Adolescents in the Youth Justice System and Future Goal Pursuit

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Introductory Chapter

The focus of this thesis is to understand how adolescents with a history of offending engage in thinking about their goal aspirations and personal future. Although there is substantial research available on goal motivation amongst adult and adolescent populations, little is known about this process amongst adolescents involved in the criminal justice system.

Chapter One consists of a literature review focused upon how adolescents with a history of offending or at risk of offending engage in thinking about goals and their future. As there is very limited research available specifically looking at personal goals amongst adolescent offenders, the literature review also focuses upon how adolescents think about the future in general. The review attempts to draw together research that contributes to an understanding of the processes involved in how young people think about their goals for the future. The literature review gives rise to questions concerning the methodological approaches used in some of the studies, and highlights gaps in the literature which could be areas of further study.

Chapter two presents the empirical paper which is based upon the research study completed as part of the Doctoral in Clinical Psychology training. The research study uses the qualitative method of Grounded Theory to explore the processes involved in how adolescents under supervision of a Youth Offending Service think about their goal aspirations and desired personal future. As past research on adolescent future goal processes is predominantly based upon pre designed questionnaires, the research aimed to gather data which was based upon meaningful goal aspirations for the adolescents. The empirical paper contributes to existing research by developing a theoretical framework which identifies the processes to explain how the young people think about their goal aspirations. Based upon the findings of the research, clinical implications are discussed. It is intended that the empirical paper will be sent for publication to the journal entitled *Youth Justice*. This appears a relevant journal as it directly

targets a range of staff involved in working with adolescent offenders including mental health professionals.

Chapter Three of the thesis presents an expanded discussion of the findings reported from the empirical paper. The expanded discussion focuses upon the findings in relation to existing literature, clinical implications, methodological considerations of the research, and reflexivity of the researcher. Chapter Three also includes a lay summary that was developed from the empirical study to make the findings more accessible. Finally, Chapter Three presents discussion of areas for further research and a brief research proposal is included for a future study which could be followed on from the empirical study.

Chapter I

Literature Review

Future thinking, planning and goal pursuits of adolescents involved in offending behaviours: A review of the literature.

According to the official crime statistics for 2010-2011, 15.5 per cent of all arrests made in England and Wales involved young people aged between 10 and 17 years of age (Youth Justice Board, YJB, 2013). In 2011-2012 there were 36,677 first time entrants who came in contact with Youth Justice Services (YJS) and the rate of re-offending amongst young people has been reported to have risen (YJB, 2013).

The rate of mental health difficulties and their level of complexity is higher among this population of young people than in their peers within the general population (Kessler, Chiu, Demler & Walters, 2005; Teplin, Abram, Mc Clelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002) and higher rates of depression, anxiety, ADHD and psychosis have been documented amongst this group. Adolescents in contact with YJS have been reported to be at increased risk of mental health difficulties alongside a range of other factors including poor school attendance, learning difficulties, chaotic relationships, and drug and alcohol abuse (Casswell, French, & Rogers, 2012; Kessler et al., 2005; Teplin et al., 2002; Vermeriren, Jespers, & Moffitt, 2006). Amongst numerous variables that have been investigated in efforts to compare young people involved in offending with their non-offending peers, the former group (sometimes referred to as 'juvenile delinquents') have been described as being goal-less and aimless (Carroll, Durkin, Hattie & Houghton, 1997). The present review focuses on the extent to which that suggestion is supported by existing research.

Despite large numbers of young people getting involved in criminal activity and coming into contact with youth justice systems, relatively little research has been conducted into how adolescents involved in criminal activity think about their future or develop goal pursuits. As increasing knowledge about future planning and goal pursuits of adolescents who engage in offending behaviours could prove to be of great importance for professionals working with that group, the present paper reviews the literature available on future planning and goal pursuit amongst adolescents who are involved in criminal activity. This review aims

to systematically draw together and integrate existing research on future planning and goal

pursuit amongst adolescents involved in criminal activity. Specifically, the current review

seeks to synthesise and critically evaluate literature addressing the following questions: 1) Do

adolescents involved in criminal activity think about future plans and goal pursuit? 2) What

are the content and nature of the future goals that adolescents involved in criminal activity set

for themselves? 3) How do adolescents involved in criminal activity plan to achieve future

goal pursuits?

It is of importance to acknowledge that research on goal pursuit and future planning

has been well documented within the literature, with all human behaviour and motivation

being regarded as fundamentally goal directed (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Successful

achievement of goals has been found to be related to subjective well-being and positive

mental health (Affleck et al, 1998; Brunstein, 1993; Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2003;

Sheldon, & Houser-Marko, 2002). Sheldon, Kesser, Smith and Share (2002) highlighted that

the process of attempting to achieve personal goals is related to psychological well-being and

personality development whether the individual is successful or not. Different patterns of

goal pursuit have also been associated with specific mental health difficulties such as anxiety

and depression in adolescents (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004; 2006).

The study of future planning and goal pursuit has been informed by various theories.

Goal Setting theory (Locke, 1968) proposed that clear and specific goals are more likely to be

achieved and that individuals are more inclined to strive towards their goals if they are

perceived as challenging and realistic. Self efficacy plays an important role in Goal Setting

Theory as an individual's motivation to achieve goals is thought to be influenced by the level

of confidence he/she has in his or her ability to achieve their desired outcome. Higgins (2000)

introduced the concept of "Regulatory Fit" and proposed that an individual's motivation

towards achieving goals is enhanced when they are interested in or value the goal they aim to

achieve. Higgins (2000) referred to people having either a promotion or prevention focused orientation towards their goals. Promotion focused orientation towards goals involves the individual actively engaging in activities to achieve their goal. Prevention focused orientations towards achieving goals has been characterised as attempting to prevent a dreaded outcome occurring. A number of theories suggest that goals provide a cognitive future representation with which an individual's present state is compared. Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nuruis, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) suggested that people base their aims and behaviour upon attempting to achieve a desired future 'possible self'. This theory proposed that subsequently people undertake steps that will aid them in reaching this and avoid aspects that will prevent this achievement.

Future planning and personal goal pursuit are particularly important to the developmental stage of adolescence (Nurmi, 1991) as adolescents become faced with age normative tasks that require thinking about their future. This life stage involves making decisions and plans that have great influence upon later adult life and can contribute to the process of identity formation for the adolescent (Nurmi, 1991). Nurmi (1991; 1993) refers to a three stage model of how adolescents engage in the process of thinking about future orientation including stages of motivation, planning and evaluation.

The content of adolescent goals for the future has been studied, with career and educational goals being cited among the most pertinent goals for many adolescents (Lantz, Rosnati, Marta & Scabini, 2001; Nurmi, 1991; Massey, Gebhradt, & Garnefski, 2008). Goals in a range of other life domains have been reported including relational goals (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 2000), social connectedness (Kerpelman, Shoffnr & Ross-Griffin, 2002) and global concerns (Malmberg & Norrgard, 1999; Nurmi, Poole & Kalakoski, 1994; Seigner, 1992). Research has been conducted into factors and processes that affect the development of adolescents' future goals including: age (Ogivile, Rose, & Heppen, 2001; Seigner, 1992)

gender (Honora, 2002; Kasser, Ryan, Zax & Sameroff, 1995); influence of family (Trice & Knapp, 1992; Wall, Covell & MacIntyre, 1999); influence of peers (Carroll, 1995; Cohen & Cohen, 1996) and socio economic status (Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Hill et al, 2004).

Although considerable research has been carried out in relation to future planning and goal pursuit within the adolescent population, little emphasis has been placed upon adolescents who do not follow the 'normative' life pathways. Most studies report findings based on student samples and do not consider groups of adolescents who may not be in contact with mainstream education. In the review carried out by Nurmi (1991), reference was made to adolescent problem behaviour and orientation to the future; however little emphasis was given to this area. A more recent literature review (Massey et al, 2008) identified that engagement in criminal activities may influence the way in which adolescents think about and plan for the future. However this is not greatly elaborated upon. Carroll, Gordon, Haynes and Houghton (2013) reported that many adolescents develop goals congruent with the values and aims of school, however they also emphasise that adolescents involved in criminal activity often reject such school based goals.

Search Strategy

Online databases (PsycINFO, Scopus and Web of Knowledge) were used to search for literature relevant to future planning amongst adolescents involved in criminal activity. Based on literature relating to future goal pursuit in adulthood and adolescence, search categories were developed to incorporate a combination of terms that would relate to the developmental age of adolescence (adolescen*; teen*; youth; young; child), future planning (future; future orientation; goals; striving; motivation; aspirations; possible selves; hopes; plans and life tasks) and offending (juvenile; offend*; delinqu*; criminal; institutionalised; incarcerated; antisocial).

Inclusion Criteria

This review included articles which met the following criteria: published between January 1900 and January 2013; written in English; including adolescents aged between the ages of 10 and 18 years (as used in other reviews referring to adolescent future planning) and future planning or goal pursuit type terms were included in the title as the main focus of the study. Studies reviewed included adolescents at risk of criminal activity, those who have involvement in community probation services and adolescents imprisoned in secure settings. As existing literature is limited in relation to future planning and goal pursuits of adolescents involved in criminal activity, both qualitative and quantitative papers were included in the review to provide a thorough overview of the available research.

Exclusion Criteria

This review excluded articles based on the following criteria: were not published between January 1900 and January 2013; were not written in English; did not include adolescents aged between the ages of 10 and 18 years and future planning or goal pursuit type terms were not included in the title as the main focus of the study. The review excluded studies that did not focus upon adolescents with a history of offending or who were at risk of involvement in criminal activity. Studies were excluded that used samples of undergraduate students. This review excluded studies that focused upon goal pursuit in relation to motivation to engage in various preventative offending treatment programmes and rather focused upon studies that placed focus upon adolescent's life goals. Similarly, it was beyond the scope of this review to focus upon the area of goals relating specifically to academic achievement.

Literature Searches

The results of the database searches were cross referenced to exclude repetition of articles. From the data base searches, 10 articles were identified as satisfying the criteria for the review (See Figure 1 for diagram of the literature search process). Three further articles were also obtained through studying the references of the ten relevant articles. The review encompassed two qualitative studies and eleven quantitative studies. Principles for reviewing qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999) were used to evaluate the qualitative studies included within the review.

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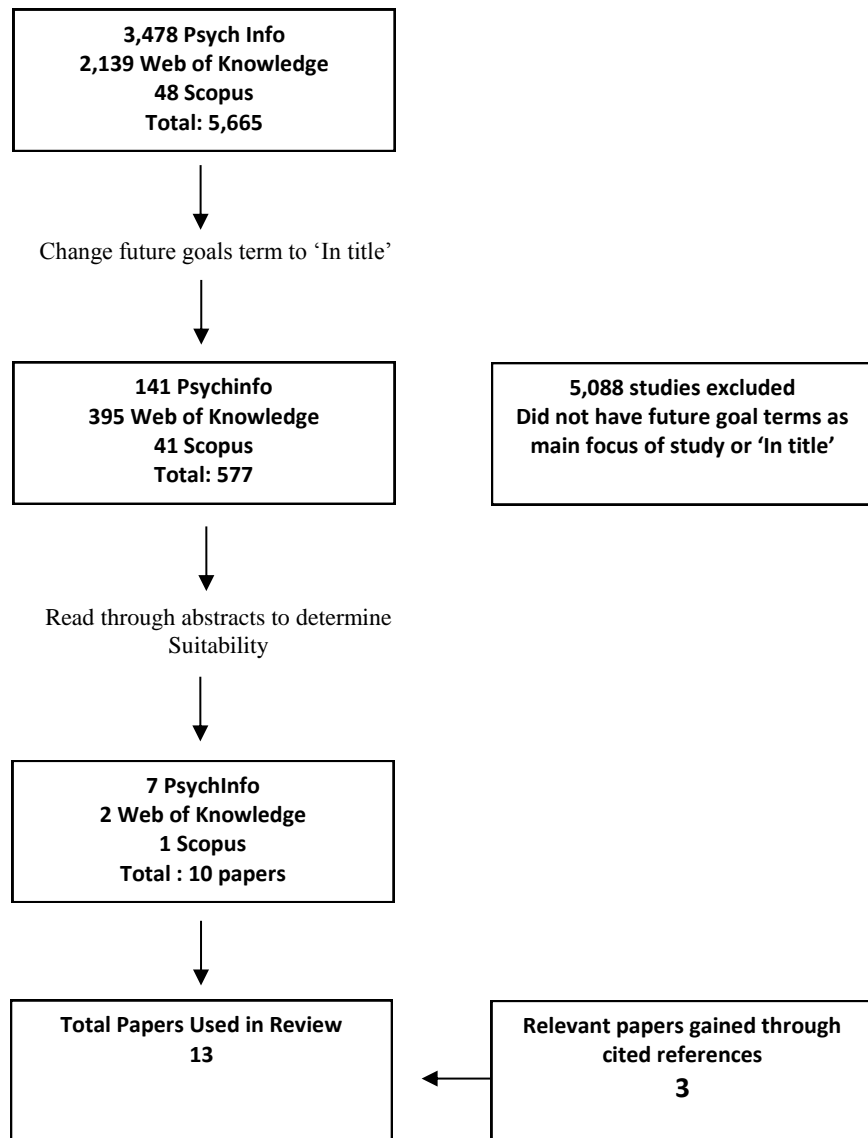
Figure 1

Diagram illustrating the process of retrieving articles in the literature search.

Table 1.1 (pg.12) presents details of the studies included in this review in alphabetical order. Details of 11 quantitative studies are presented including information about sample, age, measures, method and main results. Details of the two qualitative studies follow in Table 1.2 (pg.14) with information provided about sample, aims of the study, methodology, process of analysis and results.

Results

Although little research has been conducted into the area of thinking about or planning for the future amongst adolescents with a history of offending, the studies reviewed have identified important areas for consideration.

Future Time Perspective

Previous literature on future planning in adolescents who engage in offending behaviours suggested that offending adolescents have a shorter view of the future and do not plan for future events (Siegman, 1961). Adolescents described as 'non delinquents' displayed a longer future time perspective (Stein et al., 1968) through being able to envisage a higher mean future age for themselves. However this difference was non-significant and suggested that adolescents who had not engaged in offending behaviour only extended planning for their future by an average of two years in comparison to their peers with a history of offending. Stein et al (1968) replicated and validated this finding within a number of samples. Using a task that evaluated capacity to delay future gratification, Wilson and Daly (2006) showed that adolescents who offended were slightly less likely to engage in discounting the future than non-offenders, however this result was also not significant. In relation to identifying aspired future events, adolescents with a history of offending were significantly

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Table 1.1

Table providing information about quantitative studies reviewed.

Author	Sample	Age	Constructs related to future planning	Other Constructs measured	Method	Main Results
Carroll & Durkin (1997).	490 adolescents in Australia. Including delinquent youth, at risk youth and not at risk youth.	12-18	Importance of Goal Scale.	NA.	Series of studies to aid development and validation of Importance of Goal Scale along with comparison study.	Significant differences found in goal content of 'delinquent', 'at risk' and 'not at risk groups of adolescents.
Carroll, Hattie, Durkin, & Houghton (2001).	260 adolescents in Australia – 80 incarcerated 90; 'at risk'; and 90 'not at risk'.	12- 18	Importance of Goal Scale; Ideal Private Self Scale.	Adapted Self Report; Delinquency; Reputation Enhancement; Self Esteem.	Scales administered within schools and secure institutions within small groups of 4-6.	Significantly different types of goal orientations and reputational aspirations between the three groups.
Chen & Vazsonyi (2011).	1837 adolescents in USA.	11-20	Domain Specific Future Orientation.	Age; Race; Sex; Family Structure; Impulsivity; Problem Behaviours.	Longitudinal study Random selection of large pool of participants completed brief questionnaire followed by interviews at home. Interviews repeated at T2 & T3.	Adolescents' education life future orientation predicted problem behaviours longitudinally and explained variation in change of behaviours over time. Adolescents with more positive future outlook towards education or life domains reported initial lower levels of problem behaviour.
Clark & Wenniger (1963).	1154 adolescents from 4 different types of community within USA.	Un-known	Goal orientation Likelihood of Achieving Goals.	Extent and Nature of Illegal Behaviour.	Adolescents completed measures in group of 20-40	Significant differences found in goal orientations among different communities. Differences in goal content between adolescents more likely to report delinquency than those that do not.

