Risky business? Supporting desistance from sexual offending

Beth Weaver and Monica Barry[1], University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold: to scope out some of the implications of desistance research for the community management of sexual offenders in the current UK policy and practice context and to identify what works (why and how) in controlling and/or changing offending behaviour drawing on the views and experiences of what Wood and Kemshall (2007) term 'MAPPA eligible offenders', in this instance, high risk sex offenders. Recognising the limited empirical research on desistance from sexual offending, this chapter begins by outlining the principal themes emerging from desistance research in general, through which lens studies examining desistance from sexual offending are discussed.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are the operational structures overseeing the community management of sexual offenders in England and Wales since 2001 and in Scotland since 2007[2]. Despite the wide-ranging and high profile remit of MAPPA, little is known about the effects of professional efforts to exert control and support change. To shed light on these practices and their effects, this chapter presents some of the findings of a recent qualitative study examining the views and experiences of 26 professionals and 26 MAPPA eligible offenders. It is argued that a greater balance is required between the pursuit of control and the promotion of change. While the imposition of short term, restrictive, external controls might offer some reassurance to practitioners tasked with the difficult and uncertain business of public protection, risk management to reduce reoffending in the short term is unlikely to effect longer term change. Rather, as we elaborate in this chapter, supporting opportunities for people to move on and change the direction of their lives is likely not only to foster improved internal self-control, enhance compliance and augment naturally occurring processes of change, but also to protect the public in the longer term.

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[1] Dr Beth Weaver is Lecturer and Dr Monica Barry Principal Research Fellow at the University of Strathclyde.
[2] In England and Wales, MAPPA oversees the management of not only sexual offenders, but violent and 'other' offenders who pose a risk of serious harm; in Scotland, only registered sex offenders and restricted patients are managed under MAPPA.

The Dynamics of Desistance

Empirical research has revealed that while explanations as to why and how people give up crime vary, the process of desistance is broadly attributable to, and contingent on, an interaction between a range of factors at the level of the individual (such as advancing age, changing motivations, aspirations, self-perceptions and self-efficacy), the relational (such as marriage, parenthood and participation in social and faith-based groups) and the structural (such as housing, finances, employment) (Weaver 2012, Weaver 2013). It is perhaps because of these contingencies that there is as much diversity across peoples' narratives of desistance as there are variations in empirical interpretations, which are often similarly provisional. For example, research has revealed some conditional interaction between different transitional events and experiences – such as the links between employment and investment in significant intimate relations and/or parenthood (see for example Bianchi et al 2005 cited in Bersani et al 2009; Edin et al 2001; Laub and Sampson 2001; Owens 2009; Rhodes 2008; Savolainen 2009). The nature and form of these interacting life transitions influence the various impacts they exert on people's identities, behaviours and social contexts at different points in people's lives to which people bring their aspirations, relational expectations and cultural beliefs (Weaver 2013). What emerges from a critical reading of the research on desistance, then, is that it is the complex and contingent interaction of various opportunities for change, mediated through the lens of an individual's personal priorities, values, aspirations and relational concerns that (sometimes) imbue events or experiences (including for example marriage, parenthood, employment, religiosity) with significance and which directly influence their potential to enable or constrain processes of change, at different stages in a given individual's life (Weaver 2012, 2013).

Despite the heterogeneity of pathways to and experiences of desistance, key themes have emerged across people's narratives of desistance including the significance of hope, agency, social capital, social recognition and access to essential socio-structural resources. Hope, perhaps that things can and will be different, can enhance both motivation and perceptions of personal agency, which, generally manifests as both the capacity and opportunity to exercise choice and control over one's life and is a key component of processes of resilience and desistance (Farrall and Calverley 2006; Fitzpatrick 2011; Lloyd and Serin 2011). However, both resilience and hope can be diminished by an excess or succession of obstacles and adversities (Robertson et al 2006, LeBel et al 2008), not least in the case of high risk sex offenders, as discussed below.

