

How Might Religion and Spirituality Help to Reintegrate those Convicted of Sexual
Offending and how do Practitioners Respond?

by

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Abstract

This mixed method study, aims to first, explore the meaning, role, and purpose of religion and spirituality for people convicted of sexual offending. Exploration of their religious and spiritual experiences during periods of offending, incarceration, and desistance from offending, were examined through qualitative in-depth interviews and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Participants were drawn from prison and community populations. The second phase of the study examined the official risk management process of people convicted of sexual offending. In an effort to understand the extent to which criminal-justice practitioners utilised religious and spiritual communities during the risk-management process; 217 *risk management plans* were analysed. Results from the first phase of the research suggest that engaging and being affiliated with a religious or spiritual group might: foster the conditions needed to assist the desistance process; provide a context and language for developing non-offending identities; assist with a sense of belonging; help develop hope and manage negative emotions. Unexpectedly, findings from the second phase of the research demonstrated little evidence of practitioners using community groups or religious or spiritual activities as protective factors or supportive mechanisms in the formal risk-management process.

Key words: sexual offending, desistance, rehabilitation, religion and spirituality, risk management process

Dedication

To my loving husband and daughter

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I would like to start by expressing my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Anthony Beech, Dr Michael Larkin, and Dr Leigh Harkins. As a result of your years of continued support, unfaltering patience and sound guidance, I have achieved goals, developed skills, and grown in confidence, far beyond my expectations. During periods of self-doubt, you listened to my fears, but encouraged me to go on, for this, I am grateful.

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Finally, I hope my thesis gives testimony to the participants, who shared with me, some of the most shameful and darkest episodes in their lives. I hope I have been able to interpret, with authenticity, meaning from your experiences, and provide a platform in which others can hear your voice.

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Introduction

The majority of people convicted of sexual offending will at some point be reintegrated back into the community; either following their release from prison, or by being given a community sentence by the courts. Yet, effective reintegration is often hampered by social, economic, and psychological barriers (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; Maruna, 2001). Typically these are products of unhelpful attitudes, myths, and stereotypes, perpetuated, in the main, by the media and populist punitive policies (Thomas, 2010). As a result, professionals, politicians, and the general public, become misinformed regarding the actual risk posed by those with a history of sexual offending (Willis, Levenson, & Ward, 2010). Even after punishment has been dispensed and sentences are served, the stigma associated with a history of sexual offending pervades. People become stripped of former identity and status, rejected by social networks, and displaced from family and friends (Laws & Ward, 2011) which ultimately impedes their effective reintegration.

While effective reintegration sees the desistance from crime, this process is complex. Desistance is subjective and idiosyncratic, it is also deeply embedded within a social context (McNeill, 2012). The challenges that lie with both the person attempting to desist and the communities they hope to return to, are great (Farrall, Bottoms, & Shapland, 2010; Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004). Essential to the process is an environment which can encourage subjective change (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008); and promote opportunities for people to reintegrate and develop meaningful relationships within their returning community (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Yet current reintegration approaches for people convicted of sexual offending are uncharacteristic of one which fosters a process of desistance. Instead, they are characterised by risk aversion and managerialism (Fenton, 2013). They place clients attempting to reintegrate at a significant disadvantage. Indeed, one of the unintentional consequences of current approaches is that people are ultimately

prevented from returning to their communities (Levenson, D'Amora, et al., 2007; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007).

To facilitate and foster a process of desistance, an alternative approach is therefore required. One such approach would be to include agencies, individuals, and communities who share values and promote a culture which focuses on the humane and positive rights of people subjected to criminal sanctions (Laws & Ward, 2011). Such values would generate actions which might enable clients to return safely back to their communities and be motivated and empowered to live a life free from crime. There is one section of the community, outside of the criminal justice system, who might already hold these values, and therefore, might play an important part in fostering the conditions required to support the desistance process; religious and spiritual communities.

Religious and spiritual communities provide an interesting avenue worthy of exploration, particularly in the context of desistance. All faiths are essentially person-centric; with forgiveness, love, tolerance, and compassion being fundamental virtues to these groups. Indeed for this reason many religious and spiritual groups have prioritised their work with the most disadvantaged and marginalised within our society. Yet, little is known of the utility of such affiliation for people convicted of sexual offending, while attempting to desist from crime and reintegrate back into the community. Although the literature suggests that engaging with religion or spirituality reduces criminal or deviant behaviour (Johnson, 2011), this has yet to be shown with people convicted of sexual offending. Instead, much of the faith-based research is limited to non-offending juvenile populations. Where research has been carried out on adult populations, these tend to have been carried out with custodial cases, and to the exclusion of those convicted of sexual offending. Thus, understanding what role religion and spirituality might play in rehabilitating and supporting the desistance process for those with convictions for sexual offending, remains unclear.

The aim of this PhD research is therefore, to explore what role or purpose, if any, religion or spirituality might have for people desisting from sexual offending. Given that criminal justice practitioners play a key role in supporting this process, the research further aims to explore the extent to which clients' religious and spiritual needs are integrated into risk management processes.

To explore these issues, I conducted my research in two phases by adopting a mixed methods exploratory sequential design. In an effort to explore the perspectives and experiences of this particular group of subjects, I utilised qualitative methods in the first phase. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In an effort to understand participants' particular experiences within shared but specific contexts, I carried out two studies. One study explored the lived experiences of people incarcerated for their crimes and currently or previously engaged in religion or spirituality (N=9). The second group were also people with sexual convictions either currently or previously engaged in religion or spirituality, but living in the community (N=4). In the second phase of the research, I employed the use of quantitative methods. After coding 217 risk management plans of clients convicted of sexual offending, I carried out statistical analysis using SPSS.

Findings from the first qualitative phase of the study, show that participants benefited greatly by engaging and being affiliated with religious or spiritual communities. Indeed, findings suggest that such engagement might foster the conditions needed to assist the desistance process, as well as provide practical and emotional support during criminal justice sanctions. In particular, religion and spirituality provided: a context and language which enabled participants to develop new non-offending narratives and identities; aided a sense of belonging and social status; enabled the process of seeking forgiveness, which gave participants a sense of hope and optimism; and enabled participants to mentally escape and

manage negative emotions through activities such as meditation, reading religious texts, and prayer. Of interest was the difference between the experiences of those incarcerated and those living in the community. For example, while participants lived in the community, they experienced accessibility and engagement with religious or spiritual communities a greater challenge, when compared to those living in prison. This finding suggests that, those living in the community need greater support and facilitation when accessing social and communal networks. Given the encouraging findings of the first two studies, it was surprising to find such groups were not utilised by criminal justice practitioners, to support formal risk management planning processes. Indeed, according to the 217 risk management plans examined, practitioners did not use religious or spiritual groups at all.

Structure of the Thesis

Part I (Chapter 1 and 2).

In Chapter 1, I present the findings of a systematic review of the literature. Unfortunately little examination how a religious or spiritual context might support the rehabilitation process for those convicted of sexual offending exists. Therefore, I also highlight the literature which demonstrates how particular contexts, such as a faith environment, can act as a prime situation for those intent on sexual offending to target.

In Chapter 2, I set out the methods used to explore my research questions. I detail the mixed methods approach used, outline the rationale for this choice, and describe the qualitative and quantitative techniques used.

Part II (Chapter 3 and 4).

