

# Resilience to reoffending: Practice considerations for psychological therapies supporting young men to overcome adversity

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## Abstract

Within the United Kingdom, 75% of young men aged 18–25 will reoffend within two years of being released from prison, yet we still do not know enough about how underlying protective mechanisms contribute to positive outcomes for those who have engaged in antisocial behaviour. This study explored the mechanisms that support young men's resilience to reoffending. The aim was to inform the approach of practitioners working with this population, in particular counselling psychologists, and to contribute to youth justice policy. Additionally, young people who are involved in crime are often discussed in the literature on youth offending and mental health, yet rarely given the chance to tell their story of changing their trajectory. Eight young men, aged 18–25, with previous involvement in the criminal justice system were interviewed using narrative enquiry with an emphasis on the subjective experiences that nurtured their resilient pathways. The study drew on Hart, Blincow and Thomas' Resilience Framework (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007) to categorise the data. The young men's accounts highlighted that mechanisms within all the categories of the Resilience Therapy (Hart, Blincow & Thomas, 2007) framework were pertinent in nurturing resilient pathways: Basics, Belonging, Learning, Coping and Core Self. The study further demonstrated how the young men's contexts were significant in fostering their resilience to reoffending. The findings suggest the importance of a counselling and psychotherapy approach that targets both social and individual mechanisms to facilitate growth. In a context with significant social, economic and political challenges, the absence of a two-pronged approach will limit the young men's resilience to surviving.

## KEYWORDS

psychological therapies, reoffending, resilience, resilience framework, social justice, youth justice

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 | Research rationale

A House of Commons Justice Committee report (Justice Committee, 2016, p. 13) concluded that, 'there is a strong case for a distinct approach to the treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system' and that, '[d]ealing effectively with young adults while the brain is still developing is crucial for them in making successful transitions to a crime-free adulthood'.

The number of young adults involved in the criminal justice system, typically men, accounts for a significant and disproportionate volume of caseloads (National Offender Management Service, 2015). Young adults, defined as between 18 and 25 years of age, represent 10% of the general population, but account for 30%–40% of cases, including policing time, those under probation supervision, and prison entrants (National Offender Management Service, 2015). Young adult men, aged 18–20, are more likely than adult men to serve sentences for violent or acquisitive offences, and more likely to be involved in robbery or low-level drug dealing (National Offender Management Service, 2015).

The Ministry of Justice estimated the total economic and social cost of reoffending by adults at £16.7 billion in England and Wales for the year 2017/18 (Newton, May, Eames, & Ahmad, 2019). Young adults have the highest reconviction rates of any group: 75% are reconvicted within two years of prison release (Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2000).

Evidence from successive studies suggests that young adults who come into the criminal justice system come from the most disadvantaged families and communities, with high levels of exposure to social and economic deprivation, neglect and abuse (Harrington et al., 2005). According to Jacobson, Bhardwa, Gyateng, Hunter, and Hough (2010) young people who offend—both in custody and in the community—are a particularly vulnerable group, frequently with a history of neglect, child protection intervention, social care placements, family breakdown and school exclusions.

The multifaceted needs of young people involved in crime means that therapeutic work targeting both psychological and social determinants is a much-needed upstream solution. This was reinforced by Adler et al. in a review commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (Adler et al., 2016, p. 13), where they state that 'consideration should be given to providing interventions and support that can bolster self-esteem and resilience, appropriately challenge and change certain ways of thinking, increase skills, and facilitate viable alternative options to an individual's lifestyle. It can also be important to consider an individual's age, gender, and ethnic group. Furthermore, the wider context within which the offending occurred (e.g. family, peers and the local community) needs to be taken into account when planning and delivering rehabilitation services'. Yet such interventions are limited, leaving this population of young people at risk in terms of their resilience trajectory.

In the UK and Europe, there is a paucity of research focusing on resilience to reoffending. There is a wide debate on how to

define resilience, which will we refer to later. However, within any agreed definition, the research pertaining to resilience and youth justice remains limited. Within youth justice, 'desistance' is the term to describe an individual's cessation from criminal behaviour, with Mulvey, Schubert, and Piquero (2014) illustrating how this remains one of the least understood aspects of criminology. Desistance refers to the end of a criminal career and focuses on the behavioural outcome. Resilience is a broader concept, not limited to the offending behaviour, and encompasses a variety of individual or structural processes that follow adversity. Little research has explored individual narratives to acquire understanding within either concept.

Given the relationship between youth crime and impaired psychological well-being, this paper advocates a position of recognising youth crime as a social and individual issue, significantly impacting on the well-being of the young person, and therefore of great relevance to disciplines such as counselling, psychotherapy and psychology.

### 1.2 | Defining resilience

The concept of resilience evolved from an individual level characteristic to a wider ecological notion, accounting for broader person-environment interactions, generating an increased interest in health and wellbeing research, practice and policy (Hart et al., 2016).

Resilience research has been criticised for not acknowledging the social-environmental context when determining which outcomes are defined as 'resilient' (Ungar, 2004). If extraordinary achievements are required, over and above the norm, resilience will be rare, reinforcing the idea that resilient people are somehow 'remarkable individuals, possessing extraordinary strength' (Masten, 2001).

When the adverse socioeconomic context is acknowledged, relatively small steps towards living an ordinary life will be recognised as resilient outcomes, and resilience will be seen as a common phenomenon: Masten's 'ordinary magic' (Ungar, 2004, pp. 227–238) suggests that 'the conclusion that resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes offers a more positive outlook on human adaptation, as well as direction for policy and practice'.

From a social justice perspective, government and community-based attempts to build people's resilience are criticised for maintaining, rather than challenging, the inequitable structure of society, clearly linked with inequalities in health. An emphasis on resilience as an individual trait obscures wider structural considerations, leading to a focus on individual behaviour change in place of structural reform (De Lint & Chazal, 2013). Definitions often form the basis of the assumptions guiding resilience measures and interventions; it is vital that definitions encompass the potential to improve the wider adversity context, challenging structures that perpetuate the disadvantage.

