

The Reintegration of Sexual Offenders*

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Summary: This paper considers current and future approaches to sex offender reintegration. It critically examines the core models of reintegration in terms of risk-based and strengths-based approaches in the criminal justice context as well as barriers to reintegration, chiefly in terms of the community and negative public attitudes. It also presents an overview of new findings from recent empirical research on sex offender desistance, generally referred to as the process of slowing down or ceasing of criminal behaviour. Finally, the paper presents an optimum vision in terms of rethinking sex offender reintegration, and what I term ‘inverting the risk paradigm’, drawing out the key challenges and implications for criminal justice as well as society more broadly.

Keywords: Sex offenders, risk, strengths-based approaches, shaming, public attitudes, circles of support, reintegration, desistance.

Introduction

This paper draws upon many of the themes that underlie the work and legacy of Martin Tansey, as a progressive and forward-thinking criminal justice practitioner within the field of offender rehabilitation – namely the competing balance of rights between offenders and the wider community; the need to recognise the ‘humanity’ of offenders and to give them a ‘second chance’; and the wider social objective and benefits of offender rehabilitation and reintegration. With this legacy and these ideals in mind, I will examine a number of core aspects related to the topic of the reintegration of sexual offenders as one of the most challenging of offender groups within contemporary criminal justice policy and practice.

* This paper comprises the revised text of the 9th Martin Tansey Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development and delivered at the Criminal Courts of Justice, Dublin, 7 April 2016.

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The paper begins with a critical overview of models of reintegration primarily in terms of the ‘risk-based model’, which has shaped the contemporary criminal justice context, and the prospects of the ‘strengths-based model’, which is premised on the notions of reparation, community partnership and social inclusion as encapsulated in initiatives such as circles of support and accountability. Central to both models is the notion of ‘shame’ – shame in the criminal justice context has been said to lead to ‘disintegrative shaming’ (Braithwaite, 1989) where the offender is labelled and singled out as different from the rest of the community. Shame in the strengths-based context, however, is premised instead on ‘reintegrative shaming’ which shames the offender’s behaviour, rather than the offender *per se*, and seeks to affirm their membership of the local community.

Second, the paper examines barriers to sex offender reintegration in terms of individual obstacles stemming from the offender as well as a range of structural obstacles that relate to the role of the community in individual offender rehabilitation. This includes most notably public attitudes and mindsets regarding the presence of sex offenders in the local community, particularly those who have offended against children. The discussion seeks to draw out the common myths and misconceptions concerning sexual offenders and the risk they are deemed to present as well as the challenges of public engagement. Data are presented from an empirical study on public attitudes to sex offenders against both children and adults within Northern Ireland.

Third, the paper provides a brief overview of recent primary research on sex offender desistance. This research has highlighted key aspects of the desisting narratives of a group of men recently convicted of sex offences against children in England and Wales. These relate chiefly to work, relationships and hope for the future. The analysis also draws out the implications for sex offender reintegration in terms of the importance of helping sex offenders forge a new, non-offending future ‘identity’ and the role of social bonds and support in underpinning longer-term desistance.

Finally, the fourth part of the paper seeks to ‘rethink’ the reintegration of sexual offenders, which is presented in terms of ‘inverting the risk paradigm’ and involves incorporating strengths-based approaches within the risk framework and, crucially, changing the fundamental question to asking why it is that sex offenders do not reoffend rather than why it is that they do. The discussion also draws out the key messages for society as well as the implications for criminal justice in supporting and promoting sex offender reintegration and desistance.

Models of reintegration

Seminal research by Maruna and LeBel (2002) espoused two main models of offender reintegration which are premised on the cross-cutting themes of ex-offender resettlement, community re-entry and ‘what works’ in rehabilitating offenders and in reducing crime.¹ The first model is the risk-based model, which characterises the contemporary criminal justice context and is typified by the ethos of crime control, public protection and the social exclusion of ‘deviants’, resulting in penal and sentencing policies based on incapacitation and high rates of imprisonment. More recently, scholars have pinpointed trends in ‘preventative governance’ (Ericson, 2007) and ‘pre-emptive approaches’ to risk (Zedner, 2009), which aim to capture all possible future risks before they occur. In practice, these values are translated into measures that aim to increase the surveillance of former prisoners by extending control from prison to the community (Kemshall and Wood, 2007). They also derive from and feed into what Bottoms (1995) calls populist approaches to risk management and reintegration. That is, such situational approaches to crime prevention are based on the notion that having increased knowledge of the whereabouts and behaviours of known categories of offenders will help manage risk and increase public protection – what Ericson and Haggerty (1997) succinctly term the ‘knowledge–risk–security’ chain.