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Table 1.1   Continued

Author	Sample	Age	Constructs related to future planning	Other Constructs measured	Method	Main Results
Clinkinbeard & Zohra (2011).	534 imprisoned young offenders in USA – 385 boys and 159 girls.	12-22	Possible Selves.	Motivational Capital.	Adolescents completed measure in groups.	Young offenders identified at least one expectation or fear for coming year.
Iselin, Mulvey, Loughran, Chung, & Schubert, (2012).	1,354 adolescents from Philadelphia, USA.	14-17	Importance and expectations of goals ; Behaviours accomplishing goals.	Gender; Ethnicity; Soci economic status; amount of time spent in community; prior antisocial history.	Longitudinal study. Participants completed baseline interview using computer generated measures every six months for first 3 years, then annually for 7 years.	Adolescent offenders who believe they are capable of accomplishing positive aspired-to possible selves are more likely to achieve them. Individuals with higher ratings of expectancy to avoid trouble with law related to fewer self reports of reoffending.
Newberry & Duncan (2001).	418 high school students in USA.	14-18	Possible Selves.	Self-Reported Delinquency; Boredom.	Participants completed questionnaires in school.	Gender related to number of possible selves reported. Interaction between aspired possible selves and boredom related to delinquency.
Romero - Lopez & Romero (2010).	448 participants in Spain.	12-18	Importance of Goal Scale.	Anti-Social Behaviour.	Questionnaires administered at schools without presence of teachers.	Adolescent goals relating to social recognition, anti-social behaviour, educational and physical / athletic associated with anti-social behaviour.
Stein, Sarbin, & Kulik (1968).	200 boys in USA – 100 with no criminal record and 100 who had court orders and / or been imprisoned.	14-18	Future Events.	Intellectual Achievement; Socio-Economic Status; Future Events Test.	Participants completed questionnaires.	Adolescents not involved in criminal activity reported viewing events significantly longer into the future than young offenders. Findings were replicated with another sample. Non delinquent youth reported more socially desired goals.

Table 1.1   *Continued*

Author	Sample	Age	Constructs related to future planning	Other Constructs measured	Method	Main Results
Trommsdorff & Lamm (1980).	240 males in USA, including 90 institutionalised offenders, 30 non institutionalised delinquents, 30 non institutionalised non-delinquents, 90 institutionalised soldiers.	17-24	Hopes and Fears for Future; Attribution of Control for Future events; Judgment of Present, Past and Future; Future Extension; Future Optimism; Interest in Personal or Public Future.	Legal Status.	Participants identified hopes and fears and completed questionnaires.	Delinquency and institutionalisation significantly impact upon an individual's future orientation and personal goals.
Wilson & Daly (2006).	91 young offenders 284 high school students in USA.	12-19	Discounting Task Future Milestones Task.	Sensation Seeking Scale.	Participants completed tasks in quiet room with laptop. Audio version available if needed.	Offenders did not have more compressed view of the future than non - offending peers.

Table 1.2

Table providing information about qualitative studies reviewed.

Author	Sample	Age	Aims	Methodology	Procedure	Results
Carroll (1995).	5 imprisoned young men from Western Australia.	14-16	Investigate whether young offenders set specific and challenging goals. Examine hierarchical structure within juvenile delinquent population and explore role of goal setting within this.	Not specified.	Participants read case vignette and were interviewed and asked semi structured questions. Data was coded, clustered and summarised using procedures recommended by Zemke & Kramlinger (1985).	Juvenile delinquents set specific and challenging goals. Young people set goals for immediate gratification and goals are based upon acquiring resources.
Gardner (2009)	25 Imprisoned young men in USA.	Unsure of specific age range. Average age of participants was 16.	To explore young people's aspirations based on cultural analysis.	Critical discourse analysis.	Conducted interviews with 15 participants. 10 participants completed written essays about their future.	Young people's aspirations focused around concepts of 'Making it' or 'Not making it' in their future.

more likely to be consistent in reporting the time frame in which events would occur (Wilson & Daly, 2006). However perhaps not surprisingly, in contrast to the above findings, Trommsdorff and Lamm (1980) reported that young adults with a history of offending and imprisonment have a significantly less extended future orientation, with imprisoned 'delinquents' describing the shortest vision for the future.

Contrary to previous thought, adolescents who engage in criminal activity have been shown to engage in thinking about the future and planning, however the findings around how far their future thinking and planning exceeds into the future remains uncertain. Some of the literature focusing upon future time perspective within a young offending population (Stein et al, 1968; Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1980) used analytical procedures which may be considered outdated in the present day.

Content of Goals and Future plans for Adolescent Offenders

Differences between non-offending adolescents and those with a history of offending have been reported in the content of their goals and future aspirations (Carroll, Hattie, Durkin & Houghton, 200; Stein et al., 1968). Adolescents with no history of offending are significantly more likely to plan to finish college and education (Carroll et al., 2001; Stein et al., 1968). However in one study, fifty eight per cent of adolescents with a history of offending also identified plans to complete college (Stein et al., 1968). Adolescents with a history of involvement in criminal activity tend to report goals deemed as more socially undesirable such as 'getting drunk' (Stein et al., 1968).

During the development and validation process of the Importance of Goals Scale (Carroll & Durkin, 1997), significant differences were reported between 'delinquent', 'at risk' and 'not at risk' groups in relation to the content of adolescents goals. In this study, 'at risk' adolescents were identified using a checklist comprising 12 behavioural indicators (e.g.,

truanting, disruptive behaviour) and 12 situational indicators (e.g., suspended, expelled in time-out rooms) which were completed by the principle and school teacher. A child was identified 'at risk' if three behavioural indicators and three situational indicators were met. The Importance of Goals Scale is made up of 50 items grouped under eight different goal types including: educational; professional; interpersonal; self-expressive; social recognition; freedom/ autonomy; physical and anti-social. The Importance of Goals Scale is based upon a 3 point likert scale (very important, sometimes important, not at all important) whereby participants are asked to rate how important each goal is to them. Estimated reliabilities of the subscales have been reported to range between .62 and .84 (Carroll & Durkin, 1997; Carroll et al., 2001). Carroll et al (2001) also found significant differences between 'delinquent', 'at risk' and 'not at risk' groups relating to goals in the following areas including: physical, education and interpersonal issues. The 'delinquent' group scored significantly higher than both other groups relating to importance of physical goals. The 'not at risk' rated education and interpersonal goals as significantly higher in importance than both the 'at risk' and 'delinquent groups'. 'Delinquent' adolescents and the 'at risk' group placed significantly more importance upon goals relating to autonomy and freedom than 'not at risk' adolescents. Adolescents involved in offending placed as much importance upon career focused goals as adolescents deemed 'at risk' and 'not at risk' of offending (Carroll et al., 2001). Overall, adolescents with a history of offending placed particular importance upon goals relating to social image significantly more so than adolescents without a history of offending. Non-offending adolescents rated goals congruent with a non- conforming reputation less important than those with a history of offending who placed more importance upon aiming to be viewed as non-conforming (Carroll et al., 2001).

Existing literature has explored future plans and goals of adolescents who have been imprisoned (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1980). In a

sample of 534 adolescent offenders, most were reported (97%) as able to identify at least one hope or fear for their future whilst envisaging possible selves (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011). The average number of hopes adolescents reported for the future were between 2 to 3 with a similar finding reported for the number of fears adolescents described for their future. Although many of the prisoners identified hopes and fears in line with their mental representation of a future possible self, only 14% identified a balanced view consisting of both hopes and fears or concrete strategies to achieve their goals. Hopes and fears were reported across a range of life domains including lifestyle, school, and employment. No gender differences were reported in the number or content of hopes and fears. The most common fears reported by the adolescents for the future related to risk behaviour, drug and alcohol consumption and interpersonal situations (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011). In a sample of imprisoned adolescents, Trommsdorff and Lamm (1980) found that adolescents who were involved in criminal activity were more likely to identify future hopes relating to 'private issues' such as their own self-fulfilment and physical well-being than 'non delinquents' who also identified future hopes for others and society as a whole.

Goal Expectancy and Attribution for future.

Goal expectancy and placing importance upon goals relating to employment, and expectations around having a job have been shown to increase the likelihood that adolescents with a history of offending will be working legally within the community at a one year follow up (Iselin, Mulvey, Loughran, Chung & Schubert, 2011). Placing importance upon goals relating to employment and expectations of having a job in future also reduced the likelihood of the adolescents engaging in illegal activity as a 'job', however the effect sizes for the results are small. Expectations of staying out of trouble with the law were found to be significantly predictive of fewer self-reported offending behaviours. However future

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expectations of staying out of trouble were not significantly linked to number of documented arrests or sanctions (Iselin et al., 2011).

Adolescents with a history of offending behaviour were more likely to identify expectations about going to jail in the future (Stein et al., 1968). Although adolescents involved in criminal activity may identify goals relating to education, they hold expectations that they are less likely to graduate from high school (Wilson & Daly, 2006).

Adolescents with no history of criminal behaviour have been reported to expect more realistic events to occur in the future such as experiencing a period of hospitalisation or the death of a friend. Adolescents involved in offending are more likely to have future expectations relating to chance events such as winning the lottery and (Wilson & Daly, 2006). This research suggests that adolescent offenders may engage in a process of externalizing locus of control over future hopes. The thinking process of 'super optimism' (Walters, 2003) has been proposed in relation to people leaving prison whereby individuals engage in a process of unrealistically appraising the likelihood of avoiding negative crime related behaviours and in overestimating the probability that positive events will occur in the future. This is an area which would be of further interest to explore in relation to adolescent offenders level of optimism about their personal goals and desired future. In contrast these suggestions that adolescent offenders are more likely to describe an external locus of control, young people involved in criminal activity have been reported to rate greater levels of internal control in relation to the likelihood of their future goals occurring than non-offending adolescents (Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1980). Processes thought to be components of future planning and goal pursuit such as expectancy, attribution of control, perceived likelihood and motivation remain to be areas of limited research within the population of adolescents who engage in criminal behaviour.

Future goals, Planning and Offending

Possibly the earliest research on goal pursuit and future planning amongst adolescent offenders studied the extent of involvement in illegal behaviour amongst young people from four different social class groups (rural farming group; upper urban; lower urban and industrial city) in the USA (Clark & Wenninger, 1963). In this study, adolescents from lower socioeconomic groups were reported to be significantly more involved in illegal behaviour. By using a questionnaire made up of three different measures relating to goals and values which were thought to relate to American society as a whole, and to lower class groups and middle class groups, it was reported that goals referred to as 'middle class' were found to be predictive of avoidance of involvement in illegal behaviour. Adolescents who identified goals classified as being congruent with lower class values were more likely to report involvement in illegal behaviours. However the application of these results may be limited in current times due to changes within American society and culture.

Lopez –Romero and Romero (2010) used the Importance of Goals Scale (Carroll & Durkin, 1997) with a sample of Spanish high school students to explore the importance of goals and different types of anti-social behaviour. Based on a factor analysis on the Importance of Goals Scale, Lopez-Romero and Romero (2010) reported six types of goals including: social recognition; emancipative; educational, physical/ athletic; anti-social and interpersonal or familial. Goals relating to social recognition were found to be positively correlated with all measures of anti-social behaviour including: general anti-social behaviour; group anti-social behaviour; drug consumption; theft and aggression. Adolescents rating higher levels of importance towards educational goals reported significantly less involvement in all measures of anti-social behaviour.

Due to previous links reported between impulsivity and adolescent engagement in problem behaviours, Chen and Vazsonyji (2011) attempted to explore the role of adolescent

future thinking and planning towards areas of education, life and family, whilst controlling for the role of impulsivity. Numbers of educational focused goals reported at the time of the study were significantly related to engagement in problem behaviours at a one year follow up interview, with those reporting higher level of educational goals being less likely to be engaged in problem behaviour. Adolescents who attributed higher importance to educational goals were less likely to be engaged in problem behaviours at a seven year follow up, however this finding was not statistically significant.

As the concept of boredom has also been linked to offending behaviour, Newberry and Duncan (2001) explored the role of boredom, and adolescents holding negative views of their future possible selves upon engagement in delinquency. The study found no gender differences in relation to adolescents reporting positive and negative representations of their possible selves, however the study identified significant gender differences in relation to boredom proneness and engagement in criminal activities. In conducting a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, Newberry and Duncan (2001) identified that gender accounted for 6% of the overall variance that contributed to delinquency, holding negative views of possible future selves accounted for 21% of the variance and boredom accounted for 5%. Therefore the research indicated that along with the factors of gender and boredom, adolescents identifying negative future possible selves are a significant contributing factor to engagement in criminal activity.

Although research indicates that there appears to be some link between future thinking, goal pursuit and offending behaviours, little literature is available about the relationship and more information is needed. The studies discussed in relation to future goals, planning and offending (Clark & Wenninger, 1963; Chen & Vazsonyji, 2011; Lopez-Romero & Romero 2010; Newberry & Duncan, 2001), were all conducted with 'at risk' adolescents recruited through schools and not specific samples of adolescents involved with

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the criminal justice system and may lack relevance to adolescents who engage in more serious criminal activities. As young offenders are often likely to drop out of mainstream education, in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between future goals and offending, it would be worth exploring this area with a sample of young offenders.

Qualitative Studies relating to future planning and goal pursuit

This review includes two qualitative studies that explore future goals and plans of adolescents with a history of offending who were imprisoned at the time at which the research was conducted. As part of a larger study, Gardner (2010) aimed to explore through interviews and written essays how imprisoned young men described their future. Gardner (2010) does not specify that a particular methodological approach has been used, but analysed data using coding procedures which led to the development of emerging categories. Results of the study indicated that young men who were imprisoned had plans and goals for the future based upon two main categories of 'making it' and 'not making it'. Gardner (2010) reported that within the categories of 'making it' and 'not making it', strong narratives arose for the young men. The narrative of "Making it' via Jobs, Education, Family and staying out of the 'System" encompassed hopes the adolescents had for the future and goals that they would like to set for themselves. In contrast, the narrative of "Not Making it', Uncertainty and Dark Possibilities" arose whereby most young people identified hopes for their future but then reported the perceived unlikelihood of achieving their aspirations due to long jail sentences and exposure to violence or death. The narrative of 'Moving Away' was based upon 32% of the sample identifying that they hoped to move from the area they lived in and avoid trouble. 'Giving Back' was also described as a narrative which arose for   a minority of the young men and involved aspiring to repay others for past support and helping others in the future. This study highlighted that young people involved in criminal activity,

particularly those imprisoned often have extremely limited access to resources for the future. The study also suggested that young people's narratives and language about the future can contribute to marginalisation (expressing views of "not making it") or can lead to young people resisting the influence of the wider systemic influences towards marginalisation (talking about "making it").

Carroll (1995) used an interview schedule and case vignette to facilitate discussion with a sample of five adolescents imprisoned for various crimes in Australia. This study used the procedures recommended by Zemke and Kramlinger (1985) to analyse the data which consisted of coding, developing categories and forming questions for the researcher to develop answers to based upon the results. This study reported that adolescents within the sample identified short term and immediate goals which were based upon gaining resources, enjoyment with friends and playing sport. The goal of acquiring resources involved gaining money through various means including stealing. Adolescents reportedly set specific and challenging goals (relating to stealing) and goals appeared to become more challenging as adolescents developed confidence in their ability to achieve goals that were set (Carroll, 1995). Based on the interviews, it was also reported that goals of adolescents involved in criminal activity are set through influence from a collective group and that whilst some acts can be impulsive, some appear premeditated. The study suggested that a hierarchical structure exists within the adolescent offending population and that goals are set to develop credibility and acceptance among peers. Although this study provides informative findings about future goals and plans amongst adolescents who offend, generalizability of the results are limited due to the nature of the study and the small sample size. Also, the methodology employed in the study (Carroll, 1995) may have been amenable to researcher bias.

From the qualitative studies available on adolescents who engage in offending behaviours, it is clear that adolescents can identify and discuss goals and plans for the future.

However the validity of these studies may be limited due to the analytical methods applied. Further qualitative research is needed to explore the nature, content and processes involved in goal setting and future planning among groups of adolescents with a history of offending.

