The Howard Journal
of Crime and Justice

Howard League for Penal Reform

Check for updates

The Howard Journal Vol 60 No 2. June 2021
ISSN 2059-1098, pp. 209–231
DOI: 10.1111/hojo.12406

Desistance: A Utopian Perspective

DAVID PATTON and STEPHEN FARRALL
David Patton is Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Derby; Stephen Farrall is Professor in Criminology, University of Derby

Abstract: The written diaries of 43 adult male respondents from a prison sample that had participated in a restorative justice intervention reveal a nuanced and dynamic process of desistance via their hopes and pains of anticipated desistance at the micro, meso and macro levels. A utopian reading of the respondents' hopes and pains of desistance is developed which reveals that their diaries express a utopian vision that is not just personal, but also inherently political, radical, collective and transformative. Their pains of desistance on the other hand, reveal a critique and condemnation of the current societal and structural apparatus. The necessity for radical and collective change is clear, if desisters and society are to reach their full potential.

Keywords: desistance; hope; social change; utopia

The study of desistance from crime has received considerable attention in the last 20 years. Despite this focused body of work, gaps in our knowledge remain. This article contributes to this body of work via the exploration of the hopes and pains of desistance, employing as it does a utopian lens. We are not the first to draw connections between the desire to desist from crime and the concept of a utopia. Recently, Graham and McNeill (2017) made the link between utopian sociology and criminology, and highlighted some initial links to desistance. Building on Graham and McNeill's theoretical discussion, we shed more light on how the conceptual work on utopias can aid thinking and practice related to desistance via an encounter with empirical data. Herein we develop a utopian reading of the respondents' diaries to consider how individual hopes and pains of desistance may not just point to personal hopes for their future and anticipated barriers they may face, but may also provide a critique of the present as well as a societal vision that requires radical change to permit desisters and society to reach their full potential. The desistance literature has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex and dynamic process of transitioning from a life of crime (Graham and McNeill 2017; Maruna 2017; Sampson and Laub 1993). Recognising and studying the lived experiences of individuals in the processes associated with desistance provides

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

legitimacy, methodological integrity and political authority. This general approach, however, critics have argued, has also overly decontextualised and depoliticised crime from its social-structural roots, producing analyses that are seen as being too individualistic, too agentic, and 'over-responsibilising' of desisters, providing a reductionist account of crime (Carlton and Baldry 2013; Scraton 2014). In our view, while such criticisms have some merit, they neglect the fact that many studies of desistance reject rational choice theories of change, adopt a symbolic interactionist approach or attempt to acknowledge factors and processes beyond the individual (Farrall 2005; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002; LeBel *et al*. 2008; Maruna 2011; see also contributions to Farrall (2019)).

There has simultaneously been a renaissance of interest in utopia within criminology (Copson 2013; Graham and McNeill 2017; Malloch and Munro 2013; Scott and Gosling 2016). Unlike the everyday understanding of utopia as the unrealistic, wild and fantastical dreamings of a perfect society, Levitas (2013) defines utopia as 'the expression of desire for a better way of living and of being' (p.4). In this way, our use of the concept of utopia allows us a way of critiquing existing structures and opportunities for those trying to leave crime behind. The overlap here with the process of desistance via the three spheres of desistance (primary, secondary and tertiary desistance) is apparent. Primary desistance (Maruna and Farrall 2004) describes 'any lull or crime-free gap … in the course of a criminal career' (p.175) (and is not seen as being terribly interesting in research terms by Maruna and Farrall). Secondary desistance, on the other hand, is 'the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or "changed person"' (Maruna and Farrall 2004, p.175). In this phase, the former-offender not only ceases to offend, but (quoting Lemert 1951, p.76) 'existing roles become disrupted' and there is a 'reorganization based upon a new role or roles'. Primary desistance, Maruna and Farrall (2004, p.175) expect to occur 'only sporadically' and for 'short periods', typically weeks or months, while secondary desistance, given that it will involve more sustained efforts at conformity, ought to last for longer periods, slowing, over time, being the 'new normal'. More recently, McNeill (2016, p.201) has added the notion of tertiary desistance to refer 'not just to shifts in behaviour or identity but to shifts in one's sense of belonging to a (moral and political) community', encompassing 'how one sees one's place in society' and how one is seen by others'. Levitas (2000, p.28) further suggests that utopian visions can also be developed as a *compensation* for what is missing and lacking in the present; as a *critique* of the ills of a society, and as a means for *change* that inspires the aspirational pursuit towards a world transformed. These are topics that we shall return to later.

Despite the criticisms levelled at desistance studies, Graham and McNeill, (2017) question how individual 'experiences are best gathered, understood and explained, with critical emphasis on the reciprocal influences of context and structure' (p.12). It is argued herein that the concept of utopia as a lens through which to view the hopes and pains of desistance provides an answer to the issue of how individual desires to

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

desist and wider social forms can be recast so that the latter become more supportive of the former. Adopting a utopian lens – that is, seeing the diaries as a form of utopian literature and interpreting what is desired by would-be desisters, and extrapolating that in terms of what it means for wider society – in relation to the hopes and pains of desistance could better help to protect against individualisation and responsibilisation, while also providing a necessary means of contextualising and politicising individual narratives.

Adopting a utopian perspective is not the same as being hopeful; utopia permits an understanding that the individual lived experiences of desistance do not just reveal desires for something better but also simultaneously provide a critique of what (i) already exists, and (ii) is thwarting these desires of change, and thereby provides a stimulus for change. Discussion of the pains of desistance reveal that utopian ideals are also formed 'under the double pressure of the galvanising feeling of deprivation and the chastening squeeze of omnipresent and stubborn realities' (Bauman 1976, p.14). Therefore, utopia as Gorz argues, this intellectual project also 'allows us to judge what we are doing in light of what we could or should do' (Levitas 2013, p.xvii). Utopia as an exploration of the critique of what is lacking or deficient in our society allows us simultaneously to envision what is desired in a future one. Utopia therefore provides a more rounded commentary, revealing something more, something deeper and something beyond the individual. After all, if it is true that individuals reflect on the past, the present, and the future in order to structure their understandings of who they are and how far they have progressed towards who they want to become (Farrall 2005; Sartre 1958), some social arrangements may block or inhibit feelings that change has been accomplished.

Various forms of expression have been regarded as utopian from political programmes, intentional communities, performance, poetry, music, movies, art, autobiography, literature, and diaries, etc. (Levitas 2013). Diaries as a form of utopian literature has been acknowledged in holocaust diaries (for example, of Anne Frank) and the travel diaries of Flora Tristan, a feminist socialist (Chiarello 1994). We consider the respondents' diaries to be a form of utopian literature due to their critique of present ills and identification of lack at the micro, meso and macro levels evident in their discussions of their pains of desistance, the fears that accompanied their hopes, as well as their longings for a better way of living and being. The authors here have further envisioned what is needed in society based upon their commentary of the current lack and ills of society in order for their hopes to be facilitated and realised.