Here I present the findings from two empirical studies. In Chapter 3, I present the findings and experiences of incarcerated participants. In Chapter 4 are the experiences of participants living in the community. Findings across both studies suggest that those engaged in religion or spirituality, experience positive outcomes in relation to their psychological and social wellbeing. Many of the factors needed to help foster the desistance process such as: developing a reformed identity, engaging in new pro-social networks, developing feelings of hope and self-efficacy were identified across both sets of participants.

Part III (Chapter 5).

This section focusses on the quantitative element of the thesis. Chapter 5 extends the findings of Chapter 3 and 4. It explores the extent to which aspects of religious and spiritual affiliation feature in the risk management strategies of those convicted of sexual offending. The Chapter presents findings from an empirical study which analysed the risk management plans of 217 clients, convicted of sexual offending. The study reveals inconsistencies: a limited use of

specialist sexual offending risk management tools and an underutilisation of communities and faith groups to assist in the reintegration of clients.

Part IV (Chapter 6).

In this final section I discuss each Chapter in turn, highlighting findings and their theoretical and practical implications; I address the strengths and limitations of the studies included in this thesis, as well as areas for future direction.

Statement of Authorship

I confirm that all of the work presented in this thesis has been performed, interpreted, and written by myself. Professor Anthony Beech, Dr Michael Larkin (University of Birmingham) and Dr Leigh Harkins (University of Ontario Institute of Technology), provided support in a supervisory capacity.

A version of Chapter 1 has been accepted for publication by the journal of Aggression and Violent Behaviour, a copy is provided in the appendices (see Appendix 1). Material from Chapter's 3 and 5 has also been submitted for publication to two other journals and are currently under peer review. The authorship of the published and submitted articles indicates collaborative working, However I can confirm that I am the senior author in all works listed. Professor Anthony Beech, Dr Michael Larkin (University of Birmingham) and Dr Leigh Harkins (University of Ontario Institute of Technology), provided support in a supervisory capacity; and [REDACTED] worked as a second coder in the study in Chapter 5.

PART I

Chapter 1

Examining the Role of Religion and Spirituality for Those Convicted of Sexual Offending: A Systematic Review

Chapter Overview

The aim of this Chapter is to provide a systematic review of the religion and spirituality literature, with particular attention to those attempting to restore their lives following periods of sexual offending. It is worth noting at this juncture that throughout the literature the term *offender rehabilitation* lacks definitional clarity. Robinson and Crow (2009) provide helpful summaries of its definition, but in the criminological literature it is most commonly defined as a twofold process. First, it refers to the removal of the desire to reoffend, and second, the reintegration of the person into the community following punishment for a crime (Hudson, 2003). This thesis however, recognises that rehabilitation is a more complex process interacting between four interdependent forms: judicial; psychological; social; and moral (McNeill, 2012). Likewise, *offender reintegration*, and *re-entry* tend to be used interchangeably, referring only to the period of transition between prison and community (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Here the definition of reintegration and re-entry is extended to the process in which a person is re-established back into their community, through individual, moral and social, and criminal justice collaboration.

In carrying out this review, I found much of the faith-based research to be limited to, non-offending, juvenile, or incarcerated adult populations, often at the exclusion of those convicted of sexual offences. As a result of the review, a number of research questions emerged; these are outlined in the Chapter conclusion.

Introduction

Barriers to re-entry, faced by those convicted of sexual offending include: unstable housing (Levenson & Hern, 2007); unemployment (Levenson, D'Amora, et al., 2007); being displaced from family units (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009); being isolated from community support (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008); feeling stressed (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009), and feeling afraid and shameful (Robbers, 2009). These barriers impede the likelihood of successful rehabilitation (Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006) and increase the risk of falling back to maladaptive coping (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009). This period of re-entry is, therefore, an important one, particularly if desistance from offending is to be facilitated (Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012).

To support this process and as part of formal risk management processes, rehabilitation, re-entry, or good life plans are developed (Göbbels, Willis, & Ward, 2014). Because poorly executed plans impede desistance (Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009), and result in negative experiences for the individual (Willis & Johnston, 2012), the role criminal justice practitioners play in this process is critical. A number of factors can influence effective re-entry planning, such as: ensuring identified risks are met with appropriate resources and strategies (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Bosker, Witteman, & Hermanns, 2013), that control approaches are balanced with mechanisms to provide support and develop the strengths of the individual (Kewley, Beech, Harkins, & Bonsall, in press; Ward & Stewart, 2003), and that opportunities to attain social support from the community (Duwe, 2012), are positive and help to increase a person's social capital (Farrall, 2004; Göbbels et al., 2014). However, following a court sanction for sexual offending, people tend to find themselves isolated and excluded from their own communities (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009) making re-entry planning a challenge.

There is however, one group universal to all communities who, for some, might play an important role in the reintegration process; they are religious and spiritual communities. The exploration of religious and spiritual groups is a worthy one, for a number of reasons. First, religious experience and its meaning are idiosyncratic, exploring the particulars and uniqueness of this human phenomenon is important in the process of developing our knowledge, particularly of those convicted of sexual offending. Second, two of the primary goods sought by all humans, includes that of community and spirituality (Ward & Stewart, 2003). Third, alternatives to the current regime are needed, given that those convicted of sexual offending, still experience fear, despair, and isolation when they attempt to reintegrate back into their communities (Levenson & Hern, 2007). Finally, faith groups have for many years, operated alongside the criminal justice system both informally, and more recently as partner agencies. With the Office for National Statistics stating that almost three-quarters of the population in England and Wales identifying themselves as having a religion (*Religion in England and Wales 2011, 2012*), a third of all prisoners engaging in religious worship (O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002), and on release from prison, three-quarters of those convicted of a sexual offence are involved with the church (Robbers, 2009), it is reasonable that more should be understood of the role religious and spiritual communities play in the process of re-entry.

What the literature currently tells us about faith and adults convicted of sexual offending.

In reviewing the literature, I was interested to understand how religion or spiritually might help those convicted of sexual offending to rehabilitate and reintegrate back into their communities. The literature examining the relationship between faith and crime is currently under developed (Duwe & Johnson, 2013). However, two major pieces of work, Johnson's

(2011) systematic review, and Baier and Wright's (2001) meta-analysis, provide an excellent appraisal of the current landscape.

Johnson's (2011) review of 272 faith and crime studies, found, in almost 90% of the studies, support for his argument that *More God* means *Less Crime*. The studies were predominantly based within the United States, and dated between 1944 and 2010. While these findings show religion as having an inverse relationship with crime, this conclusion was drawn from studies which, in the main, examined the experience of faith from the perspective of the adolescent. Of the 272 studies, 86% (n=235) analysed the effects of religion on the delinquent behaviour of children, teenagers or college or high-school students. A further three percent (n=9) considered the effects on mothers or families of delinquent children, and one percent (n=5) considered the effects or perceptions on whole geographic areas through national survey or police localities. Indeed, only 10% (n=28) of the studies in his review examined adult offender populations, such as: drug users, violent offenders, domestic abusers, tax evaders, or those engaging in general disruptive behaviours in prisons. None of the studies in Johnsons review, specifically, examined the effects of faith or religion on populations convicted of sexual offending.

