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Examining the Process of Offender Change: The Transition to Crime Desistance

Ralph C. Serin and Caleb D. Lloyd*

Carleton University

B550 Loeb Building

1125 Colonel By Drive

Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6

CANADA

* Author responsible for correspondence, reprints and proofs

Abstract

Prior research focusing on crime acquisition and crime desistance has advanced the theoretical understanding of the psychology of crime and overcome many of the practical challenges of crime management. This paper, however, aims to encourage more detailed examination of the process through which offenders transition from crime to desistance. Desistance occurs when external and internal variables align in such a way that an offender with a history of multiple offences ceases all criminal activity. It is argued that systematic examination of behaviour change among offenders will complement current approaches to offender rehabilitation, risk assessment and community supervision. Previous research on crime acquisition, crime desistance and behaviour change are briefly reviewed. In addition, the theoretical assumptions of leading models of rehabilitation are examined. Finally, strategies to further integrate various research findings are discussed and several broad research hypotheses are offered.

KEY WORDS: motivation to change, offender rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Theory, Risk-Needs Model, risk management

EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF OFFENDER CHANGE: THE TRANSITION TO CRIME DESISTANCE

The psychology of criminal behaviour, crime control and criminal rehabilitation has placed the life course of the offender under scrutiny in an effort to find appropriate and useful solutions for preventing, managing and terminating crime. The research endeavors of the preceding decades have been fruitful; a detailed understanding of the origins and composition of the offender population has provided us with risk assessment tools of unprecedented accuracy (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006) and more effective rehabilitation interventions than ever before (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; McGuire, 2002). More recently, a revitalized interest in the nature of desistance has sparked healthy research momentum toward an understanding of the variables that define the offender who has given up crime and developed a propensity for prosocial habits. These two research areas (crime acquisition and crime desistance) currently drive our understanding of the psychology of crime. Broadly viewing criminal careers as a continuum allows us to track offenders' progression from crime acquisition to crime desistance, yet a crucial period has not been given adequate attention: the time period where the offender and the ex-offender overlap and a transition occurs.

Our study of the active offender's initiation into crime and the desisting offender's cessation from crime must, like the offender himself, meet in the middle. In this paper, we argue that previous research on both crime initiation and desistance hint toward the important elements of transition, yet past research has not been able to fully describe or explain these elements. Our understanding of the active offender and the desisted offender must certainly aid our understanding of the offender in transition. However, as in the case

of the caterpillar and butterfly, while the beginning and end points can be captured, dissected and labeled, the details of the transformative process remain veiled. As such, we advocate a research agenda that places greater attention upon the transition phase that mediates the shift from active criminality to successful desistance. The purpose of this paper is to outline our glimpse of a new generation of offender research and encourage empirical studies attempting to uncover the critical elements of transition, or following our earlier metaphor, what lies within the cocoon. Our hope is that the discussion we present will stimulate a variety of focused empirical studies, the development of more integrative theories, eventual substantial gains in the area of offender programming and a better understanding of the transition from crime to desistance.

In order to discuss offender transition, it must first be accepted that many, if not most, offenders desist from crime. Conceptually, two elements are necessary for desistance: a history of multiple criminal acts and the subsequent cessation of all criminal behaviour. By definition, desistance takes place immediately following the commission of an offender's final crime; however, we agree with other researchers (e.g., Maruna, 2001) that more useful and intricate theories arise when desistance is conceptualized as a change process involving multiple internal factors. Thus, desistance is directly tied to the psychological mechanisms that drive changes in criminal behaviour patterns. On the other hand, an operational definition of desistance requires that researchers set a specified timeframe to track offenders' ability to abstain from crime. Operational definitions are expected to be limited by practical considerations such as project completion and undetected crimes, but what is most relevant is determining if a well-defined and well-measured conceptual definition of desistance is empirically related to a particular

operational definition. In addition, operational definitions of desistance are necessarily intertwined with the particular behaviours listed as criminal code violations in the location where research is conducted. It is of interest (but beyond the scope of this discussion) to examine whether desisting offenders engage in noncriminal but equally harmful behaviours (e.g., failing to return money borrowed from friends or regular interpersonal deception) or experience poor levels of functioning in various life areas.

The idea of significant changes in adults' personality and behaviour patterns has long been met with suspicion (Becker, 1964). Further, personality characteristics important for antisocial behaviours appear to be relatively stable (Sigvardsson, Bohman, & Cloninger, 1987). Moreover, there is a measure of disbelief within the research community regarding whether offenders ever truly cease antisocial behaviour (Maruna & LeBel, 2003; Osborn & West, 1980). The criminal justice system is largely built around the stability of human behaviour; long prison sentences are often pronounced more for their incapacitation effect rather than as an opportunity for intensive rehabilitation. However, research on rates of criminal activity at the aggregate level has uncovered the age-crime curve, the consistent finding that crimes are largely committed by individuals during their adolescent and early adult years, but usually cease between the ages of 30 and 40 (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987). Offenders comprise a heterogeneous group (Piquero, Blumstein, Brame, Haapanen, Mulvey, & Nagin, 2001) and it has been shown that aggregate age-crime data conceal the distinct trajectories of widely different offenders (Barnett, Blumstein, & Farrington, 1987; Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, & Carrig, 2004; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995; Piquero, 2000). Still, as many as 70% of offenders follow

some approximation of the age-crime curve, with only a small percentage of offenders maintaining criminal activity well into adulthood (Piquero *et al.*, 2001).