In relation to sexual offending, the risk-based model has been the cornerstone of academic and policy debates for the past two decades (Kemshall and Maguire, 2001). The model is exemplified in measures such as sex offender registration or notification and other control in the community measures common to many Anglo-American jurisdictions, such as electronic tagging and vetting and barring schemes. The risk-based model has also fashioned multi-agency frameworks on sex offender risk assessment, treatment and management across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in the form of MAPPA/PPANI/SORAM.² Within such frameworks, court-ordered treatment and rehabilitation can become a ‘vehicle’ for risk management where, potentially, ‘rehabilitation’ may be

¹ The other type of ‘deficit’ model outlined by Maruna and LeBel (2002) is ‘needs-based’ strategies, which focus on helping ex-offenders to overcome addictions or learn basic skills in order to reduce the risk of reoffending.

² MAPPA is the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, which apply in slightly different forms in England and Wales and Scotland; PPANI is the broadly equivalent Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland; and SORAM is Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management in the Republic of Ireland.

fettered by ‘risk’ (McAlinden, 2012). As a result, as Farrall and Sparks (2006: 7) have put it, ‘the social consequences of a criminal conviction have become not just more prevalent but also weightier and “stickier” than in previous decades’.

The ‘risk-based’ model, however, is grounded on a somewhat narrow and over-simplified version of the ‘risks’ stemming from ‘known’ sexual offenders in the community; that is, those who have already come to notice. Risk management, in consequence, is conceived as ‘known’ and clearly identifiable; as aberrational rather than systemic; as being linked to ‘predatory paedophiles’ in extra-familial settings; and as being the preserve of experts via top-down elitist processes from which the public are generally excluded.

Indeed, the role and response of the local community to sex offender reintegration within the confines of the risk-based model is based on the notion of ‘disintegrative shaming’ (McAlinden, 2005, 2007), where the emphasis is on the labelling, public shaming and ostracism of sex offenders, particularly those who offend against children. Via ‘othering’ processes (Garland, 2001), the sex offender is deemed a ‘double outsider’ (Spencer, 2009: 225) – physically excluded from the community and also not seen as of the community. At worst, this has resulted in violence and vigilante action towards sex offenders, as evidenced in the aftermath of the Sarah Payne case³ and the *News of the World*’s newspaper campaign to ‘name and shame’ all known sex offenders. At best, it can impede offender rehabilitation and either increase or displace the risk of reoffending if offenders ‘go to ground’ to escape notice. In sum, the potential failure of the risk-based model is that it tends to confirm the label of ‘sex offender’ and reinforce rather than break from an offending identity, when such a break is pivotal to the process of sex offender reintegration and desistance (McAlinden *et al.*, 2016). As set out below, however, the community can make a potentially more positive contribution to sex offender reintegration through the process of ‘reintegrative shaming’ (Braithwaite, 1989).

The second main model is the ‘strengths-based’ approach, which is linked to restorative justice and based on the themes of reconciliation, community partnership and social inclusion. The model is also underpinned by ‘the helper principle’, which emphasises the role of the ex-offender in developing ‘pro-social’ concepts of self and earning their

³ Sarah Payne was an eight-year-old girl who was abducted by known sex offender Roy Whiting while playing in a field near her grandparents’ home in Sussex in July 2000, and murdered.

place back in the local community (Bazemore, 1999), usually in the form of socially useful activities such as work (Burnett and Maruna, 2006). The strengths-based model is based on the notion of shaming with a reintegrative and positive effect (Braithwaite, 1989), promoting community re-entry and a 'positive reframing' of offending identities (McNeill, 2006). That is, the emphasis is placed on shaming the offence/sexual offending behaviour rather than the offender as an individual, with the overall aim of social reintegration.

As regards sexual offending, the strengths-based approach is encapsulated in the model of circles of support and accountability (CoSA). CoSA originated in Canada, where it was initially used in an organic context with high-risk sex offenders on release from prison (Cesaroni, 2001; Petrunik, 2002). It has also been used or piloted in a range of jurisdictions across Europe, including the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England and Wales. Circles are based on the twin premises of safety and support – they provide important assurances to the local community that sex offenders are being actively 'managed' but also high levels of emotional and practical support to offenders with aspects of reintegration such as finding suitable accommodation and employment. Circles are based on a 'partnership' approach to sex offender reintegration (McAlinden, 2007) where the offender as the 'core member' works in tandem with statutory and voluntary agencies and with community volunteers. The signed 'covenant' specifies each member's area of contribution and the offender has contact with the circle daily in the high-risk phase after release, which gradually diminishes.