Our Contribution

The original contribution of this article, exploring the utopian hopes and pains of desistance, using the less frequently used methodological tool of prisoner diaries, is to reveal a utopian vision of a desistance-supporting society while illuminating the need for radical structural change. In other words, we use individual narratives as indicators of, commentaries upon

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

and critiques of a *collective future potential* beyond the individual. While existing work has highlighted the important role of hope in desistance and has identified some specific pains of desistance, the two have been explored in isolation from one another. The three aims of this article are: first, to explore both hopes and pains together to permit greater insight into the process of desistance to illustrate that the journey of desistance is neither linear nor a wholly straightforward, or positive experience; second, to explore whether and how hopes and pains of desistance operate differentially at the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis to further develop our understanding of the nuanced and dynamic process of desistance; third, to examine whether and how the personal lived experiences of the hopes and pains of desistance are also political, radical and transformative. It will be argued that the adoption of the concept of utopia within our analysis allows us to develop important insights from the diary entries both into the possibilities of, and constraints upon, supporting desistance both at the individual level, the meso level and at the socio-structural level.

Desistance has tended to highlight positive themes such as hope, generativity, of 'making good', redemption scripts, creating new prosocial identities and discovering purpose (Maruna 2001; Nugent and Schinkel 2016). Similarly, drug recovery has highlighted the accrual of 'positive' capitals (personal, social and community), and has also tended towards the implicit assumption of positive linear accrual of these capitals to describe the recovery journey (Kay 2020). Best and Laudet (2010) see personal capital as encompassing resources and qualities such as resilience, communication skills, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Social capital encompasses the relationships and networks that the person can utilise. Community capital encompasses resources at the local community level that the person can access, such as education and training, safe and secure accommodation, meaningful employment opportunities, mutual aid groups, visible recovery champions and recovery-oriented treatment services. Desistance, similar to recovery, as it will be argued here, operates on a positive and negative continuum, the capitals expressed though the respondents' hopes would be expressed positively on the continuum, and their pains of desistance would be expressed negatively on the continuum to incorporate what we will later term negative desistance capital akin to negative recovery capital (Cloud and Granfield 2008). Hopes and pains of desistance like positive and negative capital can occur simultaneously (Kay 2020). The desistance process is experienced in both positive and negative ways with different hopes and pains operating at the micro, meso and macro levels which inevitably interact and either facilitate or impede positive change towards a life beyond desistance.

Hopes, Human Development and Desistance from Crime

Hope has played a central role in desistance research (Burnett and Maruna 2004; Farrall *et al*. 2014). The role of hope permits an envisioning of the future self, a new non-offending identity and life that can be lived (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002). This provides scope for an expressed

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

intention to desist, which Bottoms and Shapland (2011) have shown was associated with subsequent lower self-reported offending. Hope also facilitates the 'projecting of the self' into the future, begging the question of 'how this future can be realised' (Farrall 2005, p.367). Going forward, 'the new or refashioned identity can act as a cognitive filter for decision making' (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002, p.1001). This process helps build self-efficacy, self-esteem and helps determine what actions they will take and also, importantly, which actions they will not (Healy 2014).

The degrees of hope expressed by an individual have been shown to be strong indicators of desistance (Burnett and Maruna 2004). LeBel *et al.* (2008) showed that hope can help people to grasp opportunities and to overcome disappointments. Levels of hope inevitably 'ebb and flow' during different phases in the desistance process (Farrall and Calverley 2006) but remain central even for those engaged in the process for many years (Farrall *et al.* 2014). Although hope is affected by structural factors and processes (Farrall 2002, p.210), Burnett and Maruna (2004) found that hope reduces the number of obstacles or problems experienced. Hopes will inevitably be challenged during the desistance journey, turning to hopelessness when routes out of offending are not facilitated or are structurally obstructed (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright 2016; Standing 2011).

Typically, hope is approached as an individual desire often focused on themselves. However, when hope is turned outwards, beyond the individual, hope may desire something beyond themselves, for example, hopes for social change. Thus the things that people hope for may require personal as well as social change. Hope, therefore, represents an inner visioning or picturing of a desired future reality for the individual and/or the world beyond them. As such, desistance is not the 'end point', as that conceptualisation remains solely focused on the absence of offending (McNeill and Weaver 2010). Indeed, McNeill (2012) argues that 'people do not simply desist; they desist into something' (p.18). That 'something' has been defined by some as the successful re/integration and participation of the individual within their community/society (Anderson and McNeill 2019; McNeill 2012). Therefore, desistance is defined as:

> a process of human development (inevitably occurring in and affected by particular social contexts) that involves moving away from crime and towards social integration and participation. (Anderson and McNeill 2019, p.412)

However, the issue of the nature of this 'something' into which desisters move is ephemeral. Nonetheless, we use the expressed hopes and desires of would-be desisters to explore their (perhaps unacknowledged) preferences of such a future society.

Pains and Limiting Lifestyles

Research has also identified that desistance can be painful and has identified several pains of desistance which act as barriers that challenge or thwart the desistance process (Calverley 2013; Graham and McNeill 2017; Nugent and Schinkel 2016). Some of the specific pains identified in the

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

literature have been the pains of hopelessness as a result of not being able to fully participate in life or attain their goals (Standing 2011). The pain of goal failure occurs when their hopes have been thwarted (Nugent and Schinkel 2016). Diachronic self-control and isolation have been shown to lead to a lonely and limited life (Shapland and Bottoms 2011). Stigma and exclusion, that is, from labour market, housing, etc., highlight the broader barriers beyond the individual of going straight (Farrall *et al*. 2014). The impact of such pains or in other words dire circumstances have been shown to reduce optimism regarding one's ability to 'go straight', as Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) note:

> Given a relatively 'advantaged' set of circumstances, the cognitive transformations and agentic moves we describe are hardly necessary; under conditions of sufficiently extreme disadvantage, they are unlikely to be nearly enough. (p.1026)

Structurally, the availability of legitimate identities has been shown to be limited at the meso and macro levels, especially those relating to employment, education, social networks, support services, financial services, etc. (Farrall *et al*. 2014). Research exploring these dynamic interactions highlights the importance of tertiary desistance in promoting (or stifling) desistance at the micro, meso and macro levels. The need for meso-brokers has been highlighted given the significant pains experienced in the desistance process (Nugent and Schinkel 2016). Meso-brokers, similar to the role of community builders for those in recovery, can help to increase social and bridging capital and extend connections (Best, Hall and Musgrove 2018) and to affirm and convey positive societal labels for respondents to promote desistance, especially if these labels are then internalised (Maruna *et al*. 2009). The pains experienced highlight that desistance, like rehabilitation, is a 'social project as well as a personal one' (McNeill 2012, p.14). Therefore, the creation of 'super-agents' heroically battling structural forces is not the answer; possessing a greater sense of agency and self-efficacy is not in and of itself productive of desistance (LeBel *et al*. 2008). Consequently, in contrast to Anderson and McNeill (2019), Nugent and Schinkel (2016) argue that desistance is experienced as 'an endurance test with little to no reward' (p.13).

