Chapter 6

How might faith communities promote desistance from sexual crime? An exploration of theory

by

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Abstract

This chapter considers a number of theories that help our understanding of the desistance process for those convicted of sexual offending; in particular it contemplates how a faith, or a religious context might serve as a mechanism to help foster a process of desistance. The chapter first briefly outlines the current rehabilitation landscape highlighting why there is a need to consider informal rehabilitation approaches such as those available in faith communities. Following this, the Good Lives Model (GLM) is presented and serves as a foundation to support the case that a religious context may help promote the desistance process for those convicted of sexual offending. Following this, a range of theories from the desistance literature are also included. In conclusion, when knitted together, GLM and desistance theories are strengthened and support the notion that informal structures (such as religious communities) ought to be capitalised upon and used in conjunction with formal risk management measures.

It is without doubt that the prevention of sexual abuse must be a priority for all in society. While it is unacceptable that abuse occurs in the first place, it is perhaps an even greater travesty when sexual abuse takes place by those already known and managed by the authorities. Sexual reconviction rates range approximately between 4% to 12% following a period of five years (Helmus, Hanson, Thornton, Babchishin, & Harris, 2012), and when compared to other types of crime are relatively low. However, such facts will be of little comfort to those who are re-victimised. Thus, for criminal justice agencies, the prevention of sexual recidivism is a primary aim.

The means by which this aim is achieved, has traditionally involved the application of formal court mandated controls. Methods of external control remove the individual from society through incarceration (prison or secure hospital). Across England and Wales, prison sentences for adults convicted of sexual offending range from anything up to one year and life imprisonment (*Sexual Offences Definitive Guideline*, 2014). While prison serves as one method of control, community controls require people to engage with requirements that aim to rehabilitate and prevent further harm ("Criminal Justice Act (c.44)," 2003); these include for example; supervision with a probation officer, drug rehabilitation order, or attending an offending behaviour treatment program. Other requirements, serve mainly to control, and include (this list is not exhaustive) the requirement to: live in a specific place of residence; disclose intimate relationships; adhere to curfew; register personal details (bank and passport); unannounced home visits; polygraph testing; electronic monitoring; and other restrictions such as access to the Internet (Thomas, 2010). The effectiveness of such requirements are arguably poor (Socia & Rydberg, 2016) and result in many unintended consequences such as: homelessness (Levenson, Ackerman, Socia, & Harris, 2015); family breakdown (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007); unemployment, inadequate support (Levenson & Hern, 2007); and stress and psychological trauma (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009). These consequences should be of concern, because our criminal justice systems ought to deliver justice and not additional harm (Ward, Gannon, & Birgden, 2007) yet, factors such as, unemployment, poor social

support, low self-control, and antisocial attitudes are causally related to sexual recidivism (Andrews & James, 2016).

It is worth noting at this juncture, there are some individuals in society who are either mentally incapacitated, wholly resistant to change, or are committed to pursue the sexual abuse and harm of others. It is without doubt, these people must be prevented from committing crime and as such, control strategies are likely the only option available in these cases. However, most people convicted of sexual offending are capable and willing to change, indeed most do not go on to commit further crime (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005); instead, over time risk decreases (Hanson, Harris, Helmus, & Thornton, 2014). Thus, when working to both prevent recidivism and ensure people who are committed to change, are reintegrated back into society safely, criminal justice agencies have a duty to do so in a way that is both effective and ethical.

Across England and Wales, Police, Probation, and Prisons have lead responsibility for the management of people convicted of sexual crime ("Criminal Justice Act (sections 325 to 327)," 2003). However, those serving a sentence in the community for committing a sexual crime spend very little, relative time, interacting with professionals in the criminal justice system; when compared with time spent outside of these activities. This may be surprising, but under ever increasing pressures placed on public sector services, it is a reality, rather than choice, that correctional practitioners have less opportunity to engage on a one-to-one basis with their clients (DeMichele & Payne, 2018). This is not to say public bodies do not manage clients effectively; rather alternative resources ought to be sought within the community to help support and promote desistance. Indeed, it is argued that "desistance occurs independently of the actions of correctional personnel" (Laws & Ward, 2011, p. 204), practitioners have little impact on the process (Farrall, Hunter, Sharpe, & Calverley, 2014), and at best can really only assist people to desist (King, 2013). Thus, to support criminal justice professionals eliminate sexual recidivism and effectively restore people safely back into the community, existing alternative community strategies such as religious communities, must be

explored. We, therefore, turn to a range of theories that provide the scaffolding needed to explain how an effective and permanent desistance process can be achieved by those convicted of sexual offending, beyond formal criminal justice arrangements.

