

Research Statement: Investigating Offender Change

My program of research investigates offender change. Broadly, I am interested in contributing research that enhances correctional practice, using approaches that respect both the psychology of the individual offender, and the complexities of the criminal justice system. Since this is an applied area of research, I am focused on obtaining offender data so my research can directly address existing challenges in corrections. My prior and forthcoming publications aim to contribute to theoretical models of offender behavior using data gathered from contemporary correctional samples.

Specifically, my research examines how offenders reduce and desist from their criminal activity through both personal volition and external assistance. Also, my research attempts to help build a bridge between strength-based desistance theories, and evidence-based risk-focused practices, by drawing from both rich traditions, and integrating them into a single theoretical model.

Measuring Internal Desistance Constructs

A renaissance of desistance research began in the early 2000s with an emerging focus on the psychology of the individual desisting offender. Much of this early work employed qualitative methodologies that centered on ex-offenders' detailed self-narratives (e.g., Maruna's instrumental book, *Making Good*). To advance this area and expand its scope, a questionnaire-based assessment strategy was necessary. With Dr Ralph Serin, I developed a suite of measures designed to assess offenders' internal beliefs and attitudes about change. We described the rationale for developing these measures in a theory paper (Serin & Lloyd, 2009, *Psychology, Crime, and Law*), and directly reported measurement development in another (Lloyd & Serin, 2012, *Psychology, Crime, and Law*).

These self-report measures are meant to fill an important gap in the field, by facilitating quantitative analysis of key desistance constructs. Since the 2012 publication, we have received over a dozen requests for access to the measures from academic colleagues and government staff worldwide. In addition to our own current efforts to extend this work with data collection in new samples (e.g., as part of National Institute of Justice's re-entry demonstration project; Lloyd, Serin, & Carter, 2010; and a proposal funded from National Institute of Justice; Lloyd & Serin, 2015), our measures were included in a completed study in Singapore (Toh, 2013), and two recently launched studies in the UK with juvenile offenders (Butterworth, 2013), and gang-affiliated offenders (Horan, 2014).

Broadening Understanding of Rehabilitation Change

Traditionally, change within participants during rehabilitation programs has been taken for granted without efforts to directly observe it, and numerous writers have advocated for research that will better account for change mechanisms within rehabilitation. Since this area is still in its genesis, our first contribution was a meta-analytic review that detailed which questionnaires show direct evidence of intra-individual change (Serin, Lloyd, Helmus, Derkzen, & Luong, 2013, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*). For this paper, I reviewed all available correctional treatment change studies in the academic and government literature to pinpoint which studies had high quality design, and reported

findings for general, violent, and substance misuse offenders. This paper summarized a small but critical body of literature that suggests reductions in recidivism follow from internal reductions in beliefs and attitudes favorable to antisocial acts.

A core purpose of this paper was to encourage more systematic measurement of intra-individual change within correctional programs. Additionally, since change research often requires more sophisticated study design and statistical analyses than typical program evaluation research, a goal for this manuscript and other work (Lloyd & Serin, 2015, *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*) was to list key considerations when undertaking this type of research.

More recently, I designed a study of offender change that utilized data gathered from a cohort of offenders who had completed rehabilitation programs (Lloyd, Hanby, & Serin, 2014, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*). In this paper, I specifically tested whether the group environment in closed-group sessions is associated with offenders' ability to succeed in the program (i.e., to change). This paper uniquely contributed to the field by finding that the social environment within a treatment group (formally, the degree of criminality among group co-participants) was related to success. Most notably, domestic violence and sex offenders who were placed in groups with lower risk peers, on average, were less likely to recidivate following release.

Discussion of these findings was situated to encourage more sophisticated conceptualizations of core correctional practices. These evidence-based practices are usually taken for granted to simply "work", often to the detriment of further theory development. Specifically, by demonstrating that the social milieu of a rehabilitation group may impact outcome, these data complicate a "one size fits all" approach to corrections. Similarly, these data argue that the interpersonal dynamics often discussed by desistance researchers as key elements of long-term change can also exert influence even within highly standardized correctional interventions.

Advancing Risk Assessment Practices by Incorporating Dynamic Change

Finally, my most recent research interest involves systematic investigation of dynamic risk across time. This stream of research is designed to enhance theoretical understanding of variables associated with likelihood of re-offending, by taking a more individualized approach to risk (i.e., examining intra-individual changes in risk factors). This work improves on how risk factors are traditionally conceptualized by specifically comparing the predictive validity of changing proximal circumstances against the comparatively distal background features typically used to define risk to re-offend.

In particular, my dissertation study (Lloyd, 2015) utilized a newly developed dynamic risk instrument, the Dynamic Risk Assessment for Offender Re-entry (DRAOR; Serin, Mailloux, & Wilson, 2010), which was used by New Zealand correctional staff to record 97,188 repeated assessments of 3498 offenders they supervised after returning from prison to the community. This project provided an opportunity to both (a) describe best practices for analyzing change with appropriate statistical models, and (b) build a logical framework for testing whether more proximal assessments of risk are better predictors than more distal

assessments. The findings suggested that re-assessment DRAOR scores added predictive validity beyond earlier assessment scores. The value of this work arguably extends beyond demonstrating that DRAOR scores “work” in a truly dynamic way across time (such that updated assessments add more predictive information), by providing the field with a framework by which this finding may be replicated with other instruments in other jurisdictions. As such, an attempt to replicate this finding with new data is currently occurring under my supervision (Davies, in progress).

Key Themes and Future Agenda

In summary of the three areas above, two key themes propel my research agenda. First, my research attempts to foster theory, while simultaneously contributing cost-effective improvements to practice. Second, my research blends constructs traditionally grounded in correctional psychology (evidence based practices) with constructs associated with the emerging criminology traditions (desistance). This bridging of traditions encourages me to be comfortable drawing on multiple frameworks and disciplines, and reflects the multidisciplinary nature of contemporary corrections.

Understanding and measuring offender change at the individual level is relatively new and a critical area of advancement for the field, yet this research is inherently complex. Thus, it presents many opportunities for novel research. With the aim to build on my prior projects, I plan to continue to work with international colleagues to develop measurement of desistance constructs. Further validation of the suite of measures is first required, before testing hypotheses about the relative importance of desistance constructs compared to other offender variables (such as within rehabilitation contexts). In addition to publishing currently ongoing work, the development of dynamic risk measurement is an important area for expansion. Short-term plans involve further validation of the DRAOR measure, comparing scores across multiple jurisdictions, and investigating the trajectories of change for multiple sub-populations (e.g., violent offenders, female offenders, offenders of different ethnicities, etc.).