The Courage to Change: An exploration of the impact of role models and other influential factors on the lives of male criminal offenders.

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Orla, without your help and love none of this would be happening. Thank you.

To all of my family, your help and support have made this journey everything.

Mum, this is for you.
Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to provide a small platform for the often-silenced voice of the convicted criminal in society. Ex-prisoners live in all of our communities and are our brothers and sisters, our parents and our children. They are also modeling their lives on some of us and finding a better way to live through rehabilitation and involvement in services and groups that are available to them.

The notion of the role model is one that is known to each of us and for many of us the exposure to negative role models has been minimal. But for some of the population of our society, negative role models are par for the course in their early developmental landscape and the influence of negative role models is detrimental to the course of their future. This study reveals the experience of six ex-prisoners in Ireland in relation to role models throughout different stages of their lives. It highlights the negative effects these role models had and it uncovers the change in behaviour of the participants throughout the different life stages.

The findings of this study expose the disastrous and destructive impact of illegal drug use on the lives of the chosen sample. The findings of this study introduce the impact of environment on the participants’ lives, the participants’ early developmental experiences, their search for power and ultimately the reparative nature of insight and introspection for the respondents.
1. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no research that this researcher has found that highlights the impact of role models on the developmental landscape of criminal offenders. Existing research relating to role models on the one hand and the onset of criminal behaviour on the other, contains common denominators. The literature tells us that social environment is a determining factor in predicting antisocial behaviour and in choosing a role model. Family of origin is also a predictor for criminality and a relevant factor in choosing a role model. This research aims to gain insight into the lives of male criminal offenders and intends to present the respondents’ experience, if any, of role models. The following is a review of a selection of the literature that is available and that is relevant to this researcher’s study.

PART 1

1.1 Definition of a role model.

In order to understand role models and their place in the lives of male offenders this research will use the Oxford definition of a role model, defining a role model as “a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated” (Soanes, 2001). This definition infers that a role model is not necessarily a positive influence on an individual but can be positive, negative or neutral.

1.2 Role Models and Social Learning Theory.

According to research carried out at Cambridge University (2007) using a sample of students from schools in the Southeast of England, role models are ‘key players’ in the socialisation process, a process that is critical to learning about others’
values, beliefs and attitudes and in forming an individual's own set of same (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). This is also called Social Learning Theory and according to Bandura (1986) it is this learning that makes individuals social beings. Bandura theorises that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling.

Bandura tells us that individuals choose role models that are of the same gender, race and social location as the modeler. He also argues that by doing so there is a much higher potential for the emulating to become realised. It is important to note that socialisation is an active process and is therefore always influenced by environment and circumstance and not predetermined. However, according to other research there are patterns to be found, the most common of these are social class and gender (Freedman-Doan, 1996).

Although social class has been found to be a common pattern in socialisation, other research suggests that role models are chosen for their success in certain fields. One German study found that less than 10% of the sample chose a person from their direct social environment as a role model (Biskup and Pfister, 1999). This study was carried out in five different primary schools in Berlin and of the fifty-three boys interviewed, sports men and actors were predominantly chosen as role models. This is similar to the findings of Carrington et al. (2002) who note that most role models are chosen on the basis of achievement and combined with the notion of stardom and idol.
1.3 Family members versus other influential adults.

Contrary to the Berlin study (Biskup & Pfister, 1999) most of the research tends to find that relatives, and particularly parents, are chosen as the best role models for young boys and girls and that sports stars are a close second for boys. (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007) This statement is backed up by the Shell Youth Studies, from different years, which showed that 80% of ten and eleven year olds chose a family member as their role model (Reported by Biskup & Pfister, 1999).

Bricheno & Thornton (2007) noted that media and government agencies asserted that male teachers were seen as positive role models for young male students. Despite this assertion, their research found that male teachers were not chosen to be role models by young male students at all. The research did find that young males had a wide variety of role models ranging from sports personalities to pop stars. (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007) The fact that this study was seeking to find out if male teachers were good role models suggests that environment is crucial to the maturation of an individual.

According to Erik Erikson (1968) identity formation is one of the central issues in adolescence. Erikson goes on to say that, because of this, youths are much more likely to be more fully influenced by the adults within their environment during the developmental years. There is a relationship between Erikson’s theories and Bandura’s theory of social learning that informs this researcher again of the impact of adults and parents on the adolescent mind.

A study carried out in Michigan in the USA found that role models contributed to the resilient behaviour of African-American children who had been exposed to non-parental negative adult conduct (Hurd et al., 2009). This study found that adolescents, who had a positive adult role model in their lives, were able to avoid
the challenging outcomes associated with the influence of non-parental negative behaviour. The study asked the sample to choose two positive role models in their lives and found that those who chose two parental role models were more likely to have a positive outcome in school. The research also found that there were no other compensatory or protective effects from having parental role models as opposed to non-parental ones. This was particularly evident when looking at externalising or internalising behaviour (Hurd et al. 2009).

In the Cambridge University study (2007) mentioned earlier it was found that, although the boys in the sample chose male relatives as role models, there were fewer male relatives mentioned as role models by children from the more disadvantaged schools. This seems to suggest that these children chose a role model as an idealized version of their own reality or someone that is outside of their own social environment. Such a finding contradicts the notion advanced by Bandura (1986) that role models are chosen from within the modeler’s own social environment. The Cambridge study also found that boys tended to choose mainly male role models only with a very small portion even mentioning a female role model (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). This tells us that gender may be a defining factor in the choice made by young males when considering a role model.

1.4 Comparisons and Identification (Social Comparison).

According to Ybema et al. (1996) the impact of a role model on an individual’s decision-making process is clear in terms of the negative or positive effect the model has on the modeler. Upward or downward comparisons can be seen to influence the individual’s thinking and self esteem. This research found that unemployed people, who compare themselves to a well functioning unemployed
person, induce a more positive effect than those who compare themselves with a poorly functioning one. These effects relate to how well the individual identifies with the subject, as it is important that the role model chosen has achieved something that the modeler can also achieve (Ybema et al. 1996). A positive role model may also stimulate career-oriented behaviour according to a study carried out by Buunk et al. (2007). They also found that students, who were exposed to a role model who was successful, had a higher degree of inspiration than those exposed to one who was unsuccessful.

Bricheno & Thornton’s (2007) study tells us that other “powerful masculine accoutrements” (2007; 394) attract boys to male role models. Among these appurtenances they found that fame, physical prowess and money might well be important for the boy when choosing a role model. This again seems to contradict the social learning theory and it’s indication that role models are often chosen from within the individual’s own social context and that the characteristics of the model are attainable by the modeler.