Circles have had proven effectiveness in securing reintegration, reducing the risk of reoffending and managing risk; in engaging the local community and the offender's family in the reintegrative process; and in mediating between local structures as barriers to reintegration (such as public opposition to offender placement in the area) and the offender's rehabilitation (Wilson *et al.*, 2009; Bates *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, more recent research has also shown that 'helping sex offenders to desist' via circles can have benefits for community volunteers (Höing *et al.*, 2016) as well as significant 'cost savings' for the criminal justice system (Elliott and Beech, 2013).

The framing of 'risk' within the strengths-based model is potentially much broader and holistic than within the risk-based paradigm. In particular, by the adoption of proactive approaches to managing risks before they might occur, the strengths-based philosophy can capture

‘unknown risk’; risk is recognised as systemic, whereby it might potentially occur anywhere, rather than aberrational or one-off; it can thus target intra-familial offending as opposed to predatory, extra-familial sex offending; it involves the local community in community-led/bottom-up as opposed to expert/top-down processes; and ultimately the community are regarded as an active and vital part of the reintegration process rather than being excluded from risk management and constituting an uncertainty and risk themselves.

In short, measures such as CoSA aim to address reintegration at both the micro and macro levels (Braithwaite, 1989) and the structural as well as individual variables that may underpin sex offender reintegration and desistance. That is, their strength lies in taking account of local infrastructures and the offender’s interaction with these. Circles have acted as a means of social ‘certification’ of rehabilitation, empowering offenders to take responsibility for their past offences via positive reinforcement of a ‘new’, ‘pro-social’ identity that recognises but, at the same time, seeks to break from an offending past (Burnett and Maruna, 2006). They also provide an actual and symbolic means of ‘hope’ in terms of reintegration and desistance (McAlinden, 2007).

Barriers to reintegration

As also noted above, there are individual as well as structural obstacles to reintegration. In brief, one of the main individual obstacles to reintegration is self-motivation, which is known to be undermined by the custodial experience but restored by aspects of community and social life (Burnett and Maruna, 2004; Farrall and Calverley, 2005). The structural obstacles to reintegration relate to risk factors and serious social and economic disadvantages which can undermine effective informal social controls (such as work and relationships) and promote reoffending.

As also noted above, a reconnection with the ‘community’ is a key structural correlate underpinning sex offender reintegration. While the role of the community was formerly a neglected dimension of academic and policy debates, more recently ‘place’ and specific social spaces have emerged as pivotal in individual reoffending (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Farrall, 2002) and in confirming an offending or non-offending identity. The power of the community in this sense is that it can suggest reformation by fostering social inclusion and constructive activities. Indeed, while the individual and structural correlates of desistance will be

considered further below, the main barriers to sex offender reintegration are often structural ones in terms of the role of the community and negative public mindsets.

Large-scale quantitative research, carried out via public surveys in Northern Ireland with over 1000 respondents, has confirmed that public attitudes to ‘child sex offenders’ – that is, those who sexually offend against children – are much more punitive than for ‘adult sex offenders’ – those who sexually offend against adults (McAlinden and RRS, 2007) with generally high levels of scepticism about rehabilitation and treatment. For example, only 16% agreed that ‘most people who commit sexual offences against children can go on to live law abiding lives’ (compared to 23% for sexual offences against adults). Further, only 32% agreed that ‘treatment programmes can help sex offenders stop reoffending’, while 66% vastly overestimated recidivism rates for child sex offenders as over 40%.⁴ The public were generally unaccepting of a sex offender living or working in the local community, with many refusing sex offenders basic rights such as education: 58% thought it unacceptable for an adult sex offender to be living in the local community; and 92% stated that if they were living near a child sex offender they should be informed of any past offences. Although communities as whole appear to have a much more collective response to sexual offending than to other political issues (see e.g. Katz-Schiavone *et al.*, 2008; Willis *et al.*, 2010), attitudes were not uniform. As might be expected, women, parents of children aged under 18 and those in the older age bracket have stronger and more punitive attitudes.

