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Rethinking Recovery and Desistance Processes: Developing a Social Identity Model of Transition

Abstract

Background: In recent years, the role of social identity (or identities which are developed through involvement in social groups with others), has received increasing attention in relation to recovery from substance abuse disorders. However, it is also widely noted that the transformation of one's social identitie(s) is vital for the cessation of other, non-addictive behaviours, such as offending. Interestingly, the discussion of the role of social identity transformation in relation to both desistance and recovery simultaneously has seldom been undertaken.

Methods: Drawing on primary research consisting of 20 double narrative interviews with young adult offenders on an Intensive Community Order, the paper builds upon the two most prominent social identity models surrounding addictive behaviour, the Social Identity Model of Recovery and the Social Identity Model of Cessation Maintenance in order to develop a social identity model which aids our understanding of desistance and recovery processes.

Results: The paper presents a Social Identity Model of *Transition* (SIMOT), allowing for the synergies between desistance and recovery as processes of transition to come to light.

Conclusion: SIMOT allows for an understanding of the role of social identity transformation in the transient nature of desistance and recovery processes. The model allows for an examination of the impact of macro and micro contextual factors on desistance and recovery processes in a way which has seldom been possible with the currently available models.

Key Words: Desistance; Recovery; Social Identity; Context; Spatial Dynamics

Introduction: Defining Recovery and Desistance

The Betty Ford Institute Consensus Panel define recovery from substance use disorders as "a voluntarily *maintained* lifestyle characterised by sobriety, personal health and citizenship" (2007: 222 emphasis added). Similarly, the UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) state recovery to be a "*voluntarily sustained* control over substance use which maximises health and wellbeing and participation in the rights, roles and responsibilities of society" (2008: 6 emphasis added). Neale and colleagues (2015), define recovery as the experience or 'process' of 'coping'. With the exception of the Betty Ford Institutes, such approaches do not suggest abstinence as an end point or goal. Instead, they see recovery as a process of maintaining control over substance use. These definitions can be found in stark contrast to that of Valentine for instance, who suggests simply that "you are in recovery if you say you are" (2011: 264).

Desistance processes share similarly contested understandings. Shover (1996: 121), for instance, sees desistance as a termination event, or as the "*voluntary termination* of serious criminal participation" (a position in line with the Betty Ford Institute Consensus Panel definition discussed above). Similarly, Piquero et al (2003: 380) regards desistance as the "termination of a criminal career" (see also Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Maruna (2001:26), by contrast, views desistance is a "maintenance process" in which "the focus […] is not on the moment of change, but rather on the *maintenance* of crime free behaviour in the face of life's obstacles and frustrations" (Maruna, 2001: 26 emphasis added, see also UKDPC definition of recovery).

While the processes of desistance and recovery have been separated in academic discourse, both are conceptualised as being, either processes where the behaviour becomes more stable or managed, or outcomes where the end-point is reached by a cessation of activity deemed problematic. The research also seems to suggest that desistance and recovery possess similar requirements. Both require the voluntary decision to change (Paternoster and Bushway, 2006;

Best et al, 2016) and both suggest that the involvement of social, cultural and economic capital are fundamental in supporting the change process (King, 2014; Boesker, et al, 2013). This notion is also known as "recovery capital"[1] in the recovery literature (see Sterling et al, 2008). It is also evident that involvement with social structures, engagement in active citizenship and community involvement is important in order to sustain desistance and recovery efforts (Monaghan and Wincup, 2013; Farrall, 2011; Maruna, 2011; Betty Ford Institute Consensus Panel, 2007). Indeed, the literature surrounding recovery capital frequently suggests that a form of *community recovery capital* is important in order to successfully maintain recovery transitions (see for instance, Best and Laudet, 2012, White and Cloud, 2008).

Unfortunately, individuals undertaking desistance and recovery transitions also largely experience similar levels of exclusion, along with social and psychological barriers to success. Frings and Albery (2015:36) for instance suggest that barriers for those with or suffering from a substance use disorder (Kelly et al, 2016)[2] include "low levels of self-esteem [and] decreased self-efficacy" while also noting that "addicts may also be embedded in social settings which feature the behaviour of other addicts, reinforcing low self-efficacy and maladaptive beliefs and providing a social reality facilitating ongoing addictive patterns" (Frings and Albery, 2015:36). Where desistance is concerned, Shapland and Bottoms (2011) suggest that while offending may not be habitual for individuals undertaking desistance transitions, the social settings within which such attempts are being made might lead to a temptation to re-offend.