The Good Lives Model (GLM)

The GLM is a strengths-based model of rehabilitation. It is capacity building in that it supports the development of a person's knowledge, skills, and experiences, so they may live a meaningful, crime free, life (Ward & Stewart, 2003). The GLM provides a rehabilitation framework that serves to guide clinicians and their clients through a therapeutic process of rehabilitation, promoting personal goods and reducing risk (Ward & Maruna, 2007). At its core is the value of human dignity, universal human rights, and the principle of agency (Ward & Gannon, 2006). Although much of the research in relation to the GLM has been undertaken with people convicted of sexual offending, the model is a general rehabilitation theory.

The model states that "as humans beings, sexual offenders are goal directed organisms who are predisposed to seek a number of primary goods" (Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006, p. 303). Primary goods (developed after extensive exploration of philosophical, psychological, social, biological, anthropological research) are best described as states of mind, characteristics, or experiences, and include at least eleven human goods including:

> "1) life (including healthy living and functioning); 2) knowledge (how well informed one feels about things that are important to them); 3) excellence in play (hobbies and recreational pursuits); 4) excellence in work (including mastery experiences); 5) excellence in agency (autonomy and self-directed this); 6) inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress); 7) relatedness (including intimate romantic and familial relationships); 8) community (connection to a wider social group); 9) spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life); 10) pleasure (the state of

happiness or feeling good in the here and now); and 11) creativity (expressing oneself to alternative forms)" (Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011, p. 7)

The model articulates that in our efforts to secure primary goods, we draw on secondary goods as a means of achieving these. It is the application of secondary goods that are of particular interest for offending behaviour as those who engage in crime do so through the adoption of maladaptive or inappropriate secondary goods in the pursuit of primary goods (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Thus, through one to one assessment and case formulation, clinicians support clients to consider and engage in viable prosocial non-offending lifestyles, developing an adaptive identity (Ward & Maruna, 2007). It is likely that many clients will face internal and external obstacles. Some may lack balance, or have a conflict in the priorities of the primary goods they seek, others may use inappropriate strategies that have led to offending, or lack the capacity or capability to put their life plan in place (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007). It is for clinicians and practitioners to help them address some of these problems (Ward & Gannon, 2006).

When developing a good life plan a religious community might be an appropriate means by which the primary goods of 'knowledge', 'inner peace', 'relatedness', 'community', 'spirituality', 'pleasure', and 'creativity' are achieved. Yet, very few studies, have examined the role of a faith community for those convicted of sexual offending and so empirical evidence is weak. In one study examining the experiences of four men living in the community while convicted for sexual offending, Kewley, Larkin, Harkins, and Beech (2016), found through the engagement of a religious group, participants gained a sense of inner peace and pleasure. It was not the authors' aim to explore the GLM or any of its particular primary goods, but emergent themes were linked. Likewise, Kewley, Larkin, Harkins, and Beech (2018) reported that through the engagement of religious groups while in prison, participants gained a sense of community, belonging, and purpose. Arguably, in their examination of seven people identifying as Buddhists while incarcerated for a sexual offence, Bell, Winder, and Blagden (2018) found participants experienced the primary good of inner peace and knowledge. Again it was

not the author's intention to examine primary goods, specifically however, participants reported through the practice of Buddhism their sense of self and place in the world improved.

One of the GLMs strengths is its empirical strength from a psychological perspective; however, it is empirically limited from a social and structural position. We, therefore, turn to the desistance literature to help address this gap.

Desistance Theories

Essentially, like the GLM, desistance is a strengths-based approach, conceptualised as a process bound by both agentic and structural factors. The process is best defined as one in which the individual ceases to commit crime following three phases: a primary phase in which crime ceases; followed by a secondary phase in which long-term desistance occurs as the individual adopts a non-offending identity and prosocial behaviours (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004); and finally a tertiary phase, the desister becomes integrated into a community experiencing genuine belonging (McNeill, 2014). This process is not necessarily linear; people move in and out of the process, desisting and persisting in crime, often, during the first phase of the process, for long periods.

