Institutional responses to youth deviance and parenting: Exploring professional perceptions on the role of social class in the beginnings of offending pathways and desistance from crime

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1. Introduction

Since criminology is a multi-disciplinary field that explores crime from theoretically different viewpoints, criminologists rarely agree upon how, why, and when people become criminals or desist from crime. However, the relationship between age and antisocial behaviour has been one of the most robust observations since 1831, when *Quetelet* first presented his "age-crime curve."[1] Although it is still generally accepted that most adolescents "grow out of crime" in their late teens or early 20s,[2] the relationship between aging and desistance remains one of the most poorly understood criminological findings.

Moffitt, for example, has argued that the understanding of the relationship between age and deviant behaviour is inadequate because the onset of offending is defined according to first police arrest — or court appearance — statistics, while data on troubling behaviour in children that have not yet reached the age of criminal liability is sparse.[3] According to *Moffitt*, law enforcement officials record only the tip of the "deviance iceberg," while there could be distinct types of juvenile offenders with different pathways to desistance, depending on their childhood conduct — and its social and neuropsychological triggers[4] — prior to entering the youth justice system.[5]

Drawing on *Moffitt*, *Maruna* has also exposed that the relationship between getting older and desisting from crime is insufficiently understood.[6] He has argued that criminological research has mainly been exploring biological maturation and particular life events as reasons for desistance, but has neglected an individual's self-narration of their decision to "make good," which amounts to more than half of their change.[7] Despite acknowledging that most offenders are of disadvantaged backgrounds,[8] *Maruna* has concluded that an individual's choice to turn their life around is largely subjective and their narrative identity is fluid, as it can change throughout their life-course.[9]

1 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 540; see also *Morgan & Newburn* 2012, pp. 512 513.
2 *Rutherford* 1992.
3 *Moffitt* 1993, p. 675.
4 *Moffitt* 1993, pp. 679— 693.
5 *Moffitt* 1993, p. 675.
6 *Maruna* 2001, p. 10.
7 *Maruna* 2001, p. 10.
8 *Maruna* 2001, pp. 59— 61.
9 *Maruna* 2001, pp. 59— 61.

Although criminologists nowadays understand desistance as not only a maturational process, but also as one that depends on both structural conditions and individual agency, there is still a dearth of research about the ways in which socio-economic circumstances interact with — and affect — the agentic aspect of desistance, especially in adolescents. There is also a lack of research on whether institutions that work with behaviourally challenging young people and their parents make different decisions about families of diverse backgrounds and with what consequences for the beginnings of children's offending pathways as well as their willingness and ability to change.

In this paper, I explore the views of practitioners that work with troubling youths and their parents across a range of agencies on the intersections between deviance, parenting and social class. I consider how their perceptions and decisions might interplay with the identities — and the desistance processes — of the young people that they work with. I begin by introducing criminological theories that have become central to UK's youth justice practice and demonstrate why they might be insufficient. I then outline the concept of social class that I use in my study before presenting the study's research design and outcomes. I conclude by suggesting alternative ways of understanding the connections between youth challenging behaviour, parenting and social class, and explain how they could impact young people's desistance pathways.

2. Intersections between youth deviance and parenting: Theory, practice, and the UK context

In criminology, there has long been an interest in the impact of family life and parenting on the development of children's troubling behaviour.[10] Although some authors have argued that delinquency can occur in both broken homes and intact families,[11] *Condry* has stressed that most contemporary discourses on crime and the family still focus predominantly on the individual offender and their parents, while underestimating the structural factors that influence their everyday lives.[12]

According to *Gottfredson* & *Hirschi* and their General Theory of Crime (GTC), the development of a child's self-control is crucial for minimising their propensity for delinquency.[13] Furthermore, the inability of a young person to delay gratification — and a consequent increased probability that they will become an offender — is, to a great extent, triggered by parental failure to monitor the child, notice their inappropriate behaviour, and prevent it.[14]

Poor parenting in early childhood is, alongside family breakdown and parents' criminal history, also a strong predictor of youth offending for developmental

