

Motivating and Maintaining Desistance from Crime:

Male Aboriginal Serial Offenders'
Experience of 'Going Good'

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Doctor of Philosophy,
of the Australian National University

Candidate's declaration

Except as acknowledged in the text, the work presented in this thesis is my own original research and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree or diploma at this or any other tertiary institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katherine Maree Sullivan', with a small dot at the end of the signature.

Katherine Maree Sullivan

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Abstract

Aboriginal people are over represented in prison in Australia, being 13 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people. Repeat offenders make up a high proportion of the Aboriginal prison population, yet most repeat offenders eventually cease offending or desist from crime. Why do they stop? The process of desistance is complex, non-linear and varies between individuals. North American and British studies report the role of structure and, more latterly, cognition and agency in desistance and re-formation of offender identities. Few of these studies examine the context, particularly the cultural context, of desisters and desistance. This thesis uses anthropological and ethnographic approaches to present and analyse the life narratives of Aboriginal men from north-western New South Wales who have been repeat offenders and are now 'going good' (i.e. have ceased offending). Concepts of agency (and its temporal orientations), cultural schemas and figured worlds are applied. The stories of the early lives of participants and the views of community members paint the backdrop of offence, desistance, identity formation and re-formation. The agentic role of the motivating cultural schemas of fatherhood, life partnership, committed kin and respected man are found to operate in the initiation of desistance as men consider ontological security and extricate themselves from the figured world of repeat offender. The interplay of contingency and capacity is critical in the maintenance of desistance, with shortfalls in the individual's capacity sometimes being bolstered by spousal and family support. The thesis examines the role and interaction of Aboriginal and offender identity in desistance and maps the repeated expression of the underlying value of 'looking after' family and kin, and in this context the role of post-release occupation in desistance is critically examined. Continuity of aspects of identity are discovered to be critical in achieving desistance and paradoxically, achieving continuity often involves innovation in relationships with kin and/or in expression of the moral value of 'looking after' or 'caring for' (kin).

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Glossary

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal refers to the people who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of mainland Australia. It does not include Torres Strait Islander people. See Indigenous
Abstudy	An Australian Government allowance for Indigenous secondary or tertiary students or full-time Australian apprentices.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
Big gaol	‘Big gaol’ is the term commonly used to refer to adult prison.
BOCSAR	Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research
Boys homes	Colloquial term for juvenile detention
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). CDEP is an Australian Government funded program for unemployed Indigenous people in remote locations
Centrelink payments	Centrelink is an agency of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services. It provides a range of payments and services
Circle sentencing	An alternative sentencing program which involves members of Aboriginal communities in the sentencing of Aboriginal offenders
Community Working Party	Most towns in the Murdi Paaki Region have Community Working Parties representing the different Aboriginal demographic groups and community organisations. There is also a Working Party in Dubbo to progress matters in partnership with the general community. The Murdi Paaki Region was an ATSIC region in Western NSW.
Detox	Detoxification
DoCS	Department of Community Services (NSW)
Dry out	Colloquial term for a drug and/or alcohol rehabilitation centre.
DV	Domestic violence
GBH	Grievous Bodily Harm
‘going good’ or ‘doing real good’	Local expression for ‘staying out of trouble (with police)’ or having been out of trouble for some time.
Housing Commission	Now ‘Housing NSW’ but still commonly referred to as ‘the Housing Commission’. This is the provider of public housing in NSW, i.e. subsidised, publicly-owned housing, also called ‘Commission Houses’
Indigenous people	The term refers to Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people collectively. The term ‘Aboriginal people’ does not include Torres Strait Islander people.
ICS	Intensive Court Supervision

Kinship terminology	See section following
Koori	Term for ‘Aboriginal person’ used by some Aboriginal groups in parts of NSW and Victoria, for instance the Wiradjuri in the west and central west refer to themselves as Kooris
Lifers	Prisoners serving ‘life sentences’.
Link-up	Organisation providing services (counselling and kin tracing) to ‘Stolen Generations’ members. http://www.linkupnsw.org.au/
LDS	Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna 2001)
Mission	(see Reserve)
Mish	Colloquial usage for Mission (see Reserve)
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey. This survey was conducted throughout Australia during April to July 1994 by the Bureau of Statistics ,
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. This survey is conducted every six years by the Bureau of Statistics and compliments the NATSIS.
NSW	New South Wales, an Australian state.
OPK	Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin, which means “learning to become a protector and provider for the community”, is a program run in Manitoba, Canada for a particular group of Canadian Aboriginal ex-offenders (Deane <i>et al.</i> 2007:127)
OxyContin	OxyContin (oxycodone) is an opioid pain reliever used to treat moderate to severe pain. It is often used by heroine addicts.
Reserve	Missions and reserves are small Aboriginal settlements on the outskirts or within a short distance (5-10 kilometres) of towns. Originally settled in 19 th or early 20 th century, many still exist in NSW under the ownership of Local Aboriginal Land Councils. Local people will refer to them as ‘the mission’ or ‘the Mish’ depending upon their history. In the interests of disguising locations and therefore identities, I use the term ‘reserve’ to refer to all of them.
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. (Commonwealth of Australia 1991)
TAFE	Department of Technical and Further Education. This is the (state run) major provider of vocational education
Yarndi	Marijuana, cannabis
Yetta Dhinnakkal	Yetta Dhinnakkal Centre is a NSW Corrective Services Department minimum security institution for Aboriginal males, located in north-western NSW, 800 km from Sydney.