Building on work we have previously undertaken, the definition this paper uses attempts to capture an element of emancipatory potential by defining resilience as 'overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially subtly changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity' (Hart, Gagnon, Aumann, & Heaver, 2020). Or, put

more colloquially, 'beating the odds and changing the odds' (Hart & Gagnon, 2014). Further definitions of resilience and examples of practice can be found on our website at: <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/definitions-resilience/>.

### 1.3 | Social justice and therapeutic interventions

Social justice is a term widely used in numerous disciplines, and the focus will be on how it is defined within counselling, psychology and applied professions. Constraints of space mean there is not scope to do justice to the many definitions in this article; instead the focus is on highlighting what is meant by the term and its relevance to this population. Calls for social justice within counselling psychology have emphasised the importance of working with and empowering oppressed groups to help address power imbalances and inequalities (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008; Speight & Vera, 2004). Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthorn, & Siddiquee (2011) commented, 'if we are serious about social justice as a value, we are serious about people's rights to self-determination, to a fair allocation of resources, to live in peace, with freedom from constraints and to be treated fairly and equitably'. A 2016 global portrait (Goodyear et al., 2016), exploring counselling psychologists' characteristics, perspectives and professional behaviours, revealed private practice as the primary work setting, particularly in the United Kingdom, charging between £50–110 per session. On discharge from prison, a young man will receive £46, a figure that has remained the same since 1996, which was then sufficient to survive on for two weeks until further benefits were available. The global portrait also highlighted that in terms of core values, 'attention to people's assets, strengths and resources' was the most highly endorsed value, with 'A focus on social justice and the necessity, when appropriate, to advocate for just causes that promote' ranking fifth. Some counselling psychologists argue that involvement in the private sector conflicts with the values of counselling psychology and reinforces the challenge by community psychologists that social justice is not only an ideological stance through which practice and research work is filtered, but is also related to behaviours and actions that constitute social justice work. According to Speight and Vera (2004) 'Issues of social justice cannot be addressed through therapy alone... a social justice perspective emphasises societal concerns, including issues of equity, self-determination and social responsibility'.

Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2005) highlighted the difference between proximal caring and distal caring to promote social justice, taking place within the therapeutic relationship and community level respectively. For youth crime, created through individual and social processes, solely working at a proximal level will be constantly undermined by conditions of injustice, limiting the resilient trajectory.

As therapeutic practitioners, failing to target interventions towards the collective places us as part of solutions that justify social inequity, contributing to the oppression of marginalised individuals. Focusing on a sole value such as proximal care undermines that value's existence; it cannot thrive in the absence of others.

### 1.4 | Therapeutic approaches to nurturing resilience

Research advances theoretical knowledge regarding the concept of resilience. A review by Hart and Heaver (2013) highlighted over 1,400 'resilience-based interventions' delivered to young people aged 12–18 within schools and communities. We have chosen three types of interventions that we believe have particular relevance to counselling psychology, psychotherapy, and youth justice. A strengths-based approach, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and Multisystemic Therapy.

### 1.5 | Strengths based counselling

Smith (2006, p. 32) presented a strengths-based counselling model with a focus on what is going well; emphasising strengths and self-determination. This model defined resilience as 'the process of struggling with the hardship, characterised by the individual's accumulation of small successes that occur with intermittent failures, setbacks and disappointments'.

Smith (2006) proposed a therapeutic strengths-based framework with ten stages of therapy, as 'an integrative counselling model which blends different theories, movements (positive psychology, prevention, resilience theory, and hope theory) and techniques that build client strengths within a multi-cultural framework'.

The model offers a valuable contribution to aspects of resilience-promoting work, interventions such as encouraging and instilling hope, developing a new narrative and problem-solving skills that have been identified by Hart et al. (2007) as important resilient mechanisms. However, an overemphasis on individual strengths may ignore risks inherent in the surrounding social structure.

### 1.6 | Cognitive behavioural therapy

A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach to resilience is also offered by therapist and coach (Neenan, 2009). According to Neenan, 'Attitude is the heart of resilience' (Neenan, 2009); consistent with Greek and Roman Stoicism's emphasis on adopting a 'philosophical' attitude towards adversity. Epictetus famously told his students that, 'People are not upset by events but rather their judgements about things', which Neenan called 'the foundation of a resilient outlook' (2009).

Padesky (2009) developed the Personal Model of Resilience (PMR). Defining resilience as how 'people persist in the face of obstacles and, when necessary, accept circumstances that cannot be changed', Padesky drew on the six areas of competence (physical, spiritual, moral, emotional, social relational, and cognitive) laid out in Davis's (1999, p. 6) research on resilience, promoting three fundamental beliefs necessary to maintain a resilience focus in therapy - that change is always possible; that every person has strengths and skills to be discovered; and that each person is able to self-right, to be knocked down and stand up again (Davis, 1999).

Padesky's (2009) and Neenan's (2009) work offer valuable contributions to practice. However, a clear omission in their work regards the exclusion of mechanisms within the family, social and political spheres contributing to the challenges facing vulnerable young men. Roth (2006, p. 12) asserted that, 'CBT needs to be integrated with other services that clients are accessing'. Samenow (1984, 1998) criticised such approaches for being too intellectual, and for being superficial in obtaining compliant behaviour in prison, stating that after release the CBT impact reduces. CBT is often offered as the therapy of choice within the National Health Service in the UK, whose core values are that, 'it meets the needs of everybody; and is free at the point of delivery; and is based on clinical need, not the ability to pay' (NHS Core Principles). One strength of CBT is its focus on changing thinking, yet doing this solely ignores structural conditions, creating oppression and marginalisation. Such points reinforce the authors' concern about applying CBT as an isolated solution within the NHS and elsewhere, in the absence of other socially just practice considerations.