If offenders give up crime either spontaneously or in response to intervention efforts, it is worthwhile to explore how this transition occurs. An understanding of offenders' life-course transitions not only gives insight into the nature of the psychological phenomena of behaviour change, it provides practical knowledge about which intervention goals are necessary, strategic and productive. While preventing crime requires a solid understanding of the active offender and accurate risk assessment requires an empirical profile of factors related to the latter stages of the criminal career, effective rehabilitation requires a grasp of the offender in transition. Our map of the life course of the offender is incomplete without recognizing the pivotal importance of the *process* of transition. In addition, our ability to intervene to spark transition or to guide offenders beginning transition is limited by our lack of understanding of the important elements of this process.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HABIT CHANGE

There are multiple reasons why an individual may be resistant to change, including preference for routine, short-term focus and rigid thinking (Oreg, 2003); however, research suggests that even those pursuing important life changes do not follow a linear path toward their desired habits, experiences and states of being (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Rather, research examining recovery from substance addiction has preferred to understand change within a stage model, the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM).

While each advancing stage of the TTM is characterized by different levels of cognitive awareness, behavioural strategies and motivation, success is most often observed as spiral, rather than linear, movement through the stages (Prochaska *et al.*, 1992).

Similarly, it was observed in an offender sample that multiple treatment episodes have a cumulative effect suggesting multiple attempts at change may be necessary for some before desistance takes hold (Merrill, Alterman, Cacciola, & Rutherford, 1999). There may be a kind of “threshold” level of engagement in the change process that must be reached before change can occur. Furthermore, with each treatment attempt, individuals may learn how much effort is required and obtain a clearer picture of what changes must occur for success. Thus, for some individuals it may be that this threshold is only reached through a learning process involving multiple failed attempts to succeed. We can expect that those who desire to change will experience periodic setbacks and decreases in motivation stemming from external and internal barriers along their way.

Whether lapses (violation of personal or mandated guidelines, i.e., choosing to enter a high risk situation) or relapses (commission of a crime) result in either a sense of hopelessness (loss of self-efficacy) or a learning opportunity for future success depends upon psychological components of the individual (Brownell, Marlatt, Lichtenstein, & Wilson, 1986). For example, those with greater motivation or an external locus of control for their problem behaviour will likely adjust their strategy after a lapse rather than blaming themselves and giving up. Preventing relapse and predicting success will likely benefit from taking into account the individual’s self-perceptions, personality characteristics and attributions (which are not captured within the stages of change). Furthermore, individual predispositions important for change and the cognitive components underlying change are important targets for intervention, whereas the stages of change offer no real guidance for treatment (Bandura, 1997).

Although the TTM offers much in terms of understanding shifts in effort and conscious awareness of one's problem through the change process, the model does not emphasize the range of self-perceptions important for change. In addition to this concern, research on the TTM has been the focus of criticism for lack of complexity (Whitelaw, Baldwin, Bunton, & Flynn, 2000), lack of empirical evidence (Weinstein, Rothman, & Sutton, 1998), severe measurement inconsistency (Sutton, 2001) and conceptual flaws (e.g., slicing a single, continuous underlying variable into pseudo-stages; Bandura, 1997; Pierce, Farkas, & Gilpin, 1998; Weinstein *et al.*, 1998). This last criticism calls the utility of the theory into question; for example, self-efficacy showed a generally linear relationship with the stages of change in an offender sample, suggesting self-efficacy may be a better target for assessment and intervention rather than the variables that define contemplation, action and maintenance (McMurrin, Tyler, Hogue, Cooper, Dunseath, & McDaid, 1998).

Despite these criticisms, the TTM has shown some promise when applied to offender populations (Cohen, Glaser, Calhoun, Bradshaw, & Petrocelli, 2005; Levesque, Gelles, & Velicer, 2000; Scott & Wolfe, 2003; Williamson, Day, Howells, Bubner, & Jauncey, 2003). Similar to substance abuse, offending behaviour focuses upon short-term gain over long-term costs (Sellen, McMurrin, Cox, Theodosi, & Klinger, 2006). However, conscious acknowledgement of the amount of effort one is putting toward change may be less important when the behaviours are sporadic and have an important interpersonal component (Brownell, Marlatt, Lichtenstein, & Wilson, 1986; Casey, Day, & Howells, 2005). Generally, evidence for the TTM is weaker when it is applied to behaviour change other than recovery from substance addiction (which involves behaviours that are frequent and intrapersonal in nature; Sutton, 2001). For example, offenders who commit an average

of two crimes a year may need to concentrate on building prosocial habits to make the criminal opportunities less enticing rather than focusing attention on the relatively infrequent problem behaviour itself. Also, offenders with a history of spousal battering will likely need to examine and adjust the interpersonal antecedents to their criminal behaviour in addition to attempts to break the pattern of their behaviour. Among sex offenders, denial of offences is common and yet not directly tied to successful outcome; thus, the TTM may be of limited use when behaviour change can occur without strong internal motivation or intended action (Ward, Day, Howells, & Birgden, 2004). In addition, it may be that precontemplators are also the lowest risk and least in need of change, suggesting that the high risk offenders most in need of treatment may not be identified from classification on the stages of change (Scott & Wolfe, 2003).