Desistance itself is not a theory but rather an approach incorporating several criminological and psychological theories. Weaver (2015) classifies these into four broad areas, for brevity, only a handful is listed in Table 1. for a detailed discussion see an excellent discussion by Weaver (2015).

Table 1. Broad classification of desistance theories and key theorists

Broad classification	Individual theories	Theorists
Individual and agentic	The Age Crime Curve	Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)
		Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington (1988)
	RCT	Clarke and Cornish (1985)
		Cornish and Clarke (1987)
		Paternoster and Bushway (2009)
Social and structural	Social Learning theories/Differential Association	Bandura (1978)
		Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill (1995)
	Informal social control (marriage, parenthood, employment, religion)	Laub and Sampson (2001)
		Hirschi (1969)
Interactionist	Narrative Identity and	Maruna (2001)

	Cognitive Identity Transformation	Farrall, Bottoms, and Shapland (2010)
		Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, and Seffrin (2008)
		Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002)
Situational	Temporal and spatial dimensions	Farrall et al. (2014)
		Flynn (2011)

These classifications are used through the remainder of this chapter to frame selected theories and their application to the notion that a religious community might support the desistance process. The organisation of this section is not indicative of any order or priority of factors or theory; indeed, the process of desistance likely involves all four classifications and multiple theories occurring both independent of each other as well as at times dependent and simultaneous.

Individual and agentic

Maturation or age-graded theorists argue that people simply grow up and grow out of crime, a combination of biological and mental changes mean that people just stop offending (Glueck & Glueck, 1950). Understanding the role of ageing for those convicted of sexual offending is limited (Lussier & Healey, 2009), however, the risk of sexual recidivism appears to reduce as people age (Nicholaichuk, Olver, Gu, & Wong, 2014). This theory is useful for assessing likely recidivism but due to the static nature of age, clinicians have little control of this factor; likewise, in relation to the engagement of a religious community, age has little bearing. To this end, while maturation theories are the most empirically tested desistance theories, for the purpose of this discussion they have little worth.

A more helpful agentic theory is Rational Choice Theory (RCT). RCT recognises people as reasoning agents, who, when deciding whether to commit a crime, do so through a process of considering associated costs and benefits; if the benefits outweigh the costs, crime is seen as the rational choice (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). Identity Theory of Desistance (ITD) (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) offers a similar perspective, explaining how agents weigh up current life circumstances, with a perceived likely future life, should they continue to offend. It is the fear of a negative future self that triggers

the desistance process, and stimulates alternative life choices (Paternoster, Bachman, Bushway, Kerrison, & O'Connell, 2015). During the process of assessing the costs and benefits to crime, an agent's religious proclivities may inform their choices, particularly given religious belief to provide answers to questions related to behaviours and 'afterlife' consequences.

The link to religion is perhaps clearer when exploring Terror Management Theory (TMT). According to this theory, humans are primed with a basic instinct to self-preserve (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991), but, when faced with inevitable mortality, turn to cultural or religious explanations to bolster fears (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). Religion provides a source of comfort, explanation, and a boost to self-esteem when faced with the inevitability of death. Indeed, religious instruction provides followers a set of beliefs, behaviours, and practices that, if adhered to, assures a particular type of afterlife, usually one of everlasting happiness and immortality. The fear of death or at least the fear of an unwanted afterlife, stimulates religious affiliation and belief (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2017) thus, when applying TMT and ITD to a religious context, for those who fear that a continued life of sexual crime might compromise their desired afterlife, desistance of such behaviours and the subsequent adoption of said religious instruction are rational.

RCT helps explain sexual crime, in that, those seeking to sexually offend do so by engaging in a cost benefit analysis considering location, time, and victim (Beauregard, Rossmo, & Proulx, 2007). However, for the process of desistance, theories are yet to be sufficiently tested. Understanding this decision-making process is essential for rehabilitation clinicians and practitioners, as by exploring the primary goods sought through the execution of a sexual crime, along with TMT and ITD theory, it is possible to help clients navigate alternative and rational means to achieve primary goals, through a religious community.