In, Baier and Wright's (2001) meta-analysis of 60 studies, dating from 1969 to 1998, they too concluded that religion acted as a barrier to crime. Again, an encouraging conclusion, yet 73% (n=44) of the studies consisted of participants who were children, students or teenagers; one paper was a discussion paper; one looked at the effects on the family unit; the remaining 12% (n=7) of studies used adult populations. Even so, these were general adult populations, not all had engaged in criminal acts, rather anti-social behaviours such as alcohol misuse. Baier and Wright's meta-analysis is important in a general sense, but tells us little of the effects of religion or spirituality on adult offending populations.

While, both Johnson (2011), and Baier and Wright's (2001) reviews are important in terms of developing our understanding of the relationship between the early onset and development of crime in adolescent populations, they do not advance our knowledge in terms of the relationship between religion and adults. Indeed, they tell us nothing of the experiences of adults convicted of sexual crimes. The second problem with the literature is that studies tend to examine the relationship between faith and crime with the aim of understanding causality or the early onset of crime; they do not examine the role of religion or spirituality from the perspective or context of rehabilitation.

While the majority of studies in these two large reviews, show in the main that by engaging with religion or spirituality, criminal or deviant behaviour is somewhat reduced, we cannot be confident that this finding applies to people attempting to reintegrate back into the community following a conviction for sexual offending.

Systematic review

In an effort to explore the literature further and shed light on the effects of religion or spirituality for those convicted of sexual crimes I completed a systematic review. Rather than replicating the work of previous reviews, and risking the inclusion of studies already examined, I limited the search of electronic records to those published between January 2000 and January 2014. This condensed period of time was selected in an effort to capture work emerging from a recent surge of interest in the positive psychology and strengths' based movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Ward & Laws, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Ward & Stewart, 2003). The key terms used in the search included "faith" or "religion" and "offender" or "crime" either featuring in the title, abstract, or key words. Six hundred records were retrieved from the following electronic databases: ProQuest, SwetsWise, Wiley Online, Sage Journals, Google Scholar and my own reference library. Following the

application of a more defined criteria for inclusion (detailed in Appendix 2), 21 studies remained, and these are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Papers Identified for Review

*B= Beneficial Association, H= Harmful Association M= Mixed NA= No Association

Study	Population Setting	N	Offence Type	Religious Variables	Other variables	Findings*
Adorjan and Chui (2012)	Community	23	Various including sexual	Religious belief	Social bonds and social capital	B
Allen, Phillips, Roff, Cavanaugh, and Day (2008)	Prison	73	Murder and Sexual	Religiousness and spirituality, daily spiritual experiences	Anxiety depression and desire for hastened death	M
Armour, Windsor, Aguilar and Taub (2008)	Prison	102	Various but sexual offending not specified	Daily spiritual experiences	Empathy, propensity to forgive, forgiveness	B
Bakken, Gunter and Visher (2014)	Prison to Community	920	None Specified	Spirituality and religious affiliation	Substance use family attachment, deviant peers, neighbourhood characteristics and employment status	B
Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken	Prison	70	None Specified	Meaning of religion		B

and Dammer (2000)

Daggett, Camp, Kwon, Rosenmerkel and Klein-Saffran (2008)	Prison	794	None Specified	Service attendance and religious salience	Motivation for change, feelings of self-worth, and community awareness	B
Duwe and King (Duwe & King, 2013)	Prison to Community	732	Various including sexual	Innerchange programme	Recidivism	B
Eshuys and Smallbone (2006)	Prison	111	Sexual	Religious affiliation: atheists, dropouts, converts, and stayers, religious behaviour, experience	Sexual offending	H
Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder and Seffrin (2008)	Community	41	None Specified	Spirituality and religious participation	Self-reported crime, problem drug and alcohol use	B
Jensen and Gibbons (2002)	Community	20	Various including sexual	Religiosity	Shame and new crime or parole violation	B
Johnson (2004)	Prison to	201	None Specified	Faith programme	Recidivism	NA

	Community			participation		
Kerley and Copes (2009)	Prison	63	Serious crimes (unclear if any sexual)	Saliency of religion, family experiences, impact of religion in present context of prison	Attitudes and behaviours and ability to cope	B
Kerley, Copes, Tewksbury and Dabney (2011)	Prison	208	None Specified	Religious behaviours inc. prayer, watching religious broadcast on TV and attending religious class or group	Deviant behaviour including; destruction of prison property, fighting, carry weapon, spend time on disciplinary unit and self-control	B
Kerley, Matthews and Blanchard (2005)	Prison	386	None Specified	Religious belief, Religious behaviour (attendance service, group etc.)	Arguing with other inmates, fighting with other inmates	B
Kerley, Matthews and Schulz (Kerley, Matthews, & Schulz,	Prison	268	None Specified	Completing OSF faith based event	Negative emotions and poor behaviour in	B

2005)					prison	
Maruna, Wilson and Curran (2006)	Prison	75	Various including sexual	Conversion	Shame management and coping strategy	B
Mela, Marcoux, Baetz, Griffin, Angelski and Deqiang (2008)	Forensic Unit	183	Substance misuse history no sexual offending specified	Religious activities, beliefs and spirituality	Depression, anxiety, satisfaction with life	B
O'Connor and Perreyclear (2002)	Prison	779	Various including sexual	Attendance of religious programmes	Infraction of prison rules (includes fighting being in restricted area having contraband, escaping)	B
Pezzella and Vlahos (2014)	Community	136	None Specified	Religious saliency and practice	Health measures (e.g. Weight, physical activity, drug and alcohol use, extramarital and unprotected sex	M

practice)

Schroeder and Frana (2009)	Community	11	Various no sexual offending specified	Religion and spirituality meaning	Emotional coping and desistance	B
Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt (2013)	Community	48	Various no sexual offending specified	Religious belief	Decisions to engage in crime	H

*B= Beneficial Association, H= Harmful Association M= Mixed NA= No Association

When reviewing the studies included in this review, and in keeping with the strategy used in Johnson’s (2011) systematic review, I classified each study in relation to the authors’ conclusion regarding their overall findings as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding to Classify the Findings from Review

Descriptor of Classification	Code
Studies were participants benefited from an association with religious or spiritual activity	B
Studies were participants were harmed from an association with religious or spiritual activity	H
Studies were there was a mixed result from participants association with religious or spiritual activity	M
Studies were there was no result from participants association with religious or spiritual activity	NA

Systematic Review Findings

The relationship between religion and spirituality and the rehabilitation of those convicted of sexual offending

Of the 21 studies reviewed, only one, by Eshuys and Smallbone (2006) purposefully sampled participants with sexual convictions. No other study aimed to explore this concern from purely the perspective of those convicted of sexual offending. Six studies focussed on participants with varying criminal histories and small numbers of participants had a history of sexual offending. However, in these studies the offence type was only relevant in terms of demographic profiling, or for the purposes of matching with a control group. The remaining 14 studies, either listed the offence types, in which sexual offences were not included, or did not include any offence type at all.

In keeping with Johnson (2011), and Baier and Wright’s (2001) findings, the majority of studies in this review (76%, n=16), reported beneficial effects for those who engaged in

religion or spirituality. A summary of these follow however, like Johnson, and Baier and Wright's findings caution must be adopted. The majority of studies in this review also fail to focus on or include participants convicted of sexual offending. The following findings are divided into studies which found engaging in religion to be beneficial, harmful, or where there was no effect on participants.

Beneficial relationship between religion and crime.

