Interview of Prof. Shadd Maruna
by Prof. Leonidas Cheliotis
and Assoc. Prof. George Giannoulis

Shadd Maruna is Head of the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology in the School of Law and Social Justice at the University of Liverpool. His book *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* received the Michael J. Hindelang Award for the Most Outstanding Contribution to Criminology from the American Society of Criminology in 2001. The American Society of Criminology is the oldest and largest criminological society in the world, and Maruna most recently served as its President, in 2023.

Leonidas Cheliotis is Professor of Criminology and Social Policy, and Director of the MSc programme in Criminal Justice Policy, in the Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He is also Co-Coordinator of the Society, Identity & Rights Cluster of LSE's Hellenic Observatory.

Georgios Giannoulis is Associate Professor of Criminology and Corrections at the Faculty of Law of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), and Director of the Penal and Criminological Research Center at the same Faculty.

Georgios Giannoulis (G.G.): Dear Shadd and Leonidas, I am delighted to welcome you both to this interview for our journal, *The Art of Crime*, and I thank you sincerely—it is a pleasure and an honor to be in conversation with you.

I would like to begin by asking you, Shadd, to briefly reflect on how your interest in desistance from crime developed, and which theoretical influences were most formative for your work.

Shadd Maruna (S.M.): Thank you for that, and thank you for this opportunity.

Leonidas Cheliotis (L.C.): I would also like to thank you, Giorgos, for the invitation, and to say that it is a real privilege to be participating in an interview with Shadd. In fact, I have just realized that I have known him for twenty-two years.

S.M.: You did the math—okay.

L.C.: Yes, since 2003, when I first came to the UK as a postgraduate student, Shadd has been someone who has been very important to both my intellectual and professional development.

S.M.: I started my desistance journey—my desistance research journey—in the early 1990s. My first publication was in 1997, but I know one of my first presentations, my first presentation at the American Society of Criminology, was in 1994, and I probably started my data collection in 1995.

At that time, a lot of what we now think of as the desistance literature hadn't really begun yet. Neal Shover was doing really interesting work in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, and I was certainly influenced by Neal's work. And of course, Sampson and Laub were already, by the early 1990s, hugely dominant in the field and had introduced many of us to this concept of desistance in their first book, *Crime in the Making*.

But my own work—although both of those research teams did qualitative work on desistance—was a bit different. It was influenced more by work outside the desistance area, which is often how these things work. Good ideas usually come from importing something that's well known from one field into another. And even that importation was an idea given to me by my supervisors.

I had two supervisors for my PhD. Dan McAdams is a narrative psychologist, and it was Dan McAdams's work that I ended up bringing into this area of research, and that led to the contributions I made. But my other supervisor, Dan Lewis—who is less well known—was a criminologist, and he used to introduce me to work by people like Stanley Cohen. He also introduced me to a book called *The Jack-Roller*, probably in my first months on the course.

He said, you know, what you need to do is take work like *The Jack-Roller*—Clifford Shaw's fa-

mous account of a juvenile delinquent from the 1930s—and do a Dan McAdams on it. That is, use Dan McAdams's theory and do a proper narrative analysis of life stories. And he was right about that. I ended up doing exactly that years later for a special issue of *Theoretical Criminology*, with David Gadd, Tony Jefferson, and others, looking again at *The Jack-Roller* around an anniversary of Shaw's death—the person we call the Jack-Roller.

There was also this broader idea that criminologists are interested in people's stories because the stories are fascinating, but they don't really understand stories in the way narrative theorists do, or in the way philosophy and psychology approach them. And that was probably the biggest contribution I made to desistance, and that came from the influence of those two supervisors and their work.

L.C.: So, as a follow-up to the question and answer: you spoke about how your interest in desistance from crime developed, but part of your research has also focused on public punitiveness. And, of course, desistance inevitably unfolds within a broader context, which includes the public in one way or another. I was wondering whether you could briefly draw some linkage between desistance from crime on the one hand and punitiveness—or indeed desistance from punitiveness—on the other.

S.M.: Yes, that's a great question. There was a natural bridge between the two. My interest in punitiveness emerged from the context of the time you mentioned, around twenty-two years ago when we met.

In terms of how it is linked to desistance, I found myself giving a lot of talks—invited and otherwise—on desistance and on the findings of the research during those early years. A lot of people were interested, and immediately people could see the policy implications. And we in criminology are always interested in the applied question: what does this mean for the real world?

And yet I kept getting the sense from colleagues and from audiences that this was all well and good, but politically there was no chance of any of these ideas taking hold. We live in a context where the public would never stand for it, or the state is inherently punitive, and so on.

That challenged me to ask: what do we really know about how punitive the public actually is? We could all feel it, and I understood what people were saying at some level, but for a field that prides itself on being evidence-based and data-driven, we were taking a lot for granted about what the public wants in terms of justice.

So, I thought, well, this is something we could study as well. Looking back, it really was an extraordinary time for punitiveness in the UK. I don't think Anna King and I fully realised that when we set out to study it, because when you're living through something, you don't always

appreciate it. Much like the present moment—when we look back in twenty or thirty years, it will probably look very strange.

This was the period of the New Labour and Tony Blair. There was excitement about a change in government away from the Conservatives, but at the same time, as our former colleague Michael Tonry has written, it was one of the most punitive governments in UK history. We saw a massive acceleration of the prison population from the early 1990s onwards, especially following the James Bulger killing, and continuing through the period when we were doing that research.

There was also a strong element of performative punitiveness—crackdowns on young people in particular, in various ways. So it was in that context that I found myself, with the luxury of being an academic, thinking that this was the most urgent thing for me to turn my attention to in the early 2000s.

That work wasn't picked up nearly as much as the desistance research, although it has started to be taken up—interestingly, particularly in the US, where British research isn't always widely cited. Some authors there have picked it up, replicated it, and drawn on it in important ways, which has been really encouraging.

G.G.: The next question is about the relationship between desistance theory and restorative justice.