Discussion

The studies located in this review indicate that adolescents with a history of offending do engage in planning for the future and thinking about future goal pursuit (Carroll et al., 1997; Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011; Stein et al, 1968; Wilson & Daly, 2006). Some evidence supported previous suggestions that adolescents involved in criminal activity have a less extended future time perspective (Trommsdorff & Lamm 1980). However, other results showed that adolescents involved in crime had similar future time perspectives to adolescents with no history of offending and do not engage in delaying future goals (Stein et al., 1968; Wilson & Daly 2006). In sum, future time perspective as such does not emerge as a differentiating feature of those adolescents who do or do not become involved in offending.

Results indicated that much of the available research about future planning and goal pursuit among offending adolescents focused upon the content of goals (Carroll et al., 1997; Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011; Trommsdorff et al., 1980). Similar to adolescents with no history of criminal behaviour (Lantz et al., 2001; Massey et al., 2008; Nurmi, 1991), young people who engaged in offending behaviours identified future goals relating to education (Carroll et al., 1997) however adolescents not involved in criminal activity were more likely to identify and place more importance upon future academic related goals (Stein et al., 1968; Carroll et al., 1997). Adolescents with previous involvement in offending reported more goals relating to physical fitness, autonomy and goals perceived as socially undesirable than non-offending peers (Carroll, 1995; Carroll et al., 1997). Imprisoned adolescents often

envisage a 'possible self' that they aspire to for the future, either a positive one to be achieved or negative view of what they wished to avoid (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011). Oyserman and Markus (1990) reported that individuals are more likely to achieve their goals and envisaged possible self if they have a balance of positive and negatives self-images to work towards for their future. It appears that adolescents involved in criminal activity may struggle to achieve their envisaged possible self as only 14% of adolescent prisoners were reported to have such a balance (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011). Expectancy was important within the literature, as adolescents' positive beliefs about the expectancy of achieving the goal of acquiring a job are associated with a higher likelihood of gaining employment in the future (Iselin et al., 2011). Although many adolescents involved in criminal activity identified education focused goals, their expectancy levels for achieving such goals are significantly lower than their non-offending peers (Wilson & Daly 2006).

In relation to adolescent future planning, goal pursuit and offending behaviours, the literature suggested that types of future goals identified by adolescents are related to rates of offending behaviours (Chen & Vazsonyji, 2011; Clark & Wenninger, 1996; Romero-Lopez & Romero, 2010). Adolescents' future goal pursuits and their images of possible selves have been reported to contribute significantly to involvement in delinquency (Newberry & Duncan, 2001). Some qualitative research has been conducted in an attempt to understand how imprisoned adolescents think about future planning and goal pursuit (Gardner 2010; Carroll et al., 1997) however results are limited due to the methodologies employed and sample sizes.

This review provides an overview of the literature on future planning and goal pursuit within the population of adolescents who have engaged in offending behaviours, focusing upon adolescents' goals for the future, and the content and nature of their goals. However this literature review has identified that there is no research available regarding the processes

involved in how adolescents think about future planning or attempt to engage in goal pursuit, despite this being an area of great importance. The existing studies in the area are often based upon adolescent samples within USA and Australia which may cause issues for generalisability of results due to cultural differences. Some of the research is also based upon older constructs and ideas about offending behaviour which may be outdated in the current climate. Some of the available research studies included within the review also raised methodological concerns or had weaknesses in design. Subsequently, results may need to be interpreted with caution, or studies repeated in future to check the reliability of the findings.

Future Implications for Further Research

As limited research is available on future planning and goal pursuit amongst the population of young offenders, there are several areas that need to be further explored. As the rate of mental health difficulties is comparatively high amongst adolescents who offend (Kessler et al., 2005; Teplin et al., 2002) and various links have been made between positive mental health, subjective well-being and goal pursuit (Afflek et al., 1998; Brunstein, 1993; Harris et al., 2003; Sheldon et al., 2002), developing a full understanding of goal pursuit within this population is of great importance in attempting to facilitate clinical interventions. Potentially this could also have an impact in reducing rates of offending. As particular patterns of goal pursuit have been associated with mental health difficulties amongst adolescents, such as anxiety and depression (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004; 2006) it may be important for future research to look at specific patterns amongst adolescents who engage in offending. There is currently no literature available on the specific processes involved in how adolescents with a history of offending behaviours engage in goal pursuit or thinking about the future. Therefore research focusing upon identifying such processes would be valuable. As most of the research on goal pursuit within adolescent populations in general uses

measures that pre-specify particular goals and values, qualitative research could be a more appropriate approach for providing meaningful insight to goals that are generated freely by young people rather than influenced by the existing bias of questionnaires items. Most of the studies reviewed placed focus of the research upon young people's involvement in offending behaviour and recidivism; however it is of great importance to gain further understanding regarding the development of future plans and goals that are meaningful to adolescents involved within the Youth Justice System as this may increase their well-being and enable professionals to support young people in attempting to achieve their goals.

Conclusion

Adolescents with a history of offending have been found to engage in thinking about the future and goals they hope to pursue. Often such goals are similar to those of non-offending adolescents however include more emphasis upon goals that may be thought of as 'non-conforming' or 'socially undesirable'. However research available is limited and raises some methodological concerns. There is no literature available about the processes involved in how adolescent offenders engage in thinking about the future or personal goals, and the meaning these may have for young people. Further research is needed to gain understanding about such processes and enable adolescents involved in the criminal justice system to achieve meaningful personal goals.

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Chapter II

Empirical Paper

Protecting Self: How Adolescents involved in a Youth Offending Service think about goal aspirations and their personal future.

This empirical Paper will be submitted to *Youth Justice*

(See Appendix A for author guidelines)

Abstract

Goal pursuit is a central element to the developmental stage of adolescence. However, little is known about how adolescents within the Youth Justice System think about their personal future. This present study explores how 14 adolescents in a Youth Offending Service think about their goal aspirations and personal future. Grounded Theory was used to focus upon individual and situational factors that contributed to the process. A theoretical framework was developed which outlined that engaging in thinking about one's personal future and developing goal aspirations is influenced by appraisal of past and present life events. Central to the development of the theoretical framework was the recognition that participants employed a range of self protecting strategies to avoid against uncertainty and threat of future disappointment. Findings of the study are discussed and clinical implications, methodological considerations and possible areas for further research are presented.

Key Words

Adolescence

Offending

Goal Pursuit

Personal Future

Introduction

Goal pursuit and motivation is thought to promote mental well- being (Afflek et al., 1998; Brunstein, 1993; Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2003; King, Richards, & Stemmerich, 1998; Schmuk & Sheldon, 2001). However little remains known about how young people think about their goal aspirations or personal futures. Even less information is known about how adolescents with a history of criminal activity engage in thinking about their goal aspirations or personal future. The present research aims to study how adolescents involved in a Youth Offending Service engage in the process of thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future.

It was suggested that planning for the future is important for young people as adolescents are often presented with 'normative age specific tasks', which are influenced by school and engagement with peers and parents (Nurmi, 1991). It has also been emphasised that developing future goals plays a pivotal role in adolescent identity formation through facilitating exploration of the self and commitment to future interests. Drawing upon previous work of Inhelder and Piaget (1958), Nurmi (1991) emphasised that the ability to conduct formal cognitive operations enables the adolescent to begin to think about future goals and construct action plans in their mind. The process of preparing for one's future has been reported to consist of three factors including motivation, planning and evaluation (Nurmi, 1991). Motivation refers to the content and level of interest that a person shows towards his or her future goals. Planning refers to how people plan to facilitate the achievement of their interests in various contexts. Evaluation involves people evaluating the likelihood and expectation that their interests will be achieved given the individual and situational factors.

Research on how adolescents think about goal aspirations and their personal future has shown the contents of adolescents' future goals which often include interests such as: future occupation; education; family; leisure activities and self actualization (Alberto &

Luzzo, 1999; Massey, Gebhardt & Garnefski, 2008; Nurmi, 1989). Identification of future goals and successful goal pursuit has been associated with greater levels of subjective well being (Afflek et al., 1998; Brunstein, 1993; Harris et al., 2003; King et al., 1998; Schmuk & Sheldon, 2001). Thinking further ahead in the future has been associated with higher levels of well-being, positive psychological adjustment and personality development (Schmuk & Sheldon, 2001; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, & Share, 2002) while a shorter term focus is associated with higher levels of emotional distress and hopelessness. In contrast however, when goals are unachievable, theories of Self Regulation and adaptive human behaviour posit that it may be more adaptive for the individual to withdraw from goal pursuit (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003; Miller & Wrosch, 2007). Miller and Wrosch (2007) proposed that it may be more helpful for the individual to re-evaluate and redirect their resources into attempting to achieve other goals.

Socio economic status has been linked to the number of goals that adolescents identify, with young people from lower class families being reported as identifying fewer goal aspirations (Conger et al., 1993; Schulenberg, Volandracek & Crouter, 1984; Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003). Sirin, Diemeer, Jackson, Gonsalves and Howell (2004) reported various factors that adolescents identified as obstacles to achievement of their personal goals amongst a USA sample, such as experiencing financial difficulty, institutional racism and gang membership.

Adolescents involved in the Youth Justice System

Studies to date have focused mainly upon adolescents who are involved in mainstream education or training. Little is known about how adolescents who may have experienced adverse life experiences or young people who are excluded from mainstream societal pathways think about goal aspirations or their personal future. In particular, little

research has been conducted into how adolescents involved in criminal activity engage thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future despite large numbers of young people coming in contact with the Youth Justice System (YJS).

In 2010 to 2011, 15.5 per cent of all arrests in England and Wales that were made involved young people aged between 10 to 17 years old (Youth Justice Board, YJB, 2013). In 2011 / 2012 there were 36,677 first time entrants coming in contact with the YJS and the rate of re-offending amongst young people increased (YJB, 2013). The rate of mental health difficulties and complexity has been reported as higher among this population of young people than peers within the general population (Kessler, Chiu, Demler & Walters, 2005; Teplin, Abram, Mc Clelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002) and higher rates of depression, anxiety, ADHD and psychosis have been documented. Adolescents involved within the YJS have been reported to be at increased risk of mental health difficulties due to a range of factors including poor school attendance, learning difficulties, chaotic relationships, drug and alcohol abuse (Casswell, French, & Rogers, 2012; Kessler et al., 2005; Teplin et al., 2002; Vermeriren, Jespers, & Moffitt, 2006). In a report published by NACRO (2011), it was stated that three quarters of adolescents involved in the YJS have serious difficulties with numeracy and literacy and that forty five per cent of young people are not involved in any formal education or training. Carroll, Gordon, Haynes and Houghton (2013) reported that many adolescents develop goals congruent with the values and aims of schools, however emphasise that adolescents involved in YJS often reject such school based goals. Therefore further research is needed to understand how adolescents involved in the YJS develop personal future goals and the factors that influence them.

Past research regarding adolescents involved in criminal activity has suggested that such young people could not think about their personal future and were viewed as 'impulsive', unable to delay gratification and having "short term" visions (Gottfredson, &

Hirschi, 1990; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Wilson & Hernstein, 1985). However, research findings have been mixed, and adolescents involved in criminal activity have been shown to engage in thinking about their personal future and goals. In a study looking at future hopes and fears of institutionalized and non-institutionalized 'delinquent youth', Trommsdorrff and Lamm (1980) highlighted that adolescents involved in criminal activity reported having a range of various hopes and fears for the future. However they reported higher levels of hope for their personal future rather than their future within society. The same authors also reported that adolescents not involved in criminal activity describe higher levels of hope for future self-fulfilment and physical well-being. Adolescents involved in criminal activity were found to judge their present situation and future situations less positively however reported having a higher level of internal control over their personal future in comparison to adolescents referred to as 'non delinquent'. Trommsdorff and Lamm (1980) reported that "the notion that the future orientation of delinquents is less realistic than that of non-delinquents seems especially false, a product of inadequate measurements and stereotyped theorising" (p.271).

Adolescents at risk of involvement in criminal activity place significantly higher levels of importance upon goals regarding autonomy and freedom more so than young people referred to as 'not at risk' (Carroll et al., 1997). In a study involving 488 Spanish students, adolescents involved in anti –social behaviour described goals relating to the following areas: social recognition, emancipative goals, education, physique / athletic ability, anti-social behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Lopez-Romero & Romero, 2010).

Some literature has focused upon involvement in criminal activity as being goal directed (Carroll et al., 2001). Based upon reputation enhancement theory (Emler & Reichner, 1995), it has been proposed that adolescents are motivated by aims and goals that lead to developing and enhancing their image (Carroll et al., 2001; Carroll et al., 1997). It has been suggested that for some adolescents, delinquent activity is goal driven and valued as a

means to enhancing their reputation with peers and to develop a social identity (Carroll et al., 1997; Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). In a sample of 260 males aged between 11 to 18 years old, adolescents categorised as 'delinquent' showed significantly higher levels of commitment to developing crime related reputations than adolescents not involved in crime. (Carroll et al., 2001). The adolescents described as 'delinquent' also reported higher levels of non-conformity and striving to be seen by others as tough and resistant to the law.

Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nuruis, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) suggests that people base their aims and behaviour upon attempting to achieve their desired future idea of a 'possible self'. This theory proposes that people undertake steps that will aid them in achieving their idea of a possible self and avoid aspects that will prevent this achievement. Oyserman and Markus (1990) reported that adolescents involved in criminal activity were more likely to hold expected negative possible selves associated with crime and a future of fear.   Oyserman and Markus (1990) suggested that adolescents involved in criminal activity may pursue negative representations of their possible selves in order to facilitate reputation enhancement. However based upon Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) it has been suggested that adolescents involved in crime may have difficulty achieving their personal valued goal aspirations and engage in criminal behaviour as a means of dealing with their unmet hopes and needs (Iselin, Mulvery, Loughran, Chung, & Schubert, 2012). Such theories suggest that adolescents involved in crime experience a discrepancy between the value they place upon their goal aspirations and the likelihood they perceive that these will be achieved (Iselin et al, 2012). In a longitudinal study involving 1354 young people deemed as 'serious offenders', it was found that adolescents who reported being capable of accomplishing positive aspired possible selves were more likely to engage in positive behaviours and goals that would help them to achieve their positive possible self.

There have been some qualitative studies carried out in relation to the types of goal aspirations which young offenders create for their personal future (Carroll, 1995; Gardner, 2010). However emphasis is placed on describing goals, supports, and barriers and studies did not focus upon the processes involved in thinking about goal aspirations or their personal future. Gardner (2010) reported that talking about the future with adolescents involved in the YJS can often become an 'institutional compulsion' due to the young peoples' familiarity of discussing the concept with judges, police, social workers and other professionals in order to facilitate rehabilitation, release or a reduced sentence. Therefore there is a need to conduct research in an attempt to understand the meaning and processes involved in future goal pursuit for adolescents involved in the YJS. Also, most of the research to date regarding adolescents involved in the youth justice system and goal setting has placed importance upon delinquency and attempting to reduce rates of offending rather than attempting to gain a meaningful understanding of how adolescents involved in YJS think about their personal futures. As most studies relating to adolescents' goal aspirations and thinking about their personal future have used pre designed questionnaires or content analysis methodologies, further qualitative research would be helpful in identifying meaningful personal future goal aspirations for adolescents and the processes involved in goal pursuit.

The present study aimed to explore how adolescents think about their goal aspirations and personal future whilst under supervision of a youth offending service (YOS). The study also aimed to explore the various processes involved and factors which may impact upon young peoples' goal aspirations and how they think about their personal future. The objectives of the study were as follows;

- To explore adolescents' goal aspirations that they envisaged for their personal future whilst involved with a YOS, and to further explore the meaning that goal aspirations held for the adolescents.

- To gain an understanding of how adolescents involved in a YOS think about goal aspirations, their ideas about their personal future and the factors involved in the process.

- To identify a theoretical framework encompassing the processes involved in how adolescents under supervision of a YOS think about goal aspirations and their personal future.

Participants

Participants consisted of fourteen adolescent males aged between 16-17 years old who were under the supervision of a YOS in the North West (NW) of England. The boys were involved with the YOS for a range of different charges however all participants had to attend the YOS as a condition of their court sentence. The length of time the boys were involved with the YOS varied from six weeks to one year. Three participants had previous experiences of being in prison or secure accommodation. All participants lived in socially deprived areas on the outskirts of a NW city. Table 1 (pg 45) highlights demographic information for each participant.