From a criminological and a sociological perspective it has long been established that young people who are reared in socially disadvantaged areas are often exposed to ‘gangster role models’ (Smith, 2009). This paper studied the outcome of a role model program run by the group Apex in Scotland whose aim it was to ascertain if young offenders could become entrepreneurs. They found that young offenders who found work were three times less likely to re-offend. The study goes on to question the reasons why young offenders look to entrepreneurs as role models when there is such an obvious gulf between them in socio-economic status (www.apexscotland.co.uk). Clearly this concurs with the findings of Biskup & Pfister
(1999) and highlights the search for a role model who is an idealised version of the self.

The social comparison orientation scale was used in the study looking at the impact of positive role models on career-oriented behaviour (Buunk et al. 2007). The theory of social comparison relates to how individuals use others to make sense of the self and the social world that surrounds them. (Festinger, 1954) It is a very powerful biological tool, a measurement for which was developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999) in order to determine levels of social comparison orientation in individuals and what this means for each personality. Such a measurement may be useful in determining the level of impact that a role model has on an individual as they compare themselves to others.

PART 2.

2.1 Family of origin and criminal behaviour.

As mentioned in the introduction of this review there is very little literature that links the phenomenon of role modeling with the onset of criminal behaviour. This researcher has found that common denominators exist between the two phenomena, the main one being family influence. The family factors associated with criminality and its generational presence are highly evident, according to Farrington & Welsh (2007), whose key finding was that convicted parents tend to have convicted children. A subsequent study by West and Farrington (1977) found that there was no significant increase in the number of boys offending who were born after their father was last convicted. This finding shows that there may be a genetic disposition to criminality as there was no environmental exposure to convictions and no absence of the father from
the family home due to incarceration. It also suggests that perhaps attitudes within the
home are also relevant.

Another factor found to be relevant in predicting a conviction was that
convicted fathers were significantly more likely to be married to convicted mothers
(Farrington et al., 2009). Criminal behaviour, it seems, runs in the family. Over half
of the study males who were convicted were the children of convicted mothers
compared with less than a quarter of those who had unconvicted mothers. The study
suggests that boys with convicted mothers were equally as likely to become convicted
as those with convicted fathers (Farrington et al., 2009). This research also found that
a convicted father was especially associated with poor parental supervision and that
this association may have been one link in the chain between convicted fathers and
sons.

Father-son transmission of intergenerational offending is stronger than
opposite sex transmission, for example father-daughter transmission (Rowe and
Farrington, 1997). This highlights the link between role modeling and young
offenders through the similarity in same sex familial exclusivity. An intergenerational
study (2004) between three generations of males {boys (G2), their parents (G1) and
their children (G3)} found that convicted G1 males predicted convictions for the G2
males. G2 males then tended to become partners of convicted females and G3 males
were found to have criminal problems at the time of the study. This study also notes
that the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behaviour was attributed to family
factors such as poor parental supervision. This was evident in the continuity of such
parenting styles being transmitted from parents to sons (Smith and Farrington, 2004).
2.2 Age related criminal activity.

The age at which criminal behaviour begins is an important aspect and influential for this study as the researcher hopes to gain an insight into the impact of the role model on the respondent’s early or formative years. The concept of adolescence-limited offenders, or offenders whose criminal career begins and ends in their adolescent or teenage years, was popularized by Moffitt in 1993. Moffitt argued that the offending was caused by peer influence and by a gap in what the offender wanted (e.g. money or status) and what they could obtain at that age. (Moffitt, 1993) She contrasted this type of offender with the life-course-persistent offender, whose age of onset was earlier again and who had a longer criminal career. The causes of this offender type included cognitive deficits, hyperactivity, poor parenting, disrupted families and low socioeconomic status (Farrington et al. 2009).

An adult onset offender category was proposed to have had cognitive deficits also, such as low academic intelligence and poor school performance. Research shows that the adult onset offender had been protected from antisocial behaviour in their earlier years due to the influence of a supportive family and a schooling environment (Thornberry and Krohn, 2005). Again the influence of positive adult is apparent in the ultimate behaviour of the young person. In this category the adult onset offender was found to have begun offending as a result of a difficult transition into adult roles such as employment and marriage.

2.3 The relationship between drug addiction and criminal behaviour.

Included in predictors of criminal activity and recidivism is the age of the first use of drugs or alcohol by the individual. (Benda et al. 2001) This is not to say that drug use necessarily precedes crime but one study by Newcomb et al. (2001) found
that polydrug use in early adulthood did predict criminal behaviour and also that criminal behaviour in fact predicted later drug addiction. There is however a complexity around the associations between drug addiction and criminal activity. Much of the complexity comes from the level of drug use and the type of drug involved. Battjes et al. (2004) found that the use of drugs other than alcohol and marijuana increased the severity of crime, as did the gender of the individual. This study found that deviant behaviour among peers and the male gender related also to the increase in criminal activity.

Funding a drug habit can also be a motivation for criminal activity according to Gossop (1996) who found that financing addiction was a prime reason for offending in a small number of heroin addicts. Interestingly, the realm of criminal activity is also found to be an access point to the lifestyle of drug addiction for non drug users according to Hammersley et al. (1990). The study examined the chaotic world of polydrug users who reported to have become involved in drug use through their criminal activity.

2.4 Family and environmental factors evident in both phenomena.

As previously mentioned, family factors in the generational and intergenerational transmission of offending are significant (Farrington et al. 2009). This notion is complimented in a study by Van De Rakt et al. (2009) whose research found that the criminal history of siblings is strongly correlated with the criminal behaviour of their focal respondents. The study also indicates that this direct influence between siblings provides support for learning and imitative behaviour. Such a notion is evident in the research of early onset offending which found that adolescent
offending behaviour is carried out due to peer influence and alongside peer groups involved in similar behaviour (Moffitt, 1993 and Farrington et al. 2009).

The social environment that one is raised in is an important antecedent to the antisocial tendency as well as being a factor in the choice of a role model for children. Studies have found that children from a lower socio-economic environment, with unemployed parents or siblings involved in criminal activity, are predisposed to antisocial behaviour (Van De Rakt et al. 2009). Similarly these parents are chosen as role models (Hurd et al, 2009) for children who are exposed to their negative behaviour. So are these family factors common denominators in the two phenomena of role models and juvenile delinquency that this research aims to investigate? And what other factors are present in the determination and onset of such antisocial behaviour?