Methodology

This article is based on the handwritten diary entries of 43 male respondents serving prison sentences in a Category C adult male English prison. The respondents had voluntarily taken part in a five-week restorative intervention and were asked at the end of each week's session to complete one diary entry. Session one explored the participants' thoughts and feelings at the time of their offending; session two focused on taking responsibility for the offence; session three explored the wider impact of who else was impacted by their offending; session four explored working towards change; and session five explored repairing the harms caused by their offending. They were asked to reflect on any issues that had come up for them during each session and as such the entries were only intended to be used for their

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

The Howard Journal Vol 60 No 2. June 2021
ISSN 2059-1098, pp. 209–231

own reflective purposes. Entries ranged in length from just under one side of A4 to two-and-a-half sides of A4. Respondents were mainly white (37) and the remaining respondents (six) were from a range of other ethnicities. Their ages ranged from 23 to 55 years (the average age was 43 years). The men had been sentenced for either violent or sexual offences and were serving a long-term or life sentence. All respondents had also taken part in other individual and group interventions during their time in prison.

The use of diaries as a methodological tool for data collection is less frequently used in desistance research (O'Keefe and Albertson 2016; Robinson-Edwards and Pinkney 2018). Retrospective consent was gained from all participants to use them for research purposes. The benefit of gaining retrospective consent is that entries are potentially less likely to have been biased by research design or interviewer presence or bias. Moule and Goodman (2009) believe that diaries can offer more intimate descriptions of events, and in this instance as participants believed the entries were for their own use rather than research, conscious or unconscious censoring was hopefully lessened. A priori qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken with the diaries based upon existing themes identified in the hopes or pains of desistance literature as a starting framework for analysis. For example, desistance literature had identified the pains of hopelessness, goal failure, diachronic self-control and isolation, exclusion from labour market, housing, etc. (Farrall *et al*. 2014; Nugent and Schinkel 2016; Shapland and Bottoms 2011). The desistance literature had also identified hopes for replacement legitimate identities, making good, generativity, inclusion and participation in family life, employment, education, etc. (Farrall and Calverley 2006; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002; Maruna 2001).

The limitations of the current study relate mainly to the sample size which cannot be generalised to the larger prison population. Even though respondents had taken part in numerous interventions there may be some selection bias among those who wanted to participate in a restorative intervention. There may also be recall issues relating to past events in their diaries and positionality perspectives to consider as their sense of identity and perspective may have changed over time. We acknowledge that the diary entries will to some extent be influenced by the course content; second, the analysis is shaped by the exploration of the data for material related to desistance theories in general and specifically hopes and fears in particular; third, they are shaped by the authors' interest in utopian framings as a result of the material uncovered in the respondents' diaries. Despite this, we find that the discovery of such content in their diaries perhaps adds greater reassurance that the respondents had included such content in their entries despite not being asked to do so.

The Utopian Hopes and Pains of Desistance

We explore the dynamic interactions of respondents' hopes and pains of desistance at the micro, meso, and macro levels in order to examine the subjective, situational, social and structural factors of the respondents' anticipated desistance journeys (see *Figure 1*).

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Level	Agent(s)	Examples of the Object of Change Sought
Macro	Government; government departments; national employers.	Rehabilitation of Offenders Act; incentives for employers to hire former offenders (via tax system, perhaps); policies which support (or do not impede) organisations and individuals wishing to desist/support others who wish to desist.
Meso	Prisons; probation service; regional employers; local voluntary services (e.g., Circles of Support); religious groups; grass-roots organisations.	Desire (and supporting policies) to hire former offenders without prejudice/stigma; Inter-organisational working/co-operation; schemes just as Jobs, Friends and Homes (see Hall, Best and Musgrove 2019), Surrey Probation and ILPS employment schemes (see Sarno et al. 2000). Mutual aid and community groups will be varied and diffuse according to local conditions and possibilities. Walking Therapy groups; Rehabilitation Coffee Mornings; men‟s groups wishing to support rehabilitation; victim-offender mediation groups, etc. (Maruna 2017; Weaver 2016).
Micro	The desister, spouse/romantic partner, children, sibling and close family members.	Promotion and affirmation of personal identity and lifestyle changes from offending based to non-offending based.

FIGURE 1
Turning Utopian Ideas into Practical Solutions

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

For example, at the macro level one might see central government and key departments working in a concerted way in order to produce incentives for all employers to employ former offenders, alongside reducing the costs (financial, practical, etc.) to employing former offenders. Such work would need to safeguard the interests of existing and potential future victims, of course. At the meso level, we foresee situations in which prisons, probation services and so on are able to encourage the organisations with which they work to create opportunities for the employment of former offenders. Such efforts would, we suspect, need to be interconnected with housing provision and 'softer' social networks (such as local community groups and mutual aid groups). At the micro level, the efforts of the desister to engage in, and sustain, secondary desistance is key (this would include, among other things, the development of a new non-offending identity and lifestyle, increased awareness of strengths, skills, articulation of new hopes and goals, etc.).

Micro Level: Everyday Hopes for Transformation

Almost all respondents hoped to experience a change of identity and personal transformation through the creation of a new non-offending identity which Healy (2014) also highlights as being a key mechanism to desistance and agentic action. Respondents were at differing stages in the creation of a valued new replacement identity, ranging from believing that it was not possible to change, to considering what it would be like to change. However, just under a third of respondents wrote about having already created a new replacement identity. They consistently used the past tense when writing about their offending identity and behaviours and the present tense when referring to a changed replacement self (Farrall and Calverley 2006). One respondent wrote: 'I know I'm a changed man'. Another wrote: 'I have changed my life'. Some respondents, echoing the redemption scripts of Maruna (2001), wrote of having 'changed to the person I was and should have been a long time ago'. Another considered how their new self may be perceived by others upon release: 'I've changed a lot and I may not be recognised when I get out … I'm not that person and it [re-offending] won't happen again'. This latter group was similar to Healy's (2014) authentic desisters group in that they expressed a greater valued replacement identity and expressed increased levels of agency.

While respondents in this latter group were aware of potential situational, relational, structural barriers and stigma they also felt empowered to overcome them as a result of their identity transformation and creation of a new replacement self. One respondent noted: 'I wanted to change. I might have a few obstacles but I see them more as goals to get past'. Another respondent echoed this sentiment by acknowledging that 'I am my own barrier'. Another respondent noted however that the prime responsibility lies with them: 'Having family around you helps massively but helping yourself is the biggest way'. Of course, this does not mean that they will not face barriers upon release which may later affect their desistance choices.