## 1.7 | Multisystemic therapy (MST)

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is targeted at young people, aged 12–17, who have previously offended or are currently offending. Developed by Henggeler, Melton, Brondino, Sherer, and Hanley (1997), MST is an intensive family and community-based therapy programme, focusing on addressing environmental systems surrounding the young person. It is founded on nine principles, which work to:

- Increase the caregiver's parenting skills.
- Improve family relations.
- Broaden the young person's social capital to include friends who do not engage in criminal behaviour.
- Increase engagement in positive activities.
- Improve grades, and future aspirations.
- Broaden the social network to friends, family and neighbours to support the caregiver to implement changes.

Delivered through an ecological framework, the MST therapist integrates themselves into the young person's environment and is available 24 hr a day, seven days a week. MST is an integrative therapeutic approach with therapists trained to Master's or Doctoral level.

The evidence base surrounding MST is well documented (Henggeler, Melton, & Smith, 1992; Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005) and positive. However, analysis of MST found little evidence to suggest it is any more effective than other intensive youth services (Littell, Popa, & Forsythe, 2005), and the mechanisms that facilitate change are unclear. Furthermore, its application for young people in care and those in and out of care with multiple co-morbidities was less obvious. It is subject to short-term funding and is costly, which is challenging in a climate of limited resources. However, MST has several advantages over previous identified approaches, offering

a comprehensive intervention targeting both individual and social conditions. Despite the acknowledgment of context, with the exception of MST, the focus of these resilience interventions is individualised adaptation, key in uncovering conflicts and tensions that prohibit resilience. However, a solely individual focus is disempowering; emphasising individual responsibility and perpetuating social structures can compromise resilience.

The authors of this paper believe a balance between targeting individual and social processes is required; both offer important resources for promoting resilience. This informed the rationale for using the Resilient Therapy (RT) framework (Hart et al., 2007) to analyse the data. RT recognises adversity as a collective experience, advocating the improvement of resources for disadvantaged groups acknowledged at social, community and individual level.

## 1.8 | Resilient Therapy framework

Using a resilience approach based on a broad range of research evidence across domains and years of practical experience, we employ a strategic methodology to support disadvantaged children and young people in overcoming adversity (Hart et al., 2007). Resilient Therapy (RT) proposes a range of interventions, entitled 'potions', which are the constituents of five separate but interrelated conceptual arenas, termed 'compartments' or 'remedy racks'. The conceptual arenas are Basics, Belonging, Learning, Coping and Core Self; under the umbrella of four Noble Truths, they form a systemic whole, designed to increase resilient responses to overwhelming adversity. The ingredients of each 'potion' may be tailored to an individual, family, or group, necessitating co-production to select, mix and adjust the interventions. A 'resilient move' is defined by Aumann and Hart as 'the kind of things that need to happen to help people manage life when it's tough... Ways of thinking and acting that we need ourselves if we want to make things better for children' (2009, p. 11).

## 1.9 | Basics

In RT, mechanisms that nurture basic needs have been considered. The most fundamental aspects of human existence and those which serve to keep young adults safe, warm and functioning, such as shelter and money for rent and food—both influenced by work opportunities—have a big effect on the life they will have access to. The latest Child Poverty Strategy showed that 30% of children and young people in the UK are living in relative poverty; links between poverty and the impact on well-being have been well-documented (Department for Work and Pensions [DWP], 2019).

## 1.10 | Belonging

Belonging has been defined as 'the psychological need for people to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and

significant interpersonal relationships' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to belong has consequences on physical and mental health. Threats to belonging have been linked to immune function and elevated inflammation (Jaremka, Lebed, & Sunami, 2018), and a low sense of belonging has been associated with depression and hopelessness (Fisher, Overholser, Ridley, Braden, & Rosoff, 2015). RT acknowledges that belonging is not limited to families, and recognises the importance of an individual's culture, ethnicity and heritage as contributing mechanisms. It integrates attachment theory into belonging, providing a framework for intervention.

### 1.11 | Learning

RT's focus is on children and families experiencing constellated disadvantage, making a conceptual shift from the focus on education given that this requires continuous school engagement, a challenge for individuals experiencing adversity. Research carried out in a Pupil Referral Unit in the UK (Hart, 2012) found that highly individualised learning in an environment with a strong learning ethos, where performance is reinforced through rewards and opportunities to succeed, contributes to resilience. Pupils' basic needs must be met, and staff should work to foster engagement in their own learning. Setting high but realistic expectations gives them opportunity to succeed and develop a positive sense of self-efficacy.

### 1.12 | Coping

Coping is any response to a stressful situation (Compas, 1987) and can be defined as 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person' (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The choices young people make after risk are forms of coping, influencing resilience by protecting or buffering them from negative outcomes associated with risk (Hart, 2012). Definitions such as these pose tall orders for young people experiencing disadvantage, especially in contexts that lack necessary resources.

### 1.13 | Core self

Lastly, inspired by other schools of therapy, the Core Self compartment recognises the importance of supporting shifts in an individual's core self. For therapies such as psychoanalytic, cognitive and attachment approaches, this is an explicit goal with far-reaching and protective functions for vulnerable children. Whether it is to develop 'reflective self-functioning' (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele, & Higgitt, 1993), to address 'depressive cognitions' (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979), and/or to develop a pattern of 'secure attachment' (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), such work plays an important part in resilience-based programmes.

Through these compartments, RT works across the developmental, social, psychological and physical domains, recognising the inter-relationship between these different areas and holding a social inequalities perspective. For a young person who has engaged in crime, holding a resilience lens acknowledges this will have an impact on their identity (core-self) and their sense of place in the world (belonging), their coping skills may be compromised developmentally (coping), they may require skills or knowledge development (learning), and structural challenges they face, such as poor housing, transport, and income are addressed in the 'basics' category of our resilience framework (Hart et al., 2007). RT provides a systemic framework that works across all of these areas, targeting collective and individual mechanisms to enhance resilience. The framework is flexible and adaptable to the context of what is appropriate and relies on co-production to do this effectively.