Expressing and experiencing belonging, however, reflects the human need to mutually and reciprocally relate to other people and 'involves feeling connected (or feeling that one belongs in a social milieu)' (Vallerand 1997: 300). This emotional drive for social relatedness or connectedness is a motivating force underpinning human behaviour generally (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000), but the related concepts of 'social capital' and inter-subjective 'social recognition' (Barry 2006; 2010) are explicitly implicated in many accounts of sustained desistance. While these terms are themselves contested, social capital is conceptualized here as the network of social or relational connections that exist between people, based on norms of reciprocity and mutual helping, through which we achieve participation in society (Fukuyama, 2001), and which requires social recognition. While Leonardsen (2003 cited in Barry 2013) has suggested that crime denotes a lack of belonging or obligation *to* the established community, if, as Barry (2006: 136) suggests, 'social recognition…expresses the capacity and need that…people have for longer-term *reciprocal* relations of trust and responsibility in the wider society' (Barry 2006:136, italics in original), then crime can equally be construed as an outcome of a lack of recognition *by* the established community (Barry 2013). This would imply that attempts to support desistance should not only focus on supporting internal changes and the relational connections and external opportunities through which these changes can be realized and sustained (Weaver 2013) but that, reciprocally, society also has a responsibility to encourage and assist people's social reintegration and in so doing recognise their efforts to change (Barry 2013).

Desistance from sex offending

While there is evidence that people who sexually offend can and do desist from these behaviours, little is known about the process through which this occurs and what supports it, although a number of studies are currently underway. While it is something of a truism that sex offenders recidivate at a slower rate than most other groups of offenders (Harris and Hanson 2004; see Laws and Ward 2011 for a comprehensive review), professionals, policy-makers and the public find common ground in the idea that sex offenders retain a lifelong propensity for offending and, thus, potential for harm (Laws and Ward 2011), a perspective that has undoubtedly been shaped by the media (Brayford and Deering 2012).

Current media perceptions on the phenomena of sex offending are intricately interconnected with policy responses and it is perhaps because of these influences and pressures, responding

to sex offending and sex offenders has become a singularly complex and contentious issue for policy makers and practitioners (Brayford, Cowe and Deering 2012). Brayford and Deering (2012) elaborate how the media has negatively influenced public perceptions of sex offending and sex offenders, encouraging an increasingly punitive and risk averse response. In turn public perceptions towards sex offending have influenced political perspectives and responses, evident in a bifurcated legislative system across the UK which assumes that sex offenders are unlikely to desist and therefore should be subjected to extended periods of containment, segregation and supervision in both custodial and community contexts (Brayford and Derring 2012; Stone 2012; Weaver and McNeill 2010). While, as Brayford and Deering (2012) suggest, the increasing punitivism which permeates political discourses and policy and practice responses is met with populist appeal, rather than engaging with the realities of sex offending, it has achieved this at the expense of understanding the dynamics of rehabilitation, reintegration and desistance among sex offenders.

Indeed, moving beyond public and policy-makers' perspectives, there appears to be some consistency across research that, as with the general offending population, age leads to reductions in sex offending behaviour (see Laws and Ward 2011 for a comprehensive review). In general, the age crime curve for sex offenders reflects a trajectory closely resembling the broad shape of the age crime curve for the general offending population (Law and Wards 2011). Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest variations in age-graded trajectories by offence-type and differential rates of recidivism and desistance within these categories (see for example Lussier et al 2010), but, as Laws and Ward observe (2011), beyond establishing the relationship between age and recidivism, we know almost nothing about the process through which individuals desist from sexual offending.

Among the few published research studies, Farmer et al's (2011) research on ten people convicted of child molestation revealed pathways to desistance contiguous with those among the general offending population. Those desisting reported internal shifts in the form of attitudinal changes and enhanced feelings of optimism, which engendered a heightened sense of agency. Correlatively, they reported an overall increase in and acceptance of personal responsibility for their actions. For some, participation in treatment was conceptualised as a turning point which they perceived as an opportunity for change. In contrast to the offending cohort who all described a life of social isolation reflecting their disconnectedness from social groups and a sense of feeling of being estranged or somehow different from others, those desisting expressed a sense of being a part of a social group (whether within a family or

the wider community). The offending cohort also tended to attribute their behaviour to external factors, viewing themselves to have little control of both their own behaviour and events that happened in their lives. While men in this group had attended treatment programmes, they did not receive or respond to these in the same way. The findings of this study echo Kruttschnitt et al's (2000) wider study of 556 probationers convicted of sexual offences, largely child molestation. They found that job stability significantly reduced probationers' probability of re-offending and they identified a positive correlation between engagement in treatment, stable employment and reduced recidivism attributed to the combined effects of the formal and informal controls they respectively engendered, although the precise psychological and social mechanisms underpinning this correlation are unclear.