In summary, our understanding of offender change should respect that offenders' commitment to a crime-free life is more likely to develop gradually and cyclically than instantaneously. While the stages defined by different levels of effort may be relevant, arguably, a greater focus should be put upon the individual differences that initiate, sustain and characterize the important life changes. Finally, for offenders, change may occur best when individuals concentrate upon building daily prosocial habits rather than a more narrow focus on changing infrequent antisocial behaviours.

Turning specifically to offender change rather than addiction recovery, it is clear that the existing body of offender research is both precise and detailed in its understanding of crime acquisition, but that unanswered questions arise from the current state of knowledge. Four questions will guide our discussion, namely: (1) What empirically observable changes may be occurring in offenders' lives as they transition from active

offending to desistance? (2) What do established empirical findings and theories contribute to our understanding of this transition phase? (3) What additional psychological elements have yet to be explored and may inform our understanding of the phenomenon of transition into desistance?, and (4) How can the apparently disparate research on offender risk assessment, rehabilitation and desistance be integrated into a more detailed and nuanced understanding of transitions out of crime?

WHAT CHANGES OCCUR?

It is possible to imagine that an “ex-offender” is an individual who has given up crime but remains unchanged in every other aspect of his self-image, social environment, life goals and motivations. However, it is more likely that offenders who give up crime undergo a wide variety of other behavioural, attitudinal and life role changes. Research suggests that desistance does not occur in a vacuum; giving up crime appears to be a part of a larger trend of improving adjustment in an offender’s life, paralleling such processes as substance abuse recovery, gaining employment and stronger interpersonal commitments (Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004). This transition phase encompasses multiple elements and involves the complex interaction of psychological, biological and situational factors. Just as violent crime is multiply determined (Douglas & Skeem, 2005), so transition into desistance is likely the result of various life changes. The challenge the offender within transition faces is not simply identifying and changing a single, key risk factor but rather nurturing in multiple life areas a dedication to doing what is necessary to stay crime-free (Ward & Marshall, 2006). Indeed, the desisting offender is faced with a greater task than even simply giving up crime. For many offenders, successful desistance

includes battling substance abuse, removing association from criminal peers and developing long-term prosocial habits and relationships.

Given the effort an offender must extend and the re-orienting an offender must undergo to achieve desistance from crime, desistance has been characterized as a process (Ayers, Williams, Hawkins, Peterson, & Abbott, 1999; Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen, & Farrington, 1991; Maruna, 2001; Stouthamer-Loeber *et al.*, 2004). The transition process is believed to include gradual changes in behaviour, perspective and attitude that somehow bridge the disconnection between the once-active offender and now-desisted offender. As Maruna (2001) notes, it is perhaps unsurprising that the major observable correlates of desistance include employment (Benda, 2005; Uggen, 1999; 2000), abstaining from substance use (Fals-Stewart, 2003; Hussong *et al.*, 2004), marriage (Maume, Ousey, & Beaver, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 2005) and the development of other important prosocial relationships (Andrews, 1980). These correlates are all long-term commitments that require ongoing maintenance (Maruna, 2001). As Laub *et al.* (1998) also point out, “social bonds do not arise intact or full-grown but develop over time” (p. 225). Offenders are not initiated into desistance through an instantaneous conversion, but take time to gradually commit themselves to prosocial lifestyles and significant others.

Thus, transition involves both gradual and wide-reaching changes. These changes require offenders to evolve from a preoccupation with the factors that maintain ongoing criminal activity to an assimilation of the factors that maintain desistance into their lives. This broad principle is expected to apply equally to adult and juvenile offenders. However, the internal processes underlying youth offenders’ desistance may be distinct. In particular, the challenges youth offenders face when re-entering the community after incarceration are

specific to their station in life (Sullivan, 2004). Life events that serve to encourage adult offenders to desist may even aggravate a youth offender's propensity toward crime (e.g., parenthood; Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Sullivan, 2004). In addition to interpersonal context, another clear difference for offenders desisting in late adolescence is the length of personal involvement with crime. Likely, the degree to which criminal activity has held meaning and become entrenched as a habitual behaviour pattern is reduced for youth offenders; however, important adult opportunities that would aid desistance may not yet be available. One leading theory of juvenile offending suggests that some adolescents drift into offending in an effort to obtain the prestige and autonomy associated with adulthood, but desist once conventional opportunities become available (Moffitt, 1993). With the exception of important long-term consequences that occur from their offending, these youth are expected to desist without prolonged effort. More focused research is required to understand the particular correlates and processes involved with desisting youth, but some evidence suggests that for many of these adolescents, the desistance process extends into early adulthood (Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002).