2.5 Psychology and Juvenile Delinquency/Antisocial Behaviour

In attempting to find causes or predisposing components for juvenile delinquency, studies have looked at the family structure, disruption of family life and other family factors (West et al., 1977). The causes or factors relating to the onset of criminal or delinquent behaviour appear to be dominated by family and environmental issues. The antisocial tendency as referred to by D.W. Winnicott is “characterized by an element in it which compels the environment to be important” (Winnicott, 1975: 309). According to Winnicott, the issues or difficulties that are inherent in emotional development can be studied in relation to an antisocial tendency.
A) Deprivation:

The antisocial tendency may be found in a normal child or in one that is psychotic or neurotic and is therefore not a diagnosis but a psychological phenomenon (Winnicott, 1975). Winnicott uses the term antisocial tendency rather than delinquency as he sees the tendency to be born from a deprivation of certain essential features of home life. This deprivation predicts a ‘deprived complex’ in the child; a complex that harbors latent maladjusted behaviour and is the precipitating factor for delinquency. Such delinquent behaviour may, henceforth, be punishable through the courts (Winnicott, 1975; 308).

Winnicott believes that a true relationship exists between this deprivation and the ‘antisocial tendency,’ and the loss that Winnicott speaks of is similar to that spoken of in John Bowlby’s attachment theories. Deprivation in early infancy relates to ‘the loss of something good that has been a positive influence in the child’s life up to the point that it becomes withdrawn’ (Bowlby, 1951). The child eventually attempts to regain, unconsciously, that which has been taken from him in some form of stealing (usually from his parents). This stealing is never meant to be a criminal act according to Winnicott but rather an attempt to make better that which has gone wrong.

According to Winnicott, a very common symptom of the antisocial tendency is greediness and at the core of greediness the deprivation complex can be found. That is to say that the individual is seeking something that they have been deprived of, a Mother’s love, a Father’s attention; and this notion belongs in the study of criminal behaviour.
B) Guilt:

Freud suggests, in his writings on criminality, that such antisocial behaviour is the product of a sense of guilt. Freud believes this guilt emerges from the Oedipus complex and the two great criminal intentions associated with it, the killing of ones father and sleeping with ones mother. He also believes that certain deeds are done principally because they are forbidden (Freud, 1914-1916). The feeling of guilt therefore is a precipitant to the criminal activity according to Freud, and paradoxically not a result of it. Freud believed that the execution of the criminal act brought about a huge mental relief for the individual of the anterior feelings of guilt.

C) Punishment:

Freud tells us that children can easily be observed being ‘naughty’ on purpose to provoke a punishment and quite content once the punishment has been handed down. This idea is fuel for the notion that punishment, as a motivation for crime, might well be taken into consideration (Freud, 1914-16). Winnicott also viewed punishment as a motivation for antisocial behaviour in his antisocial tendency theory. He saw that the child, who becomes antisocial due to the overwhelming feelings of the original deprivation, acts out through extreme acts such as drug dealing, stealing and other forms of violence. Winnicott also believes that, in doing so, the child is attempting to have society impose a punishment on him that will contain his internal state in a way that he simply cannot (Gomez, 1997). The criminal who has no ability to contain his fragmented self will perform criminal acts in a recidivistic manner in order to maintain the structure of the punishment. This is due to the trauma of the early deprivation.
Winnicott says that the security of a prison or borstal becomes the only available container for the child’s shaky psychic structure (Winnicott, 1975). In his talk given to the Borstal Assistant Governors Conference in 1967, Winnicott said that for the delinquent child, “…things went well enough and then they did not go well enough” (Winnicott, 1986; 91). In the same lecture delinquency was seen as a sign of hope for the child who had become deprived at a time when he knew what was happening. Winnicott proposes that the child subsequently acts out in an attempt to regain the fundamental good and positive thing of which he was deprived. So what sort of deprivation occurs in the lives of young male offenders and are they aware of the impact of this deprivation on their chosen criminal activities? Or is it something that they have ever considered?

Conclusion.

The literature reviewed here highlights the fact that, although the notion of the influence of others in predisposing individuals to delinquent and criminal behaviour is mooted in much of the research, a correlation between role models and the onset of criminal behaviour has not been investigated. The impact of family and socialisation has been noted as being evident in both the choosing of role models and in the emergence of criminal activity. The literature tells this researcher that same sex individuals are generally elected as role models for children and that these role models are predominantly chosen within the primary family group and are therefore generally socially equal. The same trend is found in the intergenerational transmission of offending when this researcher looks at the studies of Farrington et al.

The literature also highlights the predisposing factors for antisocial behaviour and criminal activity as being ultimately familial and early onset. A comfortable and
safe family home and environment are factors that appear to influence and predict non-offender behaviour. The literature tells us that, despite exposure to negative adult behaviour, the influence of a positive role model on the child can predict a very positive future. This researcher is interested in exploring some of the themes of the reviewed literature in the ensuing semi structured interviews with the chosen sample; themes of family history, social environment, schooling and opportunities as well as the psychological impact of other people in their lives. This researcher will offer the respondents an opportunity to tell their story in their own words about their own experience.
2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Aims and Objectives:

- This research aims to provide an insight into the respondents’ experience of past and present role models in their lives.
- This research aims to identify the personality traits of the respondents chosen role models.
- This research aims to define what a role model is for the chosen sample of ex-prisoners.
- This research aims to gain an understanding of the experience of the chosen sample in prison and how a role model on the inside might differ from one on the outside.
- This research aims to highlight the chosen samples experience of readjustment post prison and if a role model choice differed at this time.

Research Design:

This research employs a qualitative design and uses aspects of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the discourse analysis. The approach of the subject and phenomenon is constructionist insofar as the research has attempted to construct meaning from six semi-structured interviews of male ex-prisoners representing an offender population. According to Crotty (1998) meanings are constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting.

This researcher believes that a constructionist approach best suits the study as the researcher is not setting out to prove a theory or a hypothesis. The researchers’ hope is to develop an understanding or a pattern of meaning around the influences and
impact of role models on the lives of the respondents. This is done through open-ended questioning during six semi-structured interviews. The interviews were designed to minimise any influence that the researcher, or the interview, may have on the answers given and to give space to the respondents to outline their own experience and understanding of the phenomenon of role models. The interviews were conducted within the participants’ own environment in order to assure that the respondents felt comfortable and safe.

The strategy that this research employed in the study is a mix of case studies and phenomenological research. The researcher explored the phenomenon of role models with the chosen sample and their own experience of the impact of this phenomenon on their lives. This was achieved by allowing the respondents interpret and define the phenomenon themselves and subsequently explain their own experience in their own words. The subsequent analysis of the material obtained through the interview process was done using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The main “currency for an IPA study is the meaning particular experiences, events, states hold for the participants.” (Smith and Osborn, 2007) Because of the idiographic nature of enquiry utilised by IPA, this researcher believes it was the most appropriate method of discourse analysis. IPA also influenced the design of the questions that were used as a guideline for the interviews.
Research Methodology:

In order to gather data for this study this researcher had to gain access to ex-prisoners aged eighteen years and upward. This proved very difficult in the beginning due to ethical issues and many of the organisations that were approached with the research proposal advised that they were unable to grant access to an undergraduate student due to their own ethical guidelines. This researcher did manage to gain access through a gatekeeper in a community-based project located in the southeast of Ireland. The project is an Ex Prisoners one, which provides support and mentoring to participants and deals with the needs of the client base that are all aged 22 and over. This organisation understands the difficulties facing the client base that run the risk of recidivism due to their behaviour, personal circumstances and associations. The project offers practical support as well as educational and developmental programmes in an effort to assist the clients with their reintegration process.

