USING 'TURNING POINTS' TO UNDERSTAND PROCESSES OF CHANGE IN OFFENDING

Notes from a Swedish Study on Life Courses and Crime

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Processes of within-individual change in offending and desistance from crime can be very complex, often involving multiple, context-specific processes. But even in a generous reading of much research on turning points, while this is theoretically stated or inferred, it is less often shown or illustrated in empirical cases. I explore processes of change in offending with the help of the concept of 'turning points', through life story interviews conducted in the Stockholm Project, trying to make use of the possibilities inherent in qualitative inquiry. I show how life course processes and the turning points that emerge within them are often interdependent on each other, emerging in very context-specific circumstances, and need to be studied and understood and such. Future research areas are suggested.

Keywords: turning points, life course criminology, offending, desistance, life story interviews

Introduction

Since the follow-up study of 500 delinquent and 500 non-delinquent boys conducted by Sampson and Laub (1993), the concept of turning points has received much attention in life course criminology. Turning points are closely linked to desistance from crime (see, among many others, Savolainen 2009; Uggen and Wakefield 2008; Wimer *et al.* 2008; Sampson and Laub 2005; Uggen and Massaoglia 2003; Laub and Sampson 2003; Uggen 2000). Processes of family formation, stable employment, the disintegration of peer groups and subjective shifts in identity are changes that tend to emerge at certain stages in the life and have been shown to be important for understanding changes in offending (see, in turn, Laub and Sampson 2001; Farrall 2002; Warr 1998; Maruna 2001; Gadd and Farrall 2004).

   Although exceptions exist (see Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986), it is generally agreed that turning points and desistance, as manifested in individuals' lives, are very often gradual processes (Skardhamar 2010: 15; see also Laub *et al.* 1998). This complexity, according to Maruna (2001), is difficult to capture with quantitative methods. Rather, when studied with quantitative instruments, the picture that tends to appear is one of 'desistance as an event—an abrupt cessation of criminal behavior' (Maruna 2001: 22). While it is definitely not impossible to capture social processes in individual lives by using quantitative methods (see, e.g. Bushway *et al.* 2001; 2003), they are arguably less well suited for the task than qualitative life story interviews (Becker 1966). As Gadd and Farrall note, the '"turning points" in criminal careers identified

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in aggregate data may well be methodological effects that only appear so salient because of *absences* in the information gathered' (Gadd and Farrall 2004: 148, emphasis in original).

Exploring continuity and change in offending in a qualitative material is in many ways different from doing so in a quantitative material (even though the two approaches can have much in common; see Maruna 2010; Becker 1996). In their well-known study of the Glueck men, Laub and Sampson (2003) do both, confronting their quantitative data with the qualitative, with the qualitative source complementing and developing the quantitative findings. While they successfully illustrate that desistance and turning points emerge in a process and how turning points constitute a central element of their age-graded theory of informal social control, there are still some questions and areas left unanswered, especially for a purely qualitative interview study like the present one. One of those areas is to be explored in this paper: to conduct a detailed, in-depth study of the processes that support the process of desistance.

It is connected to a, perhaps, seemingly minor question of methodology. Laub and Sampson explicitly ask their interview participants about 'any important turning points' (see, e.g. Laub and Sampson 2003: 134). In interviews, you often 'get what you ask for' and, in their study, Laub and Sampson tend to get just that (I will elaborate on this below). We know from studies of narrative inquiry, interview techniques and other related methodological issues that the narrative or life story emerges in an interview situation as a result of both the interviewer and interview participant (see Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Atkinson 1998; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Wells 2011). The concepts given to an interview participant (usually in the form of questions) are often taken up and used to construct the narrative. An interesting question then arises: what accounts of continuity and change during the life course emerge when you *do not* explicitly ask the interview participants about turning points?

Perhaps it is not about whether a certain question is asked or not. We know that changes in offending and desistance from crime are often very complex social processes, and Laub and Sampson attempt to understand turning points and what they call 'turning point processes' (Sampson and Laub 2005) in light of this. But even in a rather generous reading of research on turning points, the importance of context-specific transition processes is seldom explicitly stated. So-called life course theories, Ulmer and Spencer note, often 'assume, or infer, these ... processes' (Ulmer and Spencer 1999: 116), with explicit illustrations of the context and interconnectedness of processes of change in offending being even rarer (Laub and Sampson (2003), one could argue, is an exception, but even they tend to focus on processes of employment, family formation or military service as separate from each other).