Sixteen of the 21 studies reported a wide range of beneficial effects following religious engagement. These include:(a) reduced recidivism, reduced use of substances and assisting the desistance process (Adorjan & Chui, 2012; Bakken et al., 2014; Duwe & King, 2013; Giordano et al., 2008; Jensen & Gibbons, 2002); (b) an emotional comforter which improved psychological outcomes, such as, a reduction in negative emotions including anger, depression, anxiety, stress (Kerley, Matthews, & Schulz, 2005; Mela et al., 2008; Schroeder & Frana, 2009); (c) improved pro-social peer association, strengthening social bonds and social opportunities (Adorjan & Chui, 2012; Clear et al., 2000; Giordano et al., 2008; Kerley & Copes, 2009); (d) assisted individuals form positive identities giving a sense of purpose, meaning and a new way of life (Clear et al., 2000; Maruna et al., 2006); (e) reduced anti-social behaviours while in prison such as, fighting and arguing with other inmates, breaking prison rules (Kerley et al., 2011; Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard, 2005; Kerley, Matthews, & Schulz, 2005; O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002); and (f) enabled inmates to better cope with life in prison (Kerley & Copes, 2009; Maruna et al., 2006).

None or a mixed relationship between religion and crime.

Johnson's (2004) study was the only one, in this review, to find no association between crime and faith. Johnson found, after an eight year follow up, the difference between those who engaged in the Prison Fellowship intervention to be negligible when compared to those who had not taken part in the programme.

Two studies found a mixed result. Pezzella and Vlahos (2014), considered the association between religious practice, and health, and risky health behaviours. They found no association between religion and the general health of the sample but did find an inverse relationship between religion and risky behaviours such as substance abuse, extramarital and unprotected sex practices. Allen et al. (2008), found where older inmates engaged in daily spiritual experiences, they experienced less depression and reduced feelings of or a desire to hasten the end of life. However, greater religious coping and feeling abandoned by God were also associated with greater experiences of depression.

A harmful relationship between religion and crime.

Two studies, found an association between faith and crime to be a harmful one. Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt's (2013) examined street criminals and found that those who held strong beliefs about God, punishment, and the afterlife, used their beliefs not only to justify their offending behaviour, but, as a motivation to do God's work. The authors make the important point however. They note that their findings do not reveal an association with religion and crime *per se*, rather that participants engaged in an inadequate or purposeful misinterpretation of religious scriptures, which in turn, allows the individual to engage in criminal deviancy. This process, it is reported, serves to alleviate and neutralise strong religious beliefs of death and the afterlife.

Eshuys and Smallbone's (2006) study of 111 prisoners, incarcerated for sexual offences, found religion to be positively related to sexual offending. This study analysed self-report data of participants' lifetime experiences with religion. They categorised participants' experiences into four groups: (a) 'Atheists', who had low religious experiences both as a child and an adult, (b) 'Stayers', who had high religious experiences as a child and an adult, (c) 'Drop-Outs', who had high religious experiences as a child but not as an adult, and (d) 'Converts', who had low religious experiences as a child and high as an adult. These

categories were then compared with participants' criminogenic profile including, age, number of victims and victims gender, previous sexual and non-sexual offences.

They found that stayers, those who had very strong religious beliefs and continued affiliation into adulthood (n=23), tended to have a greater number and much younger victims, they had also committed more offences when compared to the others in the sample. The largest group in this study the, atheists (n=45), were found to fit a more general offending profile. They were the youngest in the sample and had the fewest number of recorded sexual offences. Victims of their sexual crimes were also much older. As too were victims of the converts group. However, this group had the most number of recorded non-sexual offences, indicating a prolonged generalised offending history. The final group; the drop-outs, were found more likely to have been convicted of a previous sexual offence, but not as many as the participants who had maintained religious activity into adulthood.

These findings are perhaps the most significant for this review, particularly as this is the only study, to my knowledge, which specifically explores the relationship between religious affiliation and a population of people convicted of sexual offending. The study suggests that for those who experienced religion over the lifetime while holding "hell-fire" beliefs (i.e. belief in life after death, supernatural eternal punishment, sinner goes to eternal hell and damnation, etc.), saw their faith in an extreme and unforgiving way, probably also living by dominant patriarchal values and an inflexible interpretation of the scriptures. It is perhaps unsurprising that with such rigid belief systems this group held pro-offending attitudes, such as, beliefs about entitlement, seeing children as sexual beings and assuming women always want sex (Craissati & Beech, 2003).

These findings are important in terms of what they tell us about how extreme and hostile religious beliefs might be linked to values and beliefs that support or at least give permission for sexual offending behaviours. In terms of the process of rehabilitation however,

these findings are limited. They have value in perhaps indicating which people may or may not benefit from being encouraged to participate in a religious or spiritual community, but do not tell us the extent to which religious affiliation might help others reintegrate or desist from offending.

This review and previous reviews, finds evidence that religious affiliation and practice brings beneficial outcomes for those involved in the criminal justice system. However, with the exception of only one study, fails to provide any specific insight into the effects of religion or spirituality on those convicted of sexual offending. Excluded from this review were studies which explored those who sexually offend while employed or volunteer in a faith community, such as priests, church leaders, Sunday school teachers etc. The reasons for this exclusion was (a) because of the potential distinctiveness, of that population, and (b) that this review aimed to focus on the rehabilitation or re-entry process, rather than an examination of sexual offending within the church. However, given the buoyancy of literature regarding professionals who sexually offend, attention is needed at this juncture.

Professionals who sexually offend.

Professionals who sexually offend, are those who exploit their employment status, to access and abuse children or vulnerable adults, these include professionals such as teachers, foster carers, youth workers and, religious leaders (for a useful review see Sullivan & Beech, 2002, 2004). Following the trials and subsequent convictions of a number of Catholic priests across the US, during the mid-1980's, media attention fuelled the idea that 'clergy abuse' was a common phenomenon, particularly within the Catholic Church (Jenkins, 2001). In an effort to both manage reputations and understand the scale and scope of abuse within the church, the "Nature and Scope" study (John Jay College, 2004) was commissioned by the Catholic Church and a number of empirical studies emerged (Terry, 2008). While a greater understanding of the scale of sexual abuse within religious institutions has begun, it is

preliminary, and as with all types of sexual abuse, many crimes go unreported. Therefore, the full extent and profile of sexual abuse within the church, remains unclear.

The literature on religious professional perpetrators is relatively comprehensive, when compared to non-professional perpetrators. However, what remains inconclusive is whether this subgroup is distinct or not from the general sexual offending population. On the one hand, when compared to the general sexual offending population, the demographic profile of religious professionals who sexually abuse is different. They tend to have had better educational experiences, be slightly older, single, use some levels of force in their offending, and lack any criminal history (Langevin, Curnoe, & Bain, 2000). Their victim profile is also quite distinct. They tend to target young boys and use their professional status in the church to both access children and gain their trust (Firestone, Moulden, & Wexler, 2009) and report that their sexually deviant interest in children was part of their motivation to work in their chosen profession (Kotze, 2013; Sullivan & Beech, 2004). Indeed, because of their offending prevalence, recidivism and age, this group is more comparative to white-collar criminals rather than the general sexual offending population (Piquero, Piquero, Terry, Youstin, & Nobles, 2008).