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[1] Recovery capital "is the sum total of one's resources that can be brought to bear on the initiation and maintenance of substance misuse cessation" (Cloud and Granfield, 2008: 1972, see also Laudet and White, 2008).

[2] It was a conscious decision on behalf of the authors to avoid the term "addict" to refer to individuals with substance use disorders as there is considerable debate surrounding the implications of the use of such terminology. While this may have been used previously in the available literature, the authors are aware of the potential negative connotations of its use and, as such, have made the decision to avoid this term here (see Kelly et al, 2010 and Kelly et al, 2016 for a detailed discussion of the importance of language in the discussion of substance use disorders). Indeed, while the term 'addict' is avoided here, the term addiction is still used as addiction is not attributed to the person. Simply, addiction is something one experiences, the term addict suggests what one *is*. While this distinction is seemingly subtle, we consider it to be considerable in its impact.

This is on the grounds that the structures or settings in which desistance takes place are, as Farrall (2011) notes, not always particularly integrative and, in such cases as housing and employment, can be particularly exclusionary (see also Burnett and Maruna, 2006; Uggen et al, 2014).

While the desistance literature has, perhaps, more recently begun to examine the impact of contextual elements on the change process (see for instance Farrall, 2011, Healy, 2010), such discussions remain underdeveloped. Macdonald (2006: 381), for instance, argues that "there is a tendency in much criminal career research to overplay individual-level risks at the expense of those that are presented by the historical and spatial contexts within which youth transitions are made" (see also Barry, 2006). Likewise, in the recovery literature many accounts still fail to fully "identify the mechanisms of change, or the social contexts in which change occurs" (Best et al, 2016: 111).

It is argued in this paper that the notion of *social identity* (or identities which are developed through involvement in social groups with others) is vital in shaping our understanding of the contextual nature of desistance and recovery transitions. We discuss this in the following section, then we outline of what we currently know in relation to Social Identity Models of Desistance and Recovery, before introducing our own iteration, the Social Identity Model of Transition, which we then put to the empirical test via two case studies.

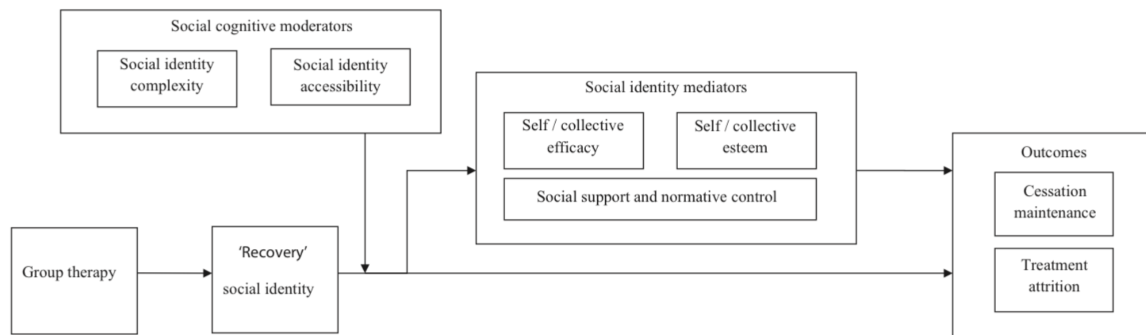
Social Identity in Recovery and Desistance

Two recent social identity models have been developed which allow for a more systematic understanding of the ways in which social identity can be used to facilitate transition away from addictive behaviours (most notably drug addiction). These are the Social Identity Model of Cessation Maintenance (SIMCM) (Frings and Albery, 2015) and the Social Identity Model of Recovery (SIMOR) (Best et al, 2016).

The Social Identity Model of Cessation Maintenance (SIMCM) utilises both Social Identity Theory and Social Cognition Theory to explain the cognitive underpinnings and societal influences that shape cessation maintenance. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals fundamentally pursue a positive self-image and that our identities are "based on intra-personal definitions, sometimes on inter-group definitions and sometimes fall between these two extremes" (ibid: 36). Social Cognition Theory argues that when an individual sees themselves as a member of a group, they develop a "prototype which maximises the differences between the 'in group' [the group the individual sees themselves as a part of] and the out group [all other groups], whilst minimizing differences between in group members" (ibid). So, for example, when an individual begins to engage with a group whose uniting characteristic is recovery from addiction, they will begin identifying as a member of this non-using group, while distancing themselves from previous groups associated with drug use.