Against a theoretical backdrop of the concept of 'turning points', its relation to changes in offending, and what it can mean to study 'processes', this paper is an attempt to elucidate the importance of exploring the multiplicity and context-specificity of processes when trying to understand changes in offending and desistance from crime. However, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of a holistic view in which no process or event is more important than any other. To untangle the processes of change in offending and explore those 'crucial [processes] in which new lines of individual ... activity are forged, in which new aspects of the self are brought into being' (Becker 1966: xiv), I argue that the concept of turning points can be useful. In the following section, I thus begin by outlining this concept.

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What Is a Turning Point?

Two concepts are often seen as central to understanding life course dynamics: trajectories and transitions (Elder 1985). A trajectory can be conceptualized as 'a pathway or a line of development over the life span' (Sampson and Laub 1993: 8) through time and space, and is marked by transitions, 'changes in state that are more or less abrupt' (Elder 1985: 31–2). Trajectories and transitions are thus interlocked and may bring about turning points.

Transitions are not synonymous with turning points, since transitions 'carry no necessary expectation of change in life trajectory', in this case, a change in offending (Rutter 1996: 614). For example, it is possible to make a transition into employment and family formation without desisting from crime or decreasing the intensity or frequency of offending.[1]

Turning points and changes in offending

Even though Laub and Sampson initially conceptualize turning points as 'part of a process over time' (Laub and Sampson 1993: 304) and try to include 'both incremental and abrupt change' (Sampson and Laub 1998: 223), they, in later writings, acknowledge that much of their research on turning points has tended to see them as single, sometimes rare events (Sampson and Laub 2005: 33). They then see a turning point as 'an alteration or deflection in a long-term pathway or trajectory that was initiated at an earlier point in time' (Sampson and Laub 2005: 16). What makes a turning point a turning point, 'rather than a minor ripple', is the amount of 'sufficient time' that is spent 'on a new course' (Abbott 1997: 89; Laub and Sampson 2003: 39).[2]

For Laub and Sampson (2003), turning points constitute a central element in their age-graded theory of informal social control. The emergence of a turning point during the life course opens up the possibility for the individual to (1) 'knife off' the past from the present, (2) invest in new relationships that foster social support and growth, (3) be under direct and/or indirect supervision and control, (4) engage in routine activities centred more around conventional life and/or (5) perform an identity transformation (Sampson and Laub 2005: 34). Siennick and Osgood's (2008) categorization of the research on desistance and transitions to adult roles offers a more explicitly theoretical version of the same underlying notions. They divide transitions into three types: changes in social control, changes in routine activities and changes in the individual's self-image. This point of departure is useful for understanding the link between turning points and processes of change in offending.

A turning point thus constitutes a change in the life course, which, in turn, constitutes a change in the individual's offending. It is not employment, marriage, military service, residential change or other changes in themselves that bring about desistance, but rather the way such changes under certain circumstances can bring about *other* changes, which are theoretically understood as central for the desistance processes to emerge.

[1]It could be argued that desistance from crime is a role transition often occurring when the individual enters adulthood, as we can be fairly sure that desistance is normative in the sense that it is expected—most individuals eventually desist and many do so in transition into adulthood (Uggen and Massaoglia 2003).

[2]For the present purposes, I limit myself to the definition(s) offered by Laub and Sampson. For other well-known definitions, see, for example, Abbott (1997: 101), Rutter (1996: 614), Clausen (1998: 204) and Hareven and Masaoka (1988: 274). The last one explicitly acknowledges turning points as processes.

Kazemian and Maruna note that most studies of desistance measure it as static rather than taking a 'process view' of the phenomenon (Kazemian and Maruna 2009: 279). By adopting a process view, we take *changes* in offending into account, as well as 'the progression towards desistance' (Kazemian and Maruna 2009: 279).

I think the notion of 'progression' must be carefully used. Progression suggests something unidirectional whereby the individual decreases his or her offending until it has ceased completely. Ever since, at least, Glaser's (1964) study of prison and parole systems, we know that the 'zig-zag path' of offending is very common (see also Maruna 2001: 43). So rather, I think, we need to acknowledge what Matza (1964) has called 'drift' and what Farrall and Calverley (2006) describe as 'lulls': a process of change, in this case towards desistance, is set in motion by someone or something, but the individual might drift back and forth, increasing or decreasing his or her offending along the way. Instead of 'progression towards desistance', it might be more useful to use the concept of drift, which Matza conceptualizes as a 'gradual process of movement' and is not as linear (Matza 1964: 29).