Hackett et al's (2012) follow up study of people subject to professional interventions as children for sexually abusive behaviours revealed that successful outcomes were associated with people who expressed optimism for their future and experienced affirmative, long term professional support which positively influenced treatment outcomes. Desistance was attributable to stable intimate relationships, educational attainment and participation in employment. By contrast, unstable living arrangements, relationship and family instability and substance misuse were associated with negative outcomes.

However, desistance is a process characterised by vacillation and uncertainty, which takes time and needs nurturing. It can be all too readily threatened by social attitudes and societal practices as much as by offender attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, one arguably influences the other. The kinds of challenges that sex offenders can encounter in the process of desistance include personal shame, stigma, fractured personal and social networks, social isolation and interpersonal distrust. In particular, public protection policies and practices that effectively limit access to opportunities for social participation as a means of exercising control (Levenson and Cotter 2005; McAlinden 2005; Burchfield & Mingus 2008; Mingus and Burchfield 2012; Robbers 2008) can send out messages that such offenders do not belong and can never fully desist or be fully reintegrated. The findings presented in this chapter explore these messages from the perspective of high risk sex offenders themselves, notably in the context of their management in the community and potential for desistance.

Methods

The research findings summarised below sought to examine the dynamics of current practice under the auspices of MAPPA through the conduct of qualitative interviews designed to elicit

the perspectives and experiences of professionals (n=26) and MAPPA eligible offenders (n=26) managed at level 2 or 3 in one local authority area in England and who were sentenced on or before 1ˢᵗ June 2012. Here we discuss the experiences of MAPPA eligible offenders convicted of both sexual and violent offences, with a focus on the former, and on their perceived experiences of professional approaches to managing risk and supporting change.

The research was undertaken between January and September 2013. Access to service users for interview was gained by randomly selecting from the area database approximately 35 potential interviewees from an anonymised sample population of 57 service users who fitted the criteria of being high or very high risk violent and sexual offenders managed at MAPPA level 2 or 3 and being sentenced on or before 1ˢᵗ June 2012. The sample of 35 potential interviewees included a mix of community-based disposals and post-release licence conditions, and also included a mix of ages, gender, offence type and disposal. Offender managers were asked to contact those service users identified as eligible for research purposes and to seek their verbal or written consent to participating in the research. These access negotiations resulted in 26 of those 35 individuals actually being interviewed, from 8 locations in one local authority area in England. These locations remain anonymised in order to protect the identities of the small sample of participants.

The 26 offenders ranged in age from 22 to 71, with an average age of 42 and two of the offender interviewees were female. Community-based statutory supervision included life licence, Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP), automatic conditional release, parole and non-parole licence, and probation, and respondents had been on supervision for between just two days and over five years at the time of interview. Due to the small sample size and small geographical location from which participants were drawn, all quotations bear only an interviewee number, but without the gender, age and location of the participants to ensure their anonymity.

The data was analysed manually by the authors. Emerging themes from the interviews formed the basis of the analysis using constant cross-checking of the data and rigorous saturation of key concepts and themes. The data was analysed through an iterative process of describing, classifying and connecting emerging themes against the research questions. The research questions sought to identify professional and service user experiences and perceptions of the process and outcomes of MAPPA in terms of managing risk and

encouraging change; and to what extent inter-agency differences in the policy, process and practice of risk assessment and management affected the likelihood of desistance amongst this population.

In what follows we provide an overview of the principal findings examining offender perspectives on the dynamics of control and change in the context of community supervision within a MAPPA context[3]. Those with personal experiences of contemporary practice under MAPPA are a group seldom heard from. We suggest that understanding how risk management practices are subjectively experienced, as well as their effects and impacts, can offer important insights for policymakers and practitioners tasked with their development and implementation.

The dynamics of change and control

The majority of the 26 respondents felt that community supervision was more oriented to control rather than change, whilst a few people felt practice was change oriented or balanced between control and change. The change oriented aspects of community supervision that people mentioned included the availability of a professional support network and access to resources that people felt would help them move on, including employment and training opportunities. The kinds of interventions and supports people said they were offered principally comprised access to employment and training courses, cognitive behavioural offence focussed courses, disclosure courses, and treatment and support for addictions. Interestingly while access to such resources were considered to enhance people's capacities and opportunities for change, the desire for and pursuit of personal change (discussed further below) was conceptualised as self-motivated and as an outcome of their own efforts rather than as a consequence of any particular intervention.