Methodology

Grounded Theory was used to develop an explanatory framework of the processes and influences involved in adolescents' thinking about goal aspirations and outlook for their personal future. Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz 2006) was applied due to the epistemological stance (see Appendix B for further details about epistemology) of the research and emphasis being placed upon how 'realities' of one's experiences are constructed at an individual and collective level.

Table 2.1

Demographic Details of Participants [1]

No	Name	Age	Living Circumstance	No. of times involved with YOS by court recommendations	Type of Order	Nature of Offences
1	Mark	17	At home with mum	3	Youth Referral Order	Theft / Criminal Damage
2	Michael	17	At home with family	9	Supervision Order	Robbery / Knife possession
3	Ben	17	At home with mum	12	Youth Referral Order	Burglary / Breach of ASBO
4	Tom	17	At home with family	1	Referral Order	Drugs
5	Barry	17	At home with mum	1	Referral Order	Drugs
6	James	16	Supported Lodgings	1	Youth Referral Order	Burglary
7	Brian	17	Care Order – residing with mother	4	Youth Referral Order	Drugs / Breach of ASBO
8	Lee	17	Care Order – Residing with father	14	Drug Treatment Order	Breach of Order / Burglary
9	Sam	17	At home with family	5	Youth Referral Order & Intensive supervision order	Breach of order / Burglary
10	Paul	17	At home with mum	7	Youth Referral Order	Drugs
11	David	17	At home with mum	3	Drug Treatment Order	Robbery/ Burglary/ Vehicle theft
12	Nick	16	At home with mum	2	Youth Referral Order	Robbery
13	Gareth	16	Residential home for Looked after children	1	Referral Order	Robbery / Criminal Damage
14	Neil	17	At home with family	3	Referral Order	Breach of ASBO/ Racially aggravated public order

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[1] All real names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was developed to explore goal aspirations of the adolescents, and how they thought about their personal future. The initial interviews focused upon content of the adolescents' goal aspirations, the perceived likelihood of achieving their goal aspirations and personal future, how they viewed their personal future, the meaning the goal aspirations held for the young people, previous experiences of goal pursuit and identifying factors that may be helpful or unhelpful in goal pursuit. The interviews were transcribed and coded after every two to three interviews had been conducted. In line with Grounded Theory, this led to a dynamic and changing interview schedule as further areas for exploration and inquiry were identified. For example, from the initial four interviews, it became clear that the young people perceived a great level of uncertainty about their personal future and this then became an area of further exploration which was incorporated into the interview schedule. This process continued and how the adolescents managed and coped with the uncertainty was explored further. It became evident that young people experienced a sense of fear and risk for the future which led to further exploration of this fear (See Appendix C for initial interview schedule & Appendix D for description of further development).

Data Analytic Procedure

The data analysis was based upon procedures recommended by Charmaz (2006). In line with the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, 'active' language was used during the process of coding to ensure that the emerging codes were grounded in the data. Initial coding involved applying a line by line strategy of analysing the data. Focused Coding was then conducted to raise the level of the initial codes to conceptual categories and synthesise larger amounts of data. An illustration of initial codes, focused codes and conceptual categories is presented in Table 2.2 (pg.47).

Table 2.2

Example of the Coding Process

Transcript	Initial Code	Focused Code	Conceptual Category
R: How important would it be for you for that to happen? **T:** Not important at the minute, cause I'm still only young but I know when I'm like 25 and you think I'm seeing 30, then you're thinking you need to get your stuff together and that's when it's going to affect you. So if you can do all that stuff now when you're still young, you'll be sorted by the time you're 30, you wouldn't have to be worrying.	Not prioritising future at present, Being 'only young', Being older – looking towards future, Getting stuff together, Discrepancy, Not worrying when older	Delaying thinking about future 'Growing up' – prioritising future Ambivalence Aspiring to reduce worry	Protecting Self
R: So at the minute, it sound like it's not an immediate thing for you but you're kind of thinking towards when you are 25? **T:** Yeah, not really, if it was it would be better but my mind isn't on that but if it was it would be good.	Future not on mind at present, Acknowledging it would be good to think about future.	Ambivalence	

Simultaneously, memos were written to capture thoughts about emerging categories and processes. In conducting memo writing and applying a constant comparison across the data, conceptual categories were developed with emphasis placed upon underlying processes, conditions that contributed to their development, links between conceptual categories and meanings associated with them (See Appendix E for example of the memo writing process & Appendix F for the development of emerging conceptual categories). During the interviews further exploratory questions would then be asked about the emerging categories in order to gather more information about the categories and processes. This was consistent with the Grounded Theory principle of theoretical sampling which involves continuing to seek and gather data from participants to highlight and define the relevance of categories.

In the present study, theoretical sufficiency was reached following 14 interviews. Dey (1999) refers to 'Theoretical Sufficiency as the point engaging in further data collection would provide limited information, which was the case in the present study. Original Grounded Theory approaches refer to 'Saturation', however, Dey (1999) refers to this as 'inaccurate' due to the difficulty in determining if that point is ever fully reached.

Validation procedures were conducted to ensure the quality and credibility of the emerging codes, categories and theoretical framework (Elliott et al., 1999). Two researchers independent from data collection read the transcripts and checked the validity of the coding and analysis. One of the independent researchers was involved in checking the coding at each level of analysis and providing validation for the theoretical framework as it emerged. The final written account of the research was also read by two independent researchers.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of Liverpool Ethics Committee. YOS workers provided information about the study to all young people on their

case loads aged between 16-17 years. Four of the young people pre booked times to attend for interviews. The other ten participants agreed to take part whilst attending routine appointments within the YOS. Informed consent to participate in the research was gained before conducting any interviews. The first two interviews were conducted as pilot interviews to test the interview schedule. These two transcripts were considered rich enough in data to be included in the analysis and validated by an independent researcher.

Results

The aim of this study was to explore the processes involved in how adolescents under supervision from a YOS think about their goal aspirations and personal future. The theoretical framework identified the conceptual categories of *'Identifying Idealised Goal Aspirations', 'Appraisal of Past and Present', 'Stuck in Uncertainty', 'Threat of Future Disappointment',* and the core conceptual category of '*Protecting Self'.*

The theoretical framework indicated that during the process of adolescents beginning to think about goal aspirations and their personal future, two conceptual categories of *'Identifying Idealised Goal Aspirations'* and '*Appraising Past and Present'* emerged simultaneously. There was a reciprocal process between the two categories whereby adolescents envisaged a range of idealised personal goal aspirations for their future; however the perceived likelihood of achieving such goals was influenced by their appraisal and interpretation of past events or present circumstances. Appraisal of past and present events often shaped the development and generation of personal goal aspirations. Engaging in the processes of identifying idealised goal aspirations and appraising past and present events contributed to the development of the conceptual category of '*Stuck in Uncertainty'.* This category emerged as adolescents expressed levels of both hopefulness and hopelessness when thinking about the likelihood of their desired personal future occurring. The uncertainty led

the adolescents to consider the likelihood of reaching their desired personal future as potentially threatening and perceive the '*Threat of Future Disappointment*'. When adolescents experienced uncertainty and perceived the threat of not achieving their goal aspirations and desired personal future, they applied a range of protective strategies to avoid such threat to their sense of self which gave rise to the development of the core conceptual category of '*Protecting Self*'. Whilst adolescents were thinking about their goal aspirations and personal future, situational factors seemed to influence each stage of the process, including the future goal aspirations that adolescents described, the level of uncertainty adolescents' perceived about the future, the way in which they appraised past and present events, and the strategies they selected in order to protect their sense of self. Figure 2 (see pg 51) depicts the theoretical framework constructed from the analysis. Further analysis of the conceptual categories is provided.

Identifying Idealised Aspirations

The young people identified a range of goal aspirations which were both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Most of the young people initially identified extrinsic goal aspirations such as having cars, money, large houses, fame, or portraying an image of success. However two of the young people described more intrinsic goal aspirations directly.

> '*I mean everyone pictures that happy life don't they, you know what I'm saying?*
> *A Bentley, Roller, big house and all that, you know what I'm saying but, er, I just*
> *picture myself doing well for myself. Seeing what the next day brings and that*'
> *(James).*

Although many of the young people initially identified extrinsically based goal aspirations, when probed further a range of intrinsically motivated meanings were disclosed.
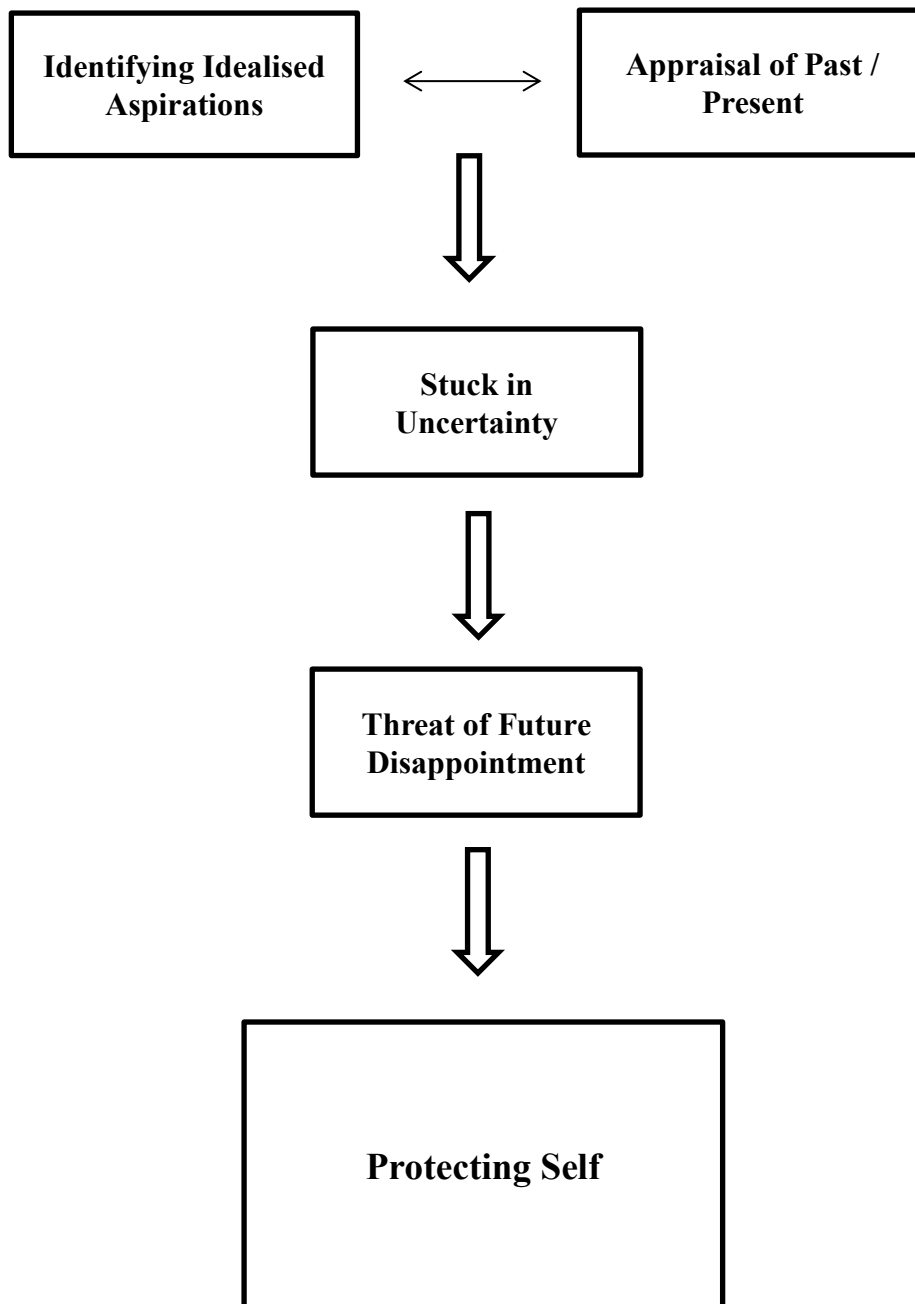
```
┌─────────────────────┐                  ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Identifying Idealised│  ◄─────────►     │   Appraisal of Past /│
│    Aspirations      │                  │       Present       │
└─────────────────────┘                  └─────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
     ┌─────────────────┐
     │    Stuck in      │
     │   Uncertainty    │
     └─────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
     ┌─────────────────┐
     │ Threat of Future │
     │  Disappointment  │
     └─────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
     ┌─────────────────┐
     │                 │
     │  Protecting Self │
     │                 │
     └─────────────────┘
```

Figure 2

A theoretical framework of how adolescents involved in a YOS think about goal aspirations and personal future.

Gaining a sense of security and belonging in the future was important for many of the young people and was highlighted through the identification of aspiring to have a 'home', relationship and family in the future.

> *Tom: 'Just seeing like what you made just grow up into a person know what I mean, knowing that that's your son or your daughter, it'd just be a mad feeling. I can imagine it but obviously I don't have a kid so what I'm imagining is probably totally different, see what it feels like one day when I have kids it'll just be nice. Like I wouldn't want to have kids if I didn't have them sorted'.*
>
> *Researcher: 'And what would 'having them sorted' look like?'*
>
> *Tom: 'Knowing like that they're going to have clothes and food and that, just knowing they won't live in a bad way ya know what I mean, knowing they're going to have a nice house and that, that they won't have to have any worries and that when they're kids, that's what I'd want'.*

For eight of the young people, developing an image, earning respect, identity or recognition from others were important goals for their future in indicating to other people that they had 'made it' and in serving as an indicator to themselves and others that they have been successful in life.

The goal aspirations and personal future hopes of the young people were often influenced by the social environment in which the young people were living and the culture in which they were immersed. For many of them, any image of an envisioned future included aspiring to escape the area and the extreme threat of violence or even of death that they experienced on a daily basis. For most of the young people, aspiring to escape the area represented an attempt to gain freedom or have access to the possibility of a better life and to survive.

'Basically yeah. If I move area I won't be walking round like para-d up all the time, know what I mean?'(Paul)

'Er it'd give me a better life, then I can go out and have my freedom again. And people can't take it from me. You know what I mean being able to talk, police can't put you in jail, lads trying to kill you.' (Gareth).

Young people described aspiring to escape the cycle of crime and this was associated with the idealised goal 'getting a proper job'. Ben highlighted that a job would lead to escaping worry and psychological distress.

Researcher: *'And what would doing your plastering and getting a job mean for you Ben?'*

Ben: *'Don't have to f****** commit crimes and sh** and end up here.'*

Researcher: *'Would it mean anything else for you?'*

Ben: *'Just achievement ain't it. Being happy to get a job.'*

Researcher: *'And what would not committing crimes mean for you Ben?'*

Ben: *'Just less risk isn't it really, be alright then, got nothing to worry about, knowing I ain't done nothing wrong, its' deep.'*

Most of the young people aspired to 'grow up', reach adulthood, have responsibilities and be able to provide for their families. Often the 'idealised goal aspirations' that the young people described were based upon wider societal expectations of appropriate goals and behaviours. For example Sam wanted to be 'normal' which was based upon the social construction of what he perceived as 'normal' and on comparing himself to others. Young people often referred to situational factors such as their specific life stages and associated thinking about a personal future with particular age bands and achieving developmental milestones.

'When you're twenty two like you still, you just wanna go out and party but when

you're twenty five you're getting old, you just wanna sit don't you and just have a

family. You know what I mean, you don't wanna go out and get in trouble with

the police.' (Gareth)

Appraisal of Past and Present

Young peoples' sense of their personal future was influenced by adolescents basing their outlook for their personal future both on past and present experiences. Young people who viewed their current circumstances more positively expressed more hope about their future and could more easily identify personal goal aspirations. It was notable that often the description of their present situation as positive was based upon the absence of negative factors rather than the presence of identifiable positive factors in their lives.

All of the young people described having past experiences of trauma or difficult life events which influenced their outlook towards their future. The young people often referred to having past experiences of instability and unpredictability such as transitioning between care homes, moving between family members and circumstances changing. Some of the young people talked about their previous experiences of violence and exposure to extreme risk.