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

These respondents (who had gained greater levels of personal capital) also wrote much more about their hopes for increased social capital through reconciliation and restoration of familial relations to 're-build family ties', 'make amends with my family', 'be a Dad to my daughter'. By extension, another respondent wrote of his hope to fulfil his responsibilities as a father by being 'A Daddy who comes home every day'. Desired social roles here were 'father', 'husband', 'partner', 'family man', and as one respondent expressed, he just wanted to 'Live a normal straight life, marriage, kids, etc.'. The key motivation here was to provide a sense of normalcy and respectability to their families and the 'other' in their wider community but also to prove that they have changed.

Notions of generativity emerged in diary entries due to desires to become 'A better role model'. Another wrote: 'show my kids I'm a good idol', and similarly another wrote they wanted to 'Be a better role model to my kids and sister and brothers'. One respondent wrote: 'my son will never learn my old ways and he could never go down this route'. For these respondents, their past would appear to have been recast 'as the necessary prelude to some newfound calling' (Maruna 2001, p.9). Part of this newfound calling for these respondents was to their family and is accompanied by a sense of generativity as evidenced in part through their selection of the phrases 'idol' and 'role model' which both point to a greater emphasis of reparation via nurturing and guiding their children. Similar to Healy's (2014) groups of desisters, the respondents here are projecting forward their imagined desistance, desired future along with their new identities, positive roles and responsibilities.

Pains of Thwarted Change

Strained familial dynamics (and therefore negative social capital) were commonly expressed in diaries as a result of the participants' criminal behaviour and imprisonment. Some described the current state of their family relationships, with one person reporting that their 'family is not that bothered, embarrassed of me', and others spoke of their families 'turning their backs'. Estranged relationships were the norm, 'My mum won't speak to me'; another respondent wrote: 'my family are ashamed of me'; and another: 'my mother felt disappointed, angry and ashamed. I don't talk to any of my family as much as I used to'. Respondents were facing familial rejection and exclusion and articulated the isolating and shameful impact such pains of desistance create: 'my family are very upset with me and I miss them. I miss the grandkids and my kids'. Another wrote: 'I'm ashamed that my mum won't speak to me'.

At the micro level, respondents' hopes for personal transformation from an offending identity to a non-offending identity then moved slightly outwards into hopes for second chances, reconciliation and restoration of close relationships with partners, children and close family members with the hope of giving back to them. Such hopes existed despite their frank assessments of their present strained and estranged relationships.

© 2021 *The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

The Howard Journal Vol 60 No 2. June 2021
ISSN 2059-1098, pp. 209–231

Meso Level: Hopes of Inclusion and Growth

Respondents were aware that the meso level was key to the success of their desistance endeavours. Their hopes for participation and achievement in family, employment, education, and beyond required hope for relational and structural inclusion, acceptance and second chances. One respondent wrote that he wanted to 'move on by getting back to the community by getting a job and organising my life'. Respondents hoped to attain a broader range of legitimate identities (such as 'employed', 'provider', 'educated', 'qualified', 'home-owner') at the meso level as compared with the micro level. The hope of being 'employed' provided a key social role that afforded the attainment of being given a second chance, a sense of pride, permitted participation in and contribution to society, as well as being a means of providing for their families. Respondents were keen to gain employment but importantly to take on the social role of 'Being a working man' in order to 'provide for my family' and show others that they were respectable.

Furthermore, the social role of being 'educated or qualified' provided a legitimate means to employment but also of proving that they had changed and are different from their past failed educational efforts; as one respondent wrote they hoped to 'gain better qualifications', and another wanted to 'apply for grants from charities'. Such actions were focused on creating a better future for themselves and their immediate families, and so one respondent wrote: 'I'll look for a part time job and get into college in order to get to where I want to be in the future and who I want to be as compared to where I was before and who I used to be'.

The social role of 'homeowner' provided a sense of pride and stability for their family but also of appearing normal and respectable and communicating to others that they had changed and had somehow made it, as one respondent wrote, he hoped for a 'clean start – get a job, new house with my partner, start a family', and another wrote they hoped for a 'nice home, a good life, kids, a good job to help me provide for my family and to grow old with my wife'. Implicit in taking on these social roles of participation, contribution and normalcy is the exchange for inclusion, acceptance, belonging and being given another chance to get it right.

Pains of Disappointment

The main pains of desistance at the meso level were as a result of legal and judicial barriers as a result of their criminal conviction and its associated stigma which can result in rejection and exclusion from various sources at the meso level such as the labour market and wider social networks at the local community level represented forms of negative social and community capital. Further, the pains of past disappointments when working with criminal justice and support agents/agencies also resulted in fears of future disappointment about not having successful relationships. We will now address the main areas in order below.

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

The Howard Journal Vol 60 No 2. June 2021
ISSN 2059-1098, pp. 209–231

Gaining Employment

The continuing symbolism of having a criminal record post release was perceived to be a significant barrier to the successful process of desistance and in assuming the legitimate social role of being 'employed'. One respondent clearly identified the perceived problem of 'Stigmatisation, and so not gaining employment'. Similarly, another respondent wrote: 'Employers may not like me trying to get a decent job because of my criminal record'. Disclosure of criminal convictions has been highlighted as a key obstacle to desistance (Kirkwood and McNeill 2015; Maruna 2011), and facing such levels of stigma was thought to make it 'hard to find work especially when you don't have a support network'. Failure to access community capital in the labour market will lead to the pain of goal frustration which over time has led some to feelings of hopelessness (personal capital) which is also a pain of desistance (Nugent and Schinkel 2016). This provides a good example of how negative community capital can then create negative personal capital to produce negative pains of desistance.

Despite such pains, those who had created a positive replacement self, hoped that the possession of personal capital and individual skills would help them overcome obstacles at the meso level. One respondent highlighted the importance of personal capital and possessing skills: 'I know I have many skills which I will never lose, and I can get it all back one day'. Another respondent noted how a new sense of self had promoted action and the projection of a new social role:

> I've totally turned my life around. And this is what I needed. My circumstances on the night was I needed some money to pay for house, rent, car insurance. I had no skills so couldn't get a job and made some bad decisions. I'm now level 3 Brickie and level 2 plasterer so will never be put in that situation again! I've skills to get a job now. I have changed my life around and what I will be doing for money when I am released.

The Role of Meso-Brokers

Respondents acknowledged their need of positive social capital and help from a range of meso-brokers to help extend their networks, fulfil hopes and goals and achieve tertiary desistance. However, the pain of disappointment was evident among some respondents when referring to their past experiences of negative social relations and a lack of supportive meso-brokers; one respondent wrote of being 'Let down, because when I asked for help, I did not get the help I needed at the time'. Others wrote of hoping for a 'positive relationship with my probation officer this time around', or of needing a good drugs/alcohol worker as previous workers were 'useless' or 'did not care'. Their need of positive social capital evoked tensions within them of needing others to achieve their goals, but were potentially returning to sources that had previously let them down, and they therefore represented negative forms of social capital to the respondents.

