOSOs will largely already be aware of how others may see them so it is important to allow space for them to process this, and consider how to balance out taking responsibility for their actions but not allowing their offence to become their master status (Becker, 1963/2018). For some, this would include access to support with addressing their own traumatic experiences and understanding how this impacted on their own decision making to

offend. Incorporating these discussions into treatment programmes in custody, as well as with Probation Officers, will help to keep these issues in mind. Supporting individuals to develop their personal strengths and protective factors would also help in allowing them a balanced view of who they are as a whole person.

Another area for consideration is the ways individuals are labelled and how professionals talk about their risk and if this is in line with what research has shown, rather than allowing people to continue to see themselves as inherently dangerous and not deserving a chance at redemption (Ward & Maruna, 2007). For example, continuing to move away from the use of the term 'sex offender' in favour of MCOSO is a small action but which can have a big impact. Being mindful of risks of reconviction data for this population is also important so that people with convictions for sexual offences are treated as individuals, and plans put in place according to their individual risks and needs, rather than their label. More responsible media reporting of those who have committed sexual offences could also have an impact on public opinion, for example on perceptions of rates of reoffending, and the purpose and remit of the 'sex offender' register.

Wider implications from this research are around continued questions over whether the 'sex offender' register is fit for purpose, and if there are alternative strategies which could better support individuals, while also promoting reintegration and desistance. As discussed in chapter 5, this research also raises ongoing questions about the possible impact of the challenges men on the 'sex offender' register face on their ability or motivation to desist. This study did not consider reconviction, but previous research has highlighted a potential link between not being able to reintegrate into the community, and risk of reoffending (e.g. Tewksbury, 2007) as well as a lack of evidence for such restrictions reducing offending (e.g. Tewksbury, 2007; Bowen et al., 2016). If restrictions are not having the desired effect, and are in fact having a detrimental impact, which in turn may further reduce their effectiveness, it is important to consider whether the public favouring such policies (e.g. Levenson, Brannon et al., 2007) warrants continuing to use them in their current form. Instead, we could be applying more specific restrictions less indiscriminately, while also prioritising supporting MCOSOs in their resettlement and desistance, to benefit not only these individuals but also any potential further victims.

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Appendix 1: A priori protocol for structured review

Structured review title: **What is the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending?**

Has it been done already? Searches done on 02/09/18
Cochrane – searched for 'stigma' (21 results) and 'sexual offending' (3 results) – 'sexual offending' = 6 results but not relevant; 'stigma' has 17 and none relevant

JBI – stigma = 3 results, which not relevant. Sexual offending/sexual offence = 0 results, and only 5 for sexual, none of which relevant. Also checked registry for identified review topics and none relevant on that list.

Prospero – searched for sexual offender (1-not relevant), sexual offending (3-not relevant), sexual offence (2-not relevant) and stigma (216 results but none relevant to my topic)

NHS research register (researchregistry.com) stigma = 7 results which not relevant. Offences = 0 results. Offending = 5, one on clinicians attitudes towards LD s.o. but nothing relevant. Sexual = 38 results (same one as above but nothing else)

NICE – 83 results for sex stigma in systematic review category – none relevant
For sex offending were 31 systematic reviews: none relevant either

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria (include rationale)

Inclusion criteria:
Written up or available in English
Used recognised research method – initially including any research method to ensure nothing missed but expecting majority to be qualitative or mixed methods
Studies that reported experiences or outcomes related to desistance, reconviction or reoffending
Community sample
Adult men convicted of any types of sexual offence convictions

Exclusion criteria:
Studies concerning offences which participants not been convicted of/those identifying as having paedophilia but who have not offended
Female only studies
Prison based sample

The search location

Journal databases:
Criminal justice abstracts
PsychInfo
PsychArticles
Proquest dissertations and theses global

Reference searching? **Yes** - checking references of papers in this area and seeing if relevant papers been located by the search

Contact authors?	Yes	**No**
Books?	Yes	**No**

Aims: To consider the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending e.g. do people convicted of sexual offences see the stigma associated with these offences as preventing them from reoffending, or does it isolate them further, potentially increasing the chance of re-offending?