An examination of the characteristics of the active offender versus the desisted offender highlights the extent to which this transition is substantial and encompassing. Contrasting the beginning and end points of the criminal career also lends clues to the nature of the transition out of crime. In terms of static factors, a pattern of criminal behaviour is predicted by an early and long history of antisocial acts. Age at first offence is an important risk factor for continued criminal activity among offenders with and without mental disorders (Bonta, Law, & Hanson, 1998; Gendreau, Goggin, & Paparozzi, 1996). Those who begin a pattern of offending behaviours prior to age 14 go on to have the most

serious and extensive criminal careers, although there can be important exceptions and variability to this (DeLisi, 2006; Piquero & Chung, 2001). Established offender typologies suggest that those who start offending earliest are also the offenders who take the longest to desist or who do not desist at all. One of the best predictors of future offending behaviour is past offending behaviour (Cocozza, Melick, & Steadman, 1978; Phillips, Gray, MacCulloch, Taylor, Moore, Huckle, & MacCulloch, 2005), however (somewhat paradoxically), it is only those with a history of antisocial behaviour who are eligible to desist from a pattern of criminality. Reduction and eventual extinction of this long pattern of criminality is the critical aspect that defines the desisted offender. It is important to note that an individual who has only committed a single crime has not desisted; a transition into desistance requires that criminal behaviour have been actively maintained at one time (Maruna, 2001). Thus, by definition, transition involves breaking a pattern of committing criminal offences (that often began as early as childhood) and exercising control over impulses to commit further offences.

Given that behaviour is not isolated from its underlying psychological processes, lengthy offending careers are maintained and supported by the offender's internal beliefs, interpersonal relationships and environmental situation. The Psychology of Criminal Conduct (PCC; Andrews & Bonta, 2006) integrates basic social learning processes into the study of criminal behaviour, noting that humans engage in activities they believe will be beneficial for their well-being rather than harmful. These beliefs are formed through observation of and interaction with important others in the context of one's own personality disposition (Bandura & Walters, 1959). Thus, individual-level dynamic factors such as antisocial attitudes and antisocial personality are strong predictors of criminal behaviour

(Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Criminal behaviours are accompanied by beliefs that committing crimes is either justifiable or worthwhile. Crimes that are more spontaneous or aggressive may stem in part from personality factors such as impulsivity and irritability (Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

Within the social learning framework, antisocial associates comprise another important risk factor. Close, meaningful contact with criminal others provides opportunities for offending and perpetuates procriminal perspectives and beliefs. Thus, transition into desistance must involve observable decreases in these important risk factors. Desisting offenders are expected to reduce contact with the relationships that maintained their continued criminality and exchange beliefs that offending is rewarding for beliefs that offending involves important costs.

While attitudes and associates may be relatively easy to change, it is less intuitive to imagine significant shifts in antisocial personality. Personality is believed to be a relatively stable characteristic. Yet, transition is likely to involve reductions in the intensity or expression of antisocial personality traits. Thus, while the desisting offender must break the pattern anticipated by static risk factors, reductions or reversals of dynamic risk factors are the mechanisms expected to underlie this cessation of crime.

The active offender is known for self-centered spontaneity. Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell, and Naples (2004) note that “much criminal behavior is maintained by rewards that are extrinsic (status, riches) or fleeting (the buzz of a drug)” (p. 279). By contrast, the desisted offender lives thoughtfully and with an awareness of the rights of others (Maruna, 2001). Desisted offenders often are engaged in quality marital relationships, maintaining employment, experiencing success in life by objective standards and possibly actively

contributing to their communities (Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2005). Thus, unlike the external gratification of crime, desistance must be maintained by internal motivations that involve self-regulation, intrinsic rewards and long-term goals (Maruna, 2001; Maruna *et al.*, 2004). As Quinsey, Skilling, Lalumiere and Craig (2003) also note, an interpersonal strategy that takes advantage of others brings short-term benefits, but only cooperation and interpersonal trustworthiness lead to long-term rewards. Antisocial behaviours limit offenders' ability to grasp the long-term advantages of cooperation; by nature, criminal behaviour seeks shortcuts to goods and power and disregards interpersonal trust and stability (Ward & Marshall, 2004). Thus, transition appears to involve two simultaneous processes: the offender broadening his awareness beyond his own needs to include the rights of others (the interpersonal) as well as actively reducing and containing his impulses (the intrapersonal).