SIMCM argues that "social identities (i.e. identities based on perceived membership of the self and others in various groups) shape the way we view and interact with our environments" (Frings and Albery, 2015: 35). It is argued that involvement in group therapy, or at least a recognition of commonality with individuals in group therapy will allow for the subsequent development of an "recovery" identity, or at least a scaffold upon which such an identity can be built. This will subsequently lead to increased feelings of self and collective efficacy and increased self-esteem. Group involvement also offers a form of social control in the sense that members of the group can offer support (and monitoring) to other members who are struggling to maintain recovery efforts (see figure 1).

Figure 1. The Social Identity Model of Cessation Maintenance (SIMCM) (Frings and Albery, 2015: 39)



Focusing on the contexts within which it is possible to operationalise such social identities, Frings and Albery argue that a "recovery" identity does not occur in isolation, rather it must be both "sufficiently complex to encompass the situation the recovering addict is in [and also], the identity must be sufficiently accessible" (Frings and Albery, 2015: 39). This caveat allows for a consideration of the ways in which social identities are contextual and contingent on interaction with other group members, which can inform the agentic action and decision-making processes of individuals in recovery. The concern here, however, is that the model is largely based upon the role of organised, structured groups, in this instance group therapy. As such, it is difficult to infer from this model how involvement in other, non-recovery-oriented groups impact upon both social identity and the ability for such groups to support cessation maintenance. Such shortcomings were addressed by Best et al (2016) in their Social Identity Model of Recovery (SIMOR).

Like SIMCM, SIMOR supports the notion that increasing involvement in non-using groups aids the development of a non-using identity. For SIMOR the key mechanism for recovery entails the transition to group membership centred around norms and values which "encourage recovery" (ibid: 113) as opposed to drug use. Put simply, a recovery based social identity becomes more salient through prolonged and recognisable association and involvement with

recovery-oriented groups. This transition is maintained through continued involvement in recovery-oriented groups which promote social learning and control.

Figure 2: The Social Identity Model of Recovery (Best et al, 2016: 116)

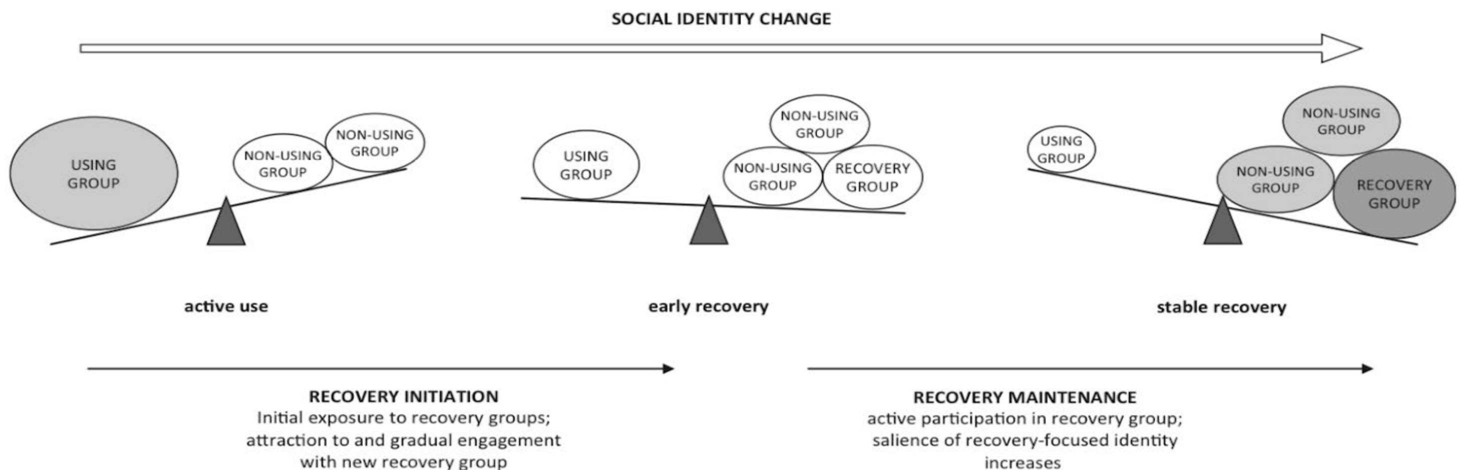


Figure 1. A schematic representation of social identity transition in the course of recovery from addiction.