Processes of Continuity and Change

Much of the research on turning points also seems to suggest that what actually happens in the individual's life is something important in itself (Maruna 2001). But there is nothing inherent in a process or event that makes it a turning point, and individuals often give 'strangely trivial reasons' as to why they desist from crime (Maruna 2001: 25). Maruna instead recommends that we see desistance as a kind of maintenance process and that research should focus on 'the maintenance of crime-free behavior in the face of life's obstacles and frustrations' (Maruna 2001: 26), focusing on continuity rather than change.

This recommendation is only partly correct, I think. Strictly speaking, there is nothing in Maruna's argument that suggests that any event or process in the life course is more important than any other—which is clearly not true. While events or processes may not inherently be turning points, the important question, to me, is whether turning points can be a useful construct for interpreting, analysing and understanding changes in offending in qualitative material. In that sense, I am very utility-oriented. And, presumably contrary to Maruna, I think turning points can help us bring clarity in the complex, dynamic life course of any given individual, and help us identify those processes that seem to be more important than others when it comes to changes in offending and desistance from crime. My aim, then, is to pay attention to those 'crucial [processes] in which new lines of individual . . . activity are forged, in which new aspects of the self are brought into being' (Becker 1966: xiv).

However, there is a clear point in Maruna's argument. As Quinney notes, when dealing with the social world, 'one rarely expects to find a single event or condition that is both necessary and sufficient to bring about another event' (Quinney 1971/2000: 41). Gadd and Farrall argue that, in relation to research on desistance and changes in offending, 'answers to the question "why do people stop offending?" are unlikely to be evident' in much of the data 'we gather about criminal careers' (Gadd and Farrall 2004: 148). To some extent, they continue, we need to study the biography of cases of change in depth. While any theoretical construct should be useful and, at least to some extent, be more general than its immediate empirical ground, it also has to be able to account for

individual agency, innovation and new observations (Farrall *et al.* forthcoming). After all, our scientific abstractions of explanation and understanding 'will always to some degree be indeterminate—not just because of methodological limitations, but also because of the nature of human social activity' (Ulmer and Spencer 1999: 106).

'Process' is a word I have used a lot so far. The idea underlying this perspective on the social world is the notion that a life story can be understood as a narrative, where we 'understand the occurrence of events by learning the steps in the process by which they came to happen' (Becker 1998: 61; see also Bruner 1987/2004). This does not necessarily imply linearity or continuity, but rather that, as Shaw (1930/1966: 13) has noted, 'any specific act of the individual becomes comprehensible only in the light of its relation to . . . past experiences' and the individual projecting him or herself into the future. Lines of action (or absence of action) 'can influence, in a dialectical fashion, the very forces or contingencies that condition later choices' (Ulmer and Spencer 1999: 109).

Processes 'don't have a predestined goal. They can have more than one ending . . . and in some of those endings the thing we set out to explain doesn't happen' (Becker 1998: 62).[3] Applying this to studying continuity and change in criminal offending, this means, to me, that we should be aware of the 'drifting' movement I described above and that we should not expect a decrease in offending to necessarily mean a movement towards desistance. This has a policy implication that I will return to.

Instead, in understanding the meaning of something—the employment, military service, marriage, the residential change, etc.—we must to a greater extent study and understand it in the context of the surrounding processes of which it must necessarily be part, and see how it is through these that the turning point emerges and how change is made possible. As Becker notes, 'our interpretation [of change] has significance only if our imagery of the underlying process is accurate' (Becker 1966: xiv).

Method: The Stockholm Boys Project

The main purpose of the Stockholm Boys Project (hereafter, the Stockholm Project) is to study the life course processes surrounding onset, persistence, desistance and intermittency of offending (the project has been described in detail elsewhere; see Sarnecki *et al.* forthcoming). Life story interviews provide a useful method of inquiry. More than other methods of inquiry, except for perhaps participant observation, the life story approach can 'give meaning to the . . . notion of process' (Becker 1966: xiii). It is well suited for exploring 'social processes themselves', including contingencies and turning points in the life course (Ulmer and Spencer 1999: 106). By using life story interviews, the process of a criminal career is studied with attention to the 'contingencies that facilitate or constrain movement from one stage to another' (Ulmer and Spencer 1999: 106). Here, I will focus on the 2010/11 sweep of life story interviews conducted with the Clientele Boys and SiS Youth.