The control oriented aspects of community supervision, however, primarily revolved around licence conditions and conditions imposed on residents of Approved Premises. People's experiences of post-release licence conditions are particularly illustrative of the culture of control that has come to characterise professional practice with this category of offender. Notably, some offenders experienced these formal, external controls as a constructive constraint; for these people, mechanisms of control were experienced as enabling processes of change by encouraging the exercise of self-control. However, more frequently, processes

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[3] A more detailed exploration of these and other findings are currently in preparation by the authors.

of change were conceptualised by the service users we spoke to as an internal phenomenon, as the outcome of the exercise of self-control, rather than the product of external controls.

> I can understand why they are there … but it's not gonna stop me from re-offending…that's a decision you've gotta make for yourself at the end of the day. No licence condition's gonna stop you from doing that (Service user 3).

> I don't think it's necessary because I have got quite a strong grip on my offending behaviour and a good understanding of where I come from and why I done it and so forth cos' I've done research all the way back to its roots and discovered why I done what I done and, with that understanding, I have a whole new strength in dealing with things (Service user 23).

There was a clear sense that reductions in the restrictions placed on people operated as a mechanism through which formal recognition of their progress towards change was communicated. For others, the lack of fit between the nature of the conditions, the nature of their offending and their perceptions of the risk they posed (or otherwise), coupled with a lack of understanding of the rationale for the imposition of certain non-negotiable conditions, also gave rise to a sense of injustice and resentment.

> When they planned their so called conditions…had they…worked with me they would have had a better understanding of what went on with me for a start…When it came to me they panicked and just threw things together which a lot of it doesn't make sense or it doesn't really reflect me or my past (Service user 1).

Of the 26 service users interviewed, 19 were or had recently been placed in Approved Premises (APs). APs aim to support successful re-entry through the injection of structure and the provision of purposeful activities intended to enhance independent living and support resettlement. Indeed, Approved Premises were experienced by three people as an aid to community re-entry, particularly after a long term prison sentence. The graduated release process, of which people perceived APs to comprise a part, enabled them to gradually re-adjust to life outside. For these men the regulations they associated with APs (such as breathalysing or curfews) made them think twice and 'stopped [them] running a risk' (Service user 11). A further two people felt that they benefited from the practical assistance that AP staff provided but more often than not, however, the unintended but no less deleterious effects that the additional restrictions that approved premises imposed were

experienced as unfair, unreasonable and unnecessary. The issues that were raised most frequently were the location of the Approved Premises and the timing and frequency of curfews (n=11/19) which, in conjunction with a limited income, restricted people's ability to work and participate in social activities, compounding their sense of social isolation and engendering boredom, and in two cases, aggravating their depression. In particular, the location and timing of curfews was considered, by the people we spoke to, to limit the time they could spend with their families. These people were placed in APs that were a considerable distance from their families. Their dependence on state benefits restricted the frequency with which they could travel to the areas in which their families resided and the frequency or timing of curfews, and their required participation in purposeful activities, restricted the amount of time they could spend with their families. Yet, families can be a critical source of support in the transition from prison to the community and in supporting a family member's process of change. In this regard, the very mechanisms intended to manage and contain risk can have the unintended effect of placing constraints on the kinds of supports and, indeed, incentives, that can motivate and enable people to change.

> After putting me here, starting my life again afresh and my family and my friends and all my connections are all the way across in [area] because that's where I'm from. So I'm stuck in this building unless I wanna go and walk the streets… I've got no support network whatsoever in that room. Luckily I've got a little TV in there but I sit in there watching it, looking out the window and, if anything, more depressed than I did when I was in prison (Service user 15).

> I'm in a completely new area, I'm isolated from most of my family members…It's just because of the signing on times and the distance, it makes it extremely difficult… it just makes it difficult and adds elements of stress (Service user 23).

Four people said that they had little to occupy their time in APs and a further two people felt that their placement in an AP had the effect of either suspending their capacity to get on with their lives or else was akin to living in a vacuum, divorced from everyday reality:

> I've sat and stewed for five months…I could have gone and got accommodation and gone back to work, so that slowed me right down. All I've done is I've sat here for 5 months just stewing and stewing and stewing, getting very angry at times (Service user 20).