There were also low levels of awareness about statutory risk management processes and programmes such as circles of support and Stop It Now!.⁵ There was a significant lack of knowledge and misinformation about issues related to ‘risk’: the public tended to underestimate overall levels of sexual offending but overestimate increases in these rates and the level of risk posed by sex offenders. Notably, there was also lack of awareness about what constitutes a sexual offence, particularly surrounding non-stereotypical offences involving, for example, children or women as perpetrators. At the same time, however, the public

⁴ In fact, recidivism rates for sexual offenders are generally low (Barnett *et al.*, 2010) and decline with age (Lussier *et al.*, 2010; Scoones *et al.*, 2012). Harris and Hanson’s (2004) meta-analysis of over 4500 sexual offenders found an average long-term reoffending rate of 24% over 15 years and that the longer offenders remained offence-free in the community the less likely they are to reoffend sexually.

⁵ Stop It Now! UK and Ireland is a charity organisation which aims to raise awareness of and prevent child sexual abuse: <http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

recognised the lower risk of victimisation by a stranger and the risk of sexual abuse to children by other children. Therefore, while there were in general inaccurate, negative and often stereotypical views about sexual offending, there were also some positive aspects and evidence of faith in the 'redeemability' (Maruna and King, 2009) of sex offenders: an average of 44% agreed that society has an obligation to assist sex offenders released into the community to live better lives.

The challenges of public engagement concerning sex offender reintegration are therefore manifold. Chief among them is addressing the common myths and misconceptions concerning sexual offending, particularly relating to children. These relate to the 'stranger danger' phenomenon and the notion of known and identifiable 'risk' – not the hidden, unknown and therefore the most dangerous risks; the predatory nature of sex offending – as opposed to offending which may also occur in situational or opportunistic contexts (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006); the gendered and oppositional notions of who are victims and offenders – generally adult male perpetrators and young (usually female) victims; the conflation of levels and types of risk – that all sex offenders tend to pose the same degree of very high risk; the lack of faith in 'treatment' or redemption – and the notion that sex offenders are 'incurable'; the belief that control in the community measures are a panacea for managing risk; and the belief that child protection is the preserve of statutory and voluntary agencies. This list can be distilled to a narrow version of 'risk' in the public mindset and the permanency of the sex offender label.

Furthermore, the challenges of public engagement surrounding the reintegration of sex offenders also relate to addressing 'punitiveness' and harsh public attitudes towards sex offenders; downplaying negative and unhelpful public attitudes and encouraging the positive aspects; and building on current initiatives such as Stop It Now! and circles of support which are aimed, *inter alia*, at greater public awareness surrounding child sexual abuse and offender reintegration. A key step on this path is the initiation of a major government-sponsored media campaign, involving key stakeholders in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, aimed at public education around key messages pertaining to the nature of sex offender risk, reintegration and the work of statutory and voluntary agencies. A better informed public may help to manage some of the 'panic', fear and mistrust that exist concerning sex offenders. Ultimately, this may also help to promote social inclusion and remove some of the barriers to reintegration.

Desistance

‘Desistance’ is generally taken to refer to the dynamic and complex process whereby offenders refrain from and/or decrease their criminal activities over time (Kazemian, 2007). There are said to be three stages of desistance (Maruna *et al.*, 2004): primary desistance – where the offender may be ‘in and out’ of criminality; secondary desistance – where the offender stops their criminal behaviour for good and begins to form a new ‘non-offending identity’; and tertiary desistance – where the offender develops a clear sense of belonging to their family and the local community. In relation to tertiary desistance, successful community re-entry (reintegration) is known to be pivotal to the desistance process (Göbbels *et al.*, 2012; Lussier and Gress, 2014). Indeed, contemporary thinking on desistance affirms that it is necessary to take account of individual (cognitive) as well as structural (societal) changes that might underpin trajectories of change (Bottoms *et al.*, 2004; LeBel *et al.*, 2008).

While there is a well-established body of literature on desistance from non-sexual crime and its role within rehabilitation practice (e.g. Laub and Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Weaver and McNeill, 2010), empirical research on desistance from sexual crime is in its infancy. However, a number of themes are emerging: ‘the age–crime curve’ shows that most sex offenders, like offenders more generally, will eventually ‘age out’ of sexual crime (Lussier *et al.*, 2010) – what Harris (2014) terms ‘natural desistance’; the role of informal social controls such as job stability in reducing the probability of reoffending (Kruttschnitt *et al.*, 2000); and the role of ‘cognitive transformations’ (Harris, 2014), which may range from a simple recognition that the individual has caused harm to the formation of a new, non-offending identity (see also Kewley *et al.*, 2016).