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[10] For example, see *Wilson & Herrnstein* 1985, pp. 213— 265.
[11] For example, see *Hirschi* 1995, p. 136.
[12] For example, see *Condry* 2007, p. 4.
[13] *Gottfredson & Hirschi* 1990, p. 97.
[14] *Gottfredson & Hirschi* 1990, p. 97.

criminologists.[15] Nevertheless, *Farrington* has acknowledged that the ways in which childrearing affects delinquency remain unclear.[16] In addition, he has argued that parenting and crime should not be studied in a vacuum, so the family's social circumstances — as well as their possible impact on parenting styles and children's misbehavior — should always be taken into account.[17]

Some macro theories have addressed structural factors of offending by exploring the relationship between crime and economic conditions in light of class struggles. Back in 1916, *Bonger* used a neo-Marxist approach to argue that the means of production are concentrated in the hands of the elites due to the capitalist division of labour, which makes the disadvantaged more inclined to criminality.[18] In addition, *Merton* drew upon *Durkheim* and used his anomie theory to explain criminal behaviour. Based on his observation of American culture, he concluded that monetary success is a universal goal, but society fails to acknowledge that the legitimate means to achieve this aim are unequally allocated, which makes the deprived more likely to adapt through crime.[19]

However, despite the socially more conscious developmental theories as well as the challenges of macro and other critical criminological perspectives, the uneven distribution of capital and poverty have remained downplayed[20] and insufficient parenting has been decontextualized[21] in the UK's political and professional discourse on crime and the family. As a consequence, bad parenting is often still perceived as an independent causal risk factor of youth deviance and is symbolically linked to disadvantaged households,[22] and their material reality tends to be sidelined. Furthermore, simplified versions of developmental and life-course criminology seem to have anchored themselves in Britain's youth justice practice.

According to *McAra & McVie*, critical criminology was unable to hamper the appeal that developmental accounts of crime had for politicians and practitioners in the UK.[23] Both had reasons to accept that delinquency was rooted in faulty upbringing and risks in early childhood, so it could be easily predicted and prevented.[24] With calls for youth justice responses, politicians were seen to be "doing something" about crime in a seemingly neutral way, by hiding behind the "risk-factor prevention paradigm."[25] Practitioners, on the other hand, made sense of the new role that they had in addressing youth troubling behaviour through early intervention into the lives of children "at risk" of offending and their families.[26]

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15 For example, see *Farrington* 2002, p.147.
16 *Farrington* 2002, p. 148.
17 *Farrington* 2002, p. 144.
18 *Bonger* 2003, p. 60.
19 *Merton* 1938, pp. 678— 682.
20 As argued, for instance, by *Gillies* 2005.
21 As argued, for instance, by *Burney & Gelsthorpe* 2008 and *Hollingsworth* 2007.
22 *Goldson & Jamieson* 2002, p. 85.
23 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 540.
24 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 540.
25 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 540.
26 *McAra & McVie* 2007, p. 316.

However, *Gillies* has exposed that risk-factor analysis retrospectively reveals the association between child delinquency and parenting, but does not explain the causal link between them.[27] Secondly, it takes socioeconomic factors into account when controlling for their effects statistically,[28] but does not consider the lived experiences of being disadvantaged or how they impact upbringing. Furthermore, *Skardhamar* has argued that intervening early could help young people with their immediate concerns, but it is harder to advocate for intervention that aims to prevent troubled children from becoming chronic offenders and perceives them as such before they have actually offended.[29]

Lastly and most importantly, a simplified developmental attempt to understand youth crime focuses on individual and familial risk factors, but disregards the possible "selection effects" [30] of institutions that deal with behaviourally challenging young people before and after they have offended. It thus seems reasonable to follow *McAra & McVie*'s recommendation that criminologists should use alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to explore the functioning of agencies[31] that help troubling youths and their parents and this has been a key aim of my study.