Both of these models are premised on the advantages of group membership in identity formation and the transition away from addictive behaviours. Research by Beattie and Longabaugh (1999) for instance, suggested that social support was the best predictor of long term abstinence. Best et al (2008; 2012) also emphasised the importance of recovery oriented social networks in order to exercise a social identity characterised by recovery.

The importance of social identity has also been identified in the desistance literature. Indeed, it has been argued that "the idea that […] our self-concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment is close to being an axiom in sociology" (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983: 77). Weaver (2012: 395) utilises Donati's (2011) relational sociology to remind us that desistance processes are intricately bound within social processes and social contexts and are, as such, "inescapably relational". Vaughan (2007: 394), highlights the importance of social identity in the transition process, suggesting that "fashioning a new identity for oneself is often dependent on considering one's current identity as viewed by others". Maruna and Farrall (2004) developed a typology of desistance which is characterised

by two distinct phases. “Primary desistance” consists of the initial termination of offending, with “secondary desistance” referring to development of an ex-offender identity This model was later developed by McNeill (2016) who added a notion of “tertiary” desistance in order to signify the recognition by others that the individual had changed.

In order to successfully undertake and maintain desistance transitions, offenders will likely need to break away from social networks characterised by offending and move towards networks characterised by conformity (see Healy 2012, Giordano et al, 2003 and King, 2013 for instance). Indeed, it has been noted in both the desistance and recovery literature that the development of new pro-social relationships, are a key contextual factor for successful transitions and social identity transformation (see for instance, Sampson and Laub, 1993 and Wyse et al, 2014).

While the above models should be praised for stressing the importance of social identity in transition, and certainly echo the wider research literature on desistance and recovery, there is a concern here that such models present a sequential approach, with transitions progressing in an almost linear fashion from one stage to the next with the process of transition moving from active involvement groups characterised by drug use/addictive behaviour, towards active involvement in groups characterised by recovery. It is important to remember that desistance and recovery processes are rarely linear, but instead offenders and drug users oscillate between periods of offending and often chaotic drug use to more prolonged periods of cessation of these activities. Indeed, the desistance literature has a long tradition of acknowledging such vacillations. Glaser (1964: 54), for instance, noted that “those who live in both the criminal and conventional social worlds may walk a zig-zag path between the two”. More recently, Phillips (2017) utilises Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) rhizomatic theory to recast the desistance metaphor as a complex journey with “a multitude of pathways, turning points, dead ends and relays” (Phillips, 2017: 97). Nugent and Schinkel (2016) rework the notions of primary,

secondary and tertiary desistance to consider each as “act desistance”, “identity desistance” and “relational desistance”, as such terms do not “suggest sequencing in time, or importance” (ibid: 570)