Despite this, many stated that they intended to ask for the help they needed. Official state agents were typically highlighted here rather than

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

informal sources of support. One respondent wrote that they needed 'help from probation to keep out of trouble and support me in getting a job/qualifications', while another wanted to 'accept support from agencies for drug use and jobs' and help to 'make another recovery plan'. Others wrote about the need of 'getting support to get into education'. For some the relationship with their criminal justice workers (that is, a probation officer or drugs worker) was key to offering hope and the attainment of goals. Such agents were seen as having a key role to play here as meso-brokers opening doors to access the ways to desistance and beyond to both social and community capital. In addition, other meso-brokers could come in the form of employers and 'co-desisters' in opening up social and bridging capital to another and vice versa (Nugent 2015; Weaver 2013, 2016; Weaver and McCulloch 2012). As one respondent wrote: 'My mate in here has connections in the building trade. Said he will ask them to help me when I get out'.

The respondents' hopes have constructed an envisioned future; but one that they cannot create or achieve by themselves. As one respondent wrote: 'simply asking for help could change my future'. Another respondent wrote: 'there could be more barriers than I anticipate but they can always be overcome with help … I can address any issues by growing closer to my support network'. Their continued hope was that as they asked for help, that help would be provided, and the means or ways for the achievement of their vision and goals would be opened to permit their participation and contribution in society. There is a clear recognition from the respondents that previously there has been a lack of suitable meso-brokers which led to disappointment but going forward there is a strong need for the effective assistance of meso-brokers to aid with building positive social and community capital.

Local Communities

Respondents were very aware of the negative reactions and responses of their wider local communities and social networks that may stigmatise, label or exclude them due to their 'old reputation' and 'people's perceptions of me and my reputation', which were key barriers post release. One respondent wrote: 'I think my local community will make it hard for me to change'. The impact of this ongoing stigma and rejection, acted as a constant reminder for some of their past self and actions (negatively impacting secondary desistance), and one respondent wrote that he will be 'Paranoid about how people look at me and what I did'.

Those who had already developed a new replacement identity appeared to have increased hopes and beliefs about overcoming stigma this time at the meso level. Respondents wrote about being able to 'eventually shake off the stigma/stereotype', that they would 'develop new relationships' and over time 'will eventually be able to get a good reputation and a good name'. Another felt that they had already overcome this barrier: 'I used to be worried what people used to think of me in the past, now I don't care what they think'. For others, however, they believed that acceptance from

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

The Howard Journal Vol 60 No 2. June 2021
ISSN 2059-1098, pp. 209–231

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the local community would not be given and so planned to move to a new geographic location upon release.

Pain of Self-isolation

Nugent and Schinkel (2016), Healy (2014) and Calverley (2013), all identified the pains of isolation in their studies; however, we refer here to the 'pain of self-isolation' as it was evident from the respondents' diaries, this is a planned strategy to isolate themselves to maintain their goal of primary and secondary desistance. They are not experiencing isolation as a result of stigma or exclusion from others, rather, they are choosing to exclude and isolate themselves as a form of protection or survival strategy while on their desistance journey. The pain of isolation is evident at the macro level, as this is a direct consequence of the isolation and exclusion experienced due to the criminal justice system's monitoring, surveillance and restrictions placed upon the respondents from their licence conditions rather than as a result of their own actions.

The pains of self-isolation are motivated by a desire to avoid temptations and risks of retuning to old behaviours and identities by avoiding specific people and places that may lead to future offending behaviour or relapses into addictions with alcohol and/or drugs. Respondents wrote about their planned isolation to, 'make sure I stay away from people that want to do a crime' and 'I know I need to avoid certain areas and people when I get out'. And similarly, 'I need to remain drug free by not moving in them circles. This also removes temptation and stress'. Therefore, some felt they needed to 'move away to a new area with my partner', or 'to start again somewhere new'. The likely lived experience of this planned strategy has been shown to be a reduced social network and social isolation (Calverley 2013; Nugent and Schinkel 2016), and reduced access to social and cultural capital.

Macro Level: Hopes of Inclusion and Participation

Desistance studies have focused less on macro-level structural issues that might facilitate or impede upon ex-offenders decisions and behaviours (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland (2010); although see some of the contributions in Farrall (2019) and Farrall, Gray and Jones (2020)). Yet macro-level structures and influences (wider social, economic, cultural or political forces) clearly impact upon respondents' pains of desistance at the micro and meso levels, such as the anticipated inequality of access or acceptability to positive micro- and meso-level relations and opportunities. Respondents' articulation of their 'future self' as influenced by the 'availability of legitimate identities' (Farrall *et al*. 2011) in the form of social roles (roles such as 'employed', 'educated', 'homeowner') as discussed above, requires macro structural pathways for such social roles to be available to them to permit their inclusion and participation. Their beliefs, perceptions, decisions and plans at the micro and meso levels have been shaped by macro-level structures and forces.

There was an awareness by some of the economic and political forces which may impact upon them gaining access and inclusion that would

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

permit the attainment of their desired social roles. Changes to the UK economy have impacted the structures of the labour market producing a decrease in manual labour and an increase in jobs in the knowledge economy (Office for National Statistics 2020). This rise in entry to the labour market with the need for higher level skills and qualifications was evident in respondents' diaries due the high desire to return to education, to only work part time to allow for participation in education to acquire the necessary qualifications and skills needed in the 'new' labour market. Their perceptions of a very limited number of jobs that they could apply for meant that their hopes were swayed towards 'applying for voluntary work' or 'part-time work' in the first instance. They also acknowledged their fears surrounding the outcomes of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks being received and the requirement to disclose their criminal convictions as a prime barrier when applying for employment, education and mortgages (as discussed above under the meso level) and as one respondent noted: 'It's like a constant reminder of who you were'. Another commented that 'The system won't allow you to progress'. Some also noted austerity reductions to the child family tax credit system and how this may negatively impact upon work and education, as one respondent noted his partner's view that 'with all of these austerity cuts with the Tories we will be worse off by me working'.

Pains of Criminal Justice Policy

Criminal justice policy has focused on increasingly punitive approaches to crime management, promoting a risk management agenda (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland 2010). The pains of current criminal justice policy and practice of 'being on licence' and 'needing to stick to MAPPA [Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements] restrictions and remembering not to go in my exclusion zone' created a sense of stress, pressure and doubt about their capacity to adhere to them and therefore maintain primary desistance. One respondent wrote: 'I just don't want to breach my licence conditions' and 'I hope I do not fuck it all off if something goes wrong'. Similarly, Halsey, Armstrong and Wright (2016) highlighted that such '"fuck it" moments' are more a commentary on people's structurally-constrained capacities and opportunities to desist from crime as opposed to a desire to return to offending behaviour. It is thought that at least for some, the reason for the pain of self-isolation discussed above, has been created in order to adhere to licence and MAPPA restrictions and maintain primary desistance. The inherent pains of being on licence and having MAPPA restrictions imposing pains of surveillance and exclusion from specific locations for specific times and people were thought to create further pains of isolation beyond the restrictions imposed. 'I don't know how I am going to get a new partner as when I tell her I can't take her out on a Saturday night in town, she is going to know something is not right' and another wrote 'as soon as you say to someone "I'm on licence" they are going to judge you'. Finally, another wrote about his uncertainty of being able to gain employment in his town centre, 'due to my likely

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

exclusion zone restrictions'. Spatial and relational isolation, exclusion and rejection are by-products of being on licence and MAPPA restrictions and the resultant stigma associated with these. The policy and practice focus on monitoring and managing risk in the community may ironically create unintended consequences that result in repeat offending. Such punitive and risk-based policies have clear implications beyond the management of the likelihood of reoffending; they may also impact on anticipated job prospects, physical movements in their home city, and on potential new romantic relationships, etc.