S.M.: That's a great question. In answering your earlier question about influences, I should have said that one of the people I was certainly reading in the 1990s was John Braithwaite. He, along with others, but especially Braithwaite, was a huge influence on my thinking.

In the 1990s, restorative justice was really at its peak in terms of being seen as innovative or "cool." There is still amazing work going on in restorative justice, but it's no longer seen in quite the same way. Likewise, desistance research hasn't been particularly "cool" for at least a decade or more.

When I was doing that work, no one had really heard of desistance, but all of us were talking about restorative justice, so I was definitely influenced by that literature. I think we were able to make some contributions to restorative justice, particularly on the empirical side.

Braithwaite's work presents restorative justice as both an empirical and a normative theory of how society should organise justice. It's a theory of justice, which desistance is not. But desistance research was able to contribute empirically by showing that if people change in the predictable ways the desistance literature suggests, that helps restorative justice as a practice.

In many ways, it also supports the idea that restorative justice should reduce crime, because it works with those processes of desistance that practitioners had a sense they were important, even if they didn't yet have a fully developed theory in the early days of the restorative justice movement.

So, I think a lot of restorative justice work from the 2000s onwards has drawn on desistance research in that regard, and certainly desistance research has also drawn on findings from restorative justice.

L.C.: This is really fascinating and very helpful. But going a little bit beyond the theoretical linkages one can draw between desistance theory and restorative justice, I'm interested in hearing from you, Shadd, a bit about practices of restorative justice. More specifically, can you identify any particular restorative justice practices that might actually work to undermine desistance? In other words, what restorative justice practices should we be avoiding from a desistance perspective?

S.M.: Oh, fascinating! Well, yes—restorative justice can be implemented incorrectly, just like any form of intervention. You could imagine restorative justice interventions that, like many others, end up labelling, stigmatising, and drawing people into a system—particularly into a kind of identity that could have been avoided.

One of the criticisms of a lot of restorative-justice-branded interventions is that they are routinely targeted at young people, first-time offenders, very minor misdemeanours and acts. And although it's noble that we don't use the punitive formal justice system to deal with these, oftentimes even welfare-based or restitution-based interventions—like a restorative circle—can lead to labelling and further offending.

There's a lot of good evidence of this. I'm thinking here of the research by Lesley McAra and Susan McVie in Scotland, which wasn't on restorative justice specifically, but on similar work with young people that was supposed to be welfare-oriented and ended up functioning much more like criminal justice—more stigmatising than transformative.

So, I think that's a risk with some interventions that are meant to be restorative. I think the theory itself largely anticipates this. If you think about Braithwaite and reintegrative shaming, he definitely wouldn't support the kind of stigmatising interventions we're talking about—but that doesn't mean they don't happen, or can't happen, for sure.

L.C.: Yes, thank you. I think that's a very important point—particularly since restorative justice may not be a "cool thing" anymore in the Western world, but it feels to me that it is very much a "cool thing" in the non-Western world.

S.M.: Interesting.

L.C.: And it's often hierarchically treated as something that originally stemmed from the West—although it hasn't.

S.M.: That's right.

L.C.: But that's another discussion.

S.M.: Yes, absolutely. Right.

G.G.: It has been suggested that there is also a considerable overlap between the Good Lives Model and the desistance literature. In your view, where do these two "frameworks" most clearly converge?

S.M.: Yes, that's an important question, because—as Leo says with restorative justice—the Good Lives Model is in many ways better known than desistance, certainly in the applied world of correctional practice and probation. So, it's important to make that distinction.

If you go back to the first formulations of the model, Tony Ward and colleagues do cite desistance work, and my book *Making Good* in particular, as a major influence. They talked about the model being desistance-focused or desistance-based even as early as their early articles—around 2000, maybe 2002 or 2004—when they first started publishing on the Good Lives Model.

They still describe it as a strengths-based model, which I think it is, although it's not the only strengths-based model. It's one of many ways people have tried to draw on strengths in developing correctional practice frameworks. But it's important not to confuse it with desistance theory.

In many ways, desistance theory is almost the opposite of rehabilitation theory. Desistance is about how people change on their own, while rehabilitation is about how you work with people to change their lives. That distinction breaks down somewhat, because no one is an island—nobody changes fully on their own—and likewise, even in a rehabilitation environment, you can't change someone who doesn't want to change. You have to work with people where they're at.

So, there is overlap, but I don't see desistance and rehabilitation as opposites. At the same time, I think the best that rehabilitation can do is learn from desistance. It can't *do* desistance. You can't bottle it. It's a process that happens in the real world. But you can learn from it, take lessons from it, and build on findings from desistance research—and I think that's what the Good Lives Model does. It was one of the first to do so, and it's done well.

Could there be better models that draw more effectively on desistance research? Absolutely. And I don't think Tony Ward would claim to have solved everything in terms of rehabilitation. Like any evidence-based framework, this brings us into debates about different kinds of evi-

dence. But it's saying that one base of evidence bases we should draw on is desistance research. We also draw on evaluation research, of course, but we can learn something from life-course research as well.

L.C.: A very brief follow-up: could you mention what, in your view, would be one or two primary lessons one should draw from desistance research for the purpose of improving rehabilitation programmes?

S.M.: Yes, that's a really good question. Leaving aside the previous question and speaking more generally, I suppose the most fundamental contribution of desistance research is the basic finding that almost everybody changes on their own. What used to be called "criminal careers" are largely self-destructive and short. People don't seem to be permanently criminal in any meaningful sense.

In fact, as Gottfredson and Hirschi once joked, at the very moment we identify someone as a criminal—however we want to label that, and I'm only using those terms in quotation marks—they've already started stopping.

If I were designing rehabilitation programmes with that in mind, it would make rehabilitation an easier business. You don't have to "correct" people who don't want to be corrected. If someone is fully committed to a criminal lifestyle, that's unfortunate, but they probably won't stay committed for long, and we're unlikely to make much difference anyway. The vast majority of people—especially inside institutions—are questioning that lifestyle and would probably love to break away from it.