'I've seen a few of me mates die and that so it's a bit bad news but if it happens

then it happens, know what I mean.'(Paul)

'I've already been stabbed and run over so I just want to get out of the f******

game of smoking weed and the game of selling weed know what I mean.' (Mark)

All of the young people described some past experiences of powerlessness or perceived victimisation. All of the young people described feeling a sense of powerlessness over past

goal aspirations which influenced their outlook on the perceived likelihood of achieving future goal aspirations.

'I wanted, me dad used to tell me a long time ago, I won't go back to jail but I always knew. I didn't want him to go, in my heart I wished he didn't and all that. I used to tell him 'Please don't go' he used to go though. You know what I mean. So like I wanted it and I couldn't stop it cos he's his own man. I could've tried and stopped it but he's his own man, it's whatever he wants to do. That's the only thing I wanted when I was a kid is just want my dad there. Cos if I had my dad there I don't think I'd have been in trouble with the police.' (Gareth)

Stuck in Uncertainty

Whilst engaging in the processes of *Identifying Idealised Goal Aspirations* and *Appraising Past and Present Experiences,* young people often experienced a mix of hopefulness and hopelessness towards the future which led to the development of the conceptual category *'Stuck in Uncertainty.* Although all of the young people described idealised goal aspirations and most young people identified initial plans to achieve these, all of the young people expressed uncertainty about the likelihood of achieving goal aspirations and of their desired future occurring.

Researcher: *'And how likely Tom say on a scale of 0-10 if 0 was it definitely won't happen and 10 was it definitely will, how likely do you think it is that you'll have that 'better life' that you described?'*

Tom: *'Dunno, it's not that likely, I think it's 50/50, just depends on which way I go isn't it.'*

For two young people, discussing their perceived personal future created a greater sense of hopelessness and uncertainty and they experienced a lack of goal aspirations.

Researcher: *'You dunno. What can you see for your future Brian? I suppose maybe you don't know yet what you would like to see or- what can you see for your future'*

Barry: *'Nothing right now.'*

Researcher: *'Nothing?'*

Barry: *'Nope.'*

Researcher: *'And what do you mean by nothing?'*

Barry: *'Not doing nothing am I so nothing. That's exactly what I'm getting aren't I?'*

Although the young people were often stuck in a cycle of uncertainty whilst thinking about their goal aspirations and personal future, they were able to identify plans that would enable them to reach their desired outcomes. Identifying plans to reach their future goal aspirations was influenced by the level of hopefulness they held about their future. Often the young people's identified plans to achieving goal aspirations were vague and non-specific, however on occasion, specific plans to achieving goal aspirations were described. For example, Mark identified wanting to do a catering course at college which would hopefully lead him to attain his 'idealised goal aspiration' of becoming a chef. Steps to achieve the idealised goal aspirations identified by the young people included both approach and avoidance based plans. However young people more easily identified avoidance plans to achieving their personal goal aspirations and desired future. Avoidance plans to achieving their goal aspirations often included avoiding jail, 'giving up weed', avoiding trouble and stopping contact with peers.

The category 'Stuck in Uncertainty' was influenced by a range of wider systemic issues such as opportunities the young people perceived as available to them and issues affecting society in general such as the current recession.

> **Researcher:** *'And how likely do you think that is Paul that you'll get a job like working with cars or welding?'*
>
> **Paul:** *'Er I dunno you know, like at this time, like it's been like, I've been watching the news and it's saying that it's back in recession and that now so I don't know. But if, cos I haven't like hardly got any qualifications or nothing, that's why I've chose a course as well. I've started doing that Maths and English to get me GCSEs.'*

For the young people, being stuck in the cycle of uncertainty often led to and was maintained by them experiencing uncertainty about their safety and security for the future. For many of the young people, uncertainty about their desired personal future occurring was based upon the risk of facing extreme risk of violence or danger like in their past.

> **Researcher:** *'And in the future Gareth, the things that you want in the future, the house, protecting your family, how much control do you think you'll have over that?'*
>
> **Gareth:** *'Dunno. I really dunno.'*
>
> **Researcher:** *'What makes you uncertain about it?'*
>
> **Gareth:** *'Cos, I dunno, with them lads, dead soon, know what I mean, sort of thing. Be dead soon you know, you don't know. Could be dead today. I don't wanna know.'*

Threat of Future Disappointment

The cycle of uncertainty contributed to the young people perceiving a threat of future disappointment about their goal aspirations not occurring and the potential possibility of failure. Often young people perceived the threat of their desired future not occurring as having a significant cost attached. For example, Nick referred to 'failing in life' if he did not

reach his desired goals of getting a house and job. The young people's perceived threat of future disappointment and possible failure seemingly increased with the level of uncertainty they anticipated about their goal aspirations and personal future.

For most young people, a history of difficult life experiences and failure to achieve past goal aspirations gave rise to the anticipation of future disappointment. Two of the young people were extremely hypervigilant to experiencing the threat of disappointment and this led to them experiencing a lack of goal aspirations and taking caution to avoid the threat of disappointment.

'*Just the disappointment of it not happening. Just waiting and waiting and waiting for it to happen and then all of a sudden it just all goes down the drain.*' (Neil)

Protecting Self

The conceptual category of 'Protecting Self' arose as the young people employed a range of techniques and strategies to manage and cope with the uncertainty, unpredictability and perceived threat of goal aspirations and their desired future not occurring.

Although all of the young people identified idealised goal aspirations, when probed further they were quite ambivalent about the importance of achieving their future goals and aspirations. Often if future goal aspirations were perceived as unlikely to happen, young people would decrease the importance of the goal. For example, often young people described aspiring to attend college or attend university however also reported that it did not bother them if this did not happen.

Similarly ambivalence occurred in relation to attempting to avoid trouble or involvement in further criminal activity. Although many young people identified avoiding further involvement in crime as a means to aid them in achieving their goal aspirations and

desired personal future, they often described a sense of doing what is necessary to reach their overall goal, including the possibility of returning to crime.

Young people often delayed committing to future goals or aspirations as a means of protecting themselves from future disappointment. Also young people minimized the importance of engaging in the process of thinking about their personal future and goals.

'Er, I think er, dunno, just wanna do well for meself. Get out there, like I said, do well for meself, get out there by the age of 27 to 30 settle down, have a nice house, family, kids on the way you know what I'm saying?' (James)

Young people avoided commitment to pursuing goal aspirations in order to protect their sense from threat of future disappointment.

Researcher: *'What things can you see for your future? What things are likely for your future do you think?'*

Neil: *'Dunno. I wouldn't really wanna say just in case they don't happen. I don't really like thinking that way.'*

Researcher: *'So you don't kind of like thinking about it really?'*

Neil: *'Not really.'*

Researcher: *'What kind of, you don't have to answer some of the questions Neil but if you can, what makes it kind of difficult for you to think about them things?''*

Neil: *'Just if I think about 'em, get used to 'em, and then I go chasing them and if it doesn't happen then it just doesn't feel good you know.'*

Many of the young people fluctuated between expressing internalised and externalised locus of control over their desired futures. Often young people displaced the responsibility of achieving their goal aspirations and attaining their desired personal future to others as a protective strategy to minimise the risk of not achieving their desired personal future. For

example, Tom aspired to avoid jail in the future however displaced some of the responsibility for this potentially happening to the police.

*'I don't wanna go either but, like, the amount of things that's going on nowadays it's f****** unbelievable that people are getting jailed and that for things that they haven't done and just stupid things. So it's like, the police round here are just bad people. They are worse than the people who are running around with guns to be honest.'*

For three of the young people, assuming total responsibility for the future and ignoring the influence of other factors provided them with a strategy to manage the uncertainty and helped to provide them with an increase sense of control over their goal aspirations and desired future occurring.

R: 'Would there be any things to kind of help you do that do you think? Is there any-?'

D: 'No just meself.'

R: 'So it's kind of yourself, kind of you doing that?'

D: 'Yeah.'

R: 'Would there be any things, David, you think that would make it difficult for that to happen? Would there be any thing?'

D: 'No. It's just meself innit.'

Strategies employed by the young people as a means of protecting self were influenced by the specific goal aspirations, young peoples' appraisal of present circumstances and past experiences, levels of hopelessness or hopefulness, uncertainty, threat of future disappointment and situational factors.

Discussion

This research aimed to explore how adolescents involved in a YOS engage in thinking about their goal aspirations and desired personal future. A theoretical framework has been developed indicating that the core conceptual category of 'Protecting Self' arose from adolescents' experiencing threat of failure and heightened levels of uncertainty about their personal futures. The young peoples' need to protect themselves arose from appraisal of past and present experiences, experience of mixed feelings of hopefulness and hopelessness and perceived threat towards achieving their goal aspirations. Whilst engaging in thinking about their personal future and goals, situational factors influenced the adolescents at each stage of the process.

For the young people, engaging in the process of thinking about their goal aspirations and personal future provoked a range of feelings predominantly of uncertainty which led the young people to apply a range of strategies in attempting to protect themselves from the threat of not achieving their goal aspirations. Applying strategies such as avoiding commitment to goals, minimising the importance of idealised goal aspirations, portraying oneself as ambivalent about the future, and delaying the process of thinking about future goals were adaptive processes for the young people in attempts to preserve their emotional well-being and sense of self. Recent research suggests that it may be helpful for individuals to disengage from goals that they view as unattainable (Miller & Wrosch 2007; Wrosch et al., 2003) and redirect their resources into other goal aspirations. However, in contrast, the young people in this study often became stuck in the cycle of uncertainty when thinking about their goal aspirations. When the adolescents experienced uncertainty about achieving their desired personal future, they applied protective strategies and had difficulty identifying other goal aspirations. Although several young people discussed the idealised goal aspiration of having a 'better life', they expressed ambivalence about how this would be achieved. Often

adolescents justified involvement in criminal activity as a 'means to an end' to reach their goal aspirations and desired personal futures which is consistent with suggestions proposed by early research (Merton, 1938).

In contrast to research suggesting that adolescents involved in a YOS do not think about their personal future, in this present study, adolescents clearly identified similar goals to normative adolescent samples regarding education, career, family and self- actualization (Alberto & Luzzo, 1999; Massey et al., 2008; Nurmi, 1981; 1989). The findings have provided support for the view that adolescents involved in YJS can engage in the process of thinking meaningfully about their personal future and goals (Trommsdorff & Lamm (1980). However adolescents in this study experienced difficulties in committing to goal aspirations and identifying specific plans to achieve their goals. Similar to previous research, adolescents described idealised aspirations of freedom and autonomy that involved escaping the areas in which they lived and the often severe risk to their safety (Carroll et al., 2013).

Adolescents' thinking about their personal future and goal aspirations were based upon the appraisal of their past and present experiences. Many of them reported experiencing past and present life experiences and events that impacted upon their goal aspirations and expectations for their personal future. This resembled previous research results suggesting that often, young people involved in the YJS experience high rates of violence, parental separation, poverty, and trauma (Conger et al., 1993; NACRO, 2011). Wider systemic issues played a role in how adolescents often thought about their goal aspirations, future expectations, feelings towards the future and the strategies they employed to protect themselves against experiencing future disappointment. Key influences were peers, media, current affairs, relationships with family, educational and training outlets, and various services in which the young people were involved. The goal aspirations and desired personal future of the adolescents often focused upon age specific tasks related to normative

development (Nurmi, 1999) such as 'growing up' or 'providing for family'. These were often influenced by societal factors and expectations.

Clinically the study provides an important insight for professionals about the meaning and processes that adolescents involved in a YOS may experience when attempting to think about their goal aspirations and personal future. While engaging in discussion and planning for adolescents involved in a YOS is of great importance, their experience of thinking about goal aspirations or their personal future was viewed as potentially threatening. As a result, thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future needs to be undertaken at the adolescent's pace to ensure that meaningful goal aspirations are identified. Support should be provided to enable the young person to feel confident and able to engage in the process. Feelings of uncertainty and hopelessness often led adolescents to experience threat of future disappointment. It would be helpful for clinicians to attempt to provide young people with a sense of hope and decrease some of the uncertainty that they experience. This may involve aiding the young people in managing some of the wider situational issues. As Gardner (2010) highlighted that young people may often develop scripts of goals and plans for the future to facilitate institutional or system requirements, it is central that professionals working with the young people attempt to gain a meaningful understanding of their goal aspirations, desired futures, feelings about the future, resources available and perceived barriers from their perspective. It appears that the development of a strong positive relationship may aid this process and also reduce the perceived threat associated with thinking about goal aspirations and a desired personal future.

The study recognises that there are often various cultural, socio economic and systemic barriers present for young people which may impact upon the process of goal pursuit. It is acknowledged that many young people involved in the Youth Justice System do have difficulties with literacy and numeracy which may create barriers to them achieving

goals such as gaining employment. It is also noted that statistics indicate that adolescent offenders often have difficulty in gaining jobs and continuing to further education due to having a history of criminal involvement (NACRO, 2011). It is worth noting that adolescent offenders are reported to have higher levels of mental health difficulties and substance misuse problems which again may impact upon the likelihood of achieving their desired personal future (NACRO, 2011; Teplin et al, 2002). This research suggests that it is important to develop an understanding of goals that are meaningful and achievable to the adolescents. Although the opportunities available to such young people are often limited, and there may be various systemic barriers present to them achieving their goal aspirations, it appears gaining an understanding of the meaning that specific goals hold for adolescents may facilitate young people and professionals to think of alternative ways of acquiring that value.

Further research could develop some of the findings of this study. As the participants in this the study applied self protecting strategies to deal with the possible threat of future disappointment, it would be worth exploring resources and strengths that the young people involved with the YOS have at their disposal to manage such threat. The participants in the study were aged 16 to 17 years and at a crucial stage of adolescent development and change. A longitudinal qualitative study would be helpful to explore how adolescents progress towards their desired futures and the processes involved. There are also a growing number of females becoming involved in the YJS and it would be of interest to explore how female adolescents involved in the YJS think about their personal future and the processes involved.

The results of the study and the development of the theoretical framework were based upon self-reported material from the adolescents. Bearing in mind the concept of 'institutionalised compulsion' (Gardner, 2010) in relation to adolescents discussing the future, it is possible that young people provided desirable responses and the validity of the results could be questioned. Given previous research on adolescents involved in the YJS, it is

also possible that participants' responses may have been influenced by factors such as verbal language difficulties (Nacro, 2011) or existing mental health difficulties (YJB, 2012) which may have not been fully considered in the study. However, the findings did provide insight into understanding the process of thinking about the personal future of the participants, and would be helpful to inform work attempting to aid adolescents in developing goals or plans for the future.

The findings of the study provided insight into understanding the processes involved in how adolescents under supervision of a YOS think about goal aspirations and their desired personal future. The theoretical framework identified that young people with a history of criminal activity engage in identifying idealised goal aspirations which are influenced by their appraisal of past and present events and experiences and influenced by the situational and cultural context they are immersed in. Young people involved with the YJS experienced great levels of uncertainty about the likelihood of achieving goal aspirations and often perceived a threat of future disappointment. In order to manage the feelings of uncertainty and avoid the threat of future disappointment, adolescents employ a range of strategies to protect their sense of self. This study provided a theoretical framework which can inform any professionals working with adolescents involved in the YJS to help young people develop meaningful goal aspirations, think about their personal future and increase their psychological well-being.

Biographical Note

The researcher would like to express their gratitude towards the adolescents that gave their time to participate in the study. Their patience and willingness to share their experiences was crucial in conducting the research and developing the theoretical framework. Also, gratitude must be expressed to the YOS staff for their help and support.

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Chapter III

Concluding Discussion

Expanded Discussion

Lay Summary Report

Proposal for Future Research

This chapter focuses upon three main sections including an expanded discussion of the present study, a lay summary report of the present study, and a section focusing upon areas for future research which includes a brief proposal for a further study. The following expanded discussion includes a general discussion of results of the present study, clinical implications, methodological considerations and issues of reflexivity.

Expanded discussion of the Present Study

General Overview & Discussion

The empirical study highlighted that although there is a large amount of research available on how adolescents engage in thinking about their future, little is known about these processes for adolescents who have contact with the Youth Justice System (YJS). The study aimed to develop a theoretical framework looking at how adolescents in a Youth Offending Service (YOS) think about their goal aspirations and personal future and the processes involved in this.