However, other studies suggest the profile of religious professionals who sexually abuse, is similar to the general sexual offending population. They are comparative in terms of risk factors found to be associated with repeat offending, such as, having all male victims and engaging in sexual offending at a young age (Perillo, Mercado, & Terry, 2008). Like general sexual offending populations, the number of offences and victims tend to be in single figures, and those committing multiple and enduring offences remain in the minority (Mercado, Tallon, & Terry, 2008). Religious professionals who sexually abuse tend to be known to the victim, do not network with other offenders, are not prolific users of child abuse imagery, and

are not deviantly fixated or attracted to children (Terry & Ackerman, 2008). Finally, they also tend to abuse as a result of situational opportunity (Holt & Massey, 2013).

It remains unclear if religious professionals who sexually abuse are distinct from the general sexual offending population or not. Therefore, they may or may not require different assessment, treatment and reintegration approaches, and a faith environment may not be an appropriate context in which this group of clients should return. Nonetheless, the literature regarding professionals who sexually abuse is an important area as it informs our knowledge in terms of pathology, criminal careers, and profiling perpetrators and their victims (Terry, 2008). It does not however, directly assist our understanding of how religious or spiritual communities might support the reintegration process of those convicted of sexual offending; instead it perhaps serves to heighten the concern regarding the risk of exposing clients to religious or spiritual environments.

Strategies to manage the potential risk within a faith environment

Some of the studies included in this review have shown there might be positive gains to be made by those engaged with a religious or spiritual community, while sanctioned by the criminal justice system. However, situations themselves, such as, religious or spiritual environments can serve as a trigger or opportunity for those motivated to engage in sexually abusive behaviours (Smallbone, Marshall, & Wortley, 2013). It is paramount therefore, when supporting the reintegration process of clients back into their communities, this is closely monitored.

The environment in which a person lives or works can be a cause for those with pre-existing vulnerabilities to sexually offend (Ward & Beech, 2006). Where a person is already predisposed to sexual offending, they might seek out and target a faith environment, or should they find themselves involved in a faith community, act impulsively to opportunity

(Smallbone et al., 2013). Indeed, there are some people for whom the environment itself acts as an influence.

Smallbone et al. (2013), divide these people into three categories. First, they describe the 'committed sexual offender' as a person who will actively seek out and manipulate situations in which to offend. They note he is more likely to have quite a criminalised history and be easily tempted by opportunity. The second type is described as the 'opportunistic sexual offender', here he does not create opportunities, but rather, takes advantage of them as they arise. He is likely to have a low-level criminal history and appears to function well, by holding down a job, is married, etc. The final type is described as the 'situational sexual offender' who is generally non-criminal and begins offending late in life. He is unlikely to create a situation, but sexual offending develops following emotional attachment or congruence with a child; this type offends against people he feels close to, within his environment. It is therefore, imperative that practitioners responsible for the management and monitoring of such clients are alert to the risks of environmental factors.

In addition to practitioner awareness, practitioners must also be qualified, experienced and well supported when managing people convicted of sexual offending (*Position Statement for the Assessment, Management and Treatment of Sex Offenders*, Ministry of Justice, 2010). To supplement training, experience and support, practitioners must also utilise appropriate tools. Before any reintegration intervention is designed, practitioners must first assess the risk and needs of those convicted of sexual offending, by using specialised, systematic and comprehensive risk management tools (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). By using specialist risk assessment tools, professionals are empowered to make robust and defensible risk assessment, and design reintegration plans that address known factors linked to offending behaviour, such as: poor social networks (Cortoni, 2009), unstable lifestyle (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004), or specific sexual risk factors such as a sexual arousal to children

(Hanson & Bussiere, 1998). By using empirically based risk management tools practitioners can design meaningful reintegration strategies (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

It should also be noted that professionals supporting those convicted of sexual offending to reintegrate back into the community, must also be mindful of the capabilities of their clients. As part of an assessment of risk, practitioners must give equal attention to the needs of the client. While public protection concerns are rightly a high priority; practitioners can become preoccupied by this, and as a consequence, fail to address the specific and often unique needs of the client (Connelly & Williamson, 2000). This presents a particular ethical concern, as reintegrating people back into the community who are ill prepared or de-skilled for the process, has the potential to cause further harm. Not only might the person being reintegrated, be harmed in the process, but people who commit crime often do so because they lack the internal and external resources to function in society and achieve meaningful life goals (Ward & Stewart, 2003), placing others at risk too. To help mitigate this, practitioners should embed into their rehabilitation strategies, support to help overcome social deficits or problems (Ward & Laws, 2010) and help build a sense of agency and hope using the involvement of significant others to support the process (McNeill, 2009). While religious and spiritual communities might appear to offer a positive solution to many clients in this situation, criminal justice professionals might struggle to accept such a context as appropriate in light of what is known of situational risk.

The Research Problem

In completing this review, two clear research problems emerged. While the literature is rich with studies demonstrating the positive benefits (for those who choose to engage in religious or spiritual activities) of engaging with religious and spiritual groups; the literature fails to clarify if these experiences are met by those convicted of sexual offending. The first problem is to therefore, explore what role engaging in religious and spiritual communities might play

in the reintegration process of those convicted of sexual offending. The second problem is however, that communities or situations such as religious or spiritual environments, can act as a trigger or a context in which those motivated to sexually offend might target. Therefore, the challenge criminal justice practitioners' face when managing and assessing clients convicted of sexual offending, is also of interest.

Chapter 2

Methods

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide an overview of the strategy of inquiry adopted for this thesis. The Chapter includes, a rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach, along with detail of the qualitative and quantitative methods used, across all three studies. Two of the three empirical studies in this thesis use an IPA approach. Therefore, a substantial amount of this present Chapter is dedicated to IPA itself.

Mixed Methods

This thesis' research problem centres around two questions: what are the experiences of people convicted of sexual offending and engaged in a faith or spiritual community, while attempting to desist from crime; the second question looks to investigate and measure the extent to which practitioners incorporate faith and spiritual communities (where relevant) into the formal risk management planning process of those clients convicted of sexual offending. Because of the incompatible nature of these research questions, a mixed methods approach is essential to offering both a flexible and dynamic approach to the research problem:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 123).

Rationale for Using Mixed Methods with a Qualitative Emphasis

Mixing methods can be logistically complex and require researchers to apply multiple skills, however, the benefits of using mixed methods research far outweigh some of the challenges (Greene, 2007). Although qualitative and quantitative methods have been used in this thesis, qualitative methods dominate the strategy. Two studies require a qualitative approach and only one a quantitative strategy. The rationale for leaning towards a qualitative approach includes; epistemological, contribution to the literature and ethical reasons. Each are addressed in turn here.

Epistemological.

One key part of the research problem looks to understand and explore the experiences and meaning made by those convicted of sexual offending, as they engage in desistance and religion and spirituality. To best understand the "real world" and the meaning made by those

experiencing the phenomenon, a phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate. Phenomenology, looks to understand the essential qualities of a particular experience, to examine what is the truth in terms of the phenomenon experienced as it presents itself (Moran, 2002). The choice of qualitative method, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, was essential for this thesis, not only because it allows the exploration of participants' unique experience but also what meaning is made from that experience. This deep and idiosyncratic perspective is a voice rarely heard for this group. Essential to this thesis therefore, was a method that could develop some understanding of how participants might make sense and meaning of their experiences, which in turn might influence the process of desistance. Phenomenology and its progress as a philosophy are discussed in more detail later on in this Chapter, under the section Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Contributory.