Rationale: Given the negative attitudes towards those convicted of sexual offences, held by the general public as well as expressed in the media, it is important to consider how these might affect individuals in this situation, and whether there are any dangers that stigma and labelling can actually increase their likelihood to offend.

Question:
What do men who have convictions for sexual offences see as the role of stigma in desistance from sexual offending?

Qualitative

Population: Men convicted of sexual offences

Phenomenon of interest: Stigma and how this may play a part in either desistance from sexual reoffending or increasing risks of sexual reoffending

Context: Men convicted of sexual offences and then being released into the community, amongst stigma and negative attitudes from the public

The search:

Concept	Synonyms	Search terms
Stigma	Labelling Disgrace Shame Tainted Dishonour	Stigm* OR Label* OR Disgrac* OR Sham*OR Taint* OR Dishono*
		AND
Desistance	Protective factors Success factors Reoffending (not) Reconviction (lack of)	Desist* OR Protect* OR success OR Reoffend* OR Reconvict*
		AND

Sexual offending	Sexual crimes Child sexual abuse	'sex* offen*' OR 'sex* crim*' OR p?edophil*

Specifics of searches: (done on 06/09/2018)
Criminal justice abstract – English - above search terms in all text comes up with 1347 results (choosing Boolean/phrase for current search), not limited by only ones with full text available, all dates, document types

Psycharticles as above– males, all record types, all methodologies, English, adulthood – 1670 results

Psychinfo – as above – all target audience also selected: only 1 result and not relevant:

Proquest dissertations and theses global – masters and doctoral, in English, anywhere except full text – 77 results

Appendix 2: Proforma for quality appraisal of studies

	Yes (1)	Partial/unclear (0.5)	No (0)	Comments
Validity				
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?				
Was a qualitative methodology appropriate?				
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?				
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?				
Demographic information given about participants?				
Analysis and results				
Was the method of analysis appropriate?				
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?				
Is there a clear statement of findings?				
Bias				
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?				
Was there any selection bias in the recruitment of the sample?				
Were the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participant selection clear?				
Applicability of research				
How valuable is the research?				
Ethics and limitations				
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?				
Are limitations of the study clearly reported?				

Appendix 3: Example data extraction form

Burchfield, K.B., & Mingus, W. (2008)
Not in My Neighborhood Assessing Registered Sex Offenders' Experiences With Local Social Capital and Social Control

	Yes (1)	Partial/unclear (0.5)	No (0)	Comments
Validity				
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	1			Explore experiences with local social capital while being registered, and on and off parole: Do sex offenders have access to and participate in networks of local social capital? Are they connected to friends and neighbours in the community? Do these social networks provide support in the form of friendly relationships, neighbourly cooperation, employment, or housing information? What barriers to social capital do these offenders experience? Do those barriers originate from individual, community, structural or formal restrictions?
Was a qualitative methodology appropriate?	1			Interested in assessing experiences of individuals
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	1			Semi-structured interviews to explore experiences
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	1			Recruitment letters sent to all sex offenders on parole and on Illinois state police sex offender registry in five counties in northern

				and central Illinois. Also subjects were recruited via sex offender treatment group in Cook County. Follow-up letters sent too.
Demographic information given about participants?	1			Age, race, gender, marital status, county, parole and most serious offence all reported.
Analysis and results				
Was the method of analysis appropriate?	1			Thematic analysis Conducted using HyperRESEARCH 2.7.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	1			Multiple readings of interview data. Common themes identified.
Is there a clear statement of findings?	1			Themes reported and summary given. Discuss problems accessing and participating in networks of local social capital, incidents of community residential mobilisation against them and their experiences with formal barriers to social capital, including parole restrictions
Bias				
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		0.5		Not specifically referenced so unclear.
Were the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participant selection clear?		0.5		Although all participants were on the child protection register, there was one female participant, and 2 had murdered a child but with no known sexual motivation
Applicability of research				

How valuable is the research?	1			Useful exploration of experiences with social capital.
Ethics and limitations				
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		0.5		Envelopes hand addressed to create more personal look and less institutional. Other information not reported.
Are limitations of the study clearly reported?	1			Limited sample based on geographic area and low response rate. Findings based on participants' own perceptions and could not be confirmed. Over-representation of urban sex offenders.
Total score				11.5/13 = 88%