A recent empirical study conducted by the author in conjunction with colleagues aimed to contribute to this emergent field of research by examining the core themes arising from the self-narratives of a sample of men convicted of a range of sexual offences against children.⁶ A total of 32 in-depth ‘life history’ interviews (McAdams, 1993) were conducted asking participants to recount and rationalise their lives and their offending. These ‘narratives’ amounted to first-hand accounts of reintegration and desistance by looking at the structural (social context) and subjective (individual cognitive) domains associated with desistance.

⁶ The research was undertaken by Mark Farmer, Shadd Maruna and Anne-Marie McAlinden and was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/K006061/1).

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy – convicted child sex offenders who had been or were currently under probation supervision in England and Wales were initially identified from probation records. The participants were selected on the basis that they had a recent conviction for sexual offences and had been living in the community for at least three to five years, during which time there were no new charges or investigations for sexual offending. Our comparison sample consisted of individuals who had received convictions for child sex offending on more than one occasion, the most recent of which was for an offence within 12 months from the date of the research (fieldwork conducted July 2013 to April 2014), so that they could not be said to be in a stable state of desistance. A total of 25 individuals in the desisting group and seven in the comparison group were interviewed.

In relation to the findings, while several themes emerged that are worthy of analysis, the discussion here will focus on three core themes: work, relationships and hopes for the future (for further discussion see Farmer *et al.*, 2015; McAlinden *et al.*, 2016). Many of the participants identified ‘turning points’ in their lives (aside from being convicted, being sent to prison or undergoing probation supervision or treatment) based on the importance of work and relationships, which were classified into ‘high points’ and ‘low points’. The ‘high points’ related to marriage or meeting a partner; having children; finding or having a job; and friendships in their childhood or adolescence. The ‘low points’ related, *inter alia*, to divorce or relationship breakdown; the death of a parent or grandparent; and their offending behaviour.

Work was generally seen as central to the identity of those deemed to be desisting. Many offenders defined themselves by work and had continuity in employment or a lifetime of work via either a professional career or a series of jobs. Work was seen not only as a ‘means of keeping busy’ in the sense that they were not then free to engage in potentially criminal pursuits, but also as central to their future identity and aspirations. However, in a departure from the mainstream literature on desistance from non-sexual crime (e.g. Sampson and Laub, 1993), gaining employment did not seem to operate as an informal social control in the sense that it was not related to a ‘shift’ in identity towards desistance – many of the men had jobs prior to and after their offending.

Many of the desisting men described lengthy relationship histories or partners who had ‘stuck by them’. There was also regret at relationship breakdown, often as a consequence of their offending, including the loss

of contact with their children. For some, offending had occurred at a low point in their lives, yet the significance of relationships is not clear-cut in relation to desistance. Relationships and the 'love of a good woman' gave the desisting men 'something to lose' and underscored Braithwaite's (1989) notion of 'reintegrative shaming'. They recognised the impact of their offending on their partner and family and the role and support of significant others in underpinning their reintegration and desistance.

For the desisting group, both work and relationships as tangible, aspirational goals were deemed pivotal to future happiness. With relationships and friendships there were hopes of forming new ones and fears of losing old ones should their sex-offending past become publicly known. Similarly, many sought to maintain existing stable employment or gain new forms of employment. Overwhelmingly, however, the desisting men in the study had a very optimistic outlook for the future and a firm and positive sense of their own wellbeing which was absent from the comparison group.

What this empirical research on sex offender desistance affirms is that there appear to be different pathways to desistance and reintegration for sex offenders compared to non-sexual offenders. In the main, informal social controls such as work and relationships remain important for offender rehabilitation and reintegration but they do not operate in the same way for this particular offender group. Their importance, however, underlines the need to take account of offender agency as well as the social context which may hinder reintegration and desistance. In bridging the gap between what has been termed 'imagined' (Soyer, 2014) and 'authentic' desistance (Healy, 2014), as professionals and as a society we need to recognise the importance of providing offenders with an alternative future identity and the role of social bonds and supports in underpinning this process. Breaking from the sex offender label, however, ultimately involves rethinking sex offender reintegration.