The second reason for adopting a mixed strategy which favours qualitative approach, relates to the issue of contribution to the literature. Following a review of the rehabilitation literature, it is apparent that many empirical works have adopted methodological approaches influenced by positivism. Much of the "what works" literature, which examined the effectiveness of interventions which aimed to reduce reoffending, were designed using complex statistical methods, such as, meta-analysis (Cullen & Jonson, 2010; Miner-Romanoff, 2012). Very few criminological and forensic psychological research questions, in terms of rehabilitation at least, explore experience from the perspective of the client (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Instead, much of the literature examining those convicted of sexual offending, has tended to focus its attention to aspects such as: the aetiology of sexual offending; understanding recidivism rates and risk factors; developing risk assessment and management tools; and examining the effectiveness of treatment intervention risk factors. While this work has been critical to advancing knowledge, for example we are much clearer of some of the factors linked to the

escalation of risk; this knowledge does not tell us how clients experience the onset of risk factors, or how they experience lapsing behaviours, or indeed what it means to desist from offending. Indeed, exploration of experience and its meaning is a method significantly underutilised in criminological research (Miner-Romanoff, 2012). Use of such approach here, therefore, not only contributes to the criminological literature as a whole, but also the field of rehabilitation concerning those convicted of sexual offending.

Ethical.

A final factor for using a qualitative approach as the dominant method is that this approach can assist with processes that require sensitivity and reflection. Sexual offending is a complex and difficult phenomenon to explore given the “social, cultural, emotional and psychological aspects” (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 2) involved. Although there is some debate regarding the vulnerability of those convicted of sexual offending (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010), this particular subgroup, as a population, are without doubt stigmatised (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013). By engaging in a transparent, nonthreatening, and collaborative recruitment process, the trust of participants was gained ahead of data collection which continued throughout the interview process.

Indeed having to manage participant distress (Cowburn, 2010) can be overcome by the use of qualitative strategies. I was able to allow time at the end of each interview, for a period of debriefing; participants were able to end the interview feeling positive. This was important, as some questions resulted in participants’ discussing periods in their lives that were traumatic and painful. Had data been collected through a questionnaire for example, an opportunity to debrief would have been more difficult.

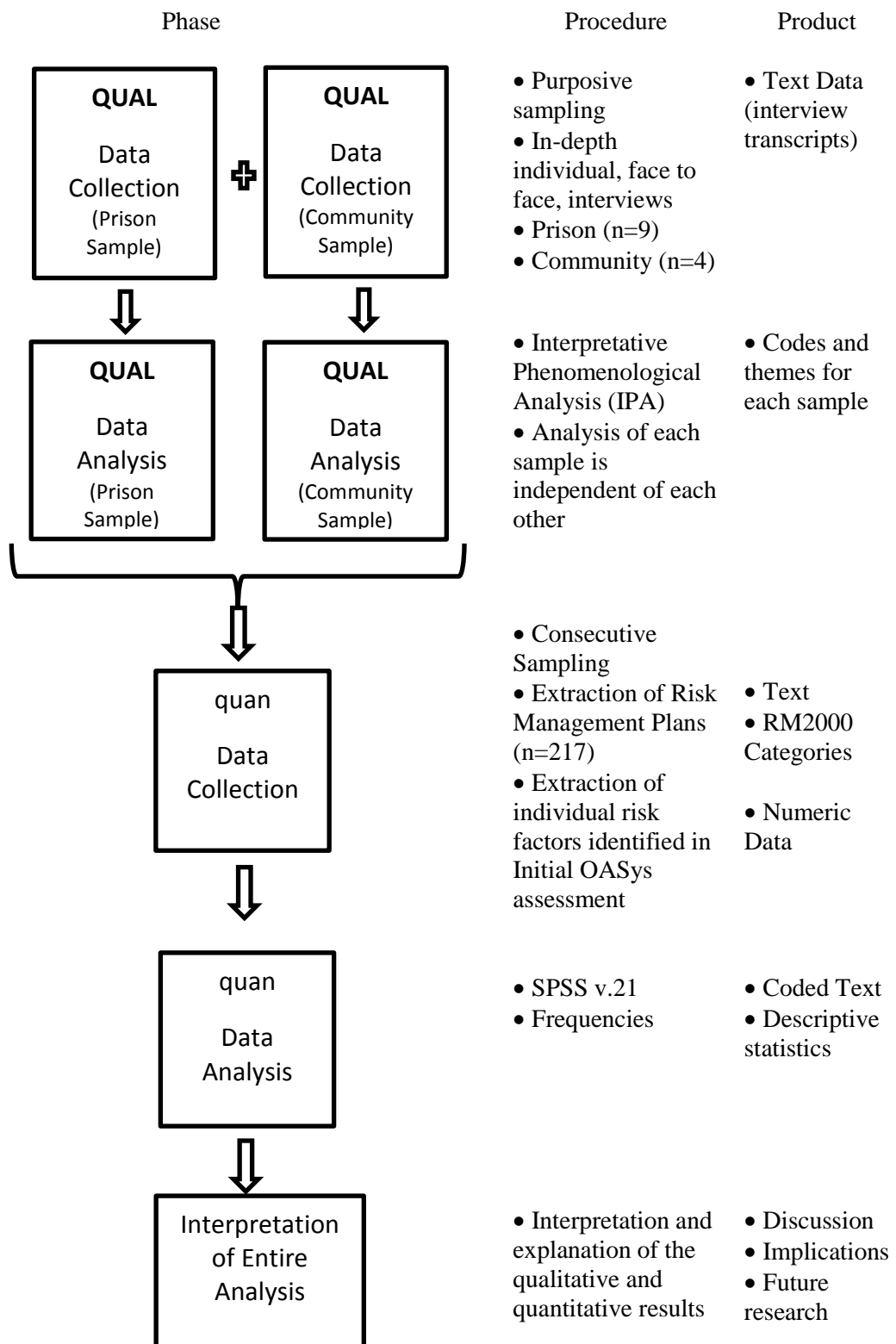
In conclusion, the use of a mixed methods strategy enabled research questions to be examined with rigour but also with care to participants needs. Epistemologically, a mixed

methods approach is justified by the phenomenological position, its contribution to the criminological and forensic psychology literature, and because it allows for a sensitive and ethical style when working with a stigmatised and potentially vulnerable population. An explanation of how the mixing of methods was determined now follows.

Sequential exploratory strategy.

When using mixed methods research, there are six major strategies to the sequencing of data collection and analysis: sequential (explanatory or exploratory); concurrent (triangulation or nested); or transformative (sequential or concurrent) (Creswell, 2009). Following consideration of the timing, weighting, mixing options and the theoretical perspective of the research questions, the most appropriate model was the Sequential Exploratory Strategy (SES), as presented in Figure 1. This strategy allows for two phases of inquiry, to run sequentially. In the first phase, qualitative data is collected, separately, and from two distinct groups; a prison sample and a community sample. In-depth, one to one interviews are used to collect the data, and data from each group are analysed, separately, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In the second phase of the strategy, data are collected and analysed using quantitative methods.