Approaching rehabilitation from that perspective is very different from older ideas about breaking people down. It starts with asking, as Tony Ward does in the Good Lives Model: what do you want out of life, and what's stopping you from living the life you want to live? That, to me, is fundamentally desistance-focused.

More specifically, I'm known for my work on narrative. Sometimes rehabilitation programmes take that too literally and say, "Maruna says you have to change your narrative, so we'll tell people to change their narrative." But that's not how narratives change. Narrative isn't the same as habitual thinking patterns we often focus on in rehabilitation. A narrative is a story about something that has really happened to you.

Narratives do change, but they don't change by fiat. People have to experience new things that break down the old narrative. There have to be opportunities to challenge what people thought they were capable of—opportunities to grow, to lead, to give back. These non-narrative activities and rituals—which I'll come to—can help cement a new narrative.

So, another finding of mine was about rituals. I can talk more about that later, but it has practical implications for rehabilitation. Institutions are full of rituals. The problem is that most of our rituals are negative, degrading rituals—lining up, cell searches, things that can be humiliating and shape identity in damaging ways. If we had more rituals focused on building people up and celebrating achievements and strengths, it would have a stronger impact on changing narratives and how people see themselves.

L.C.: Thank you. That's great.

G.G.: We could open another round of questions on research aspects. Shadd. What challenges have you encountered in conducting qualitative research with former offenders—practical, ethical, methodological?

S.M.: Of those three, I think ethics is the biggest for me. There are people who are much better interviewers than I am—some people are very good at it, some less so. I could say things about the practical aspects of interviewing, but it's really the ethical side that I struggle with now, and that was what I was already thinking about twenty-five or thirty years ago when I started this work.

Questions like: Whose story is this to tell? Who am I to ask people to share such intimate details of their lives? Why should they? Who am I to them? I'm someone they've never met. And what right do I have to take these intimate, often traumatic stories and turn them into data that I then use to develop theory and practice? It's a real concern.

G.G.: You have also used the term "trauma tourism" in this context.

S.M.: Yes, that's right. It's a worry. And I worry about it with my own students, who are more likely than me at the moment to want to go out in the field and meet people. It's such an important part of their training, their own personal growth. It's hard to imagine any of the three of us doing this work without having sat down, gotten to know, and interviewed people who were involved in crime and justice.

I always encourage my students, but I do think to myself: what right does an undergraduate—or even a master's student, a PhD student—have to bother people with these questions we deal with in social science?

I guess I have, like others, started to feel more comfortable with this idea of co-production, where I'm working with people rather than extracting someone's data—co-producing the data with individuals. At the same time, I worry that's a fairly fine line: the difference between ordinary extraction and co-production can be difficult.

I remember raising these issues with my supervisors—going back, since we're going down memory lane. I remember telling my supervisors, thirty-some years ago, that I was worried about these things. I think I had read a piece by one of the people who was involved in *Street Corner Society* as a research participant. He had written an article kind of slamming the book, saying the author got things wrong, that he was talking about him and his cousins and misrepresenting them in an important way. This was back in the early 1990s, and we were taught *Street Corner Society* as this great piece of work, as it was, and that terrified me. It was like: what if my participants—my data—talk back at me and say I got it wrong? What do I do then?

And I remember Dan Lewis—my supervisor again—saying, look, you write a book, and that book is an enormous undertaking. If people think writing books is easy, they should try it themselves. These were the days before ChatGPT or AI could write our books for us. And he said: just finish this—at the time it was just a dissertation—and I guarantee you will feel that this is yours. It doesn't belong to anybody else once you've finished it. And he was right. I didn't lose any sleep thinking, okay, I stole *Making Good* from any particular interviewee. I know it's based on their insights, one hundred percent—if it wasn't, it wouldn't be good research—but I did feel: okay, he's right, I put in all the work on this.

At the time I was even thinking: do I need to share the royalties? Well, the good news is there aren't any royalties with academic publishing. Nobody gets rich on these unless you're writing textbooks in the US or something. So, I really did think: who do I need to give authorship credit to, and so on? And I decided: no, I'm the author of this. I did this piece of work.

Now, though—thirty years on—, I'm less certain about those issues of authorship, and I've been trying to go on a kind of journey around knowledge equity and whose stories these are. Partly because, at the time, I realised I had a particular platform. I was on a PhD programme. I had this insight into the world of people coming out of prison and urban Liverpool, and they didn't have that opportunity, so I was going to use the platform I had.

In today's world—with social media, podcasting, self-publishing, and so on, and with academia opening up—there are people with lived experience who can tell their own story. In that changed environment, it has made me question: do they need me? And if they do, what is my role in this current environment? And I'm trying to put into practice that idea of walking alongside others and supporting the development of other voices, rather than just my own. But it is a tricky ethical minefield, I guess.

L.C.: I do have a brief question, both in relation to the practical aspects but also the ethical aspects of qualitative research. Your research for what became the book *Making Good*, and also subsequent research of yours, has mostly focused on the UK, and you are from the United

States. So, I'm wondering whether you could say a little bit about the status of the outsider in that sense.

We are all outsiders to the worlds we study, but there's this additional layer of being an outsider, which can function productively but also make things more complicated. As you can imagine, I'm particularly interested because I too am an outsider in the UK context.

S.M.: Exactly. It's a great question. I think there's much to be said about being an outsider. As you say, because of our status—I'm thinking of Goffman here, and the visibility of stigma—our "outsiderness" is undeniable. It's obvious as soon as you or I open our mouths in the UK. So much judgement in this country—and probably many countries—is made by someone's accent, and when people hear our accents, they place us in a certain category, broadly: outsider, other.

The truth is, as you say, that kind of nuance happens whether you're British-born or not. There are distinctions like: this is a middle-class accent, or—especially in Liverpool, where we're in the North—there's a big North–South divide. If you haven't visited: having a "southern" accent has particular connotations and assumptions attached to it.