From the population of ex-prisoners found within the organisation a purposive sample was chosen from the sample frame i.e. the list of current users of the service provided by the gatekeeper. This researcher believes that sampling bias has been avoided as this was a single stage sampling process from an available sampling frame (Creswell, 2003) and each respondent was advised that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time and/or refuse to answer any of the questions posed. Due to the chaotic nature of the service users, the gatekeeper organised eight interviews in the hope that six would show up on the allocated two days. Unusually, all six that were scheduled to attend on the first day of interviewing, did so and therefore the data was collected successfully. Those scheduled for the second day of interviews were contacted by the gatekeeper and advised that they were not required. The first interview was a pilot interview in order to obtain feedback from a
representative of the chosen sample. As no changes were made to the structure or content of the interviews following the pilot, the first interview is included in the data analysis.

Prior to meeting with the sample this researcher forwarded a descriptive letter to the gatekeeper and asked that he distribute it to the respondents in order that they may have the opportunity to prepare (Appendix 1). This was not done as the gatekeeper explained that most of the service users have literacy difficulties and are ‘turned off’ by forms. This researcher felt that it would be of more benefit to read the form to the respondents before starting the interview. The interviews, semi-structured in nature, were used in order to gain a rapport with the respondents and allow us to explore any interesting areas that arose. A semi-structured interview guides the schedule rather than dictating it (Smith et al. 2007). As it was one of the aims of this research to highlight the respondents’ own experience of the phenomenon of role models there were certain areas that this research needed to pursue. However, there was also a wish to gain access or infiltrate the psychological and social landscape of the respondents and therefore it was crucial that they share in the direction and focus of the interview. This allowed areas that this researcher had not thought of to be raised and investigated through the narrative that was forthcoming.

**Constructing the Interview:**

In constructing the interview this researcher used the IPA strategy insofar as the interview attempted to create a base of questions that were open ended and not overly prescribed. It was important to encourage the person to speak about the topic with as little prompting from the researcher as possible (Smith et al, 2007) and also to
ensure that the space was available for the respondent to speak of whatever was triggered for them by the topic. The basis for the interview can be seen in Appendix 2.

**Conducting the Interview:**

The interviews were conducted in a meeting room onsite at the projects’ headquarters. Each participant was brought directly to the interview room by the gatekeeper and personally introduced to the researcher. The gatekeeper then left the room and this researcher proceeded to explain the research and the interview process to each respondent separately. The researcher explained that the interview would be 40 minutes in duration and that it would be recorded on a digital voice recorder. Each respondent was assured that the recording would be deleted once transcribed and that all information given was done so under the strict understanding that it was done so in complete anonymity.

Once each interview was over this researcher checked in with the respondents to ensure that they were comfortable with how things had gone and asked if they had any questions that they wished to ask. One individual asked the researcher who their role models were and this researcher engaged in the question and answered truthfully. All participants responded positively to the interviews and each advised that they were comfortable with the questions that were asked and felt comfortable and trusting to be honest with their stories.

**Analysis:**

It was this researchers intention to construct meaning from the respondents’ own stories and in order to do this it was important that the analysis of the interviews highlight the complexities of these meanings rather than merely measuring the
frequency of them. According to Smith and Osborn (2007) this must involve an interpretative relationship with the transcribed discourse. This was done by, first of all identifying the themes in the first interview and then connecting the themes from the transcript. This method was then continued with each subsequent interview until as full an understanding of the themes and their meaning was reached and the results were written up in the final chapters.

**Ethical Issues:**

As the chosen sample were previously incarcerated in residential prisons this researcher understands that anonymity is of ethical concern and hereby states that, at all times during the gathering of data, this researcher has adhered to the law of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the amended Act of 2003. Only the first names of each of the respondents were gathered so as to minimise the risk of identity recognition. Due to the qualitative design and methodology of the research it was not necessary to encrypt or store any information other than transcribing the interviews. This researcher has deleted the recorded interviews and no identifying names are used in any of the transcripts which are coded on the researchers personal computer and password protected.

Autonomy is also a crucial ethical consideration for this research. This researcher respected each participant’s capability of making an informed decision regarding participation in the study. This was done through the pre-interview conversation between each participant and the researcher and also via verbal consent to participation. Appendix 1 further highlights the process taken to ensure that autonomy was respected.
The gatekeeper of the organisation was available at all times throughout the interviewing process and each participant returned to the gatekeepers’ office after the interview. This researcher believes that it was important for the participants to have a member of the project available to them should they wish to discuss any issues that were raised during the interview if they did not feel comfortable doing so with this researcher. The questions were structured in such a way as to minimise the risk of doing any harm to the respondents but the researcher understands that this subject will trigger a different emotional response in each individual. The off the record conversation with each participant following the interview was intended to check in with the individual in relation to the emotional impact of the interview. This researcher also provided the name and contact details of the research supervisor to each participant as they left and to the project leader prior to the interviews.
3. FINDINGS

The participants of this study are ultimately the authors of it due to the nature of the design and methodology used. Therefore it is important for this researcher to note that some of the findings are supplementary to the initial subject around the impact of role models on the landscape of antisocial behaviour. Although many of the themes that evolved during the data collection are auxiliary, they are of crucial importance in this researchers attempt to understand the psychological experiences of the chosen sample. Each participant was honest, congruent and most of all trusting in their introspection and exploration of their feelings and memories. Details of the participants and their criminal activity are outlined below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age first convicted</th>
<th>Amount of Convictions</th>
<th>Longest time spent in prison</th>
<th>Main reason for Convictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Drug Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13 (Juvenile home)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Drug Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10 (Juvenile home)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 Years</td>
<td>Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Drug Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 Months, 4 Weeks</td>
<td>Drug Related</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.

The participants were asked to discuss their understanding and experience of role models throughout the different stages of their lives. They were invited to talk about their life stages to date and the influence of others on each stage. As this was done in an idiographic and semi-structured manner each of the participants took the opportunity to speak of the experiences that they felt influenced their choices and, importantly for this study, their antisocial behaviour. The most explicit master theme
to emerge from the participants’ interviews and the subsequent data analysis was that of the participants ‘seeking power from a powerless place.’