Appendix 4: Sample Data extraction form

Qualitative data extraction	
Source – citation and contact details	Farmer, M., Beech, A.R., Ward, T. Assessing Desistance in Child Molesters: A Qualitative Analysis 2012
Eligibility – confirm eligibility for the review	YES
Methodology – approach to the inquiry	Drawn on work of Maruna (2001) and themes which Maruna had found were significant in desistance (redemption, generativity, agency, communion, contamination) used as initial template plus new themes also coded.
Methods – how data was collected	Life Story Interviews Also used clinicians rating schedule, RM2000, Beech's deviance system
Phenomena of interest – the described experience or activity	To investigate the process of desistance from sexual offending by comparing two groups of child molesters; one deemed to be desisting and one deemed to be still potentially active offenders Research questions: - Are desisting offenders different to those who are suspected of still engaging in risky behaviours? - What are the processes that contribute to desistance?
Setting – specific context of the study e.g. prison	Men undertaking sex offender treatment – community
Geographical location	UK – West Midlands region
Culture – cultural characteristics of setting or participants	
Participants – demographic data such as gender, age etc	10 men who had sexually offended against children – 5 'desisting' and 5 potentially 'active' offenders 80% White, 10% Asian (active group), 10% African Caribbean (desistance group)
Data analysis – analytic approach taken e.g. thematic, IPA, grounded theory	Phenomenological analysis to identify any of Maruna's themes (above) as well as any new themes related to desistance

Appendix 5: Information sheet

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by a doctorate student at Nottingham Trent University. The aim of the study is to help us understand the impact a sex offence conviction has on men once they have been released back into the community. This Information Sheet tells you about the study and what would be involved if you decide to take part. The researcher will also talk through this information with you if you do decide to participate.

Your decision to take part or not to take part will not affect your licence conditions, work with Probation or any external agencies.

The researcher is a forensic psychologist who works for the Prison Service and who is also completing a professional doctorate. This research will be supervised by two forensic psychologists who are based at Nottingham Trent University.

You do not have to take part.

This study is completely separate from your management while on licence, and you do not have to take part in this study. If you do and then change your mind (either during the interview, or up until 1 month following the interview), any information collected about you will be destroyed. You do not have to give a reason for not taking part in the study and there will be no negative consequences as a result of not taking part.

What is the research about?

The research will be looking at the experiences of men who have served prison sentences for sexual offences once they are released back into the community, such as the impact of their conviction on their views of themselves and their interactions with others. You will therefore be asked about your experiences and how your conviction is impacting on you, your life and daily interactions, and times when you have had to disclose your conviction to other people. You will be asked what your conviction was for, but you will **not** be asked to give details of the offences or your offending behaviours.

What would you be asked to do?

If you take part in the research you will be interviewed by a researcher about your experiences on release. This will include your thoughts on being on the Sex Offender Register, and the impact of your conviction on your views of yourself and the views of other people towards you. Questions would include 'tell me about your experience of being on the sex offender register' and 'how restricted do you feel as someone who has been convicted of a sexual offence who is now living in the community?'
You will also be asked to complete a task which involves identifying people and traits which are meaningful to you and comparing these/sorting these into different orders. You will be given full instructions on how to complete this task. The interviews will take place in an interview room at your Probation Offices or Approved Premises and will last approximately 2.5 hours.

What will happen to the information I give to the researcher?

We will not use your real name in any of the research. At the beginning we will give you a pseudonym (alternative name) and we will use that on all the records of you and when we write the research up. We will never use your real name, and will also not say anything else that might give away your identity.

The interview will be recorded so that what you say can be typed up onto a computer. Some written notes will also be made during the interview. We will look at this information to find any patterns or themes in what the people who were interviewed have said. What we talk about in the interview will not be passed on outside of writing up the research, unless you tell me:

- Information that suggests risk to yourself or harm to others
- Information about an offence which you have not been convicted for
- Information linked to any terrorist actions.

If you mention any of these things to me, I will have to pass the information on to your Probation Officer, Police, or Social Services as appropriate.