While internal motivation is necessary both for engaging in transition and sustaining effort in the face of external difficulties (e.g., lack of employment opportunities due to criminal record), motivation will be adaptive and productive only when structural factors converge and reach a basic threshold that allows for change. For example, internal motivation for entering a rehabilitation program is purposeless if there are no spaces available in the institutional program (Ward *et al.*, 2004). Measures of community disadvantage are related to crime even after taking criminal history into account (De Coster, Heimer, & Wittrock, 2006), suggesting an offender's context is involved in setting the limits of his opportunities to desist. Likely, it can be assumed that high risk offenders face the dual challenge of contending with greater levels of disadvantage as well as greater deficits in motivation to overcome those challenges to stay crime-free. The reciprocal

nature of structural disadvantage and motivation is probably most salient for the offender recently released from incarceration; overcoming the social stigma of a criminal record is guaranteed to require patience, skills and effort (Sullivan, 2004). Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that research suggests the effects of structural variables on crime are mediated through immediate context factors such as their peers, personal experiences with crime and personal attitudes (De Coster *et al.*, 2006; Markowitz, 2003).

HOW DO THESE CHANGES OCCUR?

Given its focus on risk factors, the PCC is primarily a theory of crime acquisition. However, by emphasizing dynamic risk factors, the PCC also offers clear targets for intervention and rehabilitation. Thus, the social learning perspective of crime anticipates that desistance will not only involve the reversal of dynamic risk factors, but that this reversal will evolve through observation of the consequences (rewards and costs) of their own and others' actions (Bandura & Walters, 1959). The clear difference in the case of desistance is that the offenders adopt the behaviours modeled by prosocial others rather than antisocial others and begin to encounter situations that lead them to perceive the costs of crime as outweighing the benefits.

While the active offender maintains beliefs that are supportive of crime, the same offender, in order to desist, must eventually undergo a transition to actively maintain beliefs unsupportive of crime. Thus, our picture of the active offender includes a strong set of internal and external antisocial influences whereas our picture of the desisted offender includes the presence of a strong set of prosocial influences. This shift in contingencies is expected to be supported by simultaneous changes in the multiple levels of the offender's

life (i.e., within the individual, his interpersonal relationships and his community setting; Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

While the PCC offers much in setting up the important psychological processes of transition, as stated before, its explanation of desistance may be limited by its primary focus on risk factors. Though it is clear that reductions in risk variables must accompany the process of desistance (by definition, desistance is the reduction and elimination of risk to re-offend), the specific factors that identify when high-risk individuals will and will not enter transition are unclear. While risk factors can identify who is likely or unlikely to commit crimes, variation in risk does not expressly explain the mechanisms behind the high-risk offender's gradual movement away from crime. The risk/needs model identifies the targets to be changed but potentially lacks the prescience needed to understand which of those offenders who show shifts in criminogenic needs are able to move into and sustain prosocial behaviour.

Arguably, research must begin to examine the desisting offender in his entirety without limiting ourselves to explaining the waning stages of a criminal career in terms of risk factors. Notably, an offender's cessation of crime is not directly tied to the extinction of the risk factors that led to his initial involvement in crime (Laub *et al.*, 1998). Further, current research suggests that the initiation into crime and the conversion out of crime are dissimilar experiences; the variables that accurately predict initiation into criminal behaviour appear to exert less and less influence on adult criminal behaviour as time goes on (Stouthamer-Loeber *et al.*, 2004). Accordingly, the characteristics of an offender's pattern of criminality do not strictly predict the nature, timing or possibility of his transition into desistance. Should it be found that attitudes associated with desistance are distinct

from risk factors, the possibility is opened that additional variance in recidivism can be explained by understanding how offenders late in their careers view themselves, their past criminal history and their prospects for the future. Since, by definition, desistance involves a prior offence history, offenders in transition may be particularly characterized by how they “take stock” in how their lives have progressed thus far. In social learning terms, high-risk offenders may only learn the costs of crime (or the benefits of a prosocial routine) after a certain threshold of first-hand experience (or a particular type of experience) has occurred.

Alternatively, the Good Lives Model (GLM) argues that both offending behaviours and desistance behaviours are the result of human agency and human motivation (Ward & Marshall, 2004). The GLM suggests that offenders engage in criminal behaviour in order to attain *primary goods*. These positive psychological constructs are posited to be universally desirable and fulfilling aspects of the human experience, including personal autonomy, mastery, and interpersonal relationship. While the GLM hypothesizes that all humans naturally seek these goods, individuals differ in which primary goods they most desire and the means by which they attempt to attain these goods (i.e., *secondary goods*).

Human goods are hypothesized to play an etiological role in offending behaviour in that they serve as the true motivation behind the offences (Ward & Gannon, 2006). However, from the GLM perspective, risk for offending lies within an individual’s choice of secondary goods (Ward & Marshall, 2004). Offenders may choose crime as a means to attain fulfilling human experiences due to mistaken beliefs that criminal activity will result in securing primary goods (the direct route) or due to frustration experienced when attempts to legitimately secure primary goods fail (the indirect route; Ward & Gannon, 2006).

Ultimately, the GLM views criminal activity as distorted methods of achieving primary goods (Ward, Vess, Collie, & Gannon, 2006).