1. Seeking Power from a Powerless Place.

When defining a role model on foot of the opening question, all six participants responded in a similar fashion with a definition centering on a person that one could look up to. The responses were so similar that just a glance at the transcripts showed the identical phrase, ‘someone you look up to’ on all but one interview. The latter participant, Paul, used a different phrase with the same implicit theme, defining a role model as someone who lives a more ‘stable life’ than he.

The notion of ‘looking up’ to another person or object is peppered throughout the early parts of each interview, giving a sense of the participants’ early lives being lived in a powerless state. The definition of a role model used in the literature review in chapter one revolves around the ‘imitation’ of another and, in the latter part of each interview, the participants spoke of a person in power being a role model to them. This master theme, which runs throughout the discourse, is supported by a number of sub-themes as follow.

1a. Early powerlessness:

Due to the chaotic nature of four of the participants’ early developmental stages, there was a much stronger presence of a lack of power at an early and influential age, mainly during early school years and into the early teenage years. This lack of power is evident in the data when the participants were asked about positive personality traits that they would seek in a role model. Brian used the phrase, “no-one would try to mess with ya” as he described the type of role model he had in his
environment. This notion emphasised the powerlessness he felt at only 11 years of age and the powerful position that he longed for. When Alan described his childhood at the hands of an abusive father he said that he “lived like a slave…in fear.” Conversely, when asked to name any personality traits that would deter the participants from choosing someone as a role model the responses related to weakness and powerlessness.

1b. Authority and Self Esteem:

Problems with authority figures were also prevalent in the respondents’ narrative as was an abuse of authoritative positions such as parenting and teaching. However one of the participants, Paul, experienced a role model teacher while in prison, who saw the potential in him and supported him through his first sentence. Paul stated that if she had been available to him at each subsequent sentence he “might not have gone down the road that he did.” His sense of self was much more positive while talking about this teacher as a person who saw him for his worth and not just as a “scum bag ex con.”

All but one of the participants had left school at the earliest possible opportunity, through choice or expulsion. These early departures from education have led to difficulties with reading and writing, which has contributed to the sense of lack in their ability to communicate and the level of powerlessness that was apparent during this disclosure. A very low sense of self worth and a low self-esteem are common factors throughout each of the participants’ lives leading to the sense of powerlessness that was perceptible.

The abuse of power is evident in the experiences spoken of by some of the participants, the powerful abusing the powerless or disempowering the weak. Alan
was the one participant who did not leave school early and who referred to his time in school as something that he enjoyed and something that returned his sense of who he was to him. School was a precious commodity in his turbulent childhood, evidenced in the statement, “I could be a child in school.” At home, Alan’s experience of authority was at the hands of his violent alcoholic father who beat him regularly. The hatred and fear around the physical abuse he encountered at the hands of his father and his own powerlessness in the situation were evident in phrases such as “my childhood was hectic” and “I don’t want any contact with that man anymore.” The latter quote provides evidence of the journey that the participant has taken in terms of empowering himself and getting his own needs met, a journey that is common for them all.

As aforementioned, most of the participants left school at the earliest opportunity for a variety of reasons but for Damian, the abuse at the hands of authority left him in such a powerless state that he felt he had no option but to leave. He states that a female teacher physically beat him in first and second class for being dyslexic and he spoke of the shame he felt around this experience; “She would pull me around the class for whatever…I couldn’t tell anyone [because] I felt so ashamed like.” Damian felt isolated by the whole class and thus ensued an onslaught of antisocial behaviour to deal with his shame at the hands of authority.

**1c. Role of Money:**

Each of the participants are of working class backgrounds and money was something that most of the them saw as a way of attaining power, becoming the role model that they aspired to and of escaping the life that they were living. In searching for the money and power all but one of the participants became involved in a life of
drug abuse and drug dealing. The notion of ‘money’ as an abstract reason to become involved in criminal activity was highlighted by Brian who believed that it all boiled down to money and power at the end of the day. When asked whom his role models were when he was growing up he said “…people who had nice cars and money and stuff like that.” These were the sorts of people that “no-one fucked with” according to Brian and this sort of power was what he longed for. Interestingly, these role models with their fast cars and their cash lived side by side with Brian in a very poor and disadvantaged area.

John also spoke of the money aspect of the powerful role model. When asked whom his role models were when he was growing up he said that they changed from “…hurlers and boxers when I was a youngster to gangsters in the movies…” when he started using drugs and getting involved in criminal activity. He attributed this shift to the lifestyle lived by the characters in ‘Goodfellas’ and ‘The Godfather’ and the money they had. John qualified this dream that he once had with a comment that could very easily relate to his own situation; “It’s good at the time but then it all always comes crashing down.”

2. Impact of Environment and Family on the Developing Self

The second most prevalent master theme to emerge from this researchers analysis of the data collected is that of the impact of the environment on the participants’ developmental life stages. The data has highlighted the strong benefit and need for a secure base in the early developmental structure. It has also accentuated the influence of the ‘other,’ a more powerful ‘role model’ on the antisocial behavioural decisions made by each of the respondents.
Most of the participants’ antisocial and criminal activity began when they connected in with a ‘group’ or ‘gang’ in their early teenage years, although some of the participants had been in trouble at home or in school previously. The environment of antisocial behaviour was augmented as each of the participants engaged in the activities that the other group members, usually older, were partaking in. This involvement and willingness to be a part of the gang was a feather in the cap, an opportunity for something different and a way to connect to something or someone for most of them.

2a. Family Environment:

Each of the participants had a very different family environment as they were growing up. Paul and Alan both had alcoholic fathers who were unavailable emotionally and Mothers who they were very close to. Alan says that his mother “only stayed around because of us [the kids]” which he feels a certain amount of responsibility for. Alan also states that his mother was a role model for him when he was younger. Graham saw his mother as a role model too. He never knew his father, having been raised solely by his mother whom he claims was a role model for him because of the way that she coped on her own; “I would have a lot of respect for her…she sacrificed a lot of things to bring me up.” He also had an Uncle his mothers’ brother, who was ‘called upon’ if Graham was being difficult and Graham saw him as a role model because of the structure and discipline he provided.

Brian states that his parents were “working people [who] did their best” and he doesn’t blame them for any of his behaviour. In fact, Brian blames the area that he lived in for his involvement in criminal activity and his antisocial behaviour stating, “I don’t blame me mother and me father because they done everything in their power
to teach us right form wrong…they done their best to make us make the right choices…but where we lived, there was drugs everywhere man…me whole family ended up on heroin.” Damian, whose brother died of a heroin overdose, also believes that the amount of criminal activity and criminals in his area accounted for his antisocial behaviour although it is interesting to note that his relationship with his mother was very ambivalent due to her unpredictable nature. Damian says that he “is very like her…I think I got her temper…you never knew when she would let fly.”