But the nuance is much finer than that. In Liverpool, there's an expression for people who are from outside Liverpool—and by that they mean just outside, like two miles outside Liverpool. These individuals are referred to as "woollybacks," and even Wikipedia doesn't know exactly where the term "woollyback" came from. They think maybe the Welsh wore sheep skins on their backs, carrying packs on their backs, five hundred years ago. But now it's shortened to just "wool." And if somebody has an accent that suggests they're from, say, Birkenhead—just across the river from Liverpool—or somewhere just outside the city, the immediate reaction is, oh, they're not local, they're "wool."

So, there are a lot of outsiders. And even if you were Liverpool born and bred, if you were a University of Liverpool researcher, you'd still be an outsider. The nature of being an academic researcher is that we are "others."

I know I've benefited from being an outsider in lots of ways. I lived in Northern Ireland for twenty years, off and on, and that's a place where people spend a lot of time trying to read what neighbourhood you're from, what school you're from, and making assumptions based on that. I start talking, and it's like, look, I can't pick what county you're from, but they have no sense of whether I'm rural, urban, rich, poor—my accent just doesn't register in their world.

I don't want to say only good things come from that, but I think it has helped me move around—not like a fly on the wall.

I've had interviewees tell me: look, I know you're not "the police" because of your accent. I

know you're not working for the state, because they would never hire somebody like you. And that's helpful. They see me as: whoever this guy is, he has no impact on my life or my world, so I'll use this as an opportunity to make a friend from afar.

On the other hand, the insider researcher has access to lots of things we don't have as outsiders. And the person with lived experience can get past a lot of what we're given in terms of sharing information and so on.

I've had research studies—most recently working with a group called User Voice—where all of our interviews were done as peer interviews. These would be the ultimate insider interviews: one prisoner interviewing another prisoner. There are ethical concerns with that—can you really share something intimate with someone you're living with? So, there are problems with that kind of insider research. But there are real advantages too. You can trust the insider researcher as a person. You're more likely to be able to share things with someone when you know they've likely been through similar experiences.

So, it cuts both ways. There are pros, there are cons. But ultimately, there's nothing you and I can do about it: we're always going to be outsiders in the UK.

L.C.: Well, it can be helpful, as you say.

S.M.: It can be, yes. There's definitely good in that.

L.C.: Okay, thank you.

G.G.: Another methodological question: do you think that adopting a more gender-sensitive perspective would modify or qualify the key findings of desistance research?

S.M.: Yes, I think I can answer that with some certainty, because plenty of people have done it.

G.G.: Indeed.

S.M.: There have been real contributions from feminist approaches, or approaches that are much more centred on gender than my research was at the time.

Most of the desistance work to date—certainly Sampson and Laub, and I'm ninety-odd percent sure Neal Shover's work—was done with all-male samples, and heavily white male samples as well. That was partly coincidence—not entirely—but largely white samples.

So, I wanted to do a more diverse sample. I didn't succeed as much on race—I had some racial diversity, but not much—but I did oversample women in Liverpool in order to get a sample size. And I forget the exact number now, but it was something like nine women who were part of that work.

And yet, as you say, I didn't look for differences across the two groups in that book. The sample size was too small to do that. I could certainly feel there were differences in those interviews. When I interviewed women, emotionally, I felt different, as a male doing the interviews. I can still remember phrases women interviewees told me. I can still remember some from men too, but those interviews hit hard in a way that made me feel, you know, I wanted to protect this person. I teared up in interviews in some cases, in ways that I didn't with male interviews.

But I didn't do much in the analysis to look at gender differences. I sort of thought I wasn't the right person to do that, and it turned out to be true. There have been some great writers who have told the story of women's experiences and have shown some similarities with what I found—some cross-gender similarities—but also important differences: motherhood, and those dynamics, and more nuanced differences that have come out well in the gender-specific research.

L.C.: I don't really have a follow-up to this—just a point. I very much appreciate Shadd's answer, in so far as it emphasises the need not just for a gender-based analysis, but also for a more intersectional analysis—one that takes into account lots of different factors that may affect, positively or negatively, the process of desistance. So, I think that's really very important.

G.G.: How important are cultural and social differences, but also the dimension of cross-national comparisons in desistance research?

S.M.: I think cross-cultural research has been really useful in shining a light on both—as you say—the structural differences, for example different approaches to criminal justice, say in Scandinavia, and the vast differences in a structure like that. And also, differences in employment patterns and opportunities.

When we were limited to Sampson's research in terms of the life course, it was a very specific generation of post-war America that benefited from this boom in employment—the world expanded, the economy was expanding year after year. We know a lot of their sample went to war and came out with a GI Bill that helped them go to university, and they turned their lives around in these very normative ways. And of course, not every era or culture or country is going to have those same opportunities.

So, it really takes the kind of work where we say: okay, now we're going to look at Liverpool in the 1990s, or now we're going to look at Japan in 2020, or… you know, all the different contexts. We've got some fabulous desistance studies from all over the world. I've examined a good few of them as PhDs, and they've helped us understand the impact of different historical macro factors on desistance patterns.

They've also helped us with cultural differences. It would be very strange to think that redemp-

tion scripts—stories of desistance—are universal. I think there are some things about that script that might tap into more fundamental notions that cut across cultures, but mostly our stories are drawn from cultural meta-narratives: from religion, from folk tales, from the movies and books we grew up with. And every country—every culture—has differences, sometimes subtle but nonetheless important.

Ireland and England are a good example: they're just a hop away from each other, they both speak English as a first language. You wouldn't necessarily know from looking at someone whether they were from one country or the other, but Irish stories and Irish storytelling are very different. There's a long history of the rebel, the outsider, and these kinds of narratives that differ from English narratives.

So having more stories, or collecting more studies from different parts of the world, can only help us. Even if you're only interested in Greece or you're only interested in the US, seeing those differences is going to help you understand your own cultural context as much as it helps you understand others.

G.G.: Thank you. In a recent discussion we had, you emphasised the value of conducting a qualitative meta-synthesis on desistance. What insights or contributions would you expect such a study to offer to the field?