This suggestion seems especially topical in the UK context since the Edinburgh Study of youth transitions to crime has shown that, even in the Scottish welfare-oriented juvenile justice system, young people's offending pathways begin before their contact with law-enforcement officials, namely with labeling practices in schools [32] and other agencies. [33] Moreover, an ongoing "filtering process" [34] continuously propels the same young people into the youth justice system, whereby this does not necessarily depend on the seriousness of their offenses, but, rather, on prior agency contact *per se* and conditions that they cannot control, including their family reputation and social disadvantage.[35]

Furthermore, *Nugent & Schinkel* have concluded that relational desistance and the recognition of change in behaviour by other people is hugely important for growing out of crime.[36] However, similarly to *Healy*, they have stressed that desistence and its acknowledgment by others relies, to a great extent, on the desister's social capital. [37] It therefore seems reasonable to explore whether the interactions of

[27] *Gillies* 2000, p. 216.
[28] *Gillies* 2000, p. 217.
[29] *Skardhamar* 2009, p. 875.
[30] *McAra & McVie* 2007, p. 317.
[31] *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 532.
[32] *McAra & McVie* 2012b, p. 374.
[33] For an insight into similar experiences of young people with the range of interventions in the youth justice system of Northern Ireland, see *McAlister & Carr* 2014.
[34] *McAra & McVie* 2007, p. 337.
[35] *McAra & McVie* 2007, p. 338; For similar findings in the justice system of Ireland, see also *Corr* 2014, p. 264.
[36] *Nugent & Schinkel* 2016.
[37] *Nugent & Schinkel* 2016; see also *Healy* 2013.

practitioners with behaviourally challenging young people and their parents from different family environments could play out adversely and how they could impact the onset of young people's delinquent pathways on one side, and their desistance patterns on the other. Nevertheless, to attend to these issues, I first provide an understanding of social class that I use in my study and consider the different forms of capital in its definition.

3. Researching the role of social class in institutional responses to youth deviance and parenting

3.1 Conceptualising social class

The analysis above has shown that a "familial-risk-factor" account of youth deviance can be too focused on the individual offender and their parents, while deemphasising the social factors that influence their lives.[38] In parallel, *Savage et al.* have argued that social class should not be determined only according to resources and employment, so its definition does not sidestep the social and cultural meaning of class for an individual's identity, or disregard the ways in which class shapes subjectivities on a symbolic level.[39] I therefore draw on *Bourdieu*'s "multi-dimensional"[40] theory, which understands class as a function of the amount, structure and mobility[41] of economic, social (networks and connections with others) and cultural (benefits of academic and cultural engagement) capital as well as the intersections between them.[42]

According to *Bourdieu*, different sorts of capital do not operate independently, but rely on — and should thus be thought together with — underlying practices.[43] Similar combinations tend to be, over time, constant in certain areas of social life, so they constitute patterns.[44] As a consequence, social class plays out in interactions[45] between groups of people with different amounts and forms of capital, and manifests itself in symbolic struggles between them.[46] In social reality, only some blends of capital and its accompanying values[47] are perceived as normative[48] and are sustained by elites[49] through the "inertia […] of institutions,"[50] especially schools,[51] that reinforce familiarity with the dominant culture.[52]

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38 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 555.
39 *Savage et al* 2013, p. 222.
40 *Bourdieu* 2010, pp. 100— 103.
41 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 261.
42 *Savage et al* 2013, p. 222.
43 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 261.
44 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 261.
45 *Bourdieu* 2010, pp. 241— 242.
46 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 243.
47 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 244.
48 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 246.
49 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 16.
50 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 315.
51 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 261.
52 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 70.

Bourdieu therefore suggested that the social sciences investigate the origins of "class making" and the processes that generate social hierarchies.[53] Furthermore, he emphasised that categorising people into classes does not depend on anything inherent in their identities, but, rather, derives from stigmatising processes of seemingly impartial agencies that might be making biased decisions based on the discrepancies between their institutional ethos and a family's cultural capital.[54] Since *McAra* & *McVie* have recommended that criminologists explore the working practices of institutions and the ways in which these could be contributing to young people's criminal involvement,[55] *Bourdieu*'s examination of class-reproduction through, amongst other processes, agency contact could be not only sociologically, but also criminologically, relevant.