John’s early environment was “grand, ordinary enough” having been reared by both parents with three other brothers. For John, things started getting bad when he started hanging out with the ‘wrong crowd.’ This notion of hanging out with groups and peers is a common thread throughout the early adolescent years of all participants and important for this researchers understanding of the entrance into the criminal world for the subjects.

2b. Peer Groups:

For all of the respondents, their portal into criminal activity was their involvement with ‘other lads’ in groups around their homes or their local environment. Each of the participants reported having ‘older lads’ as their role models in their early teenage years. They also revealed their participation in antisocial activity within group or gang environments with the aforementioned ‘older lads’ leading the way and having the power to influence the participants’ decisions. Being a part of such a group seems to have been very important in terms of gaining notoriety or status and attaining the attributes that they admired in their role models. Graham spoke of his experience of the group and how he longed to be a part of it from the age of 15; “I
would have looked up to the older boys ya know, that would have been smoking hash and robbing cars…and I would say I wouldn’t mind doing that.”

Being around the group environment had such a profound impact on the thoughts and behaviour of the participants as evidenced in each of the interviews collected. The idea or notion of being the ‘same as the others,’ seems important for the respondents in terms of belonging to the group environment. Within the group there lived the genus of the ‘older lads’ who were influential in terms of the power they possessed and there also appears to have been a hierarchy, which was strictly adhered to. Once one was caught in a criminal act and sentenced one was no longer welcome in the group environment as one was now ‘branded.’ Alan’s experience of the group, post prison, was one of rejection as he describes when discussing approaching the group once released; “…you go down to see the lads and they just blank ya, ignore ya…he’s branded now so they are looking for a new fish.” This shows how transitional the group environment can be.

2c. Institutional Environment:

Some of the participants’ antisocial behaviour began at a very young age with trouble at primary school, trouble in the home and truancy. Brian was sent to a reform school at 10 years of age for truancy and was physically abused by Christian brothers there. The anger toward them was evident in the narrative used to describe his time there; “…They were fucking animal man...there was one fella and he used to, at night time in the freezing cold, he’s strip ya naked and put ya out on the yard and he had this strap with about 20 keys on it and he used to wrap it around his hand and beat you around the yard with it.” Brian’s subsequent experience of the prison environment was one that led to an increase in appetite for criminal activity. He states that his role
models in prison continued to be other criminals. Brian went on to say that prison is 
where you get your ideas for criminal activity and that the group activity remains; 
“…when ya go into prison you go into your own little group…depending on where 
you’re from…and they talk about what they’re gonna do when they get out, how they 
are gonna make money.” Brian believes that it is not possible to rehabilitate in a 
prison environment.

For other participants the experience of the prison was one of minding ones 
own business and ‘keeping the head down.’ John experienced prison as “…handy 
enough, just kept myself to myself” which is contrary to becoming involved in groups 
or gangs within the prison environment. This unilateral experience is mirrored for 
Alan who states that he was advised by the prison officers to stay quiet, “so whatever 
I seen I just kept my mouth shut, done what I had to do and got out of there.” This 
notion of obedience and fear of authority is laced throughout almost all of the 
participants’ experience of the prison environment.

3. Achieving a Better Life and Moving on

The third theme that this researcher found most common and rich within the 
data collected was that of achieving a better life and moving on from an antisocial and 
criminal past. In searching for the money and power that they sought, all but one of 
the participants became involved in a life of drug abuse in an attempt to either connect 
with the other or escape from the feelings and emotions that were so difficult to cope 
with. A combination of two or more of the factors of abuse, loss, low sense of self 
worth and poor environmental conditions led each of the respondents into a life of 
criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. Some of the participants’ criminal lives
were short lived and some were long lasting but the one thing that each of them share as a common achievement is their will and determination to achieve a better and more fulfilling existence for themselves at this stage.

3a. Addiction:

As previously mentioned, all but one of the respondents became addicted to street drugs in their early and formative years. These addictions were to form the basis of and reasons for much of their criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. Drugs played such a crucial role in the lives of five of the participants and indeed in the lives of many of their family members, that moving on from their addictions was always going to prove difficult. According to the participants, giving up drugs and leaving them behind, was the only way they were going to attain a better life and banish criminality into the past.

Damian was the only participant who chose the twelve step method of recovery from addiction although he was not the only one who attempted this technique. For Graham, who attended residential treatment, he found that he was better off doing it himself. Brian who saw the twelve step meetings as ‘depressing’ stating that they consisted of “just everyone saying the same thing over and over” also fostered this notion. John also chose his own method of getting clean while Paul remains on a medicated heroin replacement program using Suboxone after a time using €300 worth of heroin per day. Both Graham and John spoke of continuing to drink alcohol but in moderation and only occasionally.
3b. Pride:

The sense of pride that was evident in the interviews as each of the aforementioned participants spoke of their achievement in getting clean was palpable. Graham spoke of how he never knew what he liked in life when he was using whereas now “I give everything a go…I even went to play the guitar.” Paul, who experienced a role model in the form of a photography teacher on a course that he is currently undertaking, has so much pride in his journey from where he was to where he is today. He is currently attending a program as an outpatient for his drug replacement therapy and he says of the report that will be written up for him, “…they will never have written out one like this before, for someone who is after coming near to what I have done. So I would say that my story is a role model.” The sense of pride is evident in each of the narratives equally.

3c. Anger:

Many of the participants felt huge anger throughout different stages of their lives and indeed some of that anger remains with them still. Common anger shared among them was felt toward their circumstances and environment while some of the participants were angry towards their existence and the world. Damian’s anger was subsidised by the death of his brother from the heroin overdose and an ensuing notion that he was “owed something by the world.” Paul was angry at his sister who completed suicide at the age of 19 by driving her car into a lorry and this anger stayed with him throughout most of his adult life. Others, such as Brian, were angry at the environment that they were raised in saying that “…if I was born somewhere else who knows, life might have been very different.”
Coping with this anger is something that formed much of the antisocial behaviour and addictions that followed. For Alan, his anger was toward his father and this anger remains to this day. But Alan is driven to achieve by a compulsion not to end up like his father. Indeed, it was when Alan’s parents separated and he became free from the tyranny of his father that his antisocial behaviour began. His anger was born of his freedom and acted out through robbing cars.