The Clientele Boys consists of 287 men born in Stockholm between 1943 and 1951. When they were between 11 and 15 years old, they participated in a large study commissioned by the Swedish parliament, the purpose of which was to study the causes of delinquency. They were divided into two groups: a crime group (n = 192) and

[3]A process, as it is used here, is thus not teleological (in the philosophical sense).

a matched control group (n = 95[4]) (SOU 1971: 49). In the crime group, every boy was known by the police to have committed at least one crime prior to age 15 (SOU 1971: 49). During the 1980s, 199 of these men were interviewed (Sarnecki 1990) and, of these, 158 are still alive as of this writing. Only these 158, today between 60 and 68 years old, are the subjects for our interviews.

The SiS Youth consist of 420 individuals born between 1969 and 1974. Of these, 267 individuals were admitted to care in special youth homes, administered by the National Board of Institutional Care in Stockholm, during their teens due to offending, drug use and other social problems (Sarnecki 1996; Bergström and Sarnecki 1996). The remaining 153 individuals, also with a history of offending, drug use, etc., were used as a control group. Eighty individuals in the treatment group and 53 in the control group were interviewed when they were 24–29 years old. Of these 133 individuals, eight have died, and we were unable to locate seven. Only 118 individuals were thus contacted in the 2010/11 update. Today, these individuals are between 36 and 41 years of age.

The interview participants were contacted by letter. As for the Clientele Boys, we first took a random sample of the men in the crime group still located in Stockholm, but then also systematically chose the 20 men who had the heaviest history of offending in the 1980s follow-up. The reason for this was that the random sample failed to generate the variation in offending we wished to obtain. As for the SiS Youth group, we sent out letters to all 118 individuals.

To date, we have interviewed 62 individuals (43 in the SiS Youth group, 19 in the Clientele). The circumstances surrounding the interviews varied: some were conducted in the individual's home, others at the workplace, at the University of Stockholm or at cafes and restaurants. In many cases, two interviewers were present, while, in four cases, I conducted the interviews alone. The interviews were retrospective and unstructured, with an interview guide covering a range of topics including living arrangements, education and school experiences, employment history, health, social relations, experiences of crime, drug use, victimization and the criminal justice system. The lengths of the interviews range from roughly 45 minutes to over four hours, and were tape-recorded.

Exploring turning points in life story interviews: to ask or not to ask

One of our purposes with the interviews was to explore the processes underlying continuity and change in offending over time. Unlike Laub and Sampson, we did not explicitly ask our interview participants about 'any important turning points'. The reasons for this were twofold, and the first one can be illustrated with two quotes:

[I]n response to the question 'When you look at your life, do you think you've had turning points?' Dominic said, 'Oh, sure. My biggest turning point is when I met my wife'. (Laub and Sampson 2003: 134)

In the quote above, the concept is used in the interview situation as part of a battery of questions. However, consider the sentence prior to the one I just quoted:

[4]Initially, a pilot study was conducted with 50 boys in the crime group and 50 in the control group. For the main study, due to resources, they revised the design and took a larger sample of 'crime boys' (n = 150) but matched only *every third* boy with a 'control boy' (n = 50). The initial size of the total sample (including both the pilot study and the main study) was thus 300 but, due to attrition and sampling errors, the total size was reduced to 287.

Several men we interviewed told us that marriage was their turning point and that their criminal and deviant behavior changed as a direct result of getting married. (Laub and Sampson 2003: 134)

If we put aside the problem of validity, that it is unclear whether the Glueck men and researchers use the concept in the same way, and thus if they talk about the same phenomena, it is also methodologically problematic in another way—in interviews, you tend to 'get what you ask for'. And, here, Laub and Sampson get just that—in light of their question, Dominic's answer is hardly surprising. This is not limited to Laub and Sampson—Maruna does this, too (Maruna 2001: 75ff., 171) and several other examples exist as well (see, e.g. McIvor *et al.* 2004; Rönkä *et al.* 2003).