Furthermore, desistance scholars have recently proposed that *Bourdieu*'s view on class — and its emphasis on the importance of capital for an individual's agency — is crucial for understanding the ways in which young people grow out of crime.[56] It therefore seems plausible to adopt the above-described theoretical framework to examine how practitioners that work with troubling young people and their parents perceive institutional responses to delinquency and childrearing according to social class. However, before I outline the findings of my study, I briefly present the research design and explain why it was appropriate for exploring this topic.

3.2 Research design

When examining whether institutions and their staff might be treating young people and their parents differently dependent on their background, studying both the large-scale socio-political and the face-to-face interactional processes of class-reproduction seems important. Nevertheless, since elites "produce discourse about the social world,"[57] so class-division is preserved in any political system, it is reasonable to move away from societal determinants and focus on the micro level. To explore the ways in which class-distinction within youth justice might be maintained on the ground, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 practitioners in a Home Counties local authority. I talked to youth workers, counsellors in education, early intervention specialists, drug — and alcohol — misuse workers, parenting counsellors, Youth Offending Team (YOT) officers, child psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. The reasons why I consulted practitioners in several institutions were threefold.

Firstly, I followed *Paternoster and Iovanni*'s suggestion that, within youth justice, class-conditioned labelling effects should be examined across a range of agencies as choices made about young people at earlier stages might influence the decisions

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53 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 470.
54 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 379.
55 *McAra & McVie* 2012a, p. 532
56 *Barry* 2013, p. 49.
57 *Bourdieu* 2010, pp. 398— 400.

and outcomes later on.[58] Secondly the UK's YOTs use a multi-agency approach to youth delinquency[59] and coordinate the work of various organisations to help young offenders desist from crime.[60] It therefore seems sensible to examine the responses of staff in as many of them as possible. Thirdly, interviewing people across different *milieus* prevents "individual worker or service bias"[61] and enables the comparison of professional discourses across diverse settings.

Since my study draws on the accounts of a small number of professionals, its findings are not necessarily representative of institutional responses across the UK. However, their generalizability might not be as limited as it appears. I stopped interviewing additional participants in line with the "principle of saturation"[62] when the same topics kept emerging and I thought I had a "'good enough' understanding"[63] of my research question. Although local and structural factors can interplay adversely within particular institutions, interviews with practitioners in their professional capacities across a range of agencies can provide data on institutions as *organisational forms per se*, regardless of where they are located.[64]

4. Results

4.1 Professional perceptions on the intersections between social class, parenting and youth deviance

According to *Simons, Simons & Hancock*, professionals that work with troubling young people mainly draw on social learning perspectives, the GTC, and developmental criminology when trying to explain how parents affect their children's conduct.[65] In parallel, the practitioners in my study used developmental psychology and theories on the intergenerational transmission of crime[66] to interpret the connections between childrearing and youth delinquency. However, they neither followed *Farrington*'s recommendation to avoid focusing only on individual and familial risk factors, nor did they adequately acknowledge the social context of both parenting and offending:[67]

> I think social class does make a huge difference. I think it would be crazy to pretend that it didn't. Sometimes, when I see what people are struggling with, I think 'God, would I manage to live in that sort of environment or to move house really often or to just never have enough money?' So I think that being comfortable makes everything much easier. There's no doubt about that. But I also think that there are certain things in terms of attitudes…and I suppose empathy and self-awareness can go a long way in any

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58 *Paternoster & Iovanni* 1989, p. 374.
59 *Muncie* 2015, pp. 292— 294.
60 *Muncie* 2015, pp. 292— 294.
61 *Morris* 2013, p. 200.
62 *Bachman & Schutt* 2011, p. 275.
63 *Noaks & Wincup* 2004, p. 70.
64 *Smith* 2005, p. 42— 43.
65 *Simons, Simons & Hancock* 2011, pp.175— 194.
66 *Besemer* 2014, p. 79.
67 *Farrington* 2002, p. 144— 148.