S.M.: Great, great question. And yes, we probably talked about it, you and I, in the context of this: the frustrating thing—and the liberating thing—about qualitative research is that it's not generalisable. And I kind of love that. Again, we're talking about the differences of Liverpool in the 1990s—findings from my study shouldn't be generalised to Greece in 2026. There's no reason to think what applied in my time would be applicable there. On the one hand, I'm perfectly comfortable with that.

On the other hand, there are huge numbers of social scientists—typically working in a quantitative tradition—who would say: well, what's the point of reading anything that's not generalisable? The job of the social scientist is to create generalisable knowledge about how the world works—not just Liverpool in 1990, but the world more generally. And if your research can't tell us that, then we're going to ignore it.

The anecdote I often use—I probably said this when you and I were talking—is that someone once said to me: "I read your book, or I read some of your book. I really enjoyed it. That's fun. It's a shame nobody has ever replicated that, because it would be interesting to know if those findings hold up." And I thought to myself: nobody has ever replicated it? I've examined at least fifty desistance studies using the same methodology I used, in different countries, different times, different cities. Of course it's not replicated as tightly as quantitative

research, but there's been all sorts of work in this regard.

And we don't tend, in qualitative research, to accumulate knowledge. If somebody were to do the same study—same study design as *Making Good*—and there was one recently in the US, the temptation is to find what's different. Because it would be boring if I just told you I found the exact same things, so I'm going to focus on what's unique—say, with African Americans living in the southwest of the country, where cultural differences come out in their narratives. And that is interesting, as we just talked about, but there are probably commonalities as well.

And the more these commonalities appear across culture and across time, the more those who are looking for replicability and generalisability—with that mindset—will pay attention. If they thought: okay, this wasn't just an anecdote, it's an anecdote found in multiple places and multiple contexts, then they start to take it seriously.

So, I'm of two minds about qualitative synthesis. I know plenty of qualitative folks would run a mile from that idea, but I think we should engage—at the very least to reach those audiences, but also as a kind of stocktake of all that we're doing. As important as storytelling is, we don't want to just be storytellers. We want to say we're building; we're standing on the shoulders of all the work that's come before us. And I think a synthesis might be able to do something like that—aggregating some of our findings.

L.C.: I do have a follow-up here. I have a question that may make me sound a little bit like the devil's advocate, as it were. I'm not really, but I guess if one were to pursue this avenue of a meta-synthesis, inevitably one would be confronted with the question of which studies to include and which not to include, precisely because the number of qualitative studies by now is so great. So, what, in your view, would be the basic criteria for including studies in a meta-synthesis?

S.M.: That's a great question. So, caveat one: I haven't done a meta-synthesis, and I wouldn't be the person to do it, so you're asking the wrong person.

I would think, though, as part of mimicking quantitative research, they go to great lengths to decide criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Famously, there's the Maryland scale of research quality, where you get certain points if you're an RCT (randomized controlled trial), and lower points if you're just a cross-sectional survey. And they want to include only those above a certain cutoff. As you say, they look at the entire world of evidence and narrow it down to a usable number.

And, as you say, we're not in that same world. Our levels of scientific credibility aren't the same as they would be on the Maryland scale—we'd all be a zero on the Maryland scale. So, would

we have our own selection criteria, and what would those be? That could be an interesting and useful conversation for qualitative researchers to have.

It certainly wouldn't be "must be more than thirty interviewees," because that's a quantitative criterion, and we don't believe in that kind of thing. So, what would it be? Does it have to have been peer-reviewed? How do you draw the line on what you include as a qualitative desistance study? Is it enough to just say you're doing a desistance study and be qualitative to be included? That's one to think about. But I haven't got an answer. No. I think it's a great, great question.

G.G.: We could open another round of questions concerning correctional institutions: in what ways can correctional institutions meaningfully support redemptive narratives and processes of identity reconstruction among former prisoners? And how do informal prison hierarchies and the "convict code" influence desistance processes?

S.M.: Yes, great. I think institutions have a big impact on people's narratives—and we've known that. I mean, since the invention of modern prison as this sort of penitentiary, and so forth, the idea has always been that this was an institution that was supposed to change the way people thought about themselves, and their lives. Almost immediately, the research done on people's experiences in that regard showed the more negative ways that institutions impact people.

So, we've known what's called institutionalisation—or prisonisation—for a long time: that prison can shape people's sense of self, their sense of the world, but in quite negative ways. They may be adaptive to the institution, but once they come out of prison, that same adaptation that worked for them in that total institution is suddenly very dysfunctional in the real world. And we know—Goffman talked about this—the mortification process that happens with institutions.

So, institutions do change people's identity, as in one of my previous answers to Leo was. We don't think enough about how we can use that power for creating stronger narratives. But presumably, if institutions can damage narratives—they can create condemnation scripts very well—they could also help people create redemption scripts. And that's one of, I hope, the things that comes out of the research.

But you mentioned: when we talk about institutions, we think about buildings and staff. But, of course, one of the big factors that makes an institution an institution is other people in that institution. And oftentimes it's precisely the convict code, or that culture inside the institution, that can be the most damaging in terms of desistance scripts.

And I think here of Paul Willis's book *Learning to Labour*. It's often actions that people see as resisting the institution—"we're not going to let them break us, so we're going to run this insti-

tution"—and in a way that's positive. But, as with Willis's book, often the way they change the institution makes it more damaging than it would have been otherwise: deeply punitive and dangerous places run by gangs and hierarchies, as you say—manning it, and punishing other vulnerable prisoners, prisoners who have committed certain types of crime, and these kinds of things. And those can often be the most damaging or terrifying aspects of the institutional experience.

So, yes—to change institutions, you have to work with that culture. And I guess probably the best examples of this are democratic therapeutic communities. We've got really good examples of those in the UK, in a place called Grendon. We've also had the Barlinnie Special Unit in Scotland, which is very famous—where we have seen very serious prisons handing over that control, in ways, to the people inside the prison, in positive ways.