Discussion

Analysis of desisters' hopes and pains of desistance have rightly revealed the need for (re)integration into society via access to family, employment, education, housing, financial support, etc. The utopian hopes of respondents at the personal level were homogenous and limited, modest and reasonable. The respondents hoped to settle down and lead a conforming and conventional life similar to that found by Bottoms *et al*. (2004). There would appear to be work still to do to liberate the hopes of different groups in society, as Bloch (1995) states that there is a 'beautifying mirror which often reflects how the ruling class wishes the wishes of weak to be' (p.128).

Two key strategies were utilised by respondents in an attempt to attain their personal utopia. First, in order to maintain primary and secondary desistance at the meso level respondents planned to strategically self-isolate themselves in order to eliminate offending-related people and places from their lives through the pain of self-isolation. People, social networks, places and spaces appeared to be threats and symbols of fear which needed to be avoided and knifed off from their lives (Maruna and Roy 2007). Their licence and MAPPA restrictions resulted in further pains of isolation and exclusion. Such pains highlight the need to consider the importance of connectedness when planning an individual's resettlement prior to release from prison (Best, Hall and Musgrove 2018). Devising relocation plans for those who wish to move home needs to become better established while acknowledging the *politics* of transferring cases beyond their current geographic region. The second strategy used was to adopt esteemed social roles from the 'availability of legitimate identities' (Farrall *et al*. 2011). They seek to replace the 'criminal' label for a socially accepted and esteemed replacement role, especially in the eyes of the 'other'. The strategy has been shown to be successful only where it is integrated into a wider process of secondary desistance resulting in a broader and authentic shift to non-offending identities. Meso-brokers have a key facilitative role to play here to aid access to and the adoption of esteemed replacement roles and labels. Both strategies adopted at the personal utopic level involved trying to operate within the existing societal and structural apparatus.

In the same way that Cloud and Granfield (2008) introduced the idea of 'negative recovery capital' to refer to things that impact negatively on the recovery journey and act as potential barriers to drug recovery, it is suggested here that the collective pains of desistance represent a form of

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

'negative desistance capital'. They represent negative events, forces, structures and obstacles that hinder the desistance process and may prevent people from entering into 'something beyond' desistance. Therefore, based on the pains of desistance expressed here and if one were adopting more of a reform-based agenda to the existing social and structural apparatus, then some necessary steps based on their diary entries for a personal utopia would be:

1. Amendments to the regulations relating to the disclosure of criminal convictions to help reduce stigma, promote inclusion, access and participation and promote positive community capital.
2. Among other things, prison, for some, had been a vehicle for the incubation of their hopes and the creation of a replacement non-offending identity. Research needs to explore how this incubation function can be further embedded through the correctional policies and practices of the institution and of staff and of rehabilitative pathways post release.
3. Families have a prime role in reducing reoffending, stopping the transmission of offending across generations and building social capital (Ministry of Justice 2017). Repairing family relations was very important to the respondents. Therefore, family mediation and reconciliation initiatives have a significant role in helping reconnect family members and help provide social capital given familial breakdowns.
4. Training akin to that used in recovery to improve social connections/capital and skills of ex-prisoners/offenders is necessary to promote tertiary desistance (Best, Hall and Musgrove 2018).
5. Those intending to relocate to a new geographic location require a relocation package and plan prepared before release from prison.
6. There is a need for a broader range of 'meso-brokers' to communicate affirming messages of acceptance and aid inclusion, bridging and social capital to link respondents to new groups and networks so that they can be included, participate and achieve (Best, Hall and Musgrove 2018; Nugent and Schinkel 2016).
7. Employers need to offer progressive employment packages to ex-offenders as a key mechanism to provide much-needed positive community capital and paths to desistance to permit new social roles to be established and the attainment of successful goals. Perhaps the introduction of tax breaks to employers who commit to employ former offenders may help incentivise employers. Currently 10% of Timpson's workforce are ex-offenders as a result of their well-articulated and researched employment strategy (Timpson 2019).

Without such reforms, it will be harder (although not impossible, Farrall and Bowling (1999)) for former offenders to desist. If their anticipated high levels of stigma, exclusion and rejection are experienced, and if such messages were to become internalised, then this is likely to thwart desistance (LeBel *et al*. 2008). This is a prime example of the interaction of how personal and community capital interact to create potentially significant detrimental outcomes for the desistance process. They need both the will and

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

the ways of desistance (Burnett and Maruna 2004). If a lack of legitimate ways and means to the fulfilment of tertiary desistance continues, hopes will continue to be blocked, possibly leading to reoffending. By extension, the pain of goal failure and frustration will be experienced and over time could lead to the pain of hopelessness (Standing 2011). This may increase the chances of '"fuck it" moments' (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright 2016) or as a minimum, the continued acceptance of a limited existence (Nugent and Schinkel 2016), and an ongoing cycle of hopes being deferred. There is a need to protect the respondents' hopes as otherwise they will become a source of pain rather than be a key utopian revisioning of their lives.

We found that the social and structural apparatus was not wholly deterministic or limiting in its effects highlighting the dynamic and subjective interactions between social, situational and structural factors. At the personal level, the transformative effect of having 'done the work' to establish a replacement non-offending identity (secondary desistance) had led some to take positive actions within prison to gain new qualifications and reach out to family members. A further factor was evident among those who had created a new non-offending identity and had gained an increased awareness of their personal capital and stimulated the attainment of new employment skills. Thus, a stronger replacement identity (Hunter and Farrall 2018) may promote a greater likelihood of success at the tertiary desistance level or at least the temporary hope that this may be so.

The respondents' writings on the pains of desistance at the micro, meso and macro levels reveal a lack in what is currently in existence and, it is argued, thereby also provide a critique of the present features and structural arrangements at the micro, meso and macro levels. They also allow the reader the opportunity to envision the better future that is needed to address the present lack by asking 'what barriers are being experienced?' and 'what is needed for these pains to be reduced or overcome?'. The gaps between the two answers, provide pointers for the reader to frame such an envisioning. Their hopes provide a future picture of their desired futures and better selves. However, their hopes are not guaranteed; Burnett and Maruna (2004) found that 'the impact of hope shrinks as the number of problems encountered rises' (p.399). As such, their hopes allow the reader the opportunity to envision more broadly on the basis of 'what is needed in order for their hopes to be realised?' in the knowledge of the present lack and ills.