The process of developing and conducting the study was carried out over two and a half years and recruitment of participants was conducted over a five months period after gaining ethical approval from the appropriate ethical committee. Fourteen adolescent males between the ages of 16-17 years old took part in the study. A Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) was used in the study.

The theoretical framework that was developed, indicated that adolescents involved in a YOS do engage in thinking about their personal future and often identify idealised goal aspirations that they would like to achieve. The young people's idealised goal aspirations were influenced by them engaging in a process of appraising past and present experiences. Identifying idealised goal aspirations and appraising past and present experiences led the adolescents to experience mixed feelings of hopefulness and hopelessness about their

personal future. Experiencing such feelings heightened the young peoples' levels of uncertainty about achieving their goal aspirations and desired futures. This perceived uncertainty contributed towards adolescents experiencing a threat of future disappointment towards achieving their desired goal aspirations and personal future. As a result, this increased the adolescents' needs to protect their sense of self. This led to the main conceptual category of 'Protecting Self' which incorporated a range of strategies such as minimizing the importance of thinking about goal aspirations, appearing ambivalent about identified goal aspirations, displacing responsibility for desired future goal aspirations occurring, and not committing to the process of thinking about goal aspirations. Situational factors also influenced adolescents' thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future at different stages of the process. For example, young peoples' perceived likelihood of attaining goal aspirations was often based upon the availability of opportunities that they perceived. Also, young people regularly identified the goal aspiration of escaping their area due to the culture of violence they were immersed in.

The study highlights that adolescents involved in offending behaviours can engage in the process of thinking about goal aspirations and a personal future, however, this experience is accompanied by a strong sense of threat in doing so. In relation to the stages of goal pursuit proposed by Nurmi (1991), this study highlights new considerations about the processes of goal pursuit for adolescents involved in offending. These adolescents did engage in planning content for their personal future through identifying idealised goal aspirations however these goal aspirations were accompanied by great levels of ambivalence. In relation to the stage of planning, the young people often identified avoidance orientated plans to achieving their goal aspirations and struggled to provide specific plans to reaching their desired personal future. They did engage in the stage of evaluation however this was strongly influenced by the level

of uncertainty they experienced about the likelihood of their personal future occurring and the heightened threat of future disappointment that they perceived.

The protective strategies that the young people employed to maintain their sense of self may be likened to some strategies referred to predominantly in educational psychology research. For instance, previous research refers to protective strategies such as 'Self Handicapping' (Berglas & Jones, 1978), which suggests that individuals deliberately make excuses and withdraw from a task when they expect to do poorly, and 'Defensive Pessimism' (Norem & Cantor, 1986a, 1986b) which refers to individuals setting low expectations for themselves in order to avoid failure. This study proposes that adolescents engage in strategies such as delaying thinking about their personal future or minimizing the importance of goal aspirations in order to protect themselves from heightened threat of future disappointment. This finding contributes to a better understanding of previous research which suggested that adolescents simply had short term visions, were impulsive and did not engage in thinking about their personal future (Siegman,1961).

Goal Setting Theory (Locke, 1968) proposed that individuals are more likely to strive towards their goal aspirations if they are perceived as challenging and realistic. In the present study young peoples' goals were often viewed as being somewhat unattainable and over challenging. Previous research has also suggested that disengaging from goals that appear unattainable and redirecting resources into other goals is a helpful process for individuals, in order to avoid the threat of not achieving (Miller & Wrosch, 2007; Wrosch et al, 2003). After identifying idealised goal aspirations, adolescents in this study often disengaged from goal pursuit through non commitment to goals or expressing ambivalence about the goal. They struggled to redirect their resources to pursuing other goals and often continued to be stuck in the cycle of uncertainty, anticipating threat of future disappointment, and applied further protective strategies such as minimising and delaying the importance of the future.

These young people often identified goal aspirations such as a 'better life' or gaining financial wealth which appeared to be informed by influences such as media, peers, and social factors. All of the young people taking part in the study lived in socially deprived areas of a North West city where there are high rates of unemployment accompanied by lack of opportunities and poverty. Early theories such as Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) proposed that social structure and culture, can lead to involvement in crime. It was thought this is particularly the case in Westernised societies, whereby there is an emphasis placed upon economic success. Merton (1938) emphasised that individuals often identify the goal of attaining economic success, however, due to situational factors may not have the resources to achieve their goal and as a result engage in other means to achieve their goal. This may have been the case for young people in this study, as they often aspired to have a better lifestyle yet did not have the resources available to attain their goal aspirations. The adolescents often hoped to avoid further involvement in crime yet acknowledged that they may have to continue with engagement in illegal activity in order to attain their goal aspirations of a 'better lifestyle' and economic success. Many of the young people identified goal aspirations of wanting to further their education however were uncertain about what this may involve or the likelihood that this would happen. This is surprising given that adolescent offenders have been referred to as rejecting of school based goals (Carroll et al., 2013). This leads to questioning the accessibility of the education system to adolescent offenders and the availability of opportunities for such young people to continue to pursue meaningful goal aspirations.

The young people in this study, often due to past and present experiences and circumstances, continued to anticipate a personal future of possible uncertainty, violence and fear. Possible Selves theory (Markus & Nuruis, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) suggests that adolescents engaged in offending behaviours and often identify negative possible selves

that are characterised mostly by fear and future involvement in criminal activity. Possible Selves Theory also proposes that individuals are more likely to attain their goal aspirations and desired personal future if they have a balance of hopes and fears for the future. For the adolescents in the present study it seemed that their negative representations of their possible selves contributed to their level of uncertainty and perceived threat of future disappointment. For example young people often envisaged that they would not achieve their goal aspirations and described a personal future of living in fear.

Dickson and MacLeod (2004) reported that anxiety is associated with patterns of avoidance goals and the anticipation of threat, whereas depression is thought to be associated with a lack of approach orientated goals and the anticipation of failure. The present research offers new insight into the patterns of goals identified by adolescents involved in the criminal justice system. The adolescents in the present study often identified avoidance orientated goal aspirations which indicates perceived fear and threat for their personal future. This suggests that adolescent offenders may report goal orientation patterns similar to young people experiencing anxiety as described in the previous study. However for these young people, the heightened levels of anxiety that they experience are often overlooked and focus is placed upon their offending history. For the young people in this study, engaging in the process of thinking about goal aspirations and their desired future gave rise to the sense of fear as it was the anticipation of failure and disappointment which was perceived as extremely threatening. As depression has been linked to anticipated failure of achievement, this may indicate that these young people may be prone to experience higher levels of co-morbid anxiety and depression. Given the high rates of mental health difficulties reported among this particular population this is not surprising (Kessler et al., 2005; Teplin et al, 2002). For the adolescents in the study, it appears that based upon their appraisal of past and present experiences, the actual anticipation of further failure in relation to goal aspirations may be perceived as

extremely threatening to their sense of self and protective strategies are employed as a defensive mechanism.

It is worth noting similarities and differences that appear to arise between adolescents involved in the study and adolescents not involved within the YJS. The young people in the study often described similar goal aspirations as would be identified by their non-offending peers such as having a nice home or completing a college course. However these goals often masked an avoidance orientated meaning such as escaping the life of crime or avoiding trouble. For these young people in the study, achieving their goal aspirations had a more significant cost attached. For example aspiring to provide for one's family often implied keeping them safe and avoiding extreme risk. In relation to developmental stages, the adolescents involved in the study often reported experiencing life events in parallel with adolescent development; for example, aspiring to have a relationship. However many of the young people involved in the study had a sense that they had to assume various adult-like responsibilities or roles within their families often at a very young age.

In line with previous research and the high rate of mental health difficulties among adolescent offenders, it gives rise to questioning the mental health and well-being of some of the participants in the study. Some of the young people described being quite suspicious and paranoid of others and this led me to consider the difficulty that might occur in attempting to differentiate between mental health difficulties among such young people and symptoms or experiences that they encounter as a response to the reality of their living situation. Also, as a high level of cognitive difficulties has been reported amongst adolescents in contact with the YJS (NACRO, 2011), it is worth noting that some of the young people in the study may have difficulties which have been unnoticed or not formally assessed. Experiencing cognitive difficulties could contribute to their involvement within the youth justice, their goal aspirations and view towards their personal future.

Many of the young people in this study encountered extreme risk situations on a daily basis. This risk often related to their physical safety and appeared to the young people as 'normal' and acceptable in the areas in which they were living. Many of them also discussed various extremely difficult life events throughout the interviews which led the researcher to acknowledge that although the young people often experience a sense of hopelessness about their personal future, they have often developed a great level of resilience in the face of extremely adverse life events. It seemed that the protective strategies identified in the theoretical framework to avoid threat of future disappointment were part of a broader range of protective strategies that the young people had developed in order to survive.

This study provided a theoretical framework to aid the understanding of how adolescents with a history of involvement with a YOS engage in thinking about their goal aspirations and personal future. The theoretical framework illustrated that young people within the YOS identify idealised goal aspirations informed by their appraisal of past and present experiences. Engaging in the processes of identifying idealised goal aspirations and appraising their experiences gives rise to mixed feelings of hopefulness and hopelessness for the young people. This leads adolescents to become stuck in a cycle of uncertainty and to perceive a threat of future disappointment regarding the likelihood of achieving their goal aspirations and their desired personal future. As a result, young people employ self-protective strategies to cope with the threat and maintain their sense of self.

Clinical Implications

The literature review and empirical study provide various clinical implications to consider when working with adolescents involved in criminal activity. The literature review and study highlight that adolescents involved in criminal activity may have extremely complex difficulties including mental health difficulties (Kessler et al., 2005; Teplin et al.,

2002) and experience of difficult life experiences from the past and present situations. Young people involved in the empirical study perceived extreme levels of uncertainty and threat about their personal future and described present situations whereby they have lack of opportunities, support, or whereby they face physical risk to their safety on a daily basis. Any work being undertaken with adolescents involved in criminal activity in relation to developing goals for their personal future must take into account the present situation of the adolescents and provide whatever possible support to ensure that the adolescent can have their basic needs of safety, security, and some sense of purpose met before attempting to focus upon future goal aspirations. The young people often experienced a mix of hopelessness and hopefulness about the future and perhaps therapeutic interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy may be appropriate in attempting to nurture and increase the hopefulness that young people have for their personal future. It would also be helpful to help young people to have more confidence in their ability to pursue their goal aspirations and engage more committedly in the process.

This study and the work of Gardner (2010) must be taken into account working with adolescents when attempting to elicit meaningful goal aspirations for adolescents. Staff working with young people involved in criminal activity should attempt to aid the young person in developing goals that are meaningful and realistic to them rather than influenced by external factors or societal influences.

It is possible that staff may at times also develop a sense of hopelessness when working with adolescents involved in criminal activity due to the complexity of the work, and a narrative of young people being disinterested or 'not bothered' about their future may arise. However the theoretical framework identified in the present study provides insight that young people often perceive a sense of fear and threat of future disappointment about pursuing goal aspirations and their personal future rather than an absence of envisaged goal aspirations.

This framework contributes to the development of a narrative of young people being fearful of their personal future rather than 'disinterested' or 'not bothered'. Realising this may help to increase the level of empathy and approach applied in working with them. This will enable staff working with adolescents to reframe their view of adolescents' apparent 'disinterest' to adolescents attempting to protect their sense of self.

This study also provides a framework that could be used when developing goals for therapeutic work with adolescents involved in criminal activity and could aid clinicians in anticipating the uncertainty and threat of future disappointment that young people may perceive. As adolescents may find discussing goal aspirations difficult, engagement and development of a strong therapeutic relationship is key with adolescents before discussing specific goals. Hopefully this would enable the adolescent to express meaningful goal aspirations without feeling threatened or the need to disengage.

Methodological Considerations

The study recruited participants from one YOS site within the North West and results may have been influenced by the particular service that young people received within the YOS or factors specific to the particular area. For example, the opportunities provided for courses or activities within that particular YOS, or issues related to staff working with young people such as level of training. Whilst the research was being conducted, due to the current financial recession, the YOS underwent some structural change, financial cuts and job losses. The financial cuts had an impact upon the levels of enthusiasm and hope amongst the staff and it is possible that this impacted upon the message portrayed to the young people or the outlook they had in relation to their personal future.

It has been suggested that when discussing future goal aspirations, adolescents involved in YJS may provide socially desirable responses or scripts that they have developed

due to their involvement with the court system and wanting to reduce their sentence or conviction (Gardner, 2010). Adolescents involved in YJS can also often have extremely complex difficulties which involve high levels of suspiciousness and difficulty trusting others. It is possible that these factors arose in the present study. However all efforts were made to ensure that adolescents were aware that I was independent of the YOS and justice system, and a trainee at university. I also ensured that a positive relationship was developed with the young people to increase engagement. This involved often inquiring about adolescents' interests and asking open ended questions that flowed with the discussion of the adolescent. When young people identified goal aspirations or information relating to their desired personal futures, this was probed more to elicit further meaning.

In line with Grounded Theory, data collection for the study stopped when it was felt that gathering further data would provide limited information. However as has been previously stated, it can be difficult to define the point whereby collecting further data would not provide new insight (Dey, 1999) and this may be bias to researcher interpretation.

Researcher Reflexivity

Engaging in the process of studying the available literature and conducting the empirical study led the researcher to reflect upon various issues and processes that arose. A reflective diary was kept throughout the process and issues also discussed in regular supervision.

At a personal level, I initially experienced anxiety about engaging the young people in order to elicit rich transcripts and data. However, I was then extremely surprised at the level that the young people were willing to engage in conversation and discussion with a stranger. I was often conscious of the cultural context in which I am immersed as a person (adult, female, Irish, perhaps perceived by the young people as middle class) and the impact

that this could have upon the dynamics during the interviews or the process of data analysis. Throughout the interviews, and the analytic process, I often reflected upon the difference in life experiences that I personally had as an adolescent and the experiences that these young people faced both in the past and present. This led me to often think about the young people with a mixture of sadness and amazement at their ability to cope and engage in the process of thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future.

Lay Summary Report

Due to the YOS being comprised of staff with varying degrees of qualifications and training and the fact that many of the staff most directly involved with the adolescents are unqualified support workers, the summary has been developed in the format of a lay summary. This lay summary report has been provided to staff within the YOS and includes the main findings of the study and clinical implications for staff working with the young people. Due to the presentation of the lay summary report, it has been included in the appendix section (see Appendix G for lay summary report). The staff members were also made aware that they could acquire further information about the study or a fuller report would be made available if requested.

Further Research

In conducting the literature review, it became evident that very little research is available on how adolescents involved in criminal activity engage in the process of thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future. Throughout the available literature and in the empirical paper, most of the research has been conducted with male participants. This is mostly due to greater number of adolescent male offenders being available. However female adolescents were reported to account for 25 per cent of the population of young people in

contact with the YJS in 2011/2012 (Youth Justice Board, YJB, 2013). As a result, it would be worth carrying out qualitative research to understand the processes involved in how adolescent girls think about their goal aspirations or personal future to possibly provide further understanding to the theoretical framework developed.

As the present study focused upon the processes involved in how adolescent offenders think about goal aspirations and their personal future, it would be helpful to conduct a longitudinal study to explore further the process of goal pursuit and the outcome of identified idealised aspirations. It would also be helpful to gain more information about the factors that help such young people to achieve goal aspirations they set for themselves.

Proposed Future Study

The empirical study emphasised that adolescents involved in the YOS identified avoidance orientated goal aspirations and experienced threat of future disappointment about the likelihood of achieving their desired personal future. As patterns of goal orientation have been linked to psychological well-being among adolescents (Dickson and MacLeod, 2004), it would be helpful to gain further understanding about goal orientation (approach and avoidance goals) and mental well-being among adolescent offenders. It is proposed that a quantitative study should be conducted to investigate this area further. The study could consist of a control group of non-offending adolescents, a group of non-offending adolescents who experience comorbid anxiety and depression and a group of adolescents with a history of offending. The study could investigate whether any relationships exist between goal orientation (approach or avoidance), involvement in offending behaviour, measures of anxiety and depression, goal specificity, and goal expectancy. Similar to the previous study conducted by Dickson and MacLeod (2004), the prospective study could use measures including the Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck, Epstein, Brown & Steer, 1988), Beck

Depression Inventory (Beck & Steer, 1987), Goals Task (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004) and the Plans Task (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004).   Based on previous literature, this prospective study would aim to explore the following:

- Do adolescents experiencing anxiety, adolescents experiencing comorbid anxiety and depression and adolescents involved in a YOS differ in their patterns of goal orientation?