Kinship terms

M Mother

F Father

S Son

D Daughter

B Brother

Z Sister

W Female spousal partner

H Male spousal partner

These terms are used in combination to describe relationships, for example:

FZ Father's sister

FBS Father's brother's son

FMM Father's mother's mother

MMZSD Mother's mother's sister's sons's daughter

A note about style

Because I wished to maintain as much of the ‘voice’ of participants as possible, single quotation marks have been used to denote colloquial expressions and particular terms or meanings, while double quotation marks have been used for short direct quotes, whether verbal or from text.

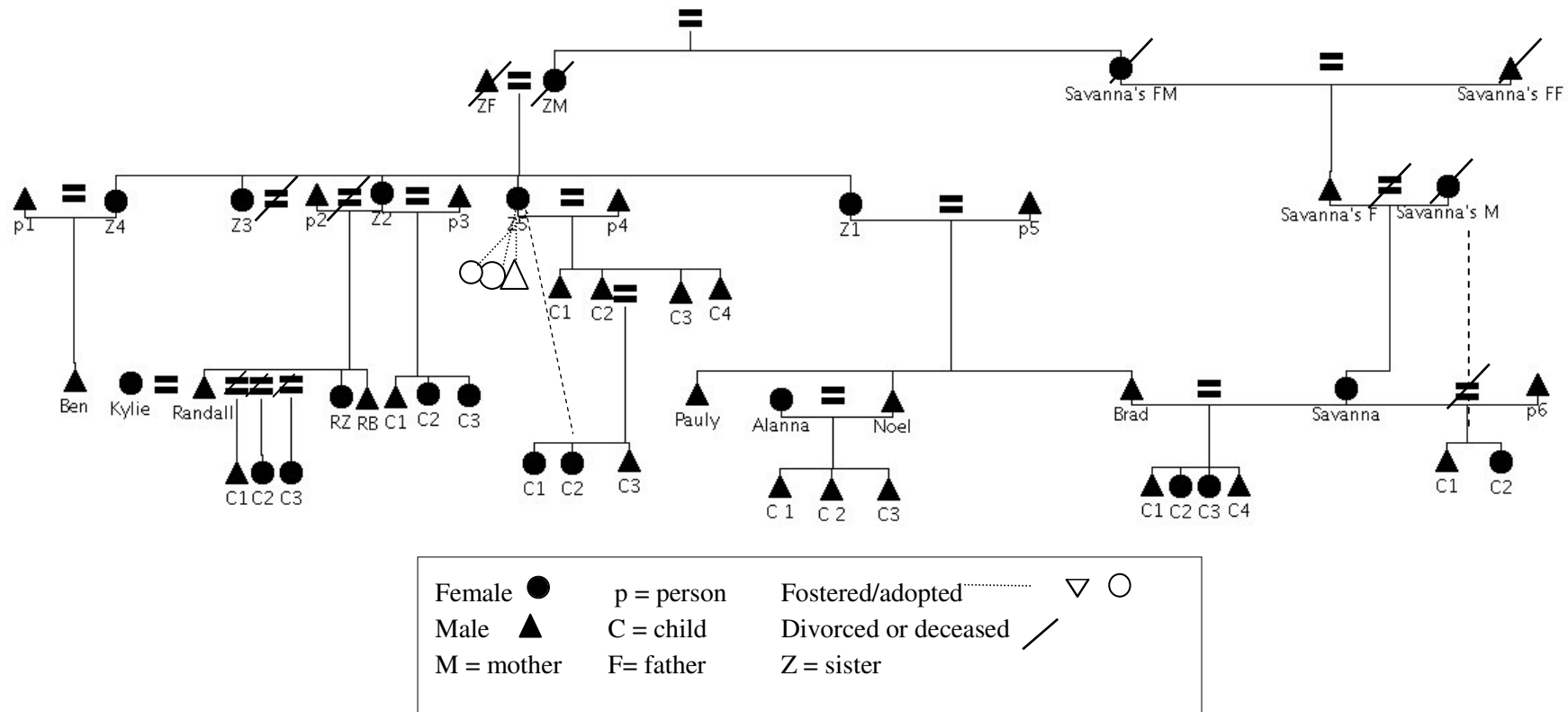
Text quotes more than five lines long are in indented block text and longer voice quotations are in indented block italics with no quotation marks. Interviewer questions and comments are in bold italics.