And you can see how that impacts and transforms. I mean, when I take students and colleagues into Grendon and other therapeutic communities, they can't believe the way these long-term prisoners speak: this kind of, you know, "everything must go to this committee," and "oh, this hasn't been approved by the social committee," and also the sort of therapy-speak that has been infused in those environments. And it's a clear kind of transformation.

It lasts on the outside. And there's some concern that when you create environments that are too therapeutically oriented, when they get out into the real world and suddenly there isn't a committee where they get to vote on this, that, and the other, it may not be—again—an adaptive new identity. But it's definitely a new identity, and it's an identity based on strengths, and hope, in lots of ways.

So, you know, these kinds of cultural changes—of the prisoner code—I think they are really fascinating.

L.C.: A follow-up—not really a question, but rather a comment. I appreciate very much the way Shadd described the ways in which institutions can facilitate the process of desistance while, at the same time, avoiding what has been described in a certain body of literature as neoliberal responsibilisation.

And at the same time, it is very important—and I think it's implicit in Shadd's remarks—that institutions recognise that, at least sometimes, if not often, prisoners' own initiatives can be very valuable in the process of desistance, and can be fruitfully incorporated, as opposed to being hijacked in institutional processes. So, I don't really have a question here—just to endorse what Shadd said.

S.M.: I appreciate that, Leo, because—we could talk all day about neoliberal responsibilisation, I think, it's such a complex term and concept, and I do think it's too easily used as a kind of brush-off of these things.

I think—although I've definitely seen it— another colleague, Ed Schreeche-Powell, has written about responsibilisation as institutional withdrawal. And I think that's a better concept, at some level, in that it really captures the difference between empowering people in prison to set up their own support groups, or to take initiatives, as you talk about, Leo—which I see as a fully positive development, and can point to all sorts of examples of that—versus institutions, because they have no staff, because they have no budget, just saying: "Okay, we're broke—do it yourself if you want to do these things." And those are very different. They may look the same at some level, but they're very different.

And, you know, I worry about this idea. I mean, neoliberalism is such a broad concept—and problematic in so many ways. But in terms of responsibilisation, I always challenge my colleagues: when did the state ever take responsibility for changing people in prison? Certainly not in the heyday of the rehabilitative ideal—the 1940s, 1950s. Although, yes, prisons saw their job as "people should come out better than when they went in," they certainly expected people to rehabilitate themselves. They weren't ever in the business of changing people in some way like they were surgeons, or *Clockwork Orange* interventionists. At the very most, they offer people opportunities, and people will take them or leave them.

But this idea that somehow, in the 1980s, there was this philosophical shift—I just don't think it holds up, at some level. What has happened is this idea of withdrawal: taking away resources and opportunities for people to change their lives, for sure.

And even in that sense, the "new penology" of Simon and Feeley captures this well: giving up on the sense that rehabilitation is even possible, and just deciding that we do waste management here, dealing with this kind of "toxic population" that's never really going to change. That's all very much the case. But that's a far cry from things like desistance-focused opportunities for peers to help peers, and these sorts of things, which I think are largely positive developments—except when they're done as a substitute for real support.

L.C.: Yes, of course. And this, of course, brings us—at least to my mind—to the research of Alessandro De Giorgi, who talks about neoliberalism not so much as a phenomenon whereby the state tries to intervene in people's lives, but rather as a phenomenon whereby the state is absent.

S.M.: Yes, very good.

G.G.: It's not a coincidence that responsibilisation became a prominent buzzword in Greece during the pandemic.

S.M.: Yes, for sure.

G.G.: Even the term "solidarity" was rediscovered where the state was absent.

L.C.: Yes.

S.M.: Sure, and in prisons as well. One of my latest big studies was during prisons and COVID, and here we got to see withdrawal in a literal sense. The education staff went home, probation staff went home—everyone except the prison officers, with line-management responsibility, were all kept away from the institutions. Not because they were at risk, but because they were the risk. If you have people coming in and out all the time, they're going to be bringing in the virus. So, everybody was out, except for a very limited number of staff.

And of course, it meant that prisoners were on lockdown, because you couldn't unlock with so few staff coming in. But it also meant: if rehabilitation was going to happen, if there were going to be positive developments, it had to be prisoners helping other prisoners, because they were the only ones in there. And, as you say, that rediscovering through COVID of "okay, actually, these are some of our best resources—and they're already there, inside the prisons." So, yes, there's a lot we can talk about there, for sure.

G.G.: Your recent work appears to bring together two interrelated lines of inquiry: first, desistance in relation to lived experience and the role of credible messengers; and second, desistance conceptualised as a social movement. Taken together, these perspectives point to a shift from a primarily individual-level account of desistance toward a broader macro-social and collective framework.

S.M.: Yes, thanks. This is one of the things I'm most proud of with this desistance work. I mean, there have been a lot of developments—we talked about the Good Lives Model—but there have been other developments that people have traced back to desistance and said they saw it as an implication of the work.

One of my favourites, though, is when people read the work and say, "Okay, you learned all this from people's stories. What we need is to bring those stories into our prison, or into our probation work." And what that usually means is bringing people with lived experience as role models into the rehabilitation or reintegration work that we do, that kind of thing.

Thirty years ago—I certainly don't want to say we invented that idea in desistance, because there's literature from the 1950s, and probably before, with examples of prisons doing this—but I can say that in the 1990s there were really strong barriers prohibiting somebody with a criminal record going back into prison, even to give a talk about "don't do crime, kids." It was very hard to get into prison as a speaker—certainly not as a probation officer, or a correctional officer, or a prison governor.

Now we are seeing this huge sea change. And again, I don't fully credit desistance work for this, but we were part of this wave that happened between that risk-oriented 1990s and a kind of: "Okay, wait—how is somebody supposed to change their life, change their narrative, if you're not introducing them to other people who have changed their lives and changed their narratives?"

And now we've got prisons in the US—even whole prison systems—that are run by people with a prison background. And getting role models into positions of leadership is a huge change, and I think a largely positive one.