In contrast to the PCC, the GLM is primarily a model of offender rehabilitation and thus shows some limitations in its explanation of crime acquisition. While the GLM is unapologetically positive in its inclusion of human goods as an important element in criminal activity, the model itself does not expressly explain why offenders are found to lack scope in the primary goods they seek. In addition, it is unclear from the GLM perspective why lack of scope or frustration in attaining human goods leads to offending behaviours in particular and not other problematic (but legal) behaviour patterns. Broadly, the GLM suggests that biological, ecological and neuropsychological variables create vulnerability for offending behaviour (Ward & Beech, 2006). However, it remains unclear what specific disruptions must exist for offending to occur. In addition, it is unclear what threshold of difficulty in good lives scope must be reached before an individual begins to offend. This also highlights the fact that many of the GLM constructs do not share a common method of measurement.

In terms of rehabilitation, the GLM concludes that an important treatment goal should be teaching offenders how to learn the skills or how to access the opportunities to attain primary goods they desire through prosocial methods (Ward & Marshall, 2004). Risk factors for crime and criminal behaviour itself are believed to be reduced when an offender re-focuses on securing the fulfillment previously achieved through offending behaviours through other, prosocial secondary means. Indeed, the GLM offers much in respecting the motivational component of the desistance process. Offenders can be expected to be resistant if treatment providers do not attend to the personal and contextual

factors that are important to the offender (Ward *et al.*, 2004). Thus, if it is clear to offenders that transition involves attaining desirable things, treatment engagement will increase (Mann, Webster, Schofield, & Marshall, 2004). Solely focusing on avoiding high risk situations, associates and emotional states will likely be ineffective unless the offender also seeks positive, prosocial experiences and relationships; indeed, greater treatment engagement and motivation was found in offenders who were encouraged to visualize and work toward a more positive lifestyle compared to those in risk management interventions (Mann *et al.*, 2004). It has been found that, upon release, offenders show more concern with the logistics necessary for their survival outside prison rather than the more abstract challenge of assessing which situations will involve temptations for them (Abrams, 2006). Thus, greater focus upon prosocial approach goals (rather than avoidance goals) connected to the offenders' basic survival in the community is expected to be a more effective rehabilitative strategy. Providing offenders opportunities for engaging in rewarding, action-oriented activities reinforces both their motivation and self-efficacy for reaching prosocial goals (Burnett & Maruna, 2006).

INTEGRATING CONTINGENCY AND MOTIVATION

While the PCC suggests that offenders enter transition when their life contingencies converge to make prosocial living more attractive than crime, and the GLM suggests transition begins when offenders start seeking primary goods through prosocial means, both perspectives may be too narrow. The high degree of interconnectedness between external contingencies and internal motivations as considered in prior research may have made it difficult to tease apart what specific influences trigger the period of transition (Gadd & Farrall, 2004). Indeed, the interplay between the two is likely important. The observable

changes an offender undergoes as he reduces his vulnerability to commit crimes must also be accompanied by internal changes that allow this change in risk state. For most offenders, simply making the decision to give up crime is insufficient for change. A greater percentage of offenders indicate a desire to stay crime-free upon release compared to those who are actually able to desist (Burnett, 1992, as cited in Maruna, 2001). Avoiding crime will prove to be challenging for even the most rehabilitated offender if he does not actively ensure his environment, relationships and self-regulation strategies are (at the very least) not antagonistic toward his new goal. Likewise, the prosocial relationships and environment will do little for an offender's desistance prospects if he does not also develop commitment for remaining crime-free. For example, quality marriage, an important factor that correlates with desistance, may act upon an offender as an external source increasing the costs of criminal activity, but it may also represent an outward manifestation of the offender's internal desire to "clean up" his life (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003).

Both the lower order, contingency-based elements (e.g., "I will lose my freedom and my quality relationship with my wife if I commit this crime") and the higher order, motivation-based elements (e.g., "I want to make a positive difference in my own life and the life of my spouse") may be relevant to the same offender in the same situation. Indeed, cognitive shifts take place within a broader social context; in the same vein, different social contexts will be chosen by those offenders who have made certain cognitive shifts (Giordano *et al.*, 2003).

Lower and higher order elements are expected to meet together in the offender's construction of his personal identity and, in particular, how he visualizes himself in the future (i.e., possible selves; Markus & Nurius, 1986). An offender working toward

desistance may imagine being fulfilled and successful in conventional business ventures and may translate this higher order self-conception into instrumental behaviours that reinforce this (Stein & Markus, 1996). Notably, adolescents' constructions of identity were able to differentiate between those with and without a criminal past as well as predict future criminal behaviour (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; 1990b). Thus, there appears to be hope for offenders who can vividly imagine themselves as ex-offenders. Identity can function as a bridge between cognitions and behaviour; taking steps to make changes and following through with ample motivation requires one to both value the goal and imagine themselves as a person who can attain the goal.