Social and structural

Social Control Theories (SCT) help explain crime and deviance. Postulated by Durkheim (1951 originally 1897) Anomie Theory asserts that as a result of significant social change and thus disorganisation, actors become unable to achieve social aspirations and, therefore, turn to crime as a viable means. Later SCT theorists such as Hirschi (1969), argued that deviant behaviour and crime occurs as a result of broken bonds and weak ties between the individual and society, arguing the role of attachment is key. Hirschi's theory states that where strong attachments and bonds are developed during adolescence to social institutions and structures (such as, family, education, or church) young people behave in accordance to the social norms of the institution. In addition, the degree of commitment and involvement with said institution further determines the degree to which a person conforms and abides by its rules and values.

In the field of desistance, the strength of ties and bonds to social institutions, such as family, education, or employment, can also initiate and maintain desistance in the same way it supports crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001). However, simple affiliation to a social institution does not, in and of itself, lead to effective desistance; instead it is the strength and meaning of the attachment that is important. While the bond of a good marriage, for example, can help support the process of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002) a poor marriage is unlikely to help (Sampson, Laub, & Wimer, 2006). Thus, sending a person to church will not cause him to stop offending, instead his attachment to the religious community must be meaningful and strong.

While SCT has provided a plethora of research that supports the notion that social structures and institutions are in some way related to the process of desistance (Weaver, 2015), few studies exist to explore this process from the perspective of people convicted sexual offending (Farmer, McAlinden, & Maruna, 2016; Kewley, Beech, & Harkins, 2015; Perrin, Blagden, Winder, & Norman, 2018). Kruttschnitt, Uggen, and Shelton (2000), found support for formal social control mechanisms in their sample of participants convicted of sexual offending; they found those who had stable work and engaged in a behaviour treatment program, reoffended less than those who did not. Authors were

unable to examine the nature of social capital gained; but, in a smaller study of those convicted of sexual offending, faith communities were found to provide social capital that enhanced participants sense of belonging, affiliation, and social support (Kewley et al., 2016, 2018).

The notion of SCT from both its original and more current interpretations map nicely onto the GLM. The GLM states that humans strive for primary goods, a premise of SCT (although in its original inception aspirations were economic). As with Durkheim's (1951 originally 1897) anomie theory, it is the choice of means that are of concern; where adaptive means of achieving goals are no longer viable, maladaptive strategies are adopted. A GLM plan can help clients achieve adaptive strategies and means to achieve desired primary goods.

Interactionist

Desistance occurs between the interplay of structure and agency; interactionist theorists argue that not one factor alone causes desistance; instead a blend of temporal, social, and psychological contexts exist. As a result of this interchange, people engaging in a process of desistance develop and form new non-offending identities that are more akin to their new social and psychological contexts. Giordano and colleagues outline the Theory of Cognitive Transformation (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2008), they found that in order for successful desistance, four types of cognitive transformation are required, including: an openness to change; openness to particular catalysts or "hooks for change"; be able to leave the old self behind and replace with the new; and change the desirability of the behaviour itself. Although originally interpreted as sequential steps, these elements operate simultaneously (Giordano, 2016). This theory allows the interplay of both structure and agency, in that the actor is required to make several cognitive leaps as a result of exposure to a particular social context. Indeed, Giordano and colleagues found that for a number of participants, a faith community helped developed friendships that in turn helped support their desistance.

A further theory that requires the interplay of structure and agency is that of Narrative Identity. This is "a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). Narrative Identity allows people to convey to themselves and to others, who they are and where they see themselves in the future. In relation to the desistance of crime, stories are crucial as they provide an explanation for crime, as well as a representation of how people will live free from crime.

In his exploration of persisting and desistance participants, Maruna (2001) found those desisting from crime spoke in a fundamentally positive way about themselves and their future lives. Labelled as 'redemption scripts', participants were able to establish the good within themselves, take responsibility for previous behaviours, acknowledge a return to a previously non-offending self, and present a desire to give back to others. Whereas, those persisting in crime spoke using 'condemnation scripts', perceiving themselves to be 'doomed to deviance'. They spoke of an inevitable cycle of crime, one they were born into with little control, or freedom to change.