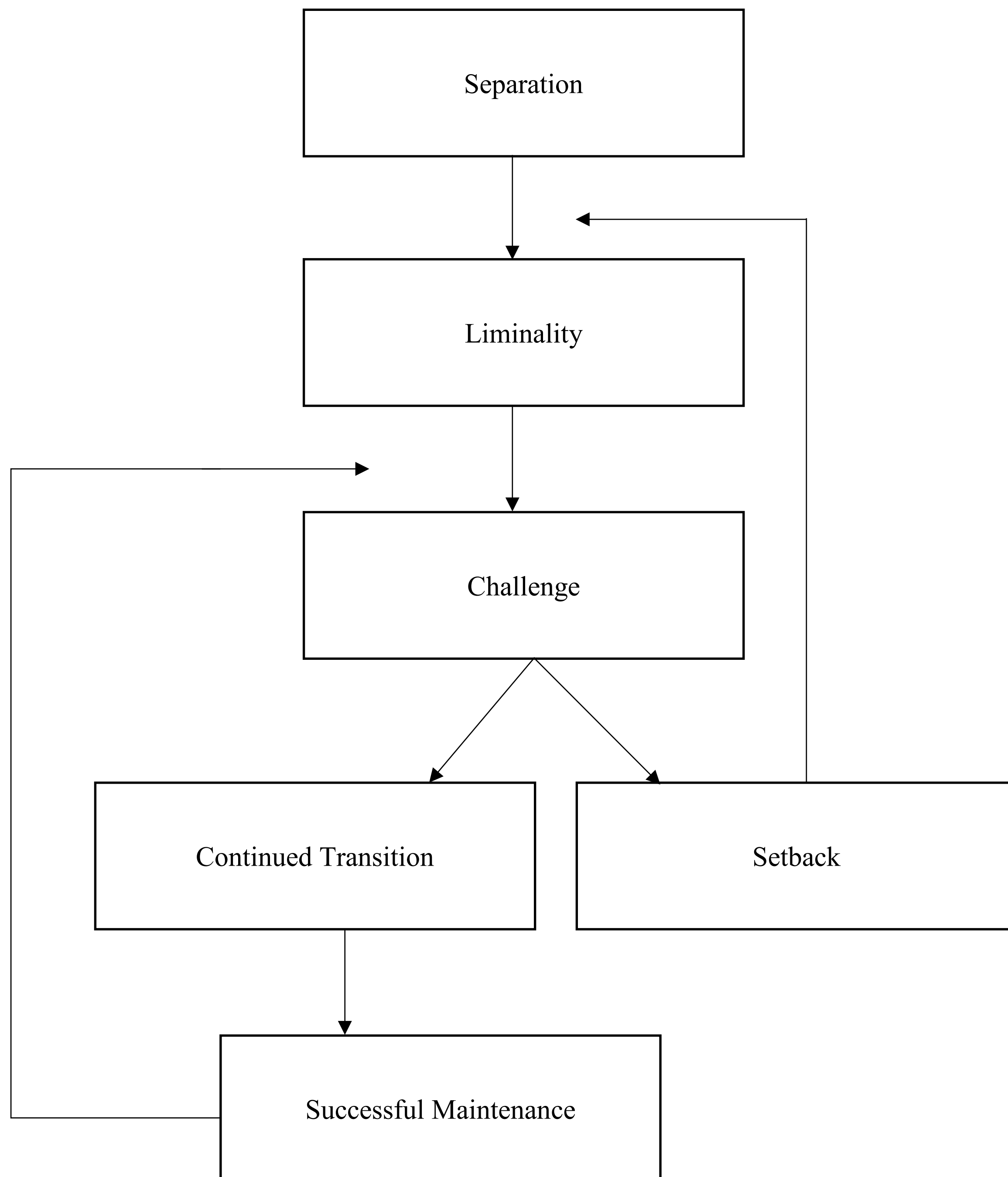
The literature surrounding relapse from substance abuse disorders is also indicative of the fact that recovery from addictive behaviours is rarely a linear process, rather, a process influenced by numerous contextual and temporal dimensions (see for instance Marlatt and Witkiewitz, 2005, Hser and Anglin, 2011). In order to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which social identity facilitate projective (forward facing) as opposed to iterative (habitual) behaviour (see Emibayer and Mische, 1998), we need see desistance and recovery processes as *transient* and highly contextual.

The Social Identity Model of Transition (SIMOT)

Desistance and recovery transitions take time to develop. Best et al (2016: 116 emphases added) emphasise this in SIMOR, suggesting that the two phases of the model are “likely to be experienced as a *gradual transition* in social identity and related behaviours”. In the intervening stages then, the individual undertaking transition is perhaps best thought of as being in a *liminal* position. When in this position “the characteristics of the [individual undertaking transition] are ambiguous: he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state” (Turner, 1969: 94). For individuals undertaking desistance and recovery transitions, the initial motivation to change allows them to distance themselves from past social networks and behaviours. However, they will not yet have a stable recovery or desistance focussed social identity. In order to understand the impact of social identity upon desistance and recovery transitions, it is argued here that the impact of social identity during this liminal period needs to be given greater attention.

SIMOT has been developed in line with the available desistance and recovery research literature and consists of four main factors. Firstly, the individual must 'crystallize discontent' with the identity one wishes to transition from (drug user/offender) (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) Secondly, once this (normative) separation commences, the individual moves into a liminal stage. Here, attempts are made to establish a new identity bolstered by involvement in both formal and informal social groups, the acquisition of capital and engagement in social structures which are known to promote desistance and recovery efforts (see Farrall and Bottoms, 2010). This liminality, is, however precarious and subject to both internal and external pressures (see Giordano et al, 2003 and Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Should a challenge to the desisting/recovering social identity not be met by a suitable response from said social identity, the potential for the return to habitual action (drug use or offending) is increased. Thirdly, it is important to consider the impact of challenges to the emerging new identity. Challenges can either be addressed by the primacy of the narrative of a changing identity which mitigates against the negative impact on successful transition or can lead to the potential reactivation of iterative forms of agency and subsequent reoffending or relapse. It is important to note here, however, that should such setbacks occur, individuals do not necessarily start from scratch, but rather employ what Shapland and Bottoms (2011: 274) refer to as "Diachronic Self Control" stockpiling knowledge of triggers for certain choices both positive and negative (see also Weaver and McNeill, 2015; and Hunter and Farrall, 2017). Finally, as challenges to the new social identity become less frequent the social identity associated with desistance or recovery can continue to develop, improving levels of efficacy (both self and collective), capital acquisition and involvement in pro-social structures. While the authors are careful to avoid stating an endpoint for desistance and recovery transitions, it is argued that the process is mutually reinforcing. This continues until the social identity associated with the problem behaviour is no longer salient.