The external and internal influences of transition may even be cyclical or bi-directional to such a degree that it will be highly difficult to unravel the unique influences of reduction of criminogenic needs and increases in agency for desistance behaviour (Kazemian, 2007; Maruna & Roy, 2007). On the other hand, it can be hypothesized that certain influences will act uniquely upon sub-types of offenders or unfold in a varied time sequence. For example, it may be that high-risk offenders are initially moved into transition by important shifts in contingencies, but with time adopt generative ambition as they interact closely with prosocial ways of living. By contrast, lower risk offenders may first experience a cognitive shift that marks a new motivation for learning to live without crime and then systematically remove the influences that could lead them back to crime. Thus, it may be reasonable to expect that the pathways out of crime will vary across offenders even if many of the same mechanisms overlap.

TOWARDS TRANSITION AND DESISTANCE

The experiences, thoughts and changes that encourage an active offender to engage in the external and internal processes of transition toward desistance need much further study. These processes may be readily hypothesized with knowledge of the known attributes of the active and desisted offenders, but these processes have yet to be empirically explored. Indeed, little is known about whether most offenders experience a moment of unprecedented insight that leads to an immediate conversion out of crime or whether they are gradually initiated into accepting desistance as a viable life goal for themselves. The strength of past research has been its dedication to exploring the offenders' perspective on their own change experiences, but much more work is necessary for a systematic understanding of transition.

A model depicting how intrapersonal moderators are hypothesized to relate to risk factors and desistance factors is presented in the figure. This framework suggests that an individual offender's criminal career follows a path roughly similar to the aggregate age-crime curve. Important individual risk factors play a causal role in the initiation and escalation of criminal behaviour whereas the reduction of these risk factors can be observed on the downward slope of desistance. However, factors that correlate with desistance also suggest the offender has begun to maintain important commitments to prosocial living in addition to learning how to avoid being entangled in criminal activity. This infers, then, that certain cognitive factors work to sustain change throughout the offender's transition period and beyond his initial commitment to desist. It is hypothesized that neither the commitment to change nor the intrapersonal moderators alone are sufficient for desistance, but that together these two elements prime an offender to sustain a crime-free lifestyle.¹

¹ The intrapersonal moderators listed in the figure are considered to be theoretically important (i.e., Sampson & Laub, 2005) and are currently being examined in a research project conducted by the authors.

Certainly desistance is not obtained in the early stages of transition even as an offender begins to be crime-free. Desistance has not occurred until prosocial habits, legitimate employment and self-regulation have taken hold and the offender has successfully pushed through the barriers and temptations he will experience in his effort to establish a non-criminal way of life. Transition does not only reflect a new way of life for an offender, but initiates the offender into the realization that ongoing maintenance will be required for success. Beyond this, institution-based rehabilitation must recognize that success can only be claimed if offenders are able to take their new skills and apply them to high-risk situations in the community and, more than that, sustain motivation to learn new skills from their community experiences (Tierney & McCabe, 2001). The critical element of wide-reaching shifts in internal motivation and perspective that allow these important external reductions in risk have not been and cannot be captured within the crime acquisition perspective with its focus on risk assessment. Specifically, sole attention upon crime acquisition ignores that desistance factors are not analogous to the absence of risk factors (Laub *et al.*, 1998).

If desistance from crime is not purely a mirror image of initiation into criminal activity, research must begin to explore additional, unidentified processes that extend beyond the scope of established risk factors. Also, should desistance be multiply determined, studies must begin to explore the nature of interactions between protective factors and the variables that motivate and mediate the adoption of a prosocial disposition. This gap in our understanding of the entire life course of the offender affects our ability to improve upon current interventions as well as employ more accurate and dynamic risk assessment; there remains a substantial amount of unexplained variation in our prediction

as well as our ability to provide effective interventions when we target the criminogenic need risk factors only. McGuire (2002) shows that effect sizes for even the most appropriate rehabilitation programs are modest and rarely exceed 0.4. A recent meta-analysis suggests that some self-report measures specifically designed to assess the attitudes, beliefs, personality and history of offenders had equivalent predictive validity for recidivism as the best risk assessment measures the field has to offer (Walters, 2006). More importantly, further analyses indicated that these self-report measures accounted for unique variance in recidivism outcome. This is strong evidence that the internal experiences of offenders, untapped by existing risk measures, provide unique information about future risk status. In addition, dynamic risk factors are shown to incrementally predict risk in combination with static variables (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996), thereby informing risk status.

It is worthwhile to encourage the research community to increase their focus on protective factors (e.g., Rogers, 2000) and the dynamic factors that reduce risk (e.g., Douglas & Skeem, 2005), but we also advocate efforts to identify the factors that predict the positive changes occurring in desisting offenders' lives. In other words, what transitional shifts in motivations, attitudes and beliefs not only predict reduced risk to re-offend, but also predict the prosocial routines, perspectives and behaviours that characterize desistance? A detailed, empirical understanding of the factors that allow individual offenders to give up crime and remain crime free will aid those who must evaluate offender risk to be more confident in their ability to detect desistance when it has truly taken hold in an offender's life. In addition, an understanding of transition highlights not only the rehabilitation goals that treatment programs should target, but can also inform the process,