> circumstances. You can go into biological explanations, social explanations, but, ultimately, it's each individual case. Going back to the whole parenting thing. I think that early experiences as an infant are absolutely huge for young people.
>
> (YOT worker 3)

Gillies has posited that decontextualised attachment and developmental explanations of delinquency can help perpetuate a deterministic perception of childrearing, namely that parents with less resources and social capital cannot provide their children with secure attachments, so, in some predominantly working-class families, both delinquency and bad parenting are transferred from one generation to another.[68] Similarly, the experts in my research talked about damaged parental bonds in a child's formative years, but, unexpectedly, rarely considered the ways in which other events in a young person's life[69] and their relationships outside the family might influence their delinquent pathway or, conversely, could contribute to their desistance. In addition, their views usually disregarded possible intervening circumstances that could affect both the child's behaviour and their parents' childrearing, namely parental stress, lack of resources, inappropriate housing, or other indicators of class.[70]

> When I worked within youth offending, I started asking — every time I went to see a parent — 'How was your bond when he was a baby?' And I lost count…I'd say that 99% of them said 'It was really difficult. I didn't really bond in the first place. He cried a lot and she did this…and I had a really hard time.' I know there's a lot of research about the attachment that's not in place in years 0-2. I mean it's probably reversible to some extent, but I'm not sure. It amazed me how many young people that were being really aggressive and violent, and were involved in youth offending have had a really rough time with their parents for the first few years.
>
> (parenting specialist)

In addition, the interviewees rarely considered other sources of influence such as peers, law enforcement professionals and youth justice officials[71] in the development of deviance, but agreed that most troubled children learn challenging behaviour from their parents.[72] Nevertheless, their narratives were often conflicting since most of them believed that young people from middle-class families, who have experienced adequate upbringing, also transgress but their wrongdoings remain invisible:

> I think the view that youth crime is limited to the lower classes oversimplifies a complex reality. I think that those who are better off have a better way of keeping bad things beyond the noses of agencies, so it's like white-collar or elite crime in adults. Probably, a lot of it bears a resemblance to burglars from the local council estates, but the scrutiny just isn't there or the state's response to it is more permissive. Or it can be hidden easily. As with offending generally, I think that those with a deprived background are more likely to come to the attention of agencies. For a variety of reasons… They're going to be picked up and identified. That might be prompted by problematic behaviour on the part of their children, but they don't have the resources to access services that can help without statutory

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[68] *Gillies* 2012, pp. 97— 100.
[69] *Besemer* 2014, p. 80.
[70] *Besemer* 2014, p. 93.
[71] *Besemer* 2014, p. 79.
[72] *Simons, Simons & Hancock* 2011, p.177.

agencies getting involved and imposing help.

(YOT worker 1)

Furthermore, while *McAra & McVie* have found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds get propelled into the youth justice system through continuous system contact,[73] my research participants also believed that police officers and other law-enforcement officials perceive deviance differently in affluent youths, so they treat them more leniently. This helps divert troubling middle-class children away from statutory agencies, predominantly into the private sector and into realms other than youth justice:

> These first-time entrants are going in who are unable to represent themselves well because they are chaotic, homeless, "looked after" [by the local authority] or they've got mental health issues, so they turn up looking unkempt... You know because they don't have any smart clothes and mum couldn't be bothered and hasn't fed them that morning or they've had a massive row at home … They are stressed about a court appearance, so of course they're not gonna come across well and they're gonna be difficult and belligerent. I think young people who are able to show up in court, dressed smartly and who are able to answer well in court, are also less likely to be punished than young people who don't have the ability or the capacity to do that. There have been cases when we have seen young people walk away with a much lighter sentence because they've been able to do that. Yeah, it feels unfair.
>
> (YOT worker 2)

It therefore becomes apparent that the professionals in my study were aware of the structural circumstances that can shape family life on a daily basis and the possibly biased decision-making across law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary. In addition, they also believed that parents' social capital could play an important role in the desistance processes of young delinquents:

> He could go wrong and he did go wrong and his parents were always there to pick him up and he'd just start again. You wouldn't have that possibility in an economically less developed family. If you're affluent and get it wrong, someone, usually your parents, will rescue you. And that's not emotional support - 'You'll be safe'- because you get that kind of support in disadvantaged families as well. It's a financial and very practical thing… 'If you get into financial or whatever problems, I will help.' So it's not the emotional part, but the financial one, when you know you can survive…Even if you have massive problems or just a gap of a couple of months, a year…
>
> (youth worker 1)

However, despite their social awareness, a number of practitioners focused predominantly on the correlation between parenting styles and the development of a young person's behaviour when they talked about youth deviance. This was not surprising since a complex understanding of the impacts of class — and the forms of capital that determine it — on a youngster's trajectory is currently still absent in their initial assessment within the youth justice system:

> In the core Asset [youth justice assessment tool], we to try and capture some information, but it's mostly related to whether the family is on benefits or not, which isn't necessarily a

[73] *McAra & McVie* 2007, pp. 337— 338

> good indicator. It's not the same as talking about the educational level of parents or their socioeconomic status and, in fact, I think that we, as a routine, don't record that information. There's nowhere in our system that we capture that. We capture other issues about diversity in terms of gender or ethnicity...But in terms of thinking about deprivation or a parent having aspirations for their children – educationally and occupationally...I mean, our primary focus is working with individuals.
>
> (YOT worker 1)

Secondly, youth justice interventions within which young people are dealt with seem to be designed in socially decontextualised ways, which has also been reported by other researchers in the UK. *Gray*, for example, has shown that young offenders' difficulties are addressed through individualised cognitive behavioural programmes that intend to help them understand themselves and control their own conduct. [74] As a consequence, practitioners often ascribe young people's challenging behaviour to their disrespectful attitudes, while the problems that their families are facing seem to be sidelined.[75] The practitioners that I interviewed also spoke about individual-focused programmes:

> At the moment, we've received training about sort of psychological skills in working with young people. This has given us quite a good knowledge about attachment and trauma and being able to unpick that with young people. So, that's been quite good. We can use CBT and talk to young people and help them understand how other people have affected them to increase their ability to cope…to get them to regulate their emotions.
>
> (YOT worker 3)

If the overarching aim of youth justice is to encourage young offenders to desist, the analysis above begs the question of whether it is even possible to speak about a unified experience of growing out of crime for children across all backgrounds that are adversely equipped with economic, social and cultural capital. I therefore use the next section to explore the possible classed consequences of both the perceptions of practitioners as well as the rationale of programmes that are currently in place for young offenders. I examine their likely impacts on young people's identities and on the decisions that institutions make about their troubling behaviour. I also consider the effects of these processes on young people's future offending and on their desistance.

4.2 Professional perceptions, institutional responses and their impacts on offending and desistance pathways

In his work on distinction, *Bourdieu* argued that differences in manner are acquired within the household and applied adversely outside the familial setting as well as valued distinctively by others across a range of social contexts.[76] Standards of conduct that are obtained within the family thus become distinctive "markers of class" in institutional settings, dependent on whether or not they play out as

[74] *Gray* 2013, p. 520.
[75] *Gray* 2013, p. 518.
[76] *Bourdieu* 2010, pp. 58— 59.

culturally legitimate in professional interactions.[77] It therefore seems important to contextualise how the above presented professional perceptions and the working practices within youth justice could impact upon the ways in which practitioners interpret family-rooted, but socially-conditioned, behaviours of challenging young people. In this task, it is also crucial to think about whether similar professional stances and organisational processes might be influencing the same young people throughout their life course and the possible cumulative consequences for their offending and desistance pathways.