Comparing RT and the highlighted therapeutic approaches, there are positions where they meet and separate. The main point of divergence is the sociological view to practice, subscribed to within RT, which not only recognises that the process of individual experiences is located within social relations, discourses and ideological positions, but also situates the work to challenge these, 'beating the odds and changing the odds' (De Lint & Chazal, 2013). Furthermore, Smith (2006), Padesky (2009), and Neenan (2009) promoted a traditional therapeutic approach, whereas RT is a 'therapeutic methodology' extending beyond traditional therapeutic interventions, not exclusively provided by professional therapists, which can be embedded in everyday practice, offering hope for those with limited resources who require an approach that is accessible, flexible and responsive.

A further point of divergence is the emancipatory spirit of RT, the drive to build the capacity of young people, increasing their agency and social responsibility. RT holds young people as equal, active participants in their change process and co-creates opportunities to challenge the structural inequalities that have perpetuated their own and others' disadvantage. This dispels the power dynamic existing in traditional therapeutic relationships, whereby the young person is a passive receiver of the service, and vulnerable because of circumstances beyond their control. Through increasing young people's skills, knowledge and capacity, they are in a position to negotiate meaningful solutions and challenge the social discourses, that place a limitation on their own and others' resilience. Following the research, the young men involved co-produced a user-friendly guide to promoting resilience to reoffending, which was used to support their skills development, promoting resilience to reoffending whilst ensuring their voices continued to be represented and disseminated (Changing Lanes, 2020).

## 2 | METHODS

Narrative enquiry was chosen as the method and the data analysed through a critical realist philosophy. The view is that reality is socially constructed and takes place via an inter-subjective field, whereby individual and social structures are mutually interactive.

We chose narrative enquiry as we believe that humans learn from re-telling stories, creating new meanings and deepening existing ones. Speedy (2001) observed how, when people re-tell stories of life and work, quite different stories might emerge, or previous ones may be elaborated upon. She reminded us that, 'telling and re-telling and listening again to other tellings has become central to the practices of narrative therapies'. The authors were not the young men's therapists; nevertheless, there was something helpful and even therapeutic occurring during the research conversations. One participant, Jake, commented: 'Well it's like a counselling session, because I hardly ever talk about this'.

Etherington (2004) saw narrative enquiry as a means by which we systematically gather, analyse and represent people's stories as told by them, challenging traditional and modernist views of truth. Previous work by Van Ginneken and Hayes (2017) found substantial differences in offenders' subjective experience and perceptions of 'punishment' for crime, which may have implications for reoffending risk. By reinforcing the rationale for using narrative enquiry within this research, attempting to understand the subjective experience of young adult males through their lived experience, we add to existing knowledge relating to vulnerable young men and resilience mechanisms.

## 2.1 | Sampling

The authors interviewed young men:

- Aged between 18 and 25.
- Ceasing to engage in criminal behaviour.

Posters were advertised in three agencies, local to where the authors practice. Each agency referred young men interested. Voluntary engagement was emphasised.

## 2.2 | Participants

Table 1 provides details of participants. Information is minimal to preserve anonymity.

**TABLE 1** Characteristics of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Racial identity/ class	EET Status	Crime	Prison Yes/No	Parent Yes/no
Hits Man	18	White/ working class	Education	Substance misuse	No	No
Marcus	18	White/ working class	Education	Theft/ substance misuse	Youth offending centre	No
Gaz	21	White/ working class	None	Criminal damage	Yes	Yes
Grumpz	23	White/ working class	None	GBH	Yes	Yes
John	23	White/ working class	Employment	Drink-driving	Yes	Yes
Mouse	19	White/ working class	Employment	GBH	No	Expectant
Chalkie	19	White/ working class	Employment	Domestic Violence	Yes	No
Jake	21	White/ working class	None	Theft	No	No

Note: EET, Education, Employment, Training Status.

## 2.3 | Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained for the study from The Research Ethics Committee at Middlesex University. Eight interviews, each lasting 2–3 hr, were conducted. The authors adapted the stage outline approach of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), encouraging interviewees to imagine writing a book about their life and to start with the first chapter. It felt age-appropriate to introduce the notion of creating a film for young men, contemplating which actor would play them and how they related to them. They developed a character name, used as their pseudonym. They reflected on scenes they would include in their film to help tease out their story, inviting a temporal dimension, and each young man contemplated their film's ending. Throughout, mechanisms of resilience were drawn out, through asking questions such as, 'What supported you through that?', 'What were the key things that helped you overcome such challenges?', and 'What was particularly helpful about that?'.

## 2.4 | Data analysis

RT concepts were utilised to organise and frame the data, alongside identifying additional concepts. This was an iterative process, both beneficial and limiting. The questioning was not directed to understanding the young men's stories; this was a process which emerged organically, and mechanisms of significance in the interviews may have been missed and not explored further. The rationale for using the framework is the underpinning resilience research evidence base and the contextual relevance for the authors' practice.

The data analysis process followed three steps, adapted from the Etherington (2004) content analysis approach. These were:

- Selecting the subtext.
- Definition of the context categories.
- Sorting the material into categories.

## 3 | FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In the sections that follow, we will highlight mechanisms supporting resilience to reoffending. The findings will be described in the

context of the resilience framework, under each of the component's headings. Concepts enhancing the resilience framework will also be discussed and overall practice implications considered.

### 3.1 | RT and resilience to reoffending

Analysis of the RT framework illustrated how mechanisms that work at a social, structural and individual level are influential in supporting resilience to reoffending. The young men's narratives highlighted the ongoing interaction between internal and external mechanisms, reinforcing the idea that the individual and his environment are mutually interacting systems, adapting to changes they each undergo (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mechanisms within the RT framework located in Basics, Belonging, Core Self and Learning were relevant in the lives of these eight young men in promoting their resilience to reoffending, strengthening the evidence base underpinning the framework.