They're not reducing anything by dumping me here now, are they? Because if I was intending to do anything, I'm gonna do it when I get my own place anyway. So surely you wanna have me on the maximum amount of time in my own place where you can monitor me rather than in an environment here where I don't have access to anything at all as such and I could end up doing 9 months in here and then only have 3 months in my own environment or you can give me the 13 months in my own environment where you have a longer time to be monitoring me in a real environment and seeing what I'm getting up to. Surely that would be the logical thing rather than, well, we've stuck him in here (Service user 15).

Nobody spontaneously identified purposeful activities in APs as a positive outcome of their placement; some people (n=8/19) felt that the generic activities offered by APs which they were mandated to participate in were too generic, that is, insufficiently tailored to their needs and strengths, to be of any tangible help to them. Rather, these people felt that purposeful activities would be experienced more positively if they were more individualised and oriented to promoting personal progression. Housing and employment were the key areas with which people wanted more proactive support.

The Impetus to Change

Everyone that we spoke to expressed a desire to avoid further offending; however their reasons for wanting to change varied. For some it was about making good on a spoilt past and preventing further harm, while for others, the development of a structured lifestyle, keeping on top of things and staying busy enabled them to stay on the straight and narrow. For others, self-awareness, self- respect, self-acceptance and personal motivation to change were seen as key. What these rationales share is a conceptualisation of desistance as an individual phenomenon. While, for some, various interventions could enhance processes of change, there was broad consensus that the most important component of the change process was personal motivation and self-control. Indeed, desistance was rarely accomplished solely through the imposition of external controls, although, as discussed above, for some people, external controls could create the circumstances in which self-change was enabled. Treatment programmes and other rehabilitative practices are seen by some as enablements to desistance, but desistance *per se* is a process of change that belongs to the individual. The adage 'you rehabilitate yourself' is not a finding peculiar to this research; indeed, a conceptualisation of

desistance as an agentic process is a central feature of desistance research and is a common thread also in these narratives of change.

> You've got to want to change at the end of the day…it doesn't matter how many courses you go on…if you don't want to change yourself, it's not really gonna make much difference…I think you know in yourself if you're gonna re-offend or not. It's as simple as that. It doesn't matter what anyone else says or does, it's how you feel at the end of the day isn't it? (Service user 3).

> It's about me. It's me that's got to change. It's not probation making you change. I've got to make that change. They're there on the guidelines, they're the ones that have got a certain amount of control and they pass that control slightly over to you but it's what you do with that, it's how you choose to take that (Service user 18).

> A person who's going to re-offend, no matter what restrictions you place on them, it's not going to stop them re-offend. If I chose to go down that route, then regardless of what restrictions are in place for me, the SOPO and licence, etc, that's not going to stop me re-offending. Not that I actually plan on doing so (LAUGHS) (Service user 17).

Others considered that while abstinence from offending was something only they could realise, *maintaining* an offence free lifestyle was enabled by the support given, rather than the control imposed, from probation services as well as the recognition given by family for the progress or changes they had made.

> Attending all the programmes to see that they're all saying how much I've changed, to get positive input from them to say that I'm more or less a completely different person than I was … and how pleased my family are and I'm getting all the support and they can see it in my looks… I'm not just doing it for myself. A lot of people have put a lot of time and it's cost a lot of money and a lot of effort to get me where I am (Service user 9).

> What makes it easier is obviously being on the licence because you have got the support network. If you've got a problem, you can come and talk in confidence with your probation officer. She can tell you the best way how to do things…I've got family as well round here (Service user 10).

Few people considered licence conditions or specific interventions by professional agencies to have a direct influence on their opportunities to live differently, which may in part reflect the constraints on professionals to provide the kinds of resources (such as employment and accommodation) that can create the conditions in which desistance might be enabled and sustained. Equally, a number of people referred to the strain of living with the risk of recall which they considered to be exacerbated by the constraints generated by the timing and frequency of AP curfews and which were viewed by some as an unnecessary hindrance to change, not least when these curfews are perceived as *additional* mechanisms of control to which they are subject solely because of their required residence in APs.

> The licence per se [is not a hindrance]. It's the fact that it's being in AP, therefore I can't go out between 10 o'clock at night and 6 o'clock in the morning…. Because that's the rules of this establishment and all APs. Now, don't get me wrong. If you have to be on a curfew set by the judge, I can understand that but if you've got no such conditions of your release set down by the judge, then you shouldn't have this 10 o'clock till 6 o'clock curfew imposed on you (Service user 17).