In her study of pupils at risk of exclusion,[78] *Gillies* has found that children's emotional literacy has become hugely important in the UK's educational setting, while, at the same time, schools rarely acknowledge that its levels might be socially and culturally conditioned.[79] Based on her findings, *Gillies* has concluded that encouraging young people to express "socially appropriate thoughts"[80] presents another classed exercise and exposes all of the pupils who cannot do so calmly and eloquently.[81] As a consequence, schools often label young people's poor behaviour as "psychologically immature"[291] and "pathological,"[82] while largely disregarding the reasons behind their emotional excesses, so the social disadvantages of families remain sidelined and become normalized.[83]

Furthermore, *Robinson* has critiqued a youth justice system that operates mainly on the individual level and sidelines structural circumstances as well as disregards the importance of viable relationships between families and the professionals that work with them.[84] She has suggested that, within such an individualised micro setting, practitioners' actions and their interactions with young offenders could exacerbate families' vulnerabilities and intensify the criminogenic factors that derive from their disadvantage at a macro level, rather than prevent them.[85] *Gillies* and *Robinson's* findings, in parallel with *McAra & McVie's* work on the onset of offending pathways,[86] thus suggest that similar class-conditioned labelling practices might derive from the functioning of institutions that deal with youth troubling behaviour at different levels, which could have criminologically significant outcomes.

Back in 1972, *Lemert* concluded that continuous labelling, even if unintended and repeated in good faith, could have secondary deviance effects and might trigger offending if internalised by the designated individual.[87] Furthermore, *Matsueda* has

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77 *Bourdieu* 2010, p. 59.
78 *Gillies* 2011.
79 *Gillies* 2011, p. 185.
80 *Gillies* 2011, p. 192.
81 *Gillies* 2011, p. 197.
82 *Gillies* 2011, pp. 194— 195.
83 *Gillies* 2011, p. 201.
84 *Robinson* 2016.
85 *Robinson* 2016, p. 21.
86 *McAra & McVie* 2012b, p. 374.
87 *Lemert* 1972.

argued that the reactions of others and their projection to the self as "reflected appraisals" can trigger delinquent behaviour.[88] Therefore, not paying enough attention to structural circumstances and frequently attributing the label of "troublemaker" based on superficial observations of problematic conduct within an institutional setting could become a standalone "cause and consequence"[89] of deviance.

Moreover, (over)reacting to children's challenging behaviour might — even if well intended — result in exclusionary practices or lesser expectations from troubling youths, both of which could contribute to their offending. In the US, criminologists have exposed school exclusions as one of the processes through which some young people might be criminalized in the web between public schools and the youth justice system.[90] Furthermore *Kupchik, Green & Mowen's* research has shown that formal differences between punitive practices in the US and UK's needs-focused school disciplinary discourse[91] play out similarly in practice, as they result in near-equal exclusion rates and an overrepresentation of disadvantaged pupils therein.[92] In addition, *Savolainen et al.* have argued that exclusions marginalise young people and prepare them for occupations that are not in high demand in post-industrial countries. This could become a contributing lead towards offending pathways either independently[93] or, according to *Briggs*, through young people embracing the "street culture" of similarly vulnerable peers.[94]

Since young people from underprivileged backgrounds are overrepresented in official exclusion statistics, it is important to consider whether and how prior class-conditioned circumstances in their lives could impact upon their misbehavior in schools and across other institutions.[95] As children's troubling behaviour might trigger less tolerant professional attitudes and the latter could, in return, affect desistance from deviance in young people, I conclude with proposing alternative ways of contextualising the links between parenting, delinquency and class within youth justice. I also touch upon the role of law enforcement and other agencies that deal with young people in trouble to highlight their possible effect on growing out of crime.

5. Conclusion

Although social class may seem like a relic of the past, exploring professional perceptions of — and institutional responses to — youth deviance and parenting reveals possible covert mechanisms through which it might play out as a real lived experience. In criminological research, analysing the implications of class in the

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88 *Matsueda* 1992, pp. 1602— 1604.
89 *Matsueda* 1992, p. 1603.
90 *Meiners* 2013.
91 *Kupchik, Green & Mowen* 2015, p. 11.
92 *Kupchik, Green & Mowen* 2015, pp. 14— 16.
93 *Savolainen et al.* 2013, p. 610.
94 *Briggs* 2010.
95 *Williamson & Cullingford* 2003.

relationship between parents and their children on one side and the interactions of both with institutions on the other, seems relevant to help disentangle the extent to which delinquency could be attributed to poor parenting or, rather, labelling of children's troubles and their parents' childrearing across organisations based on the family's social location. In addition, to design viable desistance programmes for young offenders in the future, it is crucial to understand the links between social factors, family life and the development of juvenile offending holistically, especially in the UK context.