Desistance should be more akin to a process of ongoing human development, flourishing, re/integration and participation (Anderson and McNeill 2019; Kirkwood and McNeill 2015). The goal of desistance is 'not just to "go straight" but to "go somewhere new"' (Nugent and Schinkel 2016, p.13). The type of society that can accommodate the realisation of their personal hopes is radical. Adopting the lens of utopia allows us to develop the view that respondents are not just hoping to stop offending, to find employment, or a place to live, find a life partner, or to study or settle down, etc., but rather, also point to something deeper, something beyond themselves and something radical. Or in other words, our view is that the respondents' hopes also embody both an individualistic and

© 2021 The Authors. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

personal utopian vision for themselves, and in order for this to be realised they inadvertently provide a collective vision of the communities and society or world that is yet to become. The lens of utopia has afforded an additional layer to be uncovered when exploring desisters' hopes and pains and one that allows them to 'go somewhere new' at the societal level. Therefore, it is argued that their diaries, as a form of utopian literature, and the hopes expressed therein, reveal a vision that is not just personal but inherently *political* and *transformative* in nature due to the envisioned future that they seek to express at the personal and societal levels.

Using utopia as a lens raises questions about the kinds of society (and the kinds of social order) that are needed to facilitate their hopes and promote life beyond desistance. Fundamentally, in our view, the 'desistance-informed' society (Maruna 2017, p.5) which the respondents hope for is radical. The society that is needed in order for their hopes to be fulfilled is one of acceptance, inclusion, transformation, reconciliation and restoration, of second chances, reparation, generativity, achievement, contribution and participation. The new utopian vision of society that we envision based upon their diaries is not for a perfect or Hollywood-ised mode of living. It acknowledges that people make mistakes, cause harms, can behave in self-destructive ways, have estranged and negative relationships and so on. However, such a utopian society can accommodate those who are engaged in a negative and downward spiral of behaviours and importantly have within it, structures, paradigms and pathways for re-entry, full participation and for human flourishing to be regained. It is a more inclusive, emotionally intelligent and fairer society. Reform is inadequate in the face of such a radical vision which rejects some of the fundamental principles that govern our societal structures to create something new. Increasing the number of super-agents who make it back from a life of crime is insufficient at this level of required change. Such a radical agenda requires changes at the penal, political, and public and not just personal levels.

Research has shown that both the process of desistance is painful and life after desistance can be bleak for some (De Giorgi 2014; Graham and McNeill 2017). The pains of desistance identified in the current diary entries of shame, stigma, rejection, exclusion, surveillance, goal frustration, disappointment, self-isolation, goal failure and hopelessness represent forms of negative desistance capital and provide a harsh commentary, reveal a significant critique and condemnation of where we currently are, and identify what is lacking in our structures, systems, institutions, policies, practices, perceptions and relations. Bloch (1995) states that: 'Lack cannot be articulated other than through imagining its fulfilment' (p.5). Such imaginings coupled with their hopes of desistance provide an alternative vision, they tell us where we need to go in the future by painting a picture of the refashioned society and illuminating what is possible. Both the hopes and pains of desistance therefore act as useful barometers of society, revealing what is missing and what is needed to create a fair society for all to flourish.

We are at an opportune time post-Transforming Rehabilitation to reimagine how these experiences can be changed. Factors evidenced by

© *2021 The Authors*. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the current sample reveal that the 'pains' of desistance are collective, not new but historical, structural and cultural. Only when the root causes underpinning the pains of desistance are removed, will their hopes be realised. It is suggested here that the use of meso-brokers is needed to help with the seismic paradigmatic and structural changes needed in policy, public discourse, penal practice, etc. The hopes and pains of desistance of those who have 'lived it' have the potential to show us what we could and should do. It is hoped that we allow them to take us there. The distance between the two accounts, hopes and pains, provides the means to gain a plan of action for change. Continuing the historical pattern of the pains of desistance reproduces the harsh realities that many desisters have encountered (the minimal means to survive) and still suffer. This equates to continued patterns of structural violence. Therefore, if their radical agenda for a societal utopia as we see it is taken on board, then a social movement is needed. As Maruna (2017) argues:

> Reframing the understanding of desistance as not just an individual process or journey, but rather a social movement, in this way better highlights the structural obstacles inherent in the desistance process and the macro-social changes necessary to successfully create a 'desistance-informed' future. (p.6)

Therefore, using utopia as a lens has shown, in our view, that the utopian hopes and pains of desistance represents not just individual desistance capital, or even group desistance capital (of ex-offenders) but also a sort of *societal* desistance capital, whereby the potential of any member of society who has transgressed norms can be realised. Such societal desistance capital would include the structures (such as formal regulations, commonly-accepted pathways of change, intervention philosophies and paradigms) which would provide the means for all to flourish within society.

As such, hopes at the micro and meso levels point to changes which are needed at the macro level, since wider resources (at the social/community levels) will shape opportunities for change. So, (i) desisters' desires reveal bigger changes which are needed (and rarely addressed, we ought to note); (ii) point to some possible avenues for change which might kick start/sustain the efforts of desisters; (iii) reinforce attitudes that interventions at the individual level (for example, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)) are unlikely to be very successful, and only serve to further pathologise and responsibilise individuals caught up in the criminal justice system.

References

Anderson, S. and McNeill, F. (2019) 'Desistance and cognitive transformations', in: D. Farrington, L. Kazemian and A. Piquero (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental and Life Course Criminology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bauman, Z. (1976) *Socialism: The Active Utopia*, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Best, D., Musgrove, A., Hall, L. (2018) 'The bridge between social identity and community capital on the path to recovery and desistance', *Probation Journal*, *65*(4), 394–406.

Best, D. and Laudet, A.B. (2010) *The Potential of Recovery Capital*, London: Royal Society for the Arts.

Bloch, E. (1995) *The Principle of Hope*, Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press.

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

Bottoms, A. and Shapland, J. (2011) 'Steps towards desistance among male young adult recidivists', in: S. Farrall, R. Sparks and S. Maruna (Eds.) *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life after Punishment*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Bottoms, A., Shapland, J., Costello, A., Holmes D. and Muir G. (2004) 'Towards desistance', *Howard Journal*, *43*, 368–89.

Burnett, R. and Maruna, S. (2004) 'So "prison works", does it?', *Howard Journal*, *43*, 390–404.

Calverley, A. (2013) *Cultures of Desistance: Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Ethnic Minorities*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Carlton, B. and Baldry, E. (2013) 'Therapeutic correctional spaces, transcarceral interventions', in: B. Carlton and M. Seagrave (Eds.), *Women Exiting Prison*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Chiarello, B. (1994) 'The utopian space of a nightmare', *Utopian Studies*, *5*(1), 128–40.

Cloud, W. and Granfield, R. (2008) 'Conceptualising recovery capital', *Substance Use and Misuse*, *43*(12–13), 1971–86.