Figure 3: The Social Identity Model of Transition (SIMOT)



The Social Identity Model of Transition (SIMOT) begins with the same basic assumptions of both SIMCM and SIMOR in that group membership has the potential to be transformative. However, it is argued that the social identities and social control exerted by such group membership is constantly mediated through an interaction between spatial

dynamics and contextual factors which subsequently inform (and constrain) agentic action. Should external contextual factors be considered to hinder continued projective (forward) agentic action (i.e. desistance and recovery transitions), it is possible that the reactivation of latent iterative agentic action (or "past patterns of thought and action" (Emibayer and Mische, 1998: 971)) becomes a viable alternative, potentially resulting in relapse or reoffending.

In another important development, a recent branch of desistance research has begun to consider the spatial dimensions within which desistance transitions take place. Farrall et al (2014: 160), for instance, argue that there is some utility in examining how "desistance impacts upon individuals' everyday activities, including the spaces and places in which these take place". It is important to remember that desistance and recovery transitions do not occur within a structural and spatial vacuum, individuals who are undertaking such transitions are also undertaking numerous other aspects of daily life, finding work, spending time with families, forming relationships and so on. Through an examination of the spatial dynamics at play at any given time, SIMOT is perhaps best placed to understand the ways in which the interaction between social identities and the spatial dynamics within which these are enacted can both support and hinder change efforts.

SIMOT in context and initial testing.

It is argued here that The Social Identity Model of Transition helps us understand the impact of both micro and macro spatial and contextual issues on desistance and recovery transitions. An analysis of a more macro level intervention undertaken by Kay (2016), found that the disruption caused by the privatisation of the probation service in England and Wales impacted upon offender's interaction with that service (and the social identities which had been formed through said interaction) to the detriment of probationer's desistance efforts. With this in mind,

it is important to test the efficiency SIMOT as a model of desistance and recovery against actual desistance and recovery narratives.

Alongside a review of the literature, our SIMOT draws on data collected as part of the doctoral research of one of the authors. The research looked to examine the desistance narratives of offenders "in transition" and, as such, provided a good source of data from which to develop and test a Social Identity Model of Transition. It consisted of 40 narrative interviews over a twelve-month period with 20 young adult male offenders aged between 18-25. In relation to the offender sample the average age of first offence for the sample was just over 13, while the average age of the participants at the time of interview was 21. Drug offences were noted by just over a third of the sample (33%) although drug use was considerably more prevalent (77%).[3] These interviews were supplemented by 10 interviews with probation staff (probation officers, probation service officers and administrative staff) and twelve months of observations within the fieldwork site. Importantly, however, all participants in the study noted the influence of both macro and micro level spatial and contextual disruptions on the development of a pro-social identity. In order to demonstrate this, and test SIMOT more fully, each of these shall be discussed in turn with the use of case studies obtained by one of the authors as part of the narrative research on offenders in transition (as discussed above).

The role of micro contextual factors in identity transformation – Case Study

[3] It is important to note that the sample was initially chosen for their offending history, not their recovery from addiction. As such, there is a limit to the extent to which SIMOT can be tested here. Although we do believe that the model is consistent with both the available literature and the transitions highlighted above, the authors would welcome further testing of this approach with a sample selected to investigate both desistance and recovery transitions.

What follows is a case study of Gary[4] a 24-year-old offender serving a 12-month community order at the time of the research and had a range of convictions for violent behaviour, along with more acquisitive offences. Gary attributed his history of offending and drug use, to his friendship network:

I was a bad sniff head, like I was drinking by the age of 13, taking cocaine by the age of 15. I was stressed out one day my mates just said try this I've had a line and about 10 minutes later I thought there was nothing to it, so I had another one and another one and another one and half an hour later I was off my tits chewing on my teeth.