According to *Walkerdine*, there remains a particular public perception of disadvantage in Britain, namely that the undeserving stay impoverished due to their intrinsically flawed lifestyles, inclusive of improper parenting, as well as their unconformity, including criminality.[96] Since this notion has provided the "material and discursive conditions under which lives (…) [have been] led"[97] throughout British history, it has resulted in intergenerational insecurity for the families that are classified as unworthy.[98] Based on this reasoning, *Walkerdine* has concluded that it is not the bad habits of working class families or their damaged relationships *per se* that are passed down from generation to generation, but, rather, their embodied suffering.[99] Therefore, responses to youth deviance and parenting should not focus only on behaviour as it is but a symptom of the lived experience of class.[100]

In addition, *Besemer, Farrington & Bijleveld* have found that there is no real transmission of criminal behaviour from parents to their children[101] since criminal justice institutions and law-enforcement officials are biased against children of convicted parents as well as, independently and statistically significantly, those from low-income families.[102] As criminality is not only transmitted through failed childrearing, but also through an intergenerational exposure of some families to official bias,[103] practitioners' explanations that draw predominantly on simplified attachment theory and intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour might be preventing a more nuanced understanding of how the effects of social class are intertwined with the impacts of parenting and how both, jointly, influence the formation and continuation of — as well as the desistance from — deviance in children.

Although classed institutional practices are not the only significant factor in shaping the pathways to and from delinquency, as social mobility and diverse personalities of individuals[104] should also be acknowledged, the "bogeymen"[105]

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96 *Walkerdine* 2015, p. 171.
97 *Walkerdine* 2015, p. 169.
98 *Walkerdine* 2015, p. 168.
99 *Walkerdine* 2015, pp. 174— 174.
100 *Walkerdine* 2015, pp. 171-172.
101 *Besemer, Farrington & Bijleveld* 2013, p. 438.
102 *Besemer, Farrington & Bijleveld* 2013, p. 448
103 *Besemer* 2014, p. 79.
104 *Cohen* 1955, pp. 104— 105.
105 *Maruna* 2001, p. 5.

stigma of offending is persistent and certain families are repeatedly perceived as "'doomed' to deviance".[106] In addition, desistance is not only an internal process of restorying, [107] but is also embedded in social relations and thus inevitably interactional.[108] Within education and youth justice, institutional discourses and professional interactions therefore provide significant "formal (…) auspices of storytelling" that restrict some parents and children in constructing the identities that they "choose to live by."[109] In addition, class still seems to be a "deep reservoir (…) of self-construction resources" [110] as responsible parenting and suitable behaviour are culturally determined according to middle-class standards.[111]

Individualised strategies, within which young people and their parents are encouraged to negotiate new (or revitalize previous) non-deviant identities or enhance their self-esteem could thus be standardizing the ability to be "artfully agentic" [112] based on the experiences of individuals that are equipped with economic, social and cultural capital. As working-class families struggle with numerous day-to-day concerns,[113] their willingness and ability to change through socially decontextualized, albeit welfare-oriented, programmes could restrain their identity (re)formation. To enable socially more equal pathways to desistence and adulthood, a multi-agency approach to delinquency should not only balance justice and welfare in theory,[114] but should also consider how to ensure procedurally fair encounters of young people and their parents with the institutions that address their problems on the ground.

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[106] *Maruna* 2001, p. 166.
[107] *Kirkwood* 2015, pp. 233— 234.
[108] *Kirkwood* 2015, pp. 233— 234.
[109] *Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F.* 2000, p. 105.
[110] *Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F.* 2000, p. 105.
[111] *Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F.* 2000, p. 105.
[112] *Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F.* 2000, p. 12.
[113] *Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F.* 2000, p. 105.
[114] *Muncie* 2015, pp. 265— 299.

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