- Do adolescents involved in the three groups differ in their levels of goal specificity?

- Do adolescents involved in the three groups differ in their goal expectancies?

As carried out in the study by Dickson and MacLeod (2004), data could be analysed using mixed analysis of variance (ANOVAS).

This proposed study would further explore the relationship between adolescent goal orientation and the relationship between anxiety and depression and would provide more understanding about the patterns of goal orientation reported by adolescents involved in the YJS.

Overall Summary

Overall, the thesis explored how adolescents involved in offending behaviours think about their goal aspirations and personal future. It is clear from the literature that adolescent offenders do engage in thinking about their future however little is known about the processes involved in how they think about personal goal aspirations. The present study developed a theoretical framework which posits that adolescents involved in the YJS identify idealised goal aspirations which are influenced by past and present experiences. This gives rise to young people experiencing uncertainty and perceived heightened threat of future disappointment. As a result, young people employed a range of protective strategies to defend

and maintain their sense of self. This theoretical framework is central in informing

psychological work undertaken with adolescent offenders to enable them to think about

meaningful goal pursuits for their future and to maintain positive mental health and well-

being.

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Appendix A

Author Guidelines for *Youth Justice* Journal

Copy of Journal Publication Guidelines

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Appendix B

Epistemology

Epistemology

The discipline of psychology offers great insight and knowledge into areas of human behaviour, thinking, emotions, well-being and psychological distress. Traditionally this insight has been provided through applying dominantly positivist approaches to research which aim to test scientific hypotheses and provide empirical evidence to support findings. This type of approach to research often minimizes the importance and value of human experience and leads to participants becoming a passive part in providing significant or non-significant results. It has been proposed that using quantitative methodologies can limit and reduce understanding and theoretical insight (Charmaz, 2006). In contrast qualitative research places greater importance upon human experience. Rather than using predefined constructs and assumptions, qualitative research places emphasis upon meaning, processes, actions, emotions and the individuals' interpretations. Qualitative research enables a greater understanding of human experience to be gained which leads to the development of rich theory.

This research aimed to explore how adolescents in a youth offending service engaged in thinking about goal aspirations and their personal future. It was thought that a qualitative methodology would be the most appropriate approach for a number of reasons. Due to these young people often having involvement with different services and being marginalised, it seemed likely that the environment and culture in which the young people were immersed would influence adolescents' thoughts and views about their goal aspirations and personal future. Also previous research for adolescents involved in criminal activity often places emphasis upon producing results to reduce levels of offending and recidivism rather than gaining an understanding of the actions, meanings and processes involved in adolescent goal pursuit.

Whilst developing the research idea various qualitative methodologies were considered. As the study aimed to develop a theoretical framework encompassing the processes and actions involved in how adolescents think about goal aspirations and their personal future, Grounded Theory was deemed the most appropriate approach. Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) was chosen due to the emphasis on social influences and processes. Also as adolescent offenders are not a homogenous group in relation to their view of goal aspirations or their personal future or experiences that they have encountered; it was thought that Grounded Theory would provide an approach that could explore and incorporate differences whilst also identifying processes and developing categories that include the views of all the young people.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed the original Grounded Theory and was created at a time whereby strong emphasis was placed upon the importance of positivist research. In contrast to positivist research, Grounded theorists proposed that individuals develop meaning out of their experiences and that this is a process whereby they reflect upon their own interpretation of reality rather than a reality which is defined by science and logic. The Grounded Theory approach provided systematic strategies to aid the development of theory by highlighting the need for the emerging theory to be grounded in the data. Theory development is achieved through the processes of constant comparison and theoretical sampling. The original approach to Grounded theory has received criticism from Charmaz (2006) who proposed that this approach does not acknowledge the influence of the researcher or their interpretation of the data. Also, Charmaz (2006) suggests that the use of rigorous coding strategies and techniques can imply that there is an objective reality to be discovered.

Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) adopts a stance which attempts to understand the processes involved in the identified theories rather than simply provide an explanation about specific phenomena. This approach to Grounded theory places emphasis

upon the role of social constructionism which posits that multiple realities may exist which are created through a process of individual and collective influences including culture, history, and group processes. For the young people in the study, it seemed that Constructivist Grounded Theory would be an appropriate approach due to the various systems, cultures and groups in which they are often immersed. Also, as thinking about goal aspirations and one's personal future can often be socially constructed, it was central that in developing the theory, the methodological approach would identify meaningful processes for the adolescents.

Unlike the original Grounded Theory approach, Charmaz (2006) describes flexible guidelines to carrying out data analysis and it is acknowledged that the researcher plays an active role in co-constructing the theory along with the participants.

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Opening Questions

How would you describe how things are for you now?

- Family? – How would you describe your relationship with family?
- Friends? – How would you describe your relationship with friends?
- School / College?
- Work?
- Living conditions?
- General?

How have things been lately?

What do you currently enjoy doing? What do you currently enjoy about your life?

What do you not enjoy doing? Is there anything you currently do not enjoy about your life?

Future

What can you see for yourself in the future?

What would you like to see for yourself in the future?

What if anything would you like to plan for your future?

How would you get there? What would you need to do to …?

How far ahead in the future can you see for yourself?

What would you like to be doing in your future?

What if anything would you like to be different in your future?

If I could grant you three wishes for your personal future, what would you wish for?

If you were to paint me a picture of your future, what would I see in the painting?

If your family members / friends/ keyworker were here, what do you think they would they like to see for you in the future?

How would you know things were going well in the future?

- What would it look like?
- What would be happening?

What could help you to X? What would make it easier for X to happen?

What would make it difficult to X? What would make it difficult for X to happen?

How likely do you think it is that X will happen?

Experiences of goal pursuit

In the past, what if anything has happened that you wanted/ planned?

How did you make X happen? How did you achieve X?

What helped you to achieve X?

What helped X to happen?

What made it difficult to achieve?

What made it difficult for X to happen?

Meanings

What do you think made you want to …? What made you think about…?

What would it mean for you to achieve X / if X happened?

- What difference would it make?

Why is it important for you to X?

What would it mean for you to not X?

What would it mean if X did not happen?

What do you think it would mean for your family / friends/ key worker for X to happen?

Appendix D

Further Development of Interview Schedule

Table C1

Development of the Interview Schedule

Given the level of cognitive difficulties and suspiciousness reported amongst adolescent offenders, the interview schedule included areas to cover rather than specific questions as each interview was individualised to encourage engagement. The areas covered within the interviews changed in line with Grounded Theory and the process of data analysis.

Participant	Developing Areas	Reasons
1	NA	Pilot Interview however transcript was rich enough to be included as data. Young person reported that questions were fine.
2	NA	Pilot Interview however transcript was rich enough to be included as data. Young person reported that questions were fine.
3	Explore Meaning of goal aspirations further?	
4	Explore Meaning of goal aspirations further?	
5	Further explorations of perceived likelihood of desired personal future? Exploration of Uncertainty?	Suggestion in previous interviews that difference between desired personal future and perceived likely future
6	Areas covered same as interview 5	
7	Areas covered same as interview 6	
8	Continuing to explore area of uncertainty further?	Suggestion in previous interviews that participants were uncertain about their desired personal future occurring
9	Continuing to explore area of uncertainty further?	Suggestion in previous interviews that participants were uncertain about their desired personal future occurring

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10	Exploring how young people deal with uncertainty?	Suggestions in previous interviews that participants deal with high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability
11	Same as Interview 10	
12	Fear associated with personal future not occurring?	Previous interview suggested participants experience uncertainty and fear associated with process of thinking about personal future
13	Fear associated with thinking about personal future? Consequences of desired personal future not occurring? How to deal with fear associated with thinking about goal aspirations?	Previous participant suggesting that significant costs and risk of failure associated with desired personal future not occurring.
14	Fear associated with thinking about desired personal future? Consequences of desired personal future not occurring? How to deal with fear associated with thinking about goal aspirations?	Previous interviews suggested that fear associated with engaging in process of thinking about personal future.

Appendix E

Example of Memo Writing Process

Examples of Memo Writing

Examples of memo writing within individual transcripts.

<u>Example 1 - Mark</u>

Identifying fear towards personal future - Mark identifies being imprisoned or getting killed as threats to his desired future. This creates a sense of the risk which Mark experiences as being extreme and impacts not only upon his goals but his safety, fatality and having massive implications for his life in general. There is a sense that these risks are perceived as a possible reality for Mark in the situations and social circumstances which he finds himself in. In describing these risks, Mark refers to them in a way that appears 'normal' indicating that these events may be 'usual' occurrence in the culture in which he immersed. This is perhaps a strategy he employs to manage future risk, uncertainty and unpredictability.

<u>Example 2 – Barry</u>

Ambivalence - Barry seemingly finds thinking about the future difficult and potentially threatening. Initially has difficulty thinking about the concept of future and is resistant / unwilling however then willing to identify aspirations / hopes for personal future. Does this have a Self protective function?

<u>Example 3 - James</u>

Uncertainty - Sense of personal future being unpredictable – unsure of how likely is to achieve aspirations. Likelihood of achieving goal aspirations appears based upon appraisal of present situation and perception of opportunities available. Acknowledging that more likely to gain personal future if he applies effort. Describes working towards success but also anticipating downfall – being vigilant for something negative to happen?

Example 4 –Sam

Identifying idealised goal aspirations - Sam describes idealised goal aspirations such as wishing to be a millionaire, and wanting to be strong and to become 'normal'. Sense that these goals for his personal future are informed by societal expectations and influences.

Examples of Overall Memo Writing Process Across Transcripts as Conceptual Categories Emerged

Example 5

Identifying Idealised goal aspirations

The young people identified a range of aspirations including seemingly extrinsic and intrinsic motivated goal aspirations. Most of the young people identified quite extrinsic goals such as having cars, money, big houses, fame, etc. However, often apparent extrinsic goals seem to hold quite meaningful intrinsic motivations for the young people. Some of the young people such as 'James' appeared to identify quite intrinsic aspirations directly. The aspirations of the young people appear to have a range of meanings including the following;

- Gaining a sense of security – wanting to have a nice house which when probed related to wanting a 'home' in order to be provided with security. Many of the young people also talk about financial security which would benefit them and their families.

- Belonging – young people talked about aspiring to have a relationship, family of their own and having children. Michael identified the reason behind this as not wanting to be alone. Mark also described wanting to join the army.

- Gaining recognition / image / identity – wanting to show other people that they 'made it'

- Escapism –Ben talks about wishing to have a 'proper job' so that he can escape the cycle of crime that he found himself in. For Ben it appears that this would provide a sense of happiness and relief as he described that it would free him from worry and relieve psychological distress associated with crime such as the feelings of guilt. Mark also describes

that he would like to escape the current culture of threat and victimization that he finds himself in and would like to go out with his girlfriend without being a target. Implies a sense of looking to be able to do activities that many other young people can do without experiencing extreme threat to safety. Similar to Ben, Mark creates a sense of being caught in the middle of a vicious cycle and wanting to escape this. Barry also describes aspiring towards change and escaping the cycle of owed debt and favours which he became caught in through his involvement with drugs.

- Changing as a person – Many of the young people describe the process of 'growing up' and aspiring to reach the stage whereby they are adults and have responsibilities.
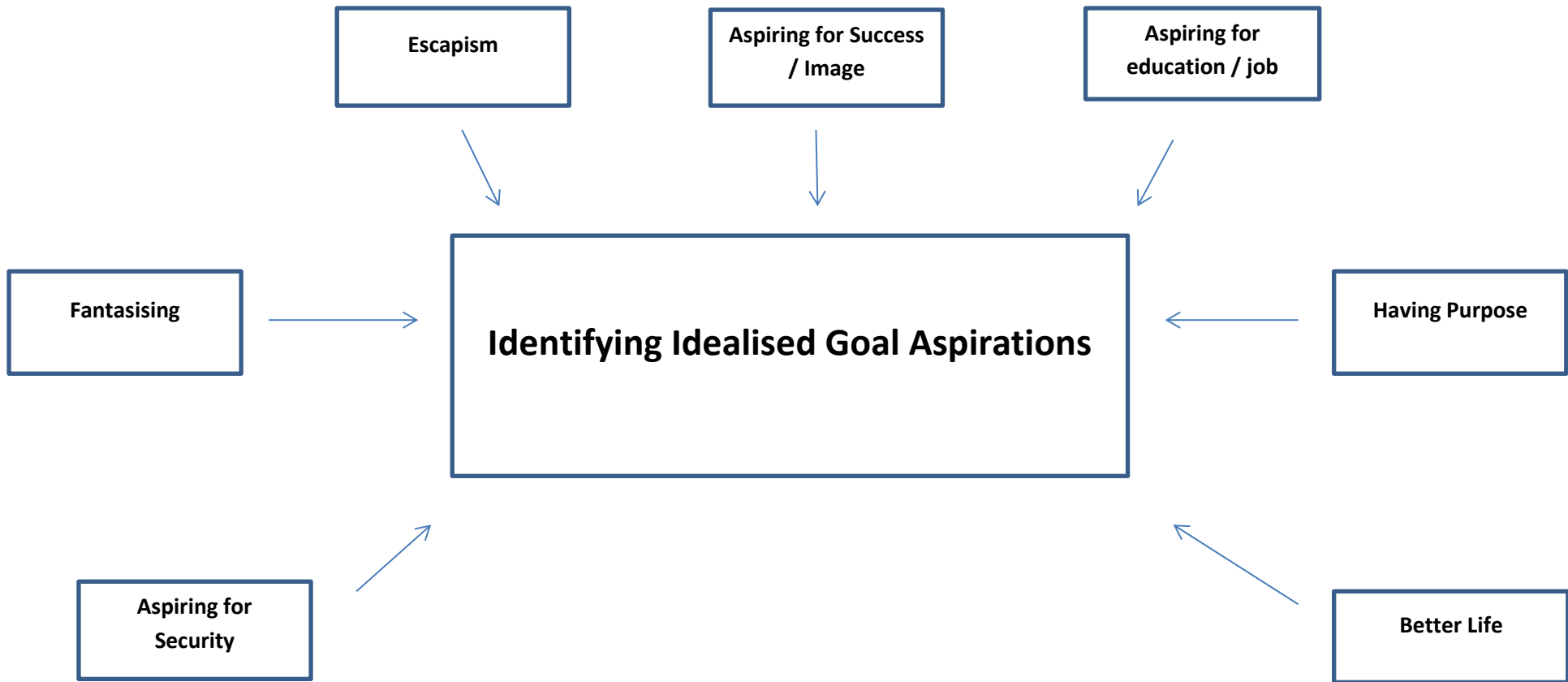- Providing for Others