And as you say, I have written about this as a kind of social movement around the value of lived experience. Even the idea that a criminal background could be anything but a stigma—something to deny or be ashamed of—now suddenly it's this thing: it's a skill set. Sometimes you'll see it described as a requirement—essential to the post—that you have lived experience. This is a really unusual development, along the lines of things like gay pride, or neurodiversity, where groups have gotten together to take something that was seen as negative and turn it into something that someone could regard as a positive.

I think it's crucial, though, that it's not just the criminal record, but the criminal record and the desistance—the fact that they've changed. That is the strength: that they've overcome those obstacles, and they have that experience, as well as the experience of being imprisoned, to draw on.

So, it's where my work and interests are going at the moment. It's not an area that is uncomplicated, though. There are definitely big questions to be asked.

You already see conflicts between, say, researchers with lived experience versus those who don't have lived experience; or drug-treatment counsellors who have addiction-in-recovery experience versus those who do not. So, you get those kinds of group tensions. But you also have tensions within the lived experience movement.

What is enough lived experience to be "lived experienced"? You've got debates: "Well, this person only did remand for two months—how does that compare to someone who did an IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) sentence?" Or: "This person had a sibling who went to prison—how does that compare to having both parents gone to prison?" These sorts of debates are happening internally.\

What about the exploitation of lived experience? How often can we really expect people to tell their stories over and over again, even if we're paying them? Isn't there a chance of retraumatising somebody by doing that? And what about stigmatizing—do we let people move on from their past if they have to keep drawing on their past over and over again?

And we've seen examples of people set up as spokespeople for lived experience who have re-lapsed, and part of that has been the stress and the tension of the expectations of those positions.

So, there are lots of challenges. It's not a crystal-clear "okay, this is all good"—although I'm strongly in favour of it—but like any social movement, there are going to be issues, tensions. And it's become an area that I'm focusing on in my own research, to the extent that I certainly haven't published on it, because of some of my own tensions around "who am I to tell this sto-ry?" But it's a story that I'm following closely, and I'm trying to learn from as we go.

L.C.: Quick—quick follow-up. I remember that when I first came to the UK, and Shadd was one of my first teachers, he was, at the time, writing about strengths-based resettlement. So, I guess, based on the answer you just gave: desistance as a social movement can indeed—it sounds to me like it should—incorporate examples of success in the process of desistance. Are there any particular ones you can mention, as an example to us, that you think have worked very well, or could work very well, in terms of facilitating the process of desistance? I mean programs or individuals who have succeeded in a particular way in desisting from crime. I'm thinking: any social movement, by definition, needs to attract the support of the broader pub-lic. So, we need the right symbols, the right messages, to communicate. To this extent, we can incorporate strengths-based examples. So, I'm wondering whether there are any—one or two, perhaps—that you can mention.

S.M.: Yes, sure. So, in the UK, two of the bigger success stories in this regard have been in the UNLOCK organisation. It was co-founded by a guy called Bob Communis, who went on to win an OBE (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) from the Queen. And Bob had been a bank robber, and one of the UK's most wanted individuals at one point in his life, and he went on to advise government and take a huge, huge role in this work.

And what UNLOCK does is largely around criminal records, trying to help people move on from the record. It's currently run by another fantastic activist with lived experience, Paula Harriott, who served a serious sentence for drugs over a decade ago and has also become a real voice of leadership in the lived experience community.

Paula previously had worked for a group called User Voice, which was founded by Mark John-son. And User Voice is also still going as an organisation. Mark has moved on to another group called Lived Expert, but he is still doing this work. But both Lived Expert and User Voice are more direct service-oriented. They organised prisoner councils, most notably, in the past de-cade, where they were helping elect leaders from within prisons to help with the governing of prisons, but they do many other things as well, including research, which I've been a part of.

And then there are other groups. I'm part of a group called Unlocking Potential, that was started

by Gethin Jones. And Gethin was very much more along the lines of what I was writing about back in 2003 when we met—using his story to audiences, usually prisoners, but also often young people who are in trouble with the law and others. And he did that for well over a decade and became very well known for the power of his story. But he got to a point where he felt like he had to move on to something else—that he couldn't keep working on the ground like that—and now he is heading up an organisation that is essentially creating more desisters and building this sort of lived experience movement.

So, there are many great examples here in the UK. In the US, Canada, and elsewhere, there are even more, partly reflecting the larger size of those countries. It's a growing movement. It's not quite Netflix, but it's certainly to the point where I can talk to people outside of criminology and they will have heard a podcast, they will have been exposed, they've read an article about this movement. And so, it's certainly growing in terms of public awareness, but there is still a lot of work to do.

L.C.: Okay, thank you.

G.G.: Reflecting on your academic career, which research finding do you regard as your most significant, and why? In relation to this question, I would like to cite a passage from an article you published recently: "When desistance research burst on to the scene around the turn of the century, the underlying message of our research—still our most important contribution to scholarship and science—was the fact that human beings can change: even superpredators, even life-course persistents, even psychopaths, and yes, even the famously grouchy Gen X. Everyone can change."

S.M.: Yes. I stand by that sentence—as hard as it was to hear it read back to me.

One of the amusing things about citations that I always tell my students is: make sure you put all your good stuff in the first ten pages of whatever you're writing. You know, it may be a 500-page book, but anything that you want people to read, get it in early—because almost all of the citations to my book that include a direct quote are from the early pages of the book. And it's human nature. The number of books behind me that I've gotten through the first chapter and I haven't read any further—it's a very common thing.

But the most common thing that I'm cited for, in *Making Good*—so, you know, I have a lot of cites to that book—and usually they go something like this: "Shadd Maruna has shown that most prisoners can, quote, 'make good.'" And so, just in terms of findings from my work, the most fundamental finding attributed to me—whether it's an actual finding or not—is that yes, people can make good, despite having long and painful criminal careers, in lots of ways.