### 3.2 | Basics

Basics such as housing, adequate income, being safe and free from discrimination and prejudice are important mechanisms that needed to be in place following prison. When the environment failed to meet basic needs, young men's resilient moves were limited, and they made adaptive choices. When services intervened, they were exposed to alternative routes, felt safe, had greater opportunities and their resilience thrived. This strengthens the position that for vulnerable young men proximal caring is insufficient, and a balance of distal and proximal caring is essential (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2005).

For practitioners, this may require the use of 'an inequalities imagination' (Hall & Hart, 2004), working creatively to support young men. Our experience of delivering training to support practitioners to consider both individualised and social interventions reveals that people are often very confident at therapeutic work that supports change at an individual level yet struggle to conceptualise how they would work socially. Therefore, we have provided some ideas for Basics which could include:

- Offering volunteer and paid work, increasing their likelihood of obtaining work and having an adequate income.
- Practitioners working with local organisations to create opportunities, reducing prejudice and discrimination following prison.
- Consideration of the circumstances and personal journey of the individual, including a realistic risk assessment, protecting both the individual and those with whom he comes into contact.
- Advocacy support in finding work and dealing with such challenges.
- Start-up funds to equip with the basics.
- Enlisting other services to support the meeting of basic needs.

These suggestions were also aligned to the young men's experiences. External support from services in order to access housing, to

have enough money, to work and and to be safe within their community were all considered to be important. We will illustrate how John and Grumpz, for example, highlighted how having basics such as housing and work meant they did not return to the original problem.

John's story emphasised the importance of having a place to live and its significance to his resilience to reoffending. The first time he came out of prison he had nowhere to live, and he shared the impact:

'Well I thought anyway you go to prison, you might get a bit of help for when you come out, but you don't. They just give you £54 and kick you on your arse. They don't help you; you know they don't help you get a flat or a room, you know a roof over your head. So, I thought right, I need a roof over my head, so I'll get back in there. I booted the door over my ex's, caused a bit of a scene. I got pulled away and put inside'.

Angrily, John described how following release he was homeless and living underneath a bridge. The lack of basics, such as a roof over his head, became the driver to re-offend. Fortunately, the next time a practitioner noticed what he needed, and he was re-housed.

Grumpz echoed the importance of having somewhere to go after prison for his own reasons. He described the meaning for him of gaining alternative accommodation:

'You wouldn't go back to the problem you know. You'd be out of that situation; you wouldn't go back into a problem that could get you back into jail, you know, you don't want that'.

The two young men highlight the care and support they need leaving prison. They demonstrate how important it is that services understand the triggers to offend, at an individual and at a community level. In the absence of these provisions, prison becomes a protective mechanism, providing warmth, shelter and safety. Therefore, appropriate housing needs to be in place to facilitate the promotion of their resilient selves.

Advocacy in finding work would support the young person to overcome the stigma they face after leaving prison with a criminal record. Chalkie explained how he dealt with this challenge to support his own resilience:

'Then it was just trying to find a job. That was the killer. And I've got to be honest, I lied in the end about my criminal record in the current job I've got because I think for every one I put down, and I applied for hundreds of jobs, for everyone I put down that I had a criminal record I got no call backs. It was only the ones I lied about, I got called back for'.

Grumpz recommended that a release from prison should include a job to go into:

'And a job to go straight into. Just get you a job to go straight into. You don't get released unless they find you a job. Or if you get released, they should give you a job'.

The young men also described the importance of having a job in terms of their resilience to reoffending: Grumpz highlighted why this was important to him and other young people:

'But if there was more jobs there for us young people, just shoved in and paid 800 quid, a basic wage of £800 a week, no, no a month I mean. Make a job for everyone. It doesn't matter what it is, and that would be easy. It wouldn't be easy, but it'd be better because everyone could have a house maybe. Live nicer, a bit comfortable in your life. Us young people wouldn't be out of a job. We wouldn't have to go and fight crimes. We wouldn't have to beat the crap out of people'.

When asked what it meant to him to have a job he replied:

'It keeps your mind out of trouble. It keeps you off trouble. Because all you do is go to work, go back home, rest, go to sleep. But if you don't have a job, you're gonna have more time to go out kicking the crap or getting into a fight. It gives me income and a life, that's the only main objective to me to have a job so that I can live. And when I have that I am happy, I can do what I want instead of being limited to what I can do'.

The young men emphasised the importance of having opportunities to earn money following prison, and challenges they encountered as a result of their criminal history. Grumpz described how having enough money to live offers a sense of freedom and a valuable distraction.

The importance of basic needs is echoed in a report produced by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A Alliance, 2011), with stable accommodation, good health and sustained employment being the three elements that make the biggest difference to reducing re-offending rates.

### 3.3 | Belonging

The importance of belonging reinforced how resilience to reoffending is grounded within individual and community exchanges. Belonging somewhat compensated for the loss of family.

Jake, Chalkie, John and Marcus's sense of belonging was compromised in childhood, as they missed out on environments and individuals that could offer them consistency, predictability and secure attachments. There was an absence of family in all of the young men's narratives.

Interactions within services, friendships, and intimate relationships nurtured shifts within the young men's core selves. For practitioners, working with communities and services to ensure there are safe, accessible environments where young people feel accepted and encouraged is paramount, as is supporting the young man's increase in social capital by making links with services, groups and employers, exposing him to broader social networks and opportunities to develop responsibility. One young man described how crucial a particular service is to him: 'It's quite weird but I think if this place didn't exist, I don't think I'd be here either. Truthfully, I just don't; this place, they've got me out of dark places'.