3d. Leaving the past behind:

All of the participants have a sense of regret for past behaviour and activity and each of them, categorically, hope for a better future. Having overcome the obstacles of their criminal history and their previous antisocial behaviour they are determined to achieve something positive in their lives. Some of the participants have spoken of the leader of the ex-prisoner group that they are part of as being a current role model for them. When asked if they saw themselves as role models at this stage in their lives all of the participants’ initial response was no. However, on reflection through silence and allowing time for the notion to integrate, all of the participants considered themselves as having achieved positive change in their lives that led to a more empowered state. They all felt that knowledge of their personal struggles and achievements could be helpful for others to model.

For Alan, who was not involved in addiction but who came from a place of immense anger towards his abusive father, his longing to leave his past behind is evident in his hope to be a better father to his two children. When asked about the future Alan stated, “I don’t want to go down the same road he went down. I don’t want my kids turning against me.” For Alan, being there for his children, being the
best father that he can be and providing for them is how he will leave his past behind him.

3e. Helping Others:

When asked if they saw themselves as role models most of the participants stated that they would like to have the opportunity to help others in similar situations as themselves. They saw the efficacy in those who have lived the life of a criminal, and been involved in addiction and antisocial behaviour, being the ones who helped those who are showing a similar pattern of behaviour. They believed that in order to help others, one had to have experienced the pain and trouble oneself and have gained an insight through life experience. Some of the participants went further and said that they planned on becoming counselors or mentors for others who are in prison or involved in criminal activity. Perhaps this is a wish for atonement or a way to forgive the self for the past.
4. Discussion

Introduction

It was the objective of this study to gain an insight into, and an understanding of, the experience of role models for a sample of male offenders throughout their life stages. This research also aimed to allow the participants of the study an opportunity to speak of what they felt were relevant influences on their choices around antisocial behaviour. This section will look at the prominent themes from the previous chapter and relate them to the literature while seeking to find meaning in these findings.

1. The Choice of Role Models:

For most of the participants in this study, the people that they chose as role models were antisocial and criminal figures, involved in behaviour that was subsequently to impact negatively on the participants’ lives. As ‘key players’ in the socialisation process these role models were chosen because of the power and confidence that they possessed, attributes the participants themselves were without. This researcher believes that many of the participants experienced an overwhelming sense of powerlessness for a variety of reasons such as a lack of positive male role models in their early developmental processes and a feeling of being ‘different.’

Much of the reviewed literature told us that the role model is chosen from a similar social class and environment and the findings back up these notions. Indeed Carrington et al. (2002) found that most role models were chosen on the basis of achievement and this is evidential in the group environment spoken of in the findings. As Erikson (1968) says, youths are much more likely to be more fully influenced by the adults within their environment during the developmental years and for the participants in this study, their environment consisted mainly of the street in their
adolescent years. The role model chosen may not have been the strict or traditional definition of an idol but within the participants’ environment, idols and stars they were.

Bricheno and Thornton’s study (2007) asserted that most of their male sample had chosen male relatives as role models but went on to say that the children from more disadvantaged areas mentioned fewer male relatives as role models. This is true for the participants within this research. Indeed, two of the participants who did report having a family member as a role model chose their mothers. This researcher notes that many of the participants of this study had highly ambivalent, or at times disorganised, attachments to their fathers and this must surely have resulted in the search for a male role model outside of the family system.

Smith (2009) advised in the literature that it had long been established, from a criminological and a sociological perspective, that young people who are reared in socially disadvantaged areas are often exposed to ‘gangster role models’. This researcher found that the level of disadvantage within the area the participant was reared was not so much a predictor for the choice of role model. The participants in this study came from many different areas, some disadvantaged and some less so, yet each of the participants were exposed to criminal activity and criminal role models. Again, this researcher believes that this was mainly due to the search for a powerful male influence in the participants’ lives. The choice of role model also adapted to the particular life stage of each participant and depended on the particular circumstance and environment that they found themselves in.

The phenomenon of role models was clearly seen by the participants of this study as a figure of power and authority. The choice of role model depended largely on the stage of life that was currently being experienced for the participants and also
the environment they inhabited at that time. The meaning behind their choices was, in this researchers interpretation, a need to connect. Each of the participants engaged in an act of seeking a combination of power, money and entitlement. These needs were clearly not being met in their lives at these particular times and thus the search ebbed and flowed throughout the course of each of their journeys. At the time of the interviews, each of them shared a similar notion of who their role models were. For some of the participants, there was no need for a role model anymore, possibly because they felt their choices had been poor in the past or had been causal in their criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. For some, they had chosen positive role models to model their futures on in an effort to insure themselves against re-offending or simply aiding better decision making in the future.

2. The formation of identity:

The notion of ‘identity formation’ is central to the findings of this study and this is in tandem with Erikson’s’ idea of this notion being a central issue in adolescence. For the participants of this study, identity formation continued throughout each of their lives and indeed, is continuing to this day. There seems to be a rather ambivalent attitude to their own identity for all of the participants, perhaps due to the chaotic nature of their history. The findings highlight the participants search for identity within the environments that they found themselves in and also a fear of the identity that they possessed due to a poor self-image and an inability to trust.

According to Ybema et al. (1996) the impact of a role model on an individual’s decision-making process is clear in terms of the negative or positive effect the model has on the modeler. The findings highlight the comparison factor that
is often found in the choosing of a role model and the impact that the role models had on the choices made by each of the participants. It appears to have been important for the respondents to be in a position to compare themselves to the chosen role model once they reached adolescence. Each of the participants suffered self-esteem issues from a young age and found solace and confidence in the groups to which they attached.

3. Family Influence on Criminal Activity:

The studies of a family transmission of intergenerational offending reviewed in the literature (Farrington et al. 2009, Rowe and Farrington, 1997) showed the transmission from parent to child and then from adult child to their child. This transmission was not evident from the findings reported or indeed the data collected by this researcher. Half of the participants had very ambivalent relationships with their fathers but none of the participants’ parents had criminal or civil convictions.

A family factor of transmission for drug use was noted by this researcher in this study, the factor being that of sibling-to-sibling transmission and not parent to child. Van de Rakt et al. (2009) found that the criminal history of siblings is strongly correlated with the criminal behaviour of their focal respondents. Some of the participants of this study reported having brothers and/or sisters involved in illegal activity and one reported a brother involved in criminal activity. The Van de Rakt et al. study also indicates that this direct influence between siblings provides support for learning and imitative behaviour. As two of the participants reported older siblings involved in drug use the influence of siblings is noted. This researcher found no
evidence for the participants’ criminal activity indicating the beginning of a generational transmission of offending within the data collected.

4. Age Factor in Criminal Activity and Peer Groups:

While one of the participants appears to be an adolescent-limited offender and one having been both an adolescent and adult offender none of the participants conveyed signs of continuing a criminal career. All of the participants did show antisocial tendencies at an adolescent stage. For half of them, criminal behaviour had an adult onset and was short lived. This researcher believes that this is due to the type of crime reported by two thirds of the participants, the crimes being drug related, and each of these participants being clean at the point of data collection.