This is not to discredit Laub and Sampson: one of their purposes when using life history interviews is to explore the individuals' 'self-identified turning points' (see, e.g. Laub and Sampson 2004: 91). Unless the interview participant himself mentions the concept (which, in itself, might be a finding—the absence of a concept says something about it, too), the researcher needs to bring the concept into the interview, but he or she needs to do so with a certain caution and reflexivity. The narrative or life story emerges in an interview situation as a result of both the interviewer and interview participant (see Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Atkinson 1998; Wells 2011). The concepts given to an interview participant (usually in the form of questions) are often taken up and used to construct the narrative. Here, it should be noted that none of our 62 interview participants used this expression when they described their lives to us.[5]

In the Stockholm Project, we tried to approach changes in offending in the interview participants' lives by asking, for example, 'You said that you quit crime when you met your wife, can you elaborate a little on that?' or 'You mentioned serving a prison sentence in the 1990s—could you talk about your experiences in jail?' or 'What experiences would you say have been important for you, considering the way your life is today?'.

We thus kept our questions as open as possible, allowing the interview participant to mention and develop topics or themes that we had not asked about (e.g. spiritualism). It was not unusual for their answers to be several minutes long. Also, rather than systematically leading them on, we tried to summarize and 'feed back' to them what they had just said, encouraging them to elaborate on it or adjust it if they wanted to. This not only helped us judge whether we had understood him adequately or not, but also helped us establish trust: it showed that we were listening, attentive and interested in his life story. The technique meant that we seldom had to 'force' the narrative forward, since the interview participant naturally did that for us.

On the narratives in this paper

In line with Laub and Sampson (2001: 10), I see a point in studying changes in offending 'among those who reach some reasonable threshold of frequent and serious criminal offending'. Low-rate offending is normative, especially during adolescence, and the Stockholm Project is no exception: most individuals in both populations had committed crimes but the vast majority, especially among the Clientele Boys, underwent the expected desistance process in the transition into adulthood (roughly around the age of 25).

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[5]This might, of course, be due to language differences (the interviews in the Stockholm Project were conducted in Swedish) but the Swedish word for a turning point ('vändpunkt') is used in the same way and relates to the same concepts as 'turning point' does in English.

Second, in line with Gadd and Farrall (2004), who draw upon Hollway and Jefferson (2000), the two cases presented here are selected on theoretical grounds, and principally on the basis that they are theoretically interesting with regards to turning points and processes of change in offending. Both cases include:

- a similar background, concerning social status and childhood experiences;
- early onset of offending;
- drug use as an important part, but only a part, of the offending history;
- salient changes in offending over time (including what might be called drifting or intermittency);
- the changes appear to have been brought about by a web of several processes.

The main difference between them in terms of characteristics is that one (Tomas[6]) is 25 years younger than the other (David). Even though these two individuals exhibit specific, similar elements, I should stress that the importance of the context and interconnectedness of processes in bringing about changes in offending appears to be rather common, especially among those individuals with a more serious history of offending.

A Half-Way Summary and Implications

In the analysis section of this paper, I explore two narratives, focusing on the processes underlying and surrounding changes in offending, and how turning points emerge in those narratives. But, first, let me summarize. Simplifying my arguments, I have so far made three points.

First, changes in offending and desistance from crime are complex processes. While this, to some extent, has been conceptualized in the literature, the context-specific circumstances of processes that bring about changes in offending are seldom explicitly stated or empirically illustrated. Second, we must make sure to not accept a holistic view of the life course, where any process is considered as important as any other. To explore and understand the processes of changes in offending, the concept of turning points can be useful, since it focuses on those events, stages and processes wherein changes emerge. Turning points as a theoretical concept is not directly but indirectly related to changes in offending. Processes entailing turning points bring about changes in the social control, routine activities and self-image of individuals and it is these changes that, in turn, bring about changes in offending. Third, my interest in turning points does not lie in the concept itself. Rather, my interest lies in how the concept of turning points can be used to understand processes of change in offending, as these changes manifest themselves in life story narratives. It is to these narratives that I now turn.

Analysis

Tomas (SiS Youth, 38 years old in 2010)

Having a hard time growing up with a mentally ill mother and an absent father, Tomas, 'violent and angry', started using drugs during his teens. This eventually led to his being placed in a foster home. Between the ages of 17 and 19, he served three sentences in

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[6]All names that appear are pseudonyms. To further assure the anonymity of the interview participants, I have also adjusted certain details in the narratives.

prison, the first after having smuggled drugs from another Nordic country. The second was for violent assault, the third for theft. This is how he described a typical day during the years when he was the most active:

T: I was out all night and slept all day. A regular day was like, you got into town. You went to Plattan [a big square in Stockholm] in the afternoon, where everybody met. And this was the beginning of the 90s, all the bad guys hung out there. And there were a lot of people, gangs, there. And there was always somebody who had money and drugs. One day it was me, another day it was somebody else. You hung out, used drugs, maybe somebody went home. But we always stayed out, maybe we robbed somebody in the evening, a couple of robberies. That's how it was. And then maybe you went out and did some burglaries if you hadn't gotten enough money from the robberies, until four or five in the morning when the Central Station [train station] opened. Then you went and had breakfast somewhere, and then you slept. Like that, it just rumbled on.