Figure 1. Visual Model for Mixed Methods Sequential Exploratory Design



Qualitative Component

In this section, I describe IPA, provide context of the samples used, and describe how the data was collected and analysed. Because of the intrinsic interpretative nature of IPA, I have also included some reflections and observations of my experiences when interviewing participants.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

IPA is theoretically grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is a method used to understand how from first-person experience, a person makes sense of a particular phenomenon, but from a third-person perspective. In contrast to a more nomothetic approach to studying human phenomenon, IPA enables the exploration of unique and idiosyncratic experiences of smaller populations. Idiography, in particular allows inquirers to focus on detail, and examine experiences of particular people, rather than striving to generalise a theory (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). While examining peoples particular experience is fundamental to the process of IPA, of equal importance is the interpretative process which contextualises participants experiences in a wider perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Exploring participants' unique experience, through interpretive inquiry, allows a reframing of accounts and reflection in light of personal experiences (Becker, 1992). Because IPA blends these three philosophical approaches, it is worth at this stage providing a brief summary of each approach.

Phenomenology.

Phenomenology is, in essence, the exploration and understanding of human experience. The concept was first published by Edmund Husserl in his *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901). Central to Husserl's phenomenology was a focus on 'essence'. Husserl believed that in order to fully understand a phenomenon, one had to understand first what it fundamentally is, what

is its 'essence'. The idea of essence was central to Husserl's phenomenology, and did not feature in other phenomenologist's explanation of the approach. He argued that in order that essence was fully explored, researchers should identify the basic components of the phenomena through 'eidetic' reduction (Moran, 2002). Husserl therefore, advanced the idea of 'going back to the thing itself' (Smith et al., 2009), by examining the core of the phenomenon as it presents itself to the perceiving person, in consciousness, while, putting to one side, preconceived ideas and experiences. Phenomenology, requires the enquirer to 'bracket off', personal values and experiences and explore reflectively the meaning of experience by asking questions, such as, 'what is this thing like?' (Van Manen, 1990). Essential to Husserl's phenomenology, is the idea that experience is a manifestation of the world through consciousness, but through a particular someone's consciousness (Moran, 2002). Indeed without phenomena being brought into a person's consciousness, it is unrelated to the outside world (Van Manen, 1990).

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, believed the origin of phenomenology to be found in the work of Aristotle rather than in Husserl's attempts to access and describe essences (Moran, 2002). Where Husserl was concerned with essence and consciousness, Heidegger transformed thinking to focus on human existence itself, and its uniqueness "human existence is some specific person's existence; it has the character of 'specificity' (Jeweiligkeit) or 'mineness' (Jemeinigkeit)" (Moran, 2002, p. 197). Heidegger made a shift away from Husserl's concept of essence. Instead, Heidegger's phenomenology had a greater hermeneutic and existential emphasis. In Heidegger's, *Being and Time* (1962), he presented the idea of *Dasein* (literally, 'there-being') the experience of being in an already pre-existing world. Existence itself, is inherently integrated and woven within the world around us; to experience being, is unique and subjective to everyone. It is also, temporal and therefore, contextualised in emotions, relationships, environments and events (Smith et al., 2009).

Heidegger was concerned with the idea that being present in the world is a constant, that there is never an objective world; rather we are always engaged in the world. Moran (2002) notes that: “an enquiry into the manner in which the structures of Being are revealed through the structures of human existence, an enquiry, furthermore, which could only be carried out through phenomenology, now transformed into hermeneutical phenomenology” (p. 197).

Hermeneutics.

Originally used to decipher biblical texts, hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutic investigators are interested in understanding authors’ original written meaning or the relationships between the current textual context and the historical context in which they were written. One of the early hermeneutical scholars, Schleiermacher (1768-1834), believed hermeneutics to be an art of understanding (Schmidt, 2006). Schleiermacher suggested that the purpose of engaging and interpreting others’ texts was not only to understand the text itself, but also the author. He reasoned that knowledge gained through interpretation was twofold: first, it was an interpretation of the writers’ grammatical utterances; and second, was an interpretation of the writers’ psychological being. Ever mindful of the problem in which preconceptions can bias or distort true meaning, Heidegger, reminds researchers of the importance of bracketing off one’s own preconceptions.

A further but important concept, of hermeneutic philosophy, is the hermeneutic circle. Essentially, this relates to the idea that any given phenomenon can only be fully understood when viewed or considered in light of its greater or whole parts. Conversely, the ‘whole’ can only ever be fully understood when each of its parts are examined individually (Schmidt, 2006). Examination of a phenomenon in a contextual sense, therefore, allows data to be understood from a greater range of perspectives.

Idiography.

Idiography is concerned with the particular or the individual. It is in opposition to the types of analysis interested in making claims that are nomothetic and on a group or population level. Instead, idiography is committed to a depth of analysis, by which understanding is gained from a particular phenomenon, with a particular perspective, and from a particular person or group (Smith et al., 2009). Because of this idiographic research becomes complex, detailed and highly descriptive.

Context.

All participants, across both studies, had histories of sexual offending and were criminally convicted. In addition, they were all either previously or currently engaged in religious or spiritual activities. Separated into two groups: One group, at the point of interview, were incarcerated in a UK prison (the prison sample); the second group at the point of interview were out living in the community, and had been either released from prison or were serving out a community sentence (the community sample).

The prison sample.

The prison where participants were incarcerated was a relatively small one, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] At the time of interview, its purpose was to

accommodate vulnerable prisoners (VP). VPs are essentially prisoners, at risk; they are segregated from the general prison population for their own safety. VPs may be at risk of being bullied by other inmates, or have a mental health condition which makes coping in

prison a greater challenge. Most people convicted of sexual offending are identified as a VP. This is because the nature of their offending places them at greater risk of harm from other inmates. In the establishment where my participants were drawn from, the majority of prisoners had committed a sexual offence. Therefore, there was no segregation wing or unit for the purpose of housing prisoners based on their offence alone.

The establishment also specialised in the delivery of accredited sexual offending behaviour programmes, such as the Core Sexual Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP) or its adapted version, for people with social or learning impairments. Additionally, the prison provided other programmes, which aim to target generalised thinking associated with offending behaviour, such as, Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) or A to Z motivation life course, and offered one to one programmes where group work was deemed inappropriate. Men in this establishment had either completed a programme, were mid-way through treatment, waiting to start, or to be assessed by the psychology department, for their suitability to attend a sexual offender behaviour programme. Completion of a programme was central to many prisoners sentence planning.

The community sample.

Participants in the community sample were made up of men living in the community following their release from prison or due to receiving a non-custodial community sentence. All four participants resided in [REDACTED]. Three of the four participants were managed by a [REDACTED] probation area, and the fourth, was previously managed by a [REDACTED] probation area, but at the time of interview, had served out his full sentence. He was however, in accordance with the Criminal Justice Act 2003, managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), and therefore, remained under the statutory responsibility of the local Public Protection Unit (PPU). At the time of interview, all participants resided in [REDACTED],

in their own homes. Three participants had recently experienced, living in approved premises or hostels, managed by [REDACTED] Probation, as a requirement of their licence conditions.

All participants while under licence and community order requirements were obliged to engage in regular supervision sessions with their probation officer. They had all participated in community delivered accredited offending behaviour programmes. Three of the men had completed the Northumbria Sex Offender Programme (NSOG), and one had completed the Internet Sex Offender Treatment Programme (ISOTP). Both programmes were delivered by probation staff, and delivered on probation premises. One participant had also previously engaged with a local Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) group. COSA are a group of volunteers who work specifically with those who have committed a sexual offence but have none or little support in the community.