Throughout the transcripts the young people appear to find themselves fluctuating between experiencing a sense of hope about their desired futures occurring or perceived hopelessness.
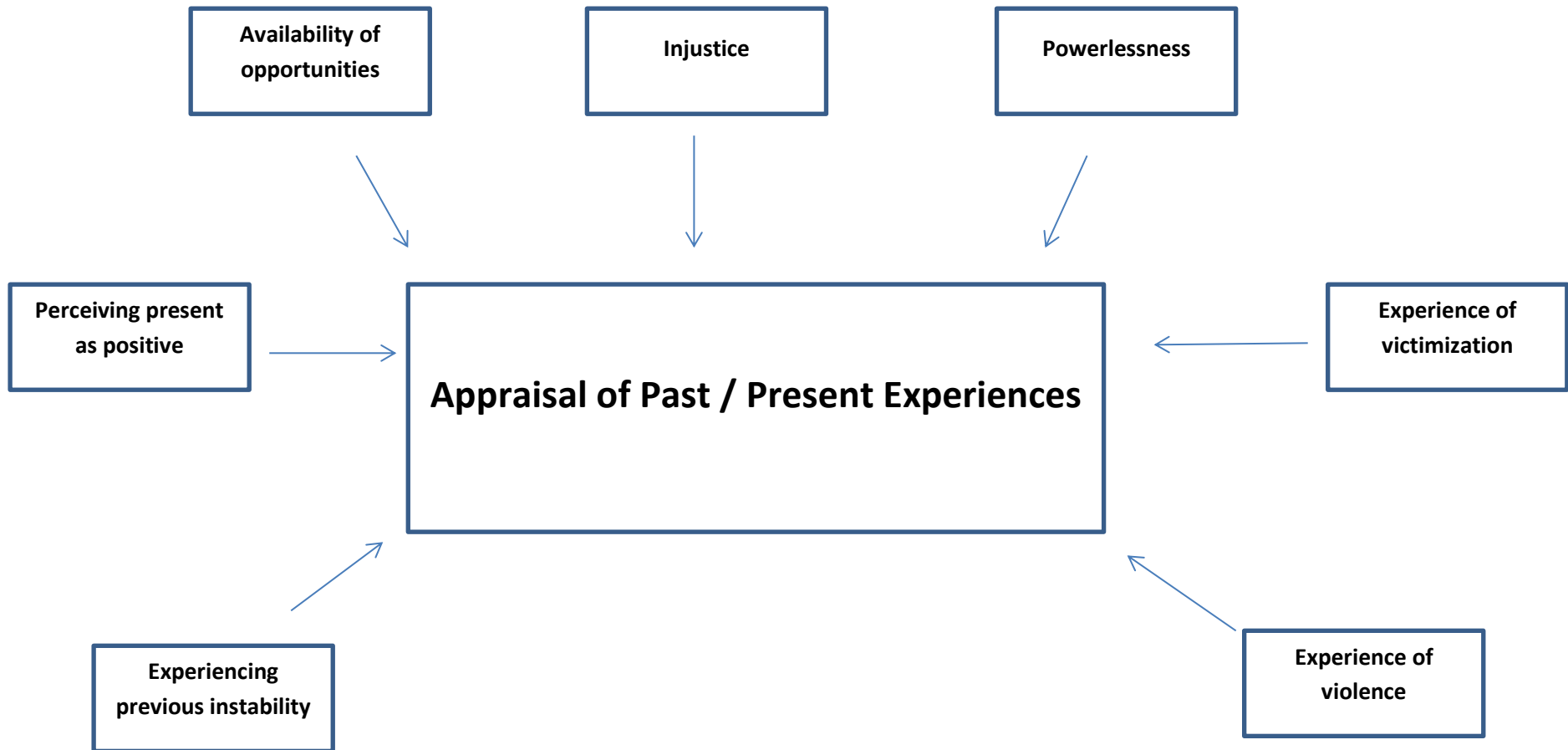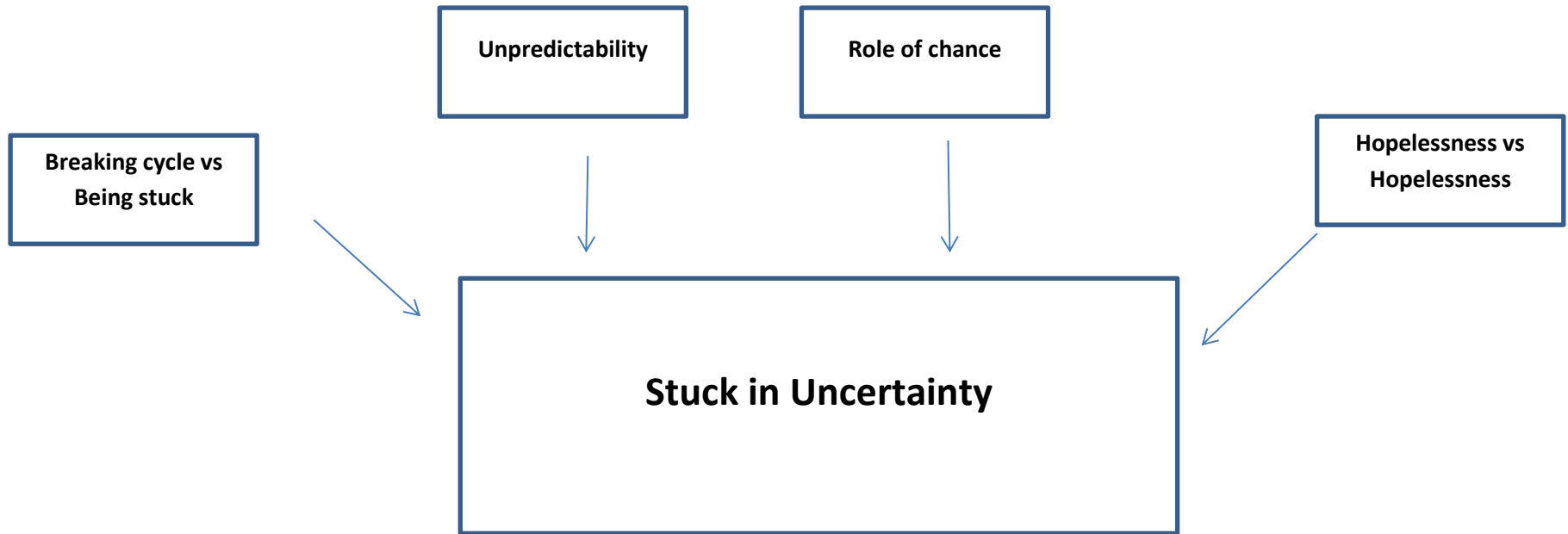
Example 6

Threat of Future Disappointment – For these young people, the thought of not achieving desired personal future appears to have a high cost. For example Nick refers to 'failing in life' if he does not reach his desired future. Young people appear to manage this by keeping goal aspirations and plans to reach goals vague. For the young people this perceived threat appears based upon past / present experiences of previous disappointment. Present circumstances appear to contribute to this threat as young people particularly if young people perceive that they have limited options.
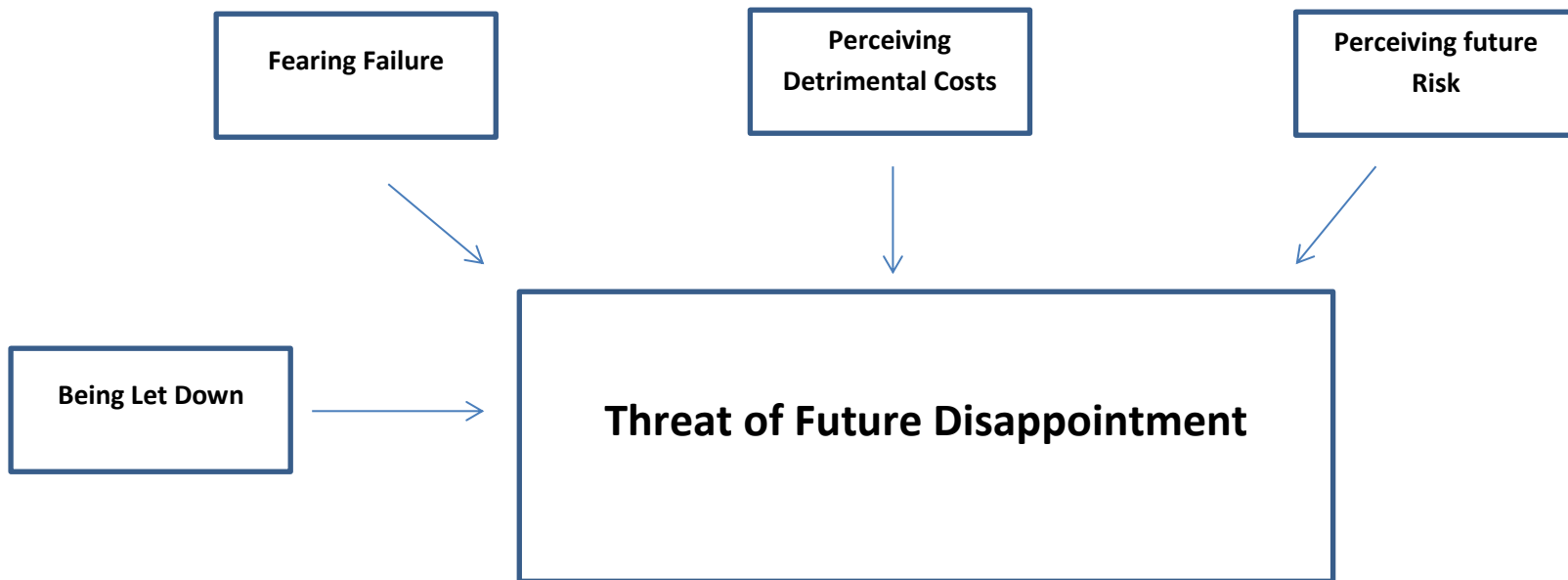
Appendix F

Development of Emerging Conceptual Categories

Escapism

Aspiring for Success / Image

Aspiring for education / job

Fantasising

Identifying Idealised Goal Aspirations

Having Purpose

Aspiring for Security

Better Life

Availability of
opportunities

Injustice

Powerlessness

Perceiving present
as positive

Appraisal of Past / Present Experiences

Experience of
victimization

Experiencing
previous instability

Experience of
violence

Unpredictability

Role of chance

Breaking cycle vs
Being stuck

Hopelessness vs
Hopelessness

Stuck in Uncertainty

Fearing Failure

Perceiving Detrimental Costs

Perceiving future Risk

Being Let Down

Threat of Future Disappointment

Ambivalence

Minimizing importance of goals

Delaying thinking about future

Displacing responsibility

Protecting Self

Avoiding commitment to goals
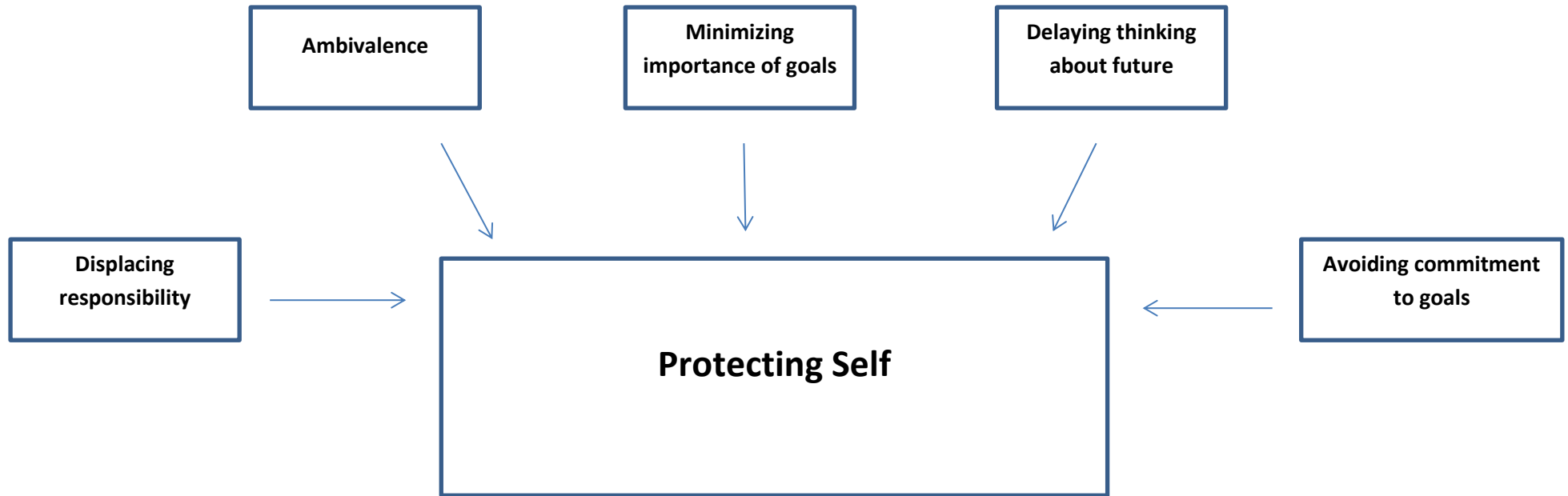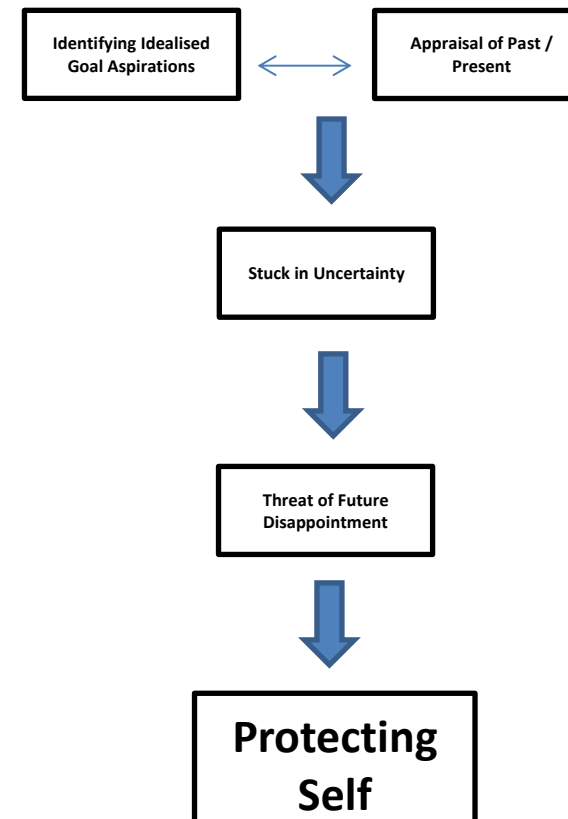
Appendix G

Lay Summary Report

Protecting Self: How do adolescents involved in a YOS think about goal aspirations and their personal future?

Thinking about goals and developing ideas for their personal future is an important aspect of the development process for young people. Goals have been thought of as directing all human behaviour and determine activities that we engage in. For many young people thinking about and making decisions about goals for their future can be a difficult process and may be stressful. For young people involved in a YOS this can be particularly difficult.

Based on interviews from 14 young people from the YOS, this model was developed to show the processes that young people go through when thinking about their future. Young people often describe 'idealised goal aspirations' such as 'a better life' or 'loads of money' which may have a lot more meaning for the young person. For young people involved in the YOS often their goal aspirations include escaping the risky situations they encounter in the areas in which they live or aspiring to be provided with security and belonging. Although young people could describe goal aspirations for their future, they often struggled to identify specific plans that would aid them to achieve their goals.

Young people's goals and outlook for their personal future are influenced by how they make sense of their past and present experiences. Many of the

Identifying Idealised Goal Aspirations	⟷	Appraisal of Past / Present

Stuck in Uncertainty

Threat of Future Disappointment

Protecting Self

young people described difficult past and present experiences which has led them to have a mix of feelings towards their future including hopefulness, hopelessness and uncertainty. Being stuck with feelings of uncertainty about the future is difficult for young people and the situation can feel unsafe and unpredicatable.This can often lead young people to find thinking about goals and their personal future as threatening. For young people involved in the YOS this can cause them to perceive a threat of future disappointment and failure. As a result, young people may lack confidence in their ability to achieve their goals and apply a range of strategies to protect them from experiencing threat of failure. Self protective strategies included the following:

- Seeming disinterested or 'not bothered' about the future (minimising the importance of thinking about future goals)
- Giving up on goals they have identified (disengaging)
- Not committing to setting goals.
- Being ambivalent about the goals they would like to set or achieve.

What can we do to help young people think about their personal future and think about goals?

- Recognise that it may be difficult for young people to think about their personal future and goals at present. For some young people it may be too threatening and the time may not be right to think about future goals.

- Consider any practical issues that may make young people feel more able and hopeful at present to think about their goals for the future. Do they have stable living conditions? Do they have opportunities available to them? Do they have a support network?

- Ensure that the goal aspirations that young people identify to work towards are meaningful to them rather than what they think you, their parents or a judge would like to hear.

- Develop strong, positive, supportive relationships with young people so they can feel able to discuss goals and ideas for their personal future that are meaningful to them without feeling threatened.

- If young people can think about goal aspirations for their future, help them to think of specific, realistic and manageable steps that will help them to achieve their goals.

- If young people appear particularly hopeless or anxious about their personal future, perhaps discuss with them the possibility of seeing a counsellor, psychologist or mental health professional.