Upon receiving a prison sentence for one offence however, Gary began to question his involvement in offending and his substance use disorder. In order to successfully maintain desistance efforts, he needed to transition away from his anti-social peer network, and the offending identity associated with it, towards a more pro-social identity characterised by the termination of offending and substance misuse and increased social inclusion and civic participation. Gary entered the liminal stage and began to actively seek involvement in pro-social institutions such as employment and the development of positive relationships:

About three months down the line met this bird and took it from there. I fell in love with her kid too because I was taking him to school in the morning, going to work, coming back from work, picking him up from school and taking him home. I was bending over backwards trying to change from being the person I was beforehand.

Throughout Gary's narrative, there were various micro level contextual challenge to this newly developing pro-social identity which were met with varying degrees of success. Gary struggled to find paid employment, something which he put down to his criminal record. As such, he was required to register for welfare support. At various points however, Gary was unable to collect

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[4] While Gary is used as an example here, it is important to note that his desistance/recovery transitions were similar to that of the rest of the sample and is also consistent with the available research literature on desistance and recovery processes (see for instance Maruna, 2001; Bryne and Trew, 2008). This narrative has been chosen by the authors as it is a critical case study and perhaps the clearest example of a desistance and recovery narrative from the sample. While there was evidence of both desistance *and* recovery efforts across most participants in the research, the narrative offered by Gary was the most amenable to representation here (see Kay 2016b).

his money due to numerous bureaucratic errors. Gary became frustrated and verbally abusive to the staff owing to the frustration of being without money for several weeks:

it's a matter of seven weeks with no money, the landlord is on my case for the rent for the house I'm in a three-bedroom house on my own its cold you know what I mean I am running out of electric, running out of food and obviously, I have bits of food but I was borrowing money for seven weeks on and off.

While Gary exhibited an emotional outburst as a result of his frustration, this did not represent a significant enough challenge to challenge Gary's desistance or recovery efforts. He noted that if he stayed in the job centre he could potentially commit a further offence and, as such, left and called one of his available support structures, his probation officer:

I got on the bus to here told my probation officer what happened, that I had kicked off in the job centre and she said you best phone the police and hand yourself in, so I handed myself in that day

Unfortunately for Gary, his relationship with his girlfriend did not last. This challenge provided a significant challenge to Gary's new social identity which he was unable to deflect resulting in the activation iterative forms of agency and returning to drug use:

She just said she didn't love me no more mate. My offending stopped when I was with her more than it would have done you know what I mean, I was going out less and er thinking about her more than anything and er just calmed down but then. Then she split up with me mate and my head just fell off because I loved her. Tried to just block it out of my head by getting pissed up, I would get pissed up and I would end up taking cocaine and then it just escalates mate you have a drink, cocaine, drink, cocaine, and before you know it you are fucked out of your head.

This, however, was not permanent (see Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). After a spell in hospital due to a cocaine overdose, Gary once again entered a liminal phase and began to try and separate himself from his drug using past. He focussed predominately on the acquisition of pro-social capital in the form of stable employment and demonstrated clear aspirations in relation to starting his own business:

Yeah, now I'm just trying to get clean, trying to make a clean start, get back into work. Get all my tools together, get driving and get my own little business sorted up and running, fitting kitchens makes some good money get the fuck out of here. Next year hopefully, end of next year be out of here.

The narrative offered Gary tentatively demonstrates how SIMOT could be used to help us understand the impact of micro level contextual factors on both social identity transformation and the successful maintenance of desistance and recovery efforts. It is important now to consider how effective this model is at helping us understand the impact of macro contextual factors on the same.

The role of macro contextual factors in identity transformation – Case study

The main aim of the research documented here, was to examine the impact of macro level changes on the social contexts and desistance transitions of offenders. The study was located within the context of the privatisation of the probation service in England and Wales as part of the coalition governments 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda (see Kay, 2016a, 2016b)[5]. Each of the offender participants in the study demonstrated a degree of separation from their offending and drug use and were arguably in the liminal stage of identity transformation. Interestingly, and in a break from the available literature, the offenders in the sample identified probation as a source of support aiding this identity transformation. Their involvement with probation allowed for continued capital acquisition and the context of their involvement in a criminal justice agency reinforced their desire to stay out of trouble. Offenders in the sample noted that they developed working relationships with their supervisory team, and that this allowed for not only an increasing stock of pro-social capital, but also a sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991), as Neil (21) an offender in the sample notes:

[5] While the privatisation of the probation service was multi-faceted, the main focus here will be on the division of probation services, and the reallocation of offenders, between the National Probation Service (responsible for managing high risk offenders, registered sex offenders and those subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements), and Community Rehabilitation Companies (responsible for managing medium and low risk offenders).