> Well, I mean, to be honest with you, if I don't comply with it, I suppose they'll technically breach me. What I find intriguing is if I was to come in late, would they breach me for that, considering I wasn't really, I'm not supposed to be on a curfew as far I'm concerned, so it's just the hostel rule that everybody's supposed to follow…. It's not on my licence (Service user 15).

In particular, as previously noted, AP curfews were considered to negatively impact people's opportunities for social participation whether this meant participating in constructive leisure actives, maintaining family contact or acquiring employment – the very factors considered to support change.

Discussion and Conclusions

Desistance research, which has principally focussed on the 'general' offending population, emphasises the importance of hope and optimism; changing values, attitudes and self-concepts; and a shift in personal priorities and aspirational concerns to the change process. However, these internal processes are dependent on, or shaped by, interactions between the individual and their relationships within the community. In this vein, the significance of formal and informal relationships (or lack thereof) and practical assistance to access

opportunities for social participation have emerged as central features of assisted desistance. The respondents in this study confirmed that the impetus for and maintenance of change can be attributed to a combination of personal motivation, encouragement from others and structural opportunities for change. Despite the majority of these respondents suggesting that change came from within, which might, in part, reflect the absence of other change promotive resources, they nevertheless realised their need for recognition and emotional support from friends, family and professionals as well as practical help in reducing reoffending and enabling reintegration. Indeed, some felt they received such support from those tasked with their management in the community. However, the majority not only felt they did *not* receive such support, they went further in suggesting that it was not so much the *absence* of such support that concerned them so much as the inadvertent or unintended outcomes and effects of the imposition of external controls by the courts, by offender managers and by other professionals involved in their management which *undermined* or *inhibited* their process of change.

While the findings presented here offer an uncommon insight into how MAPPA eligible offenders experience contemporary public protection practices, other analysts basing their evidence on different sources have also observed that containment and control have tended to characterise MAPPA interventions, with rather less attention being given to 'constructive interventions' (HMIP and HMIC 2011), particularly in work with high risk sex offenders. A focus on 'balanced and holistic' risk management plans (HMIP and HMIC 2011) has been hindered by professional cultures of risk avoidance (Kemshall 2008), shaped by political and policy directives; a lack of a 'joined up' approach to risk management planning (HMIP and HMIC 2011); and a preoccupation with professional defensiveness (Barry 2007) and reputational risk. In this latter context, it has been argued that monitoring and enforcing compliance with court orders and licence conditions has become a greater professional preoccupation than promoting the longer-term change process for, and reintegration of, high risk offenders (Barry 2007; Hayles 2006). Indeed, various analyses of contemporary approaches to the community management of sex offenders in the UK observe that professional practice with MAPPA eligible offenders is typically characterised by compulsory conditions, surveillance and monitoring, enforcement, and compulsory engagement in treatment, all of which might contain risk and constrain opportunities for offending in the short term but which show little regard for what might happen in the longer term (see for example Kemshall 2008, HMIP & HMIC 2011). These restrictive interventions

essentially control where someone can go, where they can live, what they can do and whom they can approach. The individual then develops an acute awareness of what he/she is not allowed to do but may struggle with social isolation and experience difficulties with community integration precisely because of these restrictive conditions. For some, such restrictions on their movement can enforce distance from families and social networks and limit participation in other social and vocational opportunities (Burchfield and Mingus 2008; Levenson and Cotter 2005, McAlinden 2005, 2009; Robbers 2008), the very factors generally considered to promote and support change.

It has been suggested in this chapter that there seem to be broad correlations in the pathways to desistance among people who sexually offend and the general offending population, which broadly relate to internal attitudinal changes and enhanced capacities to self-risk manage, a supportive relational network (professional and/or personal) and external, socio-economic opportunities to realise change. While further research elaborating the dynamics of desistance from sexual offending is required before we can comfortably move on from drawing inferences, at the very least, the evidence reviewed here would imply that effective risk management strategies should balance formal or external controls with strategies to develop internal controls *and* the kinds of resources that can offer informal social control and support change.

Practitioners share a responsibility with society to offer positive opportunities for change as much as those who offend have a responsibility to desist. Viewed through this lens, the kinds of desistance-promotive practices that this implies are those that can (re)connect people to circuits of social reciprocity, enhance or build connections between people and create opportunities for social participation. What this essentially implies is that practice would become not only less control focussed but also less individualistic and more oriented towards promoting change and to investing in social networks premised on reciprocity and mutual support.

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