To make money and finance his drug use (mainly amphetamine and cocaine), he stole and robbed. During the course of his life, he lost his home twice. Eventually, it happened a third time (he got kicked out, partly because he was considered economically 'unreliable' and failed to pay rent). However, he continues, for the last 12 or 13 years, he has been 'completely drug-free', 'law-abiding' and lived a 'pretty normal life'. Here is a distinct change in Tomas's narrative that needs to be explored further:

I: What happened 12 years ago?

T: I felt that enough was enough, with my life as I lived it then.

I: How was your life 12 years ago?

T: My life 12 years ago, I lost my home for the third time, or, maybe it was a little more, 13 years ago, maybe. That was when I started thinking, or I had done that a long time, actually, already when I was 19 I was like 'this is not working'. But . . . I lost my home, slept on my aunt's couch. And she said, 'Hell, you have to do something'. And that, I don't know, many people had said that many times, but that sank in. I contacted a Twelve-Step service and started to attend meetings, and . . . did that for a while. It went up and down, but then I had a real relapse, a black-out for a month, I don't remember anything. I did a lot of sick things, just . . . it was just dizzy for a month and a half. And after that, it was as if I just . . . hit bottom. Or, I mean, you could go on forever, but there I, I made a decision. Like, now is enough.

'If you happen to have a few days without drugs,' he continues. 'And . . . you know . . . if you want to quit. Then maybe you're very susceptible to change, or something new.' At this stage, he also underwent treatment for his addiction and started psychotherapy, which he would continue to attend for several years, and he also started yoga.

To this day, Tomas still attends the Twelve-Step service. This clearly indicates a process of maintenance in which he is still trying to 'go legit'. As Tomas tells his life history, the combination of several things appears to have been crucial for his desistance process. We also see traces of 'drifting', as Tomas says it 'went up and down' for a while, and also his 'relapse' into crime and drug use. The sequence described by him can be seen as a process involving losing his home for the third time, attending a Twelve-Step service and undergoing psychotherapy, hitting bottom, starting yoga and making 'a decision', which brought about a change in his life course.

Although the concept of turning points is clearly useful to capture and untangle the salient processes of change in Tomas's life, it also seems highly important to understand

the surrounding context here, and not isolate any event from the processes of which any event must be part. In my interpretation of Tomas's account, his third homelessness constitutes the turning point, since this is the first answer Tomas gives to the question 'What happened twelve years ago?' (which, in turn, is posed in response to a change in his narrative—from a narrative about serious offending to the statement that he has been drug-free and lived a 'pretty normal life' for 12 or 13 years). This starts to bring about a process of cognitive change ('this is not working'), where he drifts back and forth for a while (including 'hitting bottom') as part of the desistance process. He 'reaches out' and starts to engage in institutions and practices that generate changes in social control and his routine activities. Homelessness in itself is not a turning point—it becomes one because of an intricate web of processes generated in space and time.

The processes *surrounding* the turning point seem just as important to understand as the turning point itself. It is not at all guaranteed that Tomas will desist after he loses his home—given that the 'drifting' that occurs thereafter is not a constant progression towards desistance; it seems important to study and understand this process in greater detail. Within which interconnected processes do turning points emerge? This, to me, is a crucial question. If we see turning points as emerging within processes that are not linear towards desistance, we need to study these processes in greater depth. Not least for policy reasons, this seems highly important, since it must be here that the key to the individual's future (non-) offending lies.

David

A perhaps even clearer example of the importance of studying the interconnectedness, or rather the parallel character of mutually important, processes comes from David. He is one of the Clientele men and 62 years old in 2010. He has a long and extensive criminal record. At the age of 16, he served a six-year prison sentence for murder and spent most of his young and adult life offending—committing fraud, burglaries, thefts, selling drugs and using drugs:

I: How did you think about yourself, compared to people your age?