According to an interactionist position, both adaptive narrative identity and structural support is equally as important in the pursuit of a good life (Ward & Marshall, 2007). A religious community thus, may provide this blend. In a study of 25 adult men convicted of sexual offending, Hallett and McCoy (2015) found elements of Maruna (2001); Giordano et al. (2002); Paternoster and Bushway (2009) desistance theories in life story interviews. Participants reported that Christianity had helped them to desist from crime by helping them re-characterise a new self, distinguishing between the old offending self and new non-offending self, through spiritual enlightenment. Likewise, they became afraid of the future self had they continued to commit crime and drew upon the social support gained through church attendance. Findings were similar to the experiences of people convicted of sexual offending in the Kewley et al. (2018) study; it was reported that religious affiliation assisted the development of new narratives allowing participants to re-label themselves as reformed 'non-offenders'. Furthermore, the stigma associated with sexual offending while

incarcerated was felt to be reduced as Kewley et al. participants expressed prejudiced attitudes towards nonreligious prisoners, perceiving themselves as the superior 'in-group' (Tajfel, 1974). Although an undesirable characteristic, this demonstrates how affiliation to a faith community provides a platform in which a new narrative identity can be developed and presented.

Situational

The spaces and places in which people inhabit ought to be of interest when examining the process of desistance (Flynn, 2011) as environments influence behaviours, including crime and desistance (Farrall et al., 2014). Routine Activities Theory proposes that in order for a crime to occur three factors must be in place: a) likely offender b) suitable target and c) the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The suitability of the target includes the attractiveness of the location such as being well concealed, easily removable, and valuable (Flynn, 2011). This is perhaps best understood when examining acquisitive crimes. Bernasco, Johnson, and Ruiter (2015) found burglars choice of location was strongly determined by the success and experiences of their prior burglary locality.

There are countless reports of people attempting to avoid crime or harmful behaviours being advised to avoid certain places to assist recovery; places such as old drug taking hangouts, pubs, or clubs (Melemis, 2015; Smith, Padgett, Choy-Brown, & Henwood, 2015). Avoidance strategies are, underpinned by Relapse Prevention Models that teach people to: first identify high-risk situations; help them learn differences between lapse and relapse in behaviours, identify these; and teach people strategies to cope with high risk situations (Laws, 2003). Most of the current legislation that governs sexual offenders is built upon this premise, thus, any restriction (situational or otherwise) can be imposed through a Sexual Offender Prevention Order (SOPO) (Kingston & Thomas, 2018).

Situation and place are integral to both sexual crime and desistance. Indeed, it played a primary role in the offending experiences of participants in the Farmer et al. (2016) study. Participants reported that sexual offending occurred as a result of situations outside of their control (e.g. relationship

breakdown, job loss) and sexual interests were stimulated by situation. Participants also developed an identity narrative around their new future self, indicating not only the importance of situation in the commissioning of an offence, but also, in the desistance process too. In a further examination of men desisting from sexual offending, McAlinden, Farmer, and Maruna (2017) found the situation of an active and busy work life to be a stabilizing factor; not only did it provide opportunities to enhance social capital, but, it helped develop new narrative identities and a sense of purpose. This was also found in a (non-sexual offending) population studied by Farrall et al. (2014) where desisters reported that being busy at home with family, attending work, appointments, and avoiding old haunts, contributed to their crime free existence.

Thus, civic places such as churches, safe homes, work places, and libraries can provide a new order for people desisting from crime, as well as the opportunity to develop a new identity. Place and space is more than bricks and mortar, it has its own culture, activities, routine, rules, community, and identity. A religious place for example, says that people who come here are good, kind, reputable citizens, thus attending such a place, according to situational theories provides the opportunity for those convicted of sexual offending to gain new social capital but also develop a non-offending narrative identity.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to explore theories that help explain how a religious community might support the reintegration and desistance process of those convicted of sexual offending. While a range of theories support the case that a religious community might support and foster the desistance process for those convicted of sexual offending, such a community is not appropriate for all and caution is required. For those determined and motivated to cause harm to others, control strategies are likely the most viable option. However, for those committed to living a life free from crime and are attempting to desist from crime, the state and society have a moral and ethical duty to enable and support them in this process.

Desistance theories provide an excellent platform to help us understand how people might stop offending. When mapped across and integrated into the GLM; theory is greatly enhanced (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Arguably each theory's limitations are each other's strength; the desistance literature lacks "adequate psychological conception of agency and the conditions that make agency possible" (Laws & Ward, 2011, p. 207), whereas, the GLM's needs further development of its desistance concepts. Combined they provide a valuable theoretical framework that can guide and support practitioners, clinicians, as well as those aiming to desist from crime, in a way that is effective, meaningful, and safe.

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