Copson, L. (2013) 'Towards a utopian criminology', in: M. Malloch and B. Munro (Eds.), *Crime, Critique and Utopia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

De Giorgi, A. (2014) *Returning to Nothing: Urban Survival after Mass Incarceration* (Social Justice blog, 28 May 2014). Available at: *http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/?p=2273* (accessed 16 January 2021).

Farrall, S. (2002) *Rethinking What Works with Offenders: Probation, Social Context and Desistance from Crime*, Cullompton: Willan.

Farrall, S. (2005) 'On the existential aspects of desistance from crime', *Symbolic Interaction*, *28*, 367–86.

Farrall, S. (Ed.) (2019) *The Architecture of Desistance*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Farrall, S. (1999) 'Structuration, human development and desistance from crime', *British Journal of Criminology*, *39*, 253–68.

Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. (2006) *Understanding Desistance from Crime*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Farrall, S., Bottoms, A. and Shapland J. (2010) 'Social structures and desistance from crime', *European Journal of Criminology*, *7*(6), 546–70.

Farrall, S., Gray, E. and Jones, P. (2020) 'Politics, social and economic change and crime: exploring the impact of contextual effects on offending trajectories', *Politics & Society*, *48*(3), 357–88.

Farrall, S., Hunter, B., Sharpe, G. and Calverley, A. (2014) *Criminal Careers in Transition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Farrall, S., Sharpe, G., Hunter, B. and Calverley, A. (2011) 'Theorizing structural and individual-level processes in desistance and persistence: outlining an integrated perspective', *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, *44*, 218–34.

Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S.A. and Rudolph, J.L. (2002) 'Gender, crime and desistance', *American Journal of Sociology*, *107*, 990–1064.

Graham, H. and McNeill, F. (2017) 'Desistance: envisioning futures', in: P. Carlen and L. Ayres França (Eds.), *Alternative Criminologies*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Hall, L., Best, D. and Musgrove, A. (2019) 'Recovery and communities', in: S. Farrall (Ed.), *The Architecture of Desistance*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Halsey, M., Armstrong, R. and Wright, S. (2016) 'F*ck it!', *British Journal of Criminology*, *57*, 1041–60.

Healy, D. (2014) 'Becoming a desister', *British Journal of Criminology*, *54*, 873–91.

Hunter, B. and Farrall, S. (2018) 'Emotions, future selves, and the process of desistance', *British Journal of Criminology*, *58*, 291–308.

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Kay, C. (2020) 'Rethinking social capital in the desistance process: the "Artful Dodger" complex', *European Journal of Criminology*, published online 28 September, https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370820960615.

Kirkwood, S. and McNeill, F. (2015) 'Integration and reintegration', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *15*, 511–26.

Lebel, T.P., Burnett, R., Maruna, S. and Bushway, S. (2008) 'The "chicken and egg" of subjective and social factors in desistance from crime', *European Journal of Criminology*, *5*(2), 131–59.

Lemert, E. (1951) *Social Pathology: A Systematic Approach to the Theory of Sociopathic Behaviour,* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Levitas, R. (2000) 'For Utopia: the (limits of the) Utopian function in late capitalist society', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *3*(2–3), 25–43.

Levitas, R. (2013) *Utopia as Method*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Malloch, M. and Munro, B. (Eds.) (2013) *Crime, Critique and Utopia*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives*, Washington, DC.: American Psychological Association.

Maruna, S. (2011) 'Reentry as a rite of passage', *Punishment & Society*, *13*, 3–28.

Maruna, S. (2017) 'Desistance as a social movement', *Irish Probation Journal*, *14*, 5–20.

Maruna, S. and Farrall, S. (2004) 'Desistance from crime: a theoretical reformulation', *Kolner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *43*, 171–94.

Maruna, S. and Roy, K. (2007) 'Amputation or reconstruction?', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *23*, 104–24.

Maruna, S., LeBel, T., Naples, M. and Mitchell, N. (2009) 'Looking-glass identity transformation', in: C. Veysey and D. Martinez (Eds.), *How Offenders Transform their Lives*, Cullompton: Willan.

McNeill F. (2012) 'Four forms of "offender" rehabilitation', *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *17*(1), 18–36.

McNeill, F. (2016) 'Desistance and criminal justice in Scotland', in: H. Croall, G. Mooney and M. Munro (Eds.), *Crime, Justice and Society in Scotland*, Abingdon: Routledge.

McNeill, F. and Weaver, B. (2010) *Changing Lives?*, Glasgow: Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

Ministry of Justice (2017) *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, London: Ministry of Justice.

Moule, P. and Goodman, M. (2009) *Nursing Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.

Nugent, B. (2015) 'Reaching the "hardest to reach"', *Youth Justice*, *15*(3), 271–85.

Nugent, B. and Schinkel, M. (2016) 'The pains of desistance', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *16*, 568–84.

Office for National Statistics (2020) *SOC 2020 Volume 1: Structure and Descriptions of Unit Groups*. Available at: *https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2020/soc2020volume1structureanddescriptionsofunitgroups* (accessed 19 April 2020).

O'Keefe, C.A. and Albertson, K. (2016) 'The challenges of outcome measurement for arts practitioners in the criminal justice sector', *Howard Journal*, *55*, 496–513.

Robinson-Edwards, S. and Pinkney, C. (2018) 'Black men, religiosity and desistance', *Safer Communities*, *17*(1), 47–67.

Sampson, R.J. and Laub, J.H (1993) *Crime in the Making*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Sarno, C., Hearnden, I., Hedderman, C., Hough, M., Nee, C. and Herrington, V. (2000) *Working their Way Out of Offending* (Home Office Research Study No. 218), London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

Sartre, J.-P. (1958) *Being and Nothingness*, London: Methuen.

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Scott, D. and Gosling, H. (2016) 'Before prison, instead of prison, better than prison', *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *5*(1), 52–66.

Scraton, P. (2014) *Bearing Witness to the "Pain of Others"*, *Plenary Keynote* (Annual Australian and New Zealand Critical Criminology Conference, December 2014), Melbourne, Australia: Monash University.

Shapland, J. and Bottoms, A. (2011) 'Reflections on social values, offending and desistance among young adult recidivists', *Punishment & Society*, *13*(3), 256–82.

Standing, G. (2011) *Precariat: New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Timpson (2019) *The Timpson Foundation*. Available at: *https://www.timpson-group.co.uk/timpson-foundation/ex-offenders/* (accessed 5 August 2019).

Weaver, E. (2013) 'Desistance, reflexivity and relationality', *European Journal of Probation*, *5*(3), 71–88.

Weaver, B. (2016) *Offending and Desistance*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Weaver, B. and McCulloch, T. (2012) *Co-producing Criminal Justice*, Glasgow: Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

Date submitted: September 2020
Date accepted: December 2020

© *2021 The Authors.* The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice *published by Howard League and John Wiley & Sons Ltd*

20591101, 2021, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hojo.12406 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [20/02/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License