Key people (alphabetical order)

Name	Main ref	Age 2010	Key relationships	Key features of narrative
Aethan	Ch 5	40	Kylie (W) Allan (S)	3-4, father left; 7-10, stealing 13-14, juvenile detention 15, mother murdered 18, met his biological father in gaol 19-24, 7 year sentence for assault 26-33, 7 year sentence for assault, life in danger by end of this term 33, met Kylie, then 6 months “on protection”; starts a family 38, stops drinking alcohol 39, drug rehabilitation
Allan	Ch 5	21	Aethan (F) Unnamed (W) and child	Visited in juvenile detention by estranged father Aethan Did ICS program Nearly run over by truck Influenced by “good policeman”
Ben	Ch 5	40	Randall is MZ ₂ S Noel and Brad are MZ ₁ S	Repeated driving offences
Brad	Ch 4 Ch 6 Ch 7	26	Savanna (W) Noel (B) Randall (MZ ₂ S))	10, father died, mother started drinking, neglecting children 13, expelled from school year 7 14-18, 3 times in Juvenile detention 16, met Savanna, 19 first child 18-21, all birthdays in gaol 21-25, no offences, mostly working 26, nine months for assault
Daryl	Ch 5 Fig 7.1	34	Gail (W)	Heroin, then alcohol, scared of waking up not knowing what he had done Main motivation: partner
David	Fig 7.1	37	Charlene (W)	22 - 25, several sentences for assault DV 25, Met Charlene, an older women, strongly affiliated with land issues of their language group 28 both stopped drinking 33 traineeship, then job
Dean	Ch 4 Ch 5	35	Unnamed (W)	15, lived alone looking after siblings 19, gaol, alcohol and assault Main motivation: children
Eddie	Ch 5	43	Unnamed (W)	Alcohol and family violence Job working with Aboriginal culture
Jack	Fig 7.1	37	Merrily (W)	Was a ‘colleague’ (in crime) of Mick’s, used heroin 18 met Merrily 20, 9 months gaol, many robberies not caught 22, birth of child changed his life, got a job Now sees little of cousins, works at community controlled organisation and studying Certificate 4 level.

Kyle	Ch 4 Ch 6	31	Not named	15mths, mother left 2-7 lived mostly with Auntie (FZ) called 'Mum' 7-12 oscillated between (FZ) and (FM) 14 met partner, mother of children 15 expulsion, intermittent juvenile detention, gaol, drugs 24, rehabilitation, AA, found apprenticeship by chance 25, tradesman's job
Mick	Ch 4 Ch 6 Ch 7	36	Suzie (W) Jason ('F') June (step-M) Stuart (FB) Sarah (FBW)	2, mother left; 16, Jason moved away, Mick found out Jason not his biological father 18-28, more in gaol than out 26, met Suzie while in gaol 30, rock-bottom and rehabilitation 32, found out about course of study by chance, manages relationships with cousins 34 found out about job by chance
Noel	Ch 4 Ch 6 Ch 7	27	Alanna (W) Brad (B) Randall (MZ ₂ S)	11, father died, mother started drinking, neglecting children 14-20, all birthdays in gaol 21, met Alanna
Randall	Ch 4 Ch 5	40	Kristi (W) Noel (MZ ₁ S) Brad (MZ ₁ S) Ben (MZ ₄ S)	12/13, mother left, father in rel'shp with (MZ ₃) and mostly absent 13-18, juvenile detention 5-6 times 18, heavy drugs, 18-30 in and out of gaol 24, stabbed in gaol 30, gaol classification changed from B to A 32, "got together with Kristi" 37, methadone program
Ray	Ch 5	39	Unnamed (W)	Catalyst was 'brief intervention' re alcohol consumption. Main motivation: children
Ricky	Ch 5 Fig 7.1	21	Julie (W)	14/15, break and enter, expelled, 17, break and enters, met Julie Juvenile detention when nearly 18, Rehabilitation, traineeship, main carer
Robbie	Ch 5	48	Unnamed (W)	Alcohol and family violence Met up with his son in gaol Trained to be offender delegate
Terry	Ch 5	45	Unnamed (ex-W)	Stabbed his partner Advice from 'lifers' Main motivation: children Recruiting young to football

Noel, Brad, Randall and Ben kinship diagram



Mick's family kinship diagram