Marcus described the impact of belonging to the service he accessed:

'Well it's like another home really, you know what I mean, and er... I just know I belong there because of the way I'm treated, you know what I mean. It's like I'm treated with respect, so it makes me want to go there even more really and er, even safety comes back in. It's just you know I know it's a safe friendly environment and that's what we need'.

Finding belonging was a protective mechanism for the young men, contributing to their resilience to reoffending and their psychological safety. Services provided somewhere they could be themselves, meet others who they could relate to and gain the support, security and protection that had been missing.

John felt let down by adults and services, and was resistant to engage with his keyworker. Through the consistency and reliability offered he was able to restore trust, and through someone believing in him, he accessed his own self-belief and hope for the future:

'It makes you want to do, it makes you want to sort of achieve for yourself. You give me a bit of sort of self-belief that I can do things for myself, that things are going to get better. It's not going to happen overnight, but it will get better eventually'.

Fundamentally, the stories demonstrate the importance for therapeutic practitioners to offer a consistent, safe, reliable and persistent service, working beyond limitations. The culmination of these mechanisms can lead young men on a path towards opportunity and growth.

### 3.4 | Learning

The data reinforced RT's philosophy of seeing learning, rather than education, as a mechanism (Hart et al., 2007). Learning took place in a variety of ways and contexts; where institutions such as family and school failed to provide necessary life lessons, learning was sought elsewhere. Learning was unconventional, yet challenges embraced as opportunities to learn with such experiences working alongside



services to inoculate their ability to cope and progress. Hits Man described the way in which he learned when conventional institutions let him down:

'That's the one main thing, like that's the main thing just learning. Learning is important – not in school, school's crap. Not in, nothing else, life experience learning. Life experience learning, I just broke down and learned by my mistakes. And I just look back and I thought fucking 'ell right, wow! – that's a learning curve, that's a learning curve 'cos everyone knows what learning is do you know what I mean, so I thought yeah that's learning, that's learning, that's learning, what else can I learn, do you know what I mean. I got to the stage where I am at now and I know there's more to learn'.

Practitioners have an opportunity to enhance resilience in young men by providing chances to develop key life skills, creating systems that celebrate and praise achievements, highlighting behavioural choices available and introducing functional strategies to support those choices. For example, the young men took advantage of the life skills and support they could access inside prison: 'Er, I learned how to make stuff in there with plug sockets and that. Gives new experience. Inside you never stop learning'.

Chalkie found a network of mentors in prison: the substance misuse team, counsellors, and prison guards, and witnessing other prisoners' acceptance of their position was a huge motivation driver:

'They're always there for you, they're always helping you and you can see them inside, but you don't on the outside. So, I mean the counsellors were there. A lot of the guards you were able to talk to and they help because you know they said, you know we'll get you through it and time will pass and you know every day is one day down and seeing other prisoners helped a lot, not for talking to them because the majority of them, it's a huge shame, but the majority of them really are sort of accepting the way their lives are. But that's why helping to see them made me think I don't want to be accepting of the way my life. I don't want my life to go this way. I was able to learn a lot of things that did help for when I got out'.

Providing a stable context for experimenting with strategies to reinforce learning is vital; it is important to identify appropriate mechanisms as well as to ascertain the support needed. For example, Marcus had struggled at school and so preferred an informal learning environment; with support and encouragement he was able to access a qualification too: 'I'd rather to go to Respond (name of the service) than college, you know what I mean, because like once again in college you have to do, you have to, it's more like you have to, you know what I mean, where Respond is more of a kind of free environment'.

Services the young men access, including prison, promote the opportunity to develop skills, which has an impact on their self-esteem, confidence and ability to manage. For young men experiencing constellated disadvantage, showing an interest and creating opportunities to thrive act as a portal to developing a range of skills, and offers a lifeline into a positive future. Learning must work in such a way that young men reap the benefits.

### 3.5 | Coping

The young men demonstrated considerable resources supporting their bravery. Life experiences facilitated their skills to manage adversity in the future; Mouse and Chalkie in particular were able to make informed choices about future risk through reflection. Lessons learned enhanced their maturity, increasing their ability to problem-solve and rationalise behaviour. Previous mechanisms for coping were relinquished as new, supportive ways of regulating their feelings and behaviour developed. Receiving external support was crucial in accelerating this; Chalkie highlighted how the service he accessed supported his capacity to reflect, while increasing his capacity to problem-solve:

'I could take a step back and look at things, which I've always been able to do but not in any way in which I've been able to since I saw T, who helped me so much. I'm so glad I met T. They helped me identify problem areas in my life; what I should change and how I should try and be and how I should react to things'.

Fostering interests for the young men raised their aspirations, as Marcus and John illustrated earlier through music and cooking, providing a protective coping mechanism and helping regulate their emotions. The narratives also illustrated that finding solace in activities such as music, cooking and skateboarding supported their independence. Having an interest increased access to other resilience mechanisms, such as positive peer relationships.

Jake highlighted how activities offered him a temporary escape from his challenges:

'When I was skateboarding, I never used to think about anything other than skateboarding, or when I was playing football, I'd never think of anything other than football. When I cook, I just think of cooking. And it's kind of just like a break from my brain ticking over all the time. Not even a release, just a relaxed time like, yeah. Because all that ticking is still going on, but I just don't pay attention to it'.

Mouse talked passionately about cooking as a positive distraction: 'Yea, it's the one thing that I can sit there and say I'll always be passionate about because it takes my mind off everything and

forget all the problems I've got and focus on the cooking and making something that looks and tastes amazing'. Fostering their interests and talents provides the young men with relaxation, as well as an escape from everyday pressures.

Encouraging young men to develop nurturing ways of coping supports the development of their internal locus of control, allowing them to negotiate and navigate life and create progressive destinies.

### 3.6 | CoreSelf

The young men's narratives highlighted their journey of functioning from what appears to be an adapted self, defending against their real self as they cannot guarantee acceptance. Interventions can allow them to begin to recognise themselves, their sense of value and importance, and life begins to be determined internally rather than externally.