D: Well, what do people in my age, what do they do? . . . Everybody's a worker, everybody has family . . . two or three kids, maybe. That's the usual, that they're established in the social life. They have a stable social life. They've gotten themselves habits, routines. But all that, that's not for me, since I've never lived like that. Not even when I was a child, I didn't grow up in a safe environment . . . so compared to others, I think I'm a bit odd. Different. But at the same time, I think I've come further than them, I have more insight, maybe. . . . They just live on in their little theatre.

I: Do you feel lost?

D: No, I don't feel lost at all. Well, I feel lost in this society . . . but in here [in himself], I'm definitely not lost.

David describes himself as a life-long 'seeker' and a 'vagabond'. In his account, we see a resistance, I think, towards what he perceives as the norms of the life course, what one 'should' do:

D: I've been an outcast, I was an odd figure on the crime- and drug-scene too. I haven't belonged there and I haven't belonged in the regular world either. Somehow I've been in between.

I: Could you elaborate a little on that?

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D: All this, going to jail and drugs and offending, I haven't belonged there, you know, and I haven't belonged to that 'regular Joe' life either. I haven't belonged anywhere.

During the 1970s, in his mid twenties, David engaged in spiritualism. 'It's not a religion,' he says, 'but rather a way of looking inwards, into yourself.' This engagement he describes as one of the most important things for his development. 'It changed my life from one day to the next.' This, at first sight, seems to be an account ready to be interpreted in terms of a distinct turning point. However, consider my next question to him:

I: So, what would you say have had the most importance for you when it comes to getting away from drugs, crime and so on?

D: I think it's basically about maturation. You realize that this isn't for you anymore. I remember the last time, crime, drugs and amphetamine, I was so sick of it. But I had no choice, if you could say that. I had nothing to replace it with. But it's hard to find a way out when you're high as a kite.

Here, the spiritual part of his life is totally absent. It can thus not be interpreted as a seminal event underlying his eventual desistance. Maturation, however, is mentioned as the key. But the process of maturation, in itself, was not sufficient—David still continued to offend. But, as part of this maturation process, he met a woman during the 1980s. This marks a change in his narrative. As a 'seeker', David realized that he searched for someone he 'could relate to'—a realization that became clear as he began to age:

I: If I've understood you correctly, when you were with her, you didn't do drugs and crime as much?

D: I didn't do it at all. Because she made demands, I was on heroin then, too. So she said, it's either me or the drugs. I was madly in love, so I chose her. 'If you quit, I'll be there for you 100 percent', she said. And I mean, I was lying at home in detox, and had a relapse, and when she found out about that, I started doing amphetamine instead. I did a month of that, and then she made me quit that, and when I turned to alcohol, she made demands there too. But it was harder to quit that.

I: It was harder to quit alcohol than amphetamine?

D: It was harder because I had to have *something*.

In David's narrative, we see the relationship emerge as a process of distinct change in his offending. For a while, he did not offend or take drugs 'at all'. His will to quit was combined with the social control of the relationship. But, as we follow his narrative deeper, we see that it really seems like a process of struggle, where David moved from one drug to another. The relationship eventually ended, bringing David 'back to a life on the street, centered around drugs, theft, fraud, you name it'. To 'get out' of the life he lived, David finally, well into his forties, left Sweden and lived abroad for several years. However, as can be seen in the quote above, while moving abroad and 'knifing off' constitutes an important part of David's narrative, it is not sufficient to bring about desistance:

D: The thing is, to quit doing this stuff, it's just like becoming somebody else. And becoming somebody else, that doesn't happen overnight. I quit amphetamine, quit heroin, but this whole addiction thing was still there so I switched to alcohol, and later, when I moved abroad there was a lot of partying, taking acid and smoking pot, drinking beer and drinks. All that was still there, what actually made me start using didn't disappear with leaving the country.

I: In what way . . .?

D: Well, I was tired of that corrupt world and the people, the stealing and deceit, and also I got HIV.

I: That [HIV] was important for you [to desist]?

D: Well, yes, in a way, but I did drugs and crimes several years after that.

There is much of interest here. In the beginning, David mentions the notion of identity: desisting is 'just like becoming somebody else' (some years later, David also, as part of a punishment and treatment, served time on a boat where he had to sign on. 'That was important,' he says. 'That gave you an identity, like, I'm a *seaman*.' Here, again, we see the importance of creating a new sense of identity, which is given crucial importance in the work of Maruna 2001). But, also, David says that he got HIV, which is attributed importance.