Evident in the research of early onset offending (Moffitt, 1993 and Farrington et al. 2009) is the notion that adolescent offending is carried out due to peer influence and alongside peer groups involved in similar behaviour. All of the participants of this study became involved in peer groups in their search of a secure base. Regardless of the age of criminal activity the experience of rehabilitation has proven to be a deterrent from re-offending. Although recidivistic behaviour was reported by many of the participants, the crimes were drug related and for the time being, drugs are not a part of their lives.

5. Psychological Factors:

Winnicott’s theories on antisocial tendency refer to a phenomenon that is “characterized by an element in it which compels the environment to be important” (Winnicott, 1975: 309). The findings of this study highlight the importance of the environment in the decision making process for the participants. Most interesting for
this researcher were the psychological factors emphasised in the participants’ criminal
behaviour and antisocial tendencies. It became apparent in the data analysis that the
participants were deprived at different stages throughout their lives. For some, the
depression came at an early age through unavailable attention or care leading to a
lack of a secure base. For others it came through loss or abuse at the hands of
authority. Whichever way, the impact of the ‘loss of something good’ (Bowlby, 1951)
has led to the deprivation felt and the seeking behaviour that ensued for each of the
participants here. Their attachment to the group environment or the drug of choice is
also evidence of the psychological struggle in their search to regain that of which they
have been deprived.

The search continues for these participants, seeking solace and comfort in
their lives. To a certain extent I believe that they have reached a place that allows a
more content and real self to emerge for each of them. There is hope now instead of
hopelessness. There is help instead of helplessness. And there is kindness and
understanding and trust where once there lived fear and anger and frustration.
5. Strengths and Limitations/Recommendations/Conclusion.

Strengths and Limitations:

This study aimed to be idiographic in nature to allow the participants to tell their own story in their own way and, in the process, to highlight the nature of their experience of role models throughout their lives. The qualitative methodology and design of the study, together with the semi structured interviews, allowed this researcher to collect congruent and relevant data that exposed the experience of each of the participants. The method of analysis also allowed for the major themes to be highlighted in a meaningful and honest way.

As only six participants were interviewed for this research, the study cannot claim to be representative of an offender population. Also, as the interviews took place with participants living in one particular area in Ireland the research is biased insofar as the experience may differ in other geographic environments. Each participant is also involved in an ex-offenders service and therefore has experienced some form of assistance with coping with the trials of being an ex-offender, which limits the study in some regards. A broader sample in different geographic areas may be more representative of the general population, however this research was not intending to create generalized findings.

Recommendations for Psychotherapy:

Further studies in this area are recommended. This researcher believes that the understanding and experience of role models that has been highlighted in this research shows the relevance of a positive influence of a positive role model on an adolescent and young adult developing mind. A longitudinal study of a sample of male offenders
would benefit the profession of psychotherapy by gaining an insight into the
developmental landscape of the antisocial mind. This researcher felt that each of the
participants of this study would benefit from counselling or psychotherapy and that
each of the participants was very aware and willing to engage in a process of change.
A study of the existence, or lack, of counselling and/or psychotherapy within the
prison system or post release from prison would be of great benefit. This researcher
believes that counselling and/or psychotherapy would benefit the participants greatly
as each participant was very emotionally and psychologically aware and sought
change. A case study would also be very beneficial for psychotherapy, as this
researcher believes that an in-depth study of one individual would enrich the
understanding of the developmental stages of an individual with criminal and
antisocial tendencies.

**Conclusion:**

For this researcher, the most fundamental learning that has come from this
study has been gaining an understanding of the journey that the participants have
travelled and the achievements that they have attained through that process. Although
the literature highlights the predisposing factors for antisocial behaviour and criminal
activity as being ultimately familial and early onset, this researcher has found that the
main factor for these participants is environmental and peer oriented. The journey
through the peer group, into prison and out the other side to a place of rehabilitation
and security has been a journey that has led the participants to a state of
empowerment. This research has accentuated the strength and courage of the
participants in the face of judgement and adversity and has shown the power of
change and self-belief in coping with the difficulties encountered through life.
Prior to encountering the six participants, who agreed to be interviewed for this small piece of research, this researcher had no knowledge of the criminal mindset nor indeed had this researcher any association with any member of the offending population. Through the process of researching the phenomenon of role models on the antisocial male this researcher has gained a knowledge and respect for the lives of each of the six participants. This study has shown this researcher the richness of the participants’ experiences throughout many of their life stages and the impact of others on their lives. For their courage and trust this research is dedicated to their truth and their stories.
REFERENCES:


  
  http://atgstg01.sagepub.com/upmddata/17418_04_Smith_2e_Ch_04.pdf


• www.apex.com


Appendix 1.

Information Sheet:

Research Interviews 3rd & 4th March 2011.

Title of the Study: The impact of role models on the lives of young offenders.

Researcher: Paul Hughes, Undergraduate Student, Dublin Business School
            hughes144@hotmail.com 086-2677202
            Course: BA (hons) Counselling & Psychotherapy.

Supervisor: Susan Eustace MSc. Susan.eustace@dbs.ie 087-7550020

This study is a small piece of research exploring the influences of past and present role models on the lives of young offenders. The main aim of this study is to highlight the influence, if any, of role models on your life and therefore it would be helpful if you could reflect on this prior to our meeting.

The interview will explore:
Who your role models were when you were growing up?
Did your role model change as you got older?
Did you have a role model when you were in prison?
Do you have a role model now?

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point or to refuse to answer any question. Your identity will be kept confidential and all identifying information will be stored securely and destroyed once it is no longer needed for the study.

The impact of others on our lives is powerful and I believe that we can gain a clearer understanding of how this impact affects us through sharing our experiences. I wish to thank you, in advance, for giving up your time for this study and allowing your experience to be heard.

I look forward to meeting with you on the 3rd or 4th of March.

Kind regards,
Paul Hughes
Appendix 2.

Semi Structured Interview Questions:

1. What is your understanding of a role model?
2. What do you admire in other people? Traits/Attributions?
3. What traits do you dislike in others?
4. Did you have a role model when you were growing up?
5. What impact did this role model have on your life?
6. Tell me about your family, in your own words.
7. Describe your experience of prison, in your own words.
8. Did you have a role model when you were in prison?
9. How did this role model (if there was one) impact your life in prison?
10. When you came out of prison did you have any role model?
11. What impact did this role model (if there was one) have on your adjustment back to the outside world?
12. Do you currently have a role model?
13. Do you see yourself or have you ever seen yourself as a role model?