structure and technique that should be incorporated into programs. A transitioning offender is in a state of flux; clinicians working in offender programming must be able to engage offenders who are grappling with the daunting task of undergoing important life changes. At the same time, clinicians are increasingly required to consider more accurate information about risk state in order to identify proximal risk factors and improve their ability to predict time of risk for an offender over time (Douglas & Skeem, 2005; Hilton, Harris, Rawson, & Beach, 2005). Empirical studies must catch up to address these practical realities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Thus, we encourage greater focus on transition with several broad hypotheses. Namely, 1) Internal attitudes and shifts in attitudes about staying crime-free will be reliably associated with desistance outcomes; 2) Individual differences in attitudes and beliefs will develop gradually but certain perspectives more than others will help sustain action toward prosocial living; 3) Offenders who approach desistance with an awareness of what benefits it will bring will sustain desistance longer than those simply avoiding crime and high-risk situations; and 4) Theories that respect the internal aspects, the external aspects and the interaction between the internal and external will provide the most discriminating understanding of desistance.

While seeking parsimonious answers to questions about transition, we recognize this present discussion offers a simplified examination of complex processes. The theoretical and practical implications of these processes require systematic empirical investigation. Some questions that address the complexity of the hypotheses we offer are as follows: 1) How might risk state interact with motivation to desist?; 2) If motivation

does interact with risk state, can we expect rehabilitation is unnecessary for some offenders? In other words, is desistance personally motivated and spontaneously realized for low risk offenders?² 3) While offenders may transition out of crime with varied degrees of motivation and intervention, can we expect a homogenous set of moderators for all transitioning offenders? For example, do adolescent offenders transition out of crime through different mechanisms compared to adult offenders? In other words, how is desistance different when it follows shortly after crime acquisition as opposed to following the compounding influence of years of crime maintenance?; and, 4) While adolescent desistance may appear effortless compared to adult desistance, would adolescents characterize their transition process as automatic if internal motivation was adequately measured?³ Similarly, how do transitioning offenders adopt and create their own external contingencies? To what degree are internal contingencies involved in shaping the timing and context of transition?

² Arguably, change can occur without external pressure once an individual is aware that the dissonance between their present state and their desired state has exceeded their subjective threshold (C. Innes, personal communication, January 29, 2008).

³ It could be that all transitions out of crime are effortful, cyclical and erratic, but the need for coherent personal narratives compels many desisting offenders to characterize their transition in terms of instantaneous decision-making or well-defined turning points (D. Polaschek, personal communication, January 29, 2008). Regardless of what mechanisms were involved, all retrospective accounts are likely to be interpreted in the light of present circumstances.

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Figure:

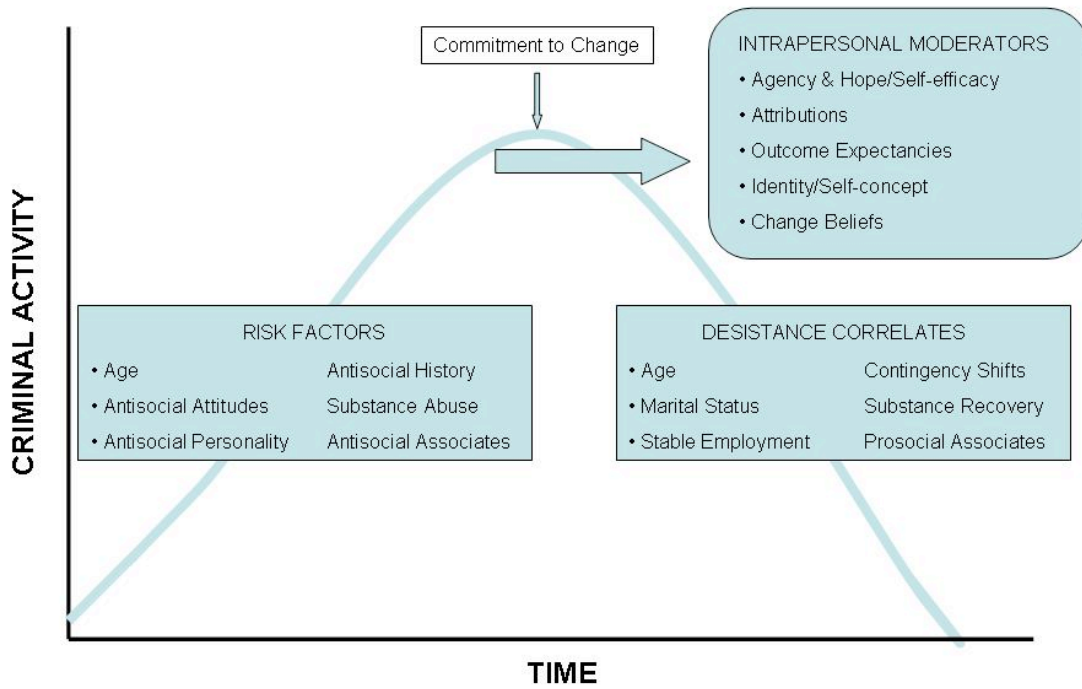


Figure Caption:

Model of Effects on an Individual's Age-Crime Curve, With Empirically Established and Hypothesized Factors.