Evident in their transcripts was the young men's (John, Chalkie and Mouse) level of core self-work, impacting on their self-narrative. Gaz, Grumpz and Marcus would have benefited from further core self-work. Jake and Hits Man had not received this type of work yet but had an intrinsic sense of awareness built on through experiences, which required and profited from external input, supporting self-awareness and reflective self-functioning. Such assessment informs practitioners as to the young man's resilient capacities and what requires nurturing.

Self-understanding was of particular significance to their core self. Acquiring this understanding in a variety of ways and contexts had varying impacts on their resilience to reoffending. For a few young men, their stories suggested an increased internal locus of control: two of the young men altered their self-narrative and one young man described a growing self-acceptance.

Hits Man described the significance for him of understanding and being true to himself:

Hits Man: 'It's like the biggest truth I've ever heard in my life, do you know what I mean, like how true do you need to be apart from being true to yourself. And that's all there is. Stop trying to go places and just learn to be, just learn to be you sort of thing...'

I: 'And what does it give you, being true to yourself?'

Hits man: 'Happiness, stability, security, everything I've ever looked for, I found by being me, do you know what I mean, because I know what I can, what I can't do; where I can go, where I can't go; what I'm possible of, what I'm not possible of.'

Being true and accepting himself elicits protective mechanisms such as happiness, stability and security. Hits Man speaks of a freedom to guide his own life, away from worrying what others are doing, due to his personal contentment.

Self-understanding also interconnected with the development of maturity and capacity to problem-solve, identified in the literature

and this research as important mechanisms for resilience to reoffending. For example, Chalkie described how he knows he has a choice with regards to how he behaves and the significance for his life trajectory:

'I see my life as better than that now. The support made me able to, able to see that things in my life weren't right and I could change them if, if I took time I could, I could change my path'.

### 3.7 | Additional mechanisms

The young men's narratives reiterated the importance of turning adversity into success. Hart et al. (2007, p. 11) describe this as 'Inoculated Resilience'. This concept allows for the complexity of resilience as a process, recognising how challenging experiences can be opportunities for change; adversity can result in optimal outcomes. The relationship between resilience and adversity was pertinent for the young men, revealing challenging experiences as valuable informants to learning.

The following quotes from the young men highlight how they turned their adversity into valuable learning opportunities.

Mouse described how he was grateful for the things that had gone wrong in his life because they gave him insight and clarity:

'It's been an amazing rollercoaster of a ride and I wouldn't have changed it for the world, not even slightly, it's been absolutely fantastic, this whole experience, going through everything I have been through, one loop after another, it's put me onto a track now where I can say yea this is what I want from my life, this is how I am going to go about it and this is what I'm gonna do'.

Hits Man described the contribution to his resilience:

'Everything. Every part of my life I've been like... anything from to this day backwards, bad and good that's happened, it's helped me be where I am now and the guy that I am now, and the guy that I'm now happy with is probably the guy that I'll say, but I'll say that'.

Gaz gained valuable learning about his life's direction from prison:

'Yeah, it's the whole like going I don't know into prison like actually made me grow as well innit. Listening to my cell mate go on about he was in there for eight years, he's got two kids and that and I don't know a lot of stuff like, like a reality check with other people are saying, look you've got a good chance to do something right here, don't fucking slip

up like half of us in here and to have them all say that and things and like’.

Rutter (1989) advocated that young people and children may face an overwhelming accumulation of risks in their families and communities, with greatly reduced access to compensating opportunities, due to the psychologically toxic nature of the social environment they inhabit. Such accumulated risks increase the young person's adversity, yet can be interrupted through turning points, creating a positive or negative chain reaction. Turning points provided a valuable learning mechanism for the young men, due to their response to such opportunities. Concepts such as inoculated resilience and turning points illustrate the relationship between adversity and resilience, and demonstrate how, depending on the young man's response, adversity can nurture resilience.

Maturity has been seen within the criminology literature as important in nurturing desistance from crime (Bryan-Hancock & Casey, 2010; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Cruise et al., 2008; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996) and the data highlighted the development of the psychosocial abilities of temperance, responsibility and perspective, the varying influence on young men's journeys of resilience, and the acceleration through service interaction. In describing his experience with services Gaz advised, ‘I just realised I needed to grow up’. The young men's stories illustrated how their level of maturity was influenced by services, their own life experiences and their response to such experiences. There was variation in the levels of psychosocial maturity amongst the young men and this variation extended to the part it played in their resilience to reoffending.

Finally, social capital emerged as an important mechanism in nurturing young men's resilience to reoffending. The data illustrated how perspectives are shaped by sense of place, friendships, and experience of community and local influences. Bonding social capital was enhanced through friendship groups, providing limiting and empowering opportunities, and there was interplay between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000).

Chalkie illustrated the importance of having a job and how this supported both his bonding and bridging social capital and illustrates the importance of RT's Obligations and Responsibilities:

‘Yeah so it gives you something to do, it gives you that financial benefit, which then means you can do things after work. It gives you, it creates a small social network with your work colleagues’.

Mouse demonstrated how his bonding and bridging social capital worked together to support him when his girlfriend encouraged him to access the Young Mens Health Worker Service: ‘She asked me to do anger management, and it wasn't until I did that, that I actually thought about my past and the things that I had done, the things people had done to me, and actually sat there and thought about it, properly talked about it, and spent a good amount of time and realised that sometimes it's easier to sit down and think about the situation, take the consequences of every action that you could do because of that situation and see what the logical thing is to do’.

The concept of social capital also illustrates the complexity of young people's networks and how their bonding social capital can restrict pathways and choices. Marcus illustrated this through his struggle in moving from the gang he was part of in London to Hastings:

‘It was just all that partly made me want to go back to London, because I knew I was wanted, I knew my friends liked me, you know what I mean. It was like for the first time people were sad to see me go, so then I realised, oh yeah you lot do actually kind of love me sort of thing and we all care about each other’.