Your interview will be treated with the strictest confidence. Your information will be kept safely on a password protected computer file by the researcher. When the research has finished, the tape recordings will be deleted. No one will have access to your data except the researcher and her supervisors. We completely understand how important it is to you that the things you say are looked after very carefully. Remember that your real name will never be kept with any other information about you.

I will write a report at the end of this study to show what has been found. This report will make reference to what you, and other participants, have said, to show what has been found. The report will be given to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to help them consider the best ways to support men being released from prison. The findings from the research will also be used for teaching and research purposes and are likely to be published in academic journals as well as through the University. Any reports written, or research published, will not mention you by name and nobody will be able to tell you took part in the research.

What happens if I do not want to take part anymore?

You can stop the interviews and you can say that you do not want to take part in the research at any time, with no consequences for yourself. If you change your mind after the interview and do not want to take part anymore, you have 1 month after the interview to let me know.

Are there any risks to me if I take part in this research?

We do not think that there are any risks to you from taking part in this research, however it is possible that you may find it upsetting to discuss any difficult experiences you have had since being released from prison.

Are there any benefits to me if I take part in this research?

There are no financial benefits to taking part but you might find it interesting to take part in the interview and to share and reflect on your views and experiences.

Complaints procedure

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research, please write to my supervisor: Nick Blagden, SOCAMRU, Division of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, Room 4001 Chaucer Building, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU.

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Form

Purpose:
This research is looking at the experiences of men who have served prison sentences for sexual offences once they have been released back into the community. I would like you to share your experiences about the impact of your conviction on your view of yourself, your interactions with others, and any challenges you have faced on release.

Procedure:
The interview will ask questions to find out your experiences and views about being back in the community, and being on the Sex Offender Register. You will also be asked to complete a task which involves identifying people and traits which are meaningful to you and comparing these/sorting these into different orders. You will be given full instructions on how to complete this task.
It will take place in an interview room in the Probation Offices, Approved Premises or other suitable space, lasting around 2.5 hours. The interview will be recorded (voice only) so that the information can be typed up accurately following the interview. Some written notes will also be made during the interview. You will be asked what you were convicted of but will not be asked any personal questions about the offences themselves. You can tell the interviewer if you don't understand a question or if you don't want to answer any of the questions. You will be given a pseudonym (alternative name) that lets us identify your information without anyone else being able to link you with what you have said. Results from the interview will be analysed then written up in a report which will be published. No information identifying you or anyone else you mention will be included.

The only circumstances in which further information would be shared would be if you choose to disclose an offence for which you have not been convicted, if you indicate that yourself or another person are at risk of harm, or information linked to any terrorist actions.

Voluntary nature of the research:
Whether you take part in this research or not is your choice and it will have no effect on your licence conditions, work with Probation or any other external agencies. There is no benefit from taking part, but you may find it interesting to share your views. You do not have to take part in this research but if you do, you can remove your data at any time during the interview. You do not have to give a reason for not taking part or for removing your data.

Statement of consent

I have read the participant information sheet and understand what my participation involves. I hereby consent to taking part in the above research project and to being recorded as part of this.

I understand that by consenting to this research, I am agreeing to take part in an interview for approximately 2.5 hours, which will ask questions about my experience

of returning to the community after having served a prison sentence for a sexual offence and my views of myself throughout this process.

I understand that my data will be anonymised and will only be identifiable through the pseudonym assigned to me.

Signature or mark of respondent

Print Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Signature or mark of Researcher

I certify that I have explained the above information to the participant and he has agreed to take part.

Print Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix 7: Semi-structured interview schedule

Please can you tell me your age, ethnicity, what you were convicted of, and how long you spent in prison? This information will not be used to identify you but may be useful in considering any similarities or differences between participants' experiences, and in explaining the range of people I spoke to for this research.

Experience of being on sex offender register in community

- Tell me about your experience of being on the sex offender register.
- What do you think is the purpose of the register?
- What have the main challenges been for you since being released?
    - What has helped you to navigate these challenges?
    - Who has helped you?
    - What has made it more difficult?
- How restricted do you feel as someone who has been convicted of a sexual offence who is now living in the community?
    - What is helpful about these restrictions?
    - What is unhelpful? What are the consequences for you of not complying?
- Do you think being on the sex offender register makes you different from other people?