Rethinking reintegration

While the 'risk-based' model has dominated academic, public and policy discourses on sex offender reintegration, key aspects of a more progressive approach are inverting the risk paradigm and removing the individual and structural obstacles to reintegration. The latter involves overcoming the public stigma associated with the sex offender 'label' and strengthening criminal justice interventions to improve the range of pro-social

opportunities for longer term sex offender desistance and reintegration. The former involves integrating ‘strengths’ and ‘needs’ with ‘risk-based’ approaches. It also entails moving ‘beyond risk’ and thinking more broadly in terms of social reintegration, incorporating what Weaver (2014) terms ‘control’ as well as ‘change’ and even ‘care’ aspects within criminal justice policies. In essence, this involves changing our mindsets as academics and practitioners from thinking about reoffending to thinking about desistance, and also, crucially, changing the fundamental question and the emphasis in praxis from asking why it is that sex offenders reoffend to why it is that they don’t.

Inverting the risk paradigm, as I would term it, has profound implications for society as well as for criminal justice provision. A number of key messages need to be imparted to society concerning the realities of ‘risk’ concerning sex offenders in the community and in particular that sex offenders are not a homogeneous group – that there are differing levels of risk and not all sex offenders pose the same level of high risk; that sex offenders can include women, children and young people;⁷ and that the majority of abused children are abused in the home or by someone they know.⁸ Further, in relation to current processes, efforts need to be made to downplay ‘risk’ – that many sex offenders will not reoffend with appropriate treatment and support; that sexual offending can be situational/opportunistic as opposed to simply preferential, and may occur as a result of a combination of circumstances rather than predatory intent;⁹ that most sex offenders, who come from communities, will be released back into society at some point; and finally, that ‘child protection is everyone’s responsibility’.

As regards criminal justice, while the justice system deals predominantly with the offender as the ‘perpetrator’ and the person who is adjudicated upon, there are twin dimensions of sex offender reintegration that are often little considered – that is, the offender as the person who committed the offence, and their family and the local community as the people also

⁷ Female offenders account for about 15–20% of sexual offending against children (see e.g. Cortoni and Hanson, 2005; MacLeod, 2015) and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour account for one-third to one-half of sexual offending against children (see e.g. Vizard *et al.*, 2007; Finkelhor *et al.*, 2009).

⁸ Approximately 80% of abused children are abused in their own home or by someone they know (Grubin, 1998).

⁹ Only about 25–45% of sex offenders attract the label ‘paedophile’ and will set out to groom children for sexual abuse (McAlinden, 2012).

impacted by the offence. In short, there are both ‘affective’ and ‘effective’ dimensions of criminal justice.¹⁰ Sexual offending, particularly against children, has significant emotional dimensions for society as well as the offender’s family. The offender’s family and significant others have a vital role to play in supporting emerging ‘desisting identities’ and promoting ‘trajectories of change’ (Sampson and Laub, 1993). As I have noted in a previous study, citing a criminal justice professional in relation to the role of the family in reintegration and in stopping future offending:

It’s a very painful thing for a family and it often splits the family right down the middle. And if they can’t step away from that awful imprisoning need to either completely collude with the person or to shut the person out completely ... if they can manage to hold some middle ground there’s huge benefit to be gained in that. (McAlinden, 2012: 273)

In practice, the potential contribution of the community and the family to criminal justice interventions on risk management and reintegration can be taken forward as follows: by developing rehabilitative sex offender programmes that are forward-looking rather than backward-looking and that focus on future change rather than a ‘confessional’ approach to past offences; by improving the range of work-based opportunities for sex offenders to help promote positive self-identities and longer-term desistance and social reintegration; and to extend the range of programmes for offenders’ families as part of a ‘reintegrative’ release package. The last of these in particular would have dual benefits in terms of enhanced risk management and in helping families come to terms with the offence and its aftermath.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goals of sex offender reintegration amount to assimilation of the offender into the community and cessation of or reduction in offending behaviour. This highlights the responsibilities and needs of society as well as those of the offender. The analysis has offered some tentative thoughts on how we might, as a society and as reflective practitioners, begin to ‘rethink’ reintegration. Key to this approach is

¹⁰ See Karstedt *et al.* (2011) on emotions and criminal justice generally.

helping the offender to break free from the label ‘sex offender’ and forge a new non-offending identity. For society, this means accepting sex offenders as ‘of us’ rather than ‘other than us’ (McAlinden, 2014: 188). For the offender, this means helping them to break free from an ‘offending past’.

The analysis has also highlighted how strengths-based approaches might help offenders develop intrinsic motivations for change yet how, at the same time, pure managerialist approaches, premised on a range of external controls, may undermine strengths-based policies. It has been contended that we need to extend the range of ‘pro-social’ opportunities for change and the range of programmes for offenders and their families by developing and institutionalising these approaches as a standard part of reintegrative practices for sex offenders.

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