I know the staff as well, so I wouldn't have to say ring up a special support agency or a community worker to get the support I can ring up because I know all the staff here, I have built up a relationship with them, so they understand my situation, they understand me and know who I am so I would be able to talk about it and stuff

The relationship the offender participants in the sample had with the probation service was an example of the way in which macro level institutions such as employment and even probation supervision, can act as a scaffold upon which pro-social identities can be developed (Giordano et al, 2002). As was seen above with the outburst in the Job Centre by Gary, the development of a positive relationship with their supervisory team provided an additional source of support for probationers in the sample, that they could turn to in the face of a challenge to their desisting/recovery identity. The privatisation of the probation service, then, represented a challenge to not only this scaffold, but also to the social identity being developed alongside it in several ways. Firstly, the initial disruption caused by the reallocation of both cases and responsibilities between the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) resulted in less time being spent between a probationer and their supervisory team. Time which could have been spent developing positive relationships that provided support for the development of a pro-social identity, was markedly reduced in favour of addressing administrative requirements. As Sarah, a senior probation officer in the sample, notes:

My staff can't be spending the same amount of time with clients because everyone is trying to get to grips with, what do I do if so and so breaches his curfew, what do I do? Those 20-minute appointments with somebody checking in after they have had thinking skills which are kind of a bit of a luxury, won't happen. I don't think the conversations will change I just think we will have less of them

As such, the privatisation of the probation service, for probationers in the sample, resulted in the weakening influence of an available support structure in the development of positive

desisting/recovery identities. Thereby weakening a probationer's ability to deflect any potential challenges to this identity should they arise. Not only this, but it has been noted elsewhere (see Kay, 2016) that the privatisation of the probation service, particularly the division of work between the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Companies on the basis of risk, called for the offenders in the sample to question their sense of self. A point reiterated by Sarah:

I think that can only be interpreted in one of two ways, you are saying I am risky and you don't care so you are sending me somewhere else, or you are saying you are risky and I disagree, why aren't you doing this then why are you passing it on to someone else? Why are you passing the buck?

Indeed, Healy (2012b: 389), notes that "harsh judgements made by supervising officers about their clients may reduce the likelihood of desistance since offenders sometimes cope with negative social labels by retreating further into criminality". Finally, the reallocation of probationers between the NPS and CRC arguably represented a challenge to desisting/recovery identities in itself. The office in which the fieldwork was undertaken became a CRC under Transforming Rehabilitation, meaning that the management of high risk cases was reallocated to an NPS probation officer, usually in a different office. The communication of this to the probationer had the potential to represent a challenge to this developing desisting/recovery identity. As Farrall et al (2010: 560) notes "the communication to individuals that they are 'high-risk' of reoffending [is] essentially equivalent to saying to them 'you can't change'" (see Kay, 2016 for a more detailed discussion).

In addition to the micro level factors in the previous case study, the privatisation of the probation service represented a macro level contextual factor in the desistance and recovery

narratives of the offenders in the sample, which subsequently impacted upon their ability to successfully maintain the development of a desisting/recovery identity in the face of challenges to this identity. It is equally plausible that there are other micro, meso and macro factors that impact on desistance and recovery identities and it is these that SIMOT, which we tentatively introduce here attempts to capture.

Conclusion

This article has introduced the Social Identity Model of Transition. It has been widely acknowledged that desistance and recovery are socially embedded processes. The intrinsic value of this model, when compared to pre-existing models of social identity transformation in desistance and recovery processes rests in the argument that there is a non-trivial amount of zig-zagging between different identities in desistance and recovery journeys as, the transient nature of desistance and recovery processes allows for both backwards and forwards momentum. The ways in which individuals react to external contextual factors (or challenges to a developing social identity) provide the current for such momentum. An analysis of the narrative accounts of 20 probationers identified that desistance and recovery processes are rarely linear. The vacillation between offending/drug use and desistance/recovery is highly contextual, with each challenge to a developing identity being assessed and reacted to in turn. In order to fully understand the role of social identity in the desistance/recovery process, it is important to not only understand that setbacks happen, but also to understand the ways in which contextual factors influenced such setbacks. The SIMOT allows for a discussion of the influence of micro and macro contextual factors on social identity transformation in a way which was not previously discussed with the currently available models. It is tentatively introduced here as the sample size and focus of the initial research which was used to underpin the testing of this model provide significant limitations to our ability to fully test the model. Our intention here is that the model reignites the discussion of social identity within desistance and recovery fields, in an attempt to further illuminate the similarities between desistance and recovery transitions.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest

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