And other than that, I mean, the narrative finding is, of course, the thing I'm probably known for. But, as I said, that wasn't even my idea to pursue. I think the one I'm probably proudest of is the ritual piece. And when you phrase it as "findings," well, it's interesting—I like that as a word—and that one really was a kind of, you know: a lot of my work tends to be, even though it's qualitative, deductive. I'm looking for patterns that I'm already aware of, and I'm testing different hypotheses and things. But I do grounded work as well—grounded theory, or inductive research.

And the fact that people were going through these things that looked like redemption rituals—that really did come up from the data. And then, of course, I pursued it, and I started reading about rituals, and I became something of a minor expert on rituals and criminal justice. But yes, it really was something I learned from the stories. And yes, I think that's maybe the thing I'm proudest of, or one of the more significant findings that came.

L.C.: May I add a point here? I did allude to this earlier: on top of all the other very important research you've done, Shadd, I also find very significant your work on punitiveness, and I have benefited from it enormously. I know it constitutes a smaller part in your broader corpus of research, but it feels to me that it has helped criminology understand in a much deeper way the very concept of punitiveness itself—a highly fuzzy concept, indeed.

You have taken an empirical approach that very neatly combines quantitative and qualitative research. I remember the work you did with Anna King, where surveys are combined with qualitative interviews with a specific group of survey respondents. And I think this is a model to be replicated.

But I also think the clarity of your expression—your writing style—is very important too. I cannot claim myself I'm able to do that, as you know very well, but I think that, in itself, it is something very important. While there is a lot of good research out there, it is not necessarily communicated in an effective way. And the way you do it, I think, is important in itself.

S.M.: I appreciate that—thanks. I very much appreciate both of those points.

On the punitiveness work, it did eventually come full circle and reconnect with desistance. The part that finally got people's attention—and I read it that as well, people want me to stay in my box—was when I started talking about belief in redeemability. People liked that, and that's the part that has largely been taken from the punitiveness research. And I guess it shows that linkage between punishment and desistance that—going back to George, to your earlier questions about restorative justice and things like that—you know, it is one of the contributions of my work.

I don't ever really think about it as penal theory, or as directly relevant to questions like sentencing or how we should punish. But I do think that some of the punitiveness research—and in particular this "belief in redeemability" concept—does make a contribution to that work, and to that important area.

As for the writing, I really appreciate that, Leo, and it means a lot coming from you. You know, these days—with Copilot and AI—everybody's writing has improved immensely. But I also think there's going to be a real sameness of voice, and we'll miss that in criminology, I think, and in all the social sciences, if we lose people's unique personality in writing.

I know a hundred people who had better datasets than I had, who did better research than I had—certainly better interviews—people who are gifted in lots of ways, but one thing they couldn't do was write, and write up their findings. So, I always had an unfair advantage. I mean, I'm a wannabe writer who ended up in academia. I would have gladly been in Hollywood—today, tomorrow—or writing screenplays, but it didn't work out. So, yes, I benefited.

But, yes, I have a feeling we're going to get a sameness of voice, and we'll miss that. So, I'm glad that the work will kick around out there on the internet and so forth. And hopefully I can write again soon. I haven't been able to write a whole lot recently, but interviews like this make me want to write again. So, I thank you both for those questions.

G.G.: As we come to a close, I would like to ask one final question concerning your 2025 Presidential Address in the journal *Criminology*, in which you share aspects of your own personal story. I must admit that I was deeply moved by your narrative. And I would like to ask: how important do you consider it—for criminology as a discipline, but also for society more broadly—that academic criminologists share their lived-experience narratives, openly acknowledge mistakes, and engage in practices guided by principles of generativity and contribution to others?

S.M.: Yes, I appreciate that—and I appreciate you getting what I was trying to do in that 2025 *Criminology* article.

You know, I think we certainly don't do enough of bringing ourselves into the story in academia. And I eat it up when people do. When you can find books where criminologists are asked to talk about their lives—I love that, because, you know, again, like anyone, like a person who's trying to desist, we need these role models. And obviously we have their published work to use as a model, but it's wonderful to hear people's stories.

And, you know, when you find out, "Oh, this famous sociologist hated this other famous sociologist" or you hear about personal conflicts or relationships, it can be illuminating, and it really helps you understand your own life, to see the patterns in other people's

lives. So, I'm all for it, as much as there's a narcissistic element there that I'm not interested in.

The other thing is, as you say, I tried to shape that paper like a redemption script, in lots of ways. And, yes, the thing we don't see very often is people writing about our mistakes, and we certainly do need to do that more often. We need to see when academics change their minds, and why they changed their minds, and more of that kind of vulnerability on the page.

Because it's easy— in textbooks—to reify: "Maruna says it's all about stories; Sampson and Laub say it's all about marriage," and then, you know, let's put them head-to-head. And it's sort of like: well, I'm still here, and I've written a lot of things since then, and you can't just reify me as having one view. So, it's important to show that our ideas are like ourselves and our lives—always developing and changing.

But this "engaging" and generativity is something I think we don't do in academia a lot. We probably don't celebrate it enough, and we certainly don't get workload credit for it, or recognition enough for it, by our institutions. But I do think it's the obligation of older-generation researchers to develop the next generation.

And, you know, I started my interview today talking about my own supervisors and how they shaped me. I can still remember meetings I had with them thirty years ago. And, yes, what I'd like to think is that my own students—the people I work with who are early-career researchers, in the new language—would have similar things to say about me, and my conversations, and so forth. I don't think I do it as well as my own supervisors did thirty years ago, but I may not have the time on my schedule that they had—or that they made. But I think we should fight for that, because I think it's a crucial part of how academia works: each generation raises the next one, and then they surpass us and do things we couldn't have imagined. But, yes, I do think a little bit of generativity is a good way of putting it.

L.C.: I'm not going to spoil that.

S.M.: Okay.

G.G.: I would like to thank you both warmly! Shadd, thank you for this quasi "narrative interview", for sharing your reflections with such generosity! Leonidas, thank you for your crucial and insightful contributions throughout the discussion!