Disclosure experiences

- How many people are aware of your offending?
- What concerns would you have about people finding out? Why? Any examples?
- What worries do you have about the disclosure process?
    - Are there any situations you have avoided due to concerns about disclosure?
- Can you give me an example of when you have had to disclose (or discuss) your offending to a professional?
    - What went well?
    - What was difficult?
    - How do you think that person's view of you changed as a result of your disclosure, if at all?
- Can you give me an example of when you have had to disclose your offending to someone in a personal capacity (family, friends)?
    - What went well?
    - What was difficult?
    - How do you think that person's view of you changed as a result of your disclosure, if at all?

Views of self

- When/if you are described as a sex offender, how do you feel? How would you describe yourself? Do you feel this label 'fits' you?
- How is this different to before your offending and/or time in prison?
- What do you think you have learned about yourself through your experiences of offending and going to prison?

- How do you feel about the way sexual offences are reported in the media? (how discussed amongst people you know?)
- How do you think people generally feel about those who have committed a sexual offence?
- How do people who are important to you view you?
- What impact does this have on your view of yourself/self-esteem, if any?
- How often do you think of anything related to your offending/your circumstances as a result?
- How do you manage any negative thoughts or feelings about yourself?
    - How effective are these strategies?
    - What makes it more difficult to implement these strategies?

What helps/hinders reintegration and identity management

- How would you describe your relationship with your Offender Manager?
    - What could improve it?
- What would help you to manage living with being on the sex offender register/other people's views more effectively?
- What do you think are the main things that need to be done/you need to do to reduce risk of reoffending?
- What about the main things that need to be done/you need to do to reintegrate fully?

Anything you would like to add that is important for me to know about your experience of being back in the community and managing the label of sex offender, which we haven't discussed already?

Appendix 8: Debrief form

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. This research aims to look at how men who have served prison sentences for sexual offences adjust back into the community on release, and the impact their conviction has on them and their interaction with others.

Only the researcher and her supervisors will know about what we spoke about during interview. When I write up what you said and any results, I will not use your real name but will instead use a pseudonym (alternative name). You will not be named or identified in any way in the write up of this research.

If you change your mind and do not want me to use the information you have given, you have until 1 month after the interview to tell me. After this time, the interview information will be typed up and cannot be withdrawn from the study. If you decide to no longer take part and wish for your information to be withdrawn, there will be no negative consequences and all information you have given will be destroyed.

If anything discussed today has led to you feeling upset or distressed, you could do one of the following:

- Speak to your Probation Officer or other relevant keyworker
- Speak to someone in your support network
- Call a helpline if you wish to speak to someone independent for example you can contact the Samaritans on 116 123.
- The STOP IT NOW helpline on 0808 1000 900 can help if you are concerned about your risk of sexual reoffending and wish to get support to manage this.
- The SupportLine helpline on 01708 765 200 provides emotional support and information on counsellors and support groups throughout the UK.
- You may wish to speak to your GP if you need more support to manage any stress or depression you are experiencing.

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this research. If you have any concerns or complaints about this research interview, please write to my supervisor: Nick Blagden, SOCAMRU, Division of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, Room 4001 Chaucer Building, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU.

Appendix 9: Repertory grid template

Similarity or emergent pole	Elements												Contrast pole
	Me at time of conviction	Me in prison	Me now	Me in the future	Friend:	Partner /ex-partner:	Parent:	Fellow prisoner:	A man on SOR:	Probation Officer:	Police Officer	?	
Isolated													Integrated
Stigmatized													Accepted
Restricted													Free

i A note: Throughout this thesis, the terms '**men convicted of sexual offences'**, 'men with sexual offence convictions' or MCOSO are used. While these may appear unwieldy, it is important not to characterise the participants in this research, as well as those in other research cited here, by their offence status alone. Where the term 'sex offender' needs to be used, other than in transcript data, quotation marks will be used. The implications of labelling someone as a 'sex offender' and not considering them as a person as a whole is discussed within the thesis, including from the perspective of the research participants.