This quote illustrates how bonding social capital can have both a positive and negative impact.

The social capital of the young men's networks is instrumental to their resilience as offering essential accessible resources within conditions of adversity. Important resources that are made available by friends, neighbourhood networks and community organisations provided a buffer to adverse conditions and supported their resilience to reoffending. As conduits to information and social benefits provided by local agencies, the networks facilitate the young men's individual agency towards realising their aspirations. The norms within the young men's networks emphasise loyalty and care. When there have been insecure attachments and a lack of early intervention, holding a longer-term perspective shows that there is an opportunity to turn things around, a second chance to create social networks and institutions where they feel they belong.

To summarise, applied to the data retrospectively, the approach advocated within RT promotes mechanisms that nurture resilience to reoffending. RT can provide a valuable contribution to counselling, psychology and psychotherapy training, promoting work at a systemic level with young people. RT is a protective process that involves reducing adversity and enabling positive directions for young people's resilience.

#### 4 | LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

On submitting this article for review, the reviewer advised that the young men's voices were of significant absence. This was accurate and we rectified this through the addition of quotes.

While we have strongly argued for the value of giving space to minority narratives, ensuring marginalised voices are heard and are equal participants in the process of research and practice, we also recognise that this study could have done more with regards to co-production. The way in which this research was conducted still lends itself to positioning the researcher as ‘expert’ and benefiting greatly from undertaking the research (future career opportunities, etc.) and the young men as passive, powerless participants.

Unless we change this and ensure research and practice is fully co-productive, this power imbalance and oppression will continue, and we own that this was an area of development for this research. As we continued to learn, we tried to ensure the young men were an equal part of the dissemination of the research and they were invited back to produce a publication that shared the findings (Changing Lanes, 2020). Since then, within Boingboing, we have continued to advance our co-productive practice and research programmes and apply very strongly the ethos of 'Nothing about us, without us' (Charlton, 1998), whereby no piece of work, policy or programme of research should take place without the full inclusion of the population that it is seeking to understand or on who it impacts. One Step Forward was a piece of co-productive research that sought the views of care leavers' experiences in the system to better understand the mechanisms that nurtured their resilience. Over fifteen young people took part and developed skills in graphic design, dance, music (as forms of dissemination) and creating further outputs (Hart, Stubbs, Plexousakis, Georgiadi, & Kourkoutas, 2017; Stubbs & Hart, 2015).

#### 4.1 | Implications for counselling psychology and psychotherapy practice & implications for policy

This article began by advocating the importance of both collective and individual work within counselling psychology and psychotherapy. Individual work was significant to the young men's resilience to reoffending; it was important to access individual support through their networks, developing a new narrative to describe their experience, increasing self-understanding, which impacted their capacity to problem solve and their sense of autonomy over choices and decisions.

Mechanisms within the young man's context played an important part in contributing to resilience to reoffending. Contexts of constellated disadvantage had an impact on the young person's access to mechanisms and resources that compromised the building of resilience. For example, young people aged 18–25 and within the current context are faced with societal challenges such as high levels of unemployment and reduction in benefits and service provision. Such inequalities can be manifested in a young person's sense of belonging, their experience of themselves, capacity to learn, sense of safety and trust, self-efficacy, and access to social capital. All these need to be taken into account when understanding pathways towards resilience.

This reinforces the importance of attending to both social and individual processes within therapeutic work for all individuals, not just vulnerable young men. Individual work can be empowering, yet the danger is the reinforcement of social and cultural relations as 'individual challenges' and making a priority of solving those challenges intrapsychically. What can be lost through this process is young people's genuine critique or 'voice' describing their collective experience of institutions and communities. It could also promote an energy of change which is located within

the person, rather than within organisations designed to accommodate and support young people.

The vision we are proposing for psychological therapies is a fusion between the understanding, analysis, technical knowledge and skills present in therapeutic modalities and principles of community development. Community development connects locally based solutions to wider issues of power, participation and social and economic justice, moving away from individualised interventions, which are at best ameliorative and tacitly supporting oppressive structures. RT already works in this way by harnessing the broadest range of therapeutic approaches and integrating them with social and welfare initiatives. Then, through RT, this context of inequality and social exclusion is worked through as a specific focus, to prevent the practitioner's work being undermined and overwhelmed. Psychological health is fundamental for community development, and successful psychological well-being policies and practices must also be grounded in its principles—through integrating therapeutic practice as part of its framework, the practitioner is in a better position to facilitate the bringing together of people through professional and public forums; helping them connect with others and increasing the opportunity for change. Through being integrated into the community, the practitioner has the opportunity to challenge the way dominant narratives legitimise the status quo, to give space to existing minority narratives and hopes, championing action and change.

The implications for youth justice policy through understanding young men's subjective accounts are to develop a stronger advocacy base for the allocation of local and national resources which strengthen and support young men's resilience.

Another implication is to further challenge the dominant political and ideological preference to reduce crime through an individual remedy, excluding the social contribution.

A final implication is to encourage counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists and all youth practitioners to become active participants in changing the social systems that impact resilience, reconciling their roles as healers to change agents.

As Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2005) advocated, 'Community change, not just personal change; political change, not just psychological change; justice, not just caring; all are urgently needed within a counselling psychology and psychotherapy approach'.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No potential conflicts of interest exist within this research.

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**Claire Stubbs** began her career as a youth worker in East Sussex as she felt passionate about supporting young people to overcome social and psychological barriers. Claire built on this passion through the management of health services targeting disadvantaged young people within East Sussex. With an interest in people and wanting to develop her skills and knowledge, Claire pursued training in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. She now has ten years' experience working with young people and adults in a psychotherapeutic capacity, supporting young people to work through a range of issues including addiction, self-harm, relationships, loss, bereavement, anxiety and depression.

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