In David's account, we can see several events and processes that often seem to indicate a turning point or a process of change in offending: spiritualism, a will and desire to quit, falling in love and engaging in a relationship, 'knifing off' the past by moving abroad (Sampson and Laub 2005), gaining a new sense of identity and getting HIV. But none of them seems to be salient enough for David to desist. We must acknowledge that these processes often should be seen as a whole, that we must study the desistance process in such a way that its dimensions, taken together, become the 'story of the road taken to it' (Becker 1992: 209). It was not until David engaged in spiritualism that the thought of changing his life occurred, and perhaps this should be interpreted as a turning point, since it is an event that brings about clear changes in his life. 'When it comes to my development,' David says, 'that's what has meant the most. Without it, I'm not even sure if I had been alive. Maybe I had, but kind of out of life anyway, you know?' Also, David's relationship during the 1980s is an important turning point, made possible by his realization with age that he wanted to 'relate to' somebody. It made him try to change his life, even making him cease his offending for a while.

To understand the context of these turning points, and how David's change towards desistance eventually unfolded, it is, once again, necessary to pay close attention to the surrounding processes, seeing how the changes became possible through past experiences, processes and events, and how the turning point, in turn, made future processes of change possible. Here, too, as in the case of Tomas, we see how the process of change in offending is very complex and, to be understood as fully as possible, must be analysed in such a way that the contextually bound processes that emerge in David's narrative are included in the interpretation.

Conclusion: Using 'Turning Points' to Explore and Untangle Processes of Offending

During an offender's life course, things change. Some of those changes might emerge as important for understanding his or her changes in offending; other changes might not. The importance of using the concept of turning points in qualitative inquiry lies in its ability to help us explore, analyse and understand these life course processes in (greater) depth. My aim has been to show the possible benefits, in terms of greater understanding, of such an approach, where the research not only consists of doing interviews, but in using the possibilities that come along with qualitative inquiry. This requires that we acknowledge the intricate web of life course processes and the note made by Quinney more than 40 years ago: that, as we deal with phenomena in the social world, 'one rarely

expects to find a single event or condition that is both necessary and sufficient to bring about another event' (Quinney 1971/2000: 41). The relevance of this note is echoed in the observation made by Gadd and Farrall that the 'turning points' identified in much criminal career research might in fact be 'methodological effects that only appear so salient because of *absences* in the information gathered' (Gadd and Farrall 2004: 148). My attempt in this paper has been to show the importance in using the concept of turning points to untangle and understand processes of change, but also to try not to fall into the trap of isolating any event or sequence of events from the surrounding social context. We need to explore the processes that support the process of desistance.

In the narratives presented in the analysis section of this paper, we can distinguish processes salient enough to bring about distinct changes in offending. The concept of turning points is a useful tool in understanding the crucial parts of these processes and their context. If we see turning points as parts of processes that are not constant progressions towards desistance, we need to study these in much greater depth. Not least for policy reasons, this seems crucial, since it must be here that the key to the individual's future (non-) offending lies.

The question, then, is whether this is 'only' about explicitly asking or not asking about turning points. The 'you get what you ask for' slogan in interview research is valid in the Stockholm Project as well. Of course, the way we approached change in offending in the interviews is important for our findings. But I do not think it is simply a matter of interview technique—rather, I think that an important dimension is, as I mentioned above, the attempt to exploit the possibilities available through qualitative inquiry. It is in the concreteness of an empirical material that we can find important theoretical insights (Becker 1998).

Another important dimension is social stratification. While I have not explored it in the analysis, it is rare that processes of change in offending are dependent on only individual agency. Rather, they emerge in an interplay between the individual and the wider, social community and society (Farrall *et al.* 2010). This dimension is evident, for example, in Tomas's homelessness, which clearly involves a structural element. It is also evident in the resistance David shows towards conventional norms and 'roles' in Swedish society. Siennick and Osgood (2008: 163) argue that individuals who 'find the constraints of these conventional roles unacceptable are the same individuals who tend to show high rates of offending'. We know that how individuals experience social structures and social institutions, as well as their perceived ability to make transitions into and between them, is highly dependent on their past and present 'location in social structures of inequality, based on class, race, gender and other social statuses' (Berger and Quinney 2005: 167; see also Sampson and Laub 1997). The cases in this paper show individual offenders with rather weak locations in these social structures. Exploring turning points and social stratification along these dimensions is an important area for further research. How do one's attitudes, values towards the norms of the life course and institutions of military service, work, family, etc., intersect and make certain processes of change (im-) possible? This, to me, is an important but highly understudied area within the field of life course criminology.

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