Sampling.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for both the prison and community studies. Purposive sampling allowed participants to be selected with specific characteristics, relevant to the research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In doing this, I was able to maximise the likelihood of collecting rich data, from a homogenous sample, as those selected were able to provide information relevant to the research questions; this is a fundamental aspect to IPA. The philosophical approach of IPA is unconcerned with generalisability, instead its emphasises is that of commonality of experience and contextual detail which can be used to provide the reader with the information needed to estimate transferability thus the sample “represent[s] a perspective rather than a population” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49), and is more concerned with the divergence and convergence of the sample (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, identifying patterns across different individuals, while also recognising what is idiosyncratic to them, required a sample with particular characteristics. I therefore,

purposively sampled those with both a conviction for sexual offending, and current or previous experience, of practicing or engaging with religion or spirituality.

In the prison study, posters and flyers, advertising the research and requesting volunteers to take part, and listing criteria for participation, were distributed across the prison (see Appendix 3). Participants interested in taking part in the study were provided with further information and contact details (see Appendix 4). Prior to the interview, I met with participants, privately, to discuss details of the study, and answer any questions or concerns. There were no financial or other rewards provided for participation. It was also at this stage that I went through the idea of consent, with participants. All participants gave their full consent and understood that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point, without any consequences to them (see Appendix 5).

In the community sample, recruitment was also purposive; however participants were initially identified by their probation officer. I delivered a presentation, outlining the study, to a Senior Management Team, of a [REDACTED] probation area. Following this, a number of probation officers were identified as managing case-loads of people convicted of sexual offending, and therefore, a good source to recruit participants from. Specific probation officers were sent an email detailing the study. The email provided detail of the research, the criteria of participants needed and instructions of how to refer people to participate. The process required probation officers to identify potential participants who might fit the criteria, speak with the potential participant and provide them with the information sheet. All information, and consent forms were identical to prison material, with only slight amendments made to reflect specific contacts.

Where participants were identified as willing to engage, I was sent their contact details, following which, I telephoned them to discuss the research further. All participants

were interviewed on probation premises, apart from one who was interviewed in his home due to disabilities restricting his ability to travel. Consistent with the prison study, discussions regarding consent and being able to withdraw at any stage were agreed. Likewise, participants were not given any financial or other rewards for participating. To prevent any financial burden on participants who had to travel to the interview, I arranged for interviews to take place on the day they met with their probation officer. This enabled participants to be reimbursed for their travel expenses, in line with [REDACTED] probation policy.

Data collection procedures.

As noted by Smith et al., (2009), the nature of IPA interviews are best described as conversational. They require a flexible natural approach, which allow the participant to tell their story; a semi structured interview schedule was therefore, developed and used only as a prompt and guide for each interview (see Appendix 6). The schedule consisted of general introductory questions with the aim of putting the participant at ease. The interview then moved to open and prompting questions about participants religious or spiritual affiliation and what this means or meant to them, how they experience(d) religion or spirituality, what role religion or spiritual communities play(ed) during periods of non-offending, offending, detection and (where appropriate) while in custody and while living in the community. All interviews ended with questions about how the participants viewed their future.

In the prison study, I carried out all one to one interviews in a private, interview or group room, within the prison psychology department. After being escorted to the interview room, only me and the participant were present throughout the duration of the interview. In the community study, I carried out all one to one interviews in a private interview room on probation premises, apart from one interview carried out at the participants' home where no one else was present. All interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were digitally

recorded. After the interview, participants were debriefed, before either being returned back to the prison wings or leaving probation premises.

Interviews were later transcribed, verbatim. Included in the transcripts were sounds such as sighing, crying and laughter or non-verbal movement such as hand gestures or eye rolling. It is a requirement for IPA that all semantic aspects of the interview were captured, not only to ensure an accurate account of the interview, but such articulations and gestures may have important significance and meaning for later interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). A copy of the transcript was sent to each participant, with a cover letter asking them to read over the transcript and give further consent for its use in the study. All participants gave consent, with only two participants requesting minor changes to their transcript.

Reflections of the interview.

Gaining a good rapport between interviewer and participant is important for IPA. It is essential that participants feel they can trust the interviewer; this makes it easier for participants to open up and share their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It is worth noting at this juncture, I have over a decade of experience, working both in a prison and a community context, with people convicted of sexual offending. I have both delivered and treatment managed accredited sexual offender behaviour programmes, for the prison and probation services; meaning I am experienced in interviewing and assessing the risk and treatment needs of this group. It also means I am comfortable with both the prison environment, and the nature of topics under discussion.

In saying this, the tone and pace of an IPA interview is somewhat different to my experience of interviewing people in a criminal justice context. For example as a criminal justice practitioner, in an effort to motivate and help clients change behaviours and attitudes, there is an expectation that discrepancies in a client's account are challenged and levels of

denial, blame, or minimisation, are explored. Yet, during an IPA interview, the role of the interviewer is not to challenge or stimulate change, but to enquire, observe, and draw out participants experience and meaning made of a given phenomenon.

This tension was an interesting experience, and maintaining an IPA stance, was at times difficult. In particular, when participants appeared to lack empathy or expressed minimum responsibility for their actions, I was tempted, but resisted, to explore this further. The experience was not too dissimilar to that of Cowburns (2007), in his study researching men in prison while maintaining a pro-feminist approach. To aid my objectivity, I chose not access any case files or information about the participants ahead of the interview. Before the interview, the only information I was given was the participant name, confirmation that they had a sexual offending history and had some experience of religion or spirituality. After the interview, I requested minimum information from the participant's official offence record because I was also mindful of how supplementary official information might influence analysis later. The purpose of accessing offence records was only to help corroborate participant testimony in terms of offending history. This information was helpful post interview, as I discovered a number of participants gave only partial testimony of their offending. Where participants did not provide a full sexual offending disclosure to me during the interview, this was included in the analysis of the transcript.

In the spirit of transparency, however, I felt it was important that I disclose to the participants not only my research interest but also my professional background; believing such openness might enable participants feel comfortable discussing their past. I am mindful to the fact that, participants might have viewed me as a part of the criminal justice system, rather than as an objective researcher. Such a disclosure, therefore, might have caused some bias to participants' responses.

The prison sample. Interviews undertaken within the prison study were interesting, because, the atmosphere within the prison was unlike other prison experiences. This prison housed mainly prisoners who had committed sexual offences. Therefore, the need to segregate whole groups of prisoners was unnecessary. This I felt meant the fear of being identified as a '*sexual offender*' by other inmates was not sensed. Likewise, the underlying threat of violence and the daily balance of power and control, struck between prison officer and inmate, experienced in other prisons, was also not sensed. Prison officers appeared somewhat relaxed and at ease with this population. This is not to say security was not taken seriously because I witnessed; cell searches, lock downs and prisoners being searched for contraband or weapons before leaving the wings. However, a subtle trust was also felt. It is possible that because most of the inmates were of an older generation, along with a perception that those convicted of sexual offences are a more compliant population; the threat and risk of violence was considered to be greatly reduced.

In terms of the interviews, participants appeared genuinely comfortable with me and the material discussed throughout the interview; I observed participants to be at ease, open and even pleased to talk about their experiences, even when discussing their offending experience. This is probably because, participants had engaged in offending behaviour programmes where disclosure would be routine. In terms of discussing their religious or spiritual experiences, I observed participants more than happy to converse with me throughout the interview. I believe their enthusiasm to engage might have been for a number of reasons: for some, I felt, it allowed them time out of their cell or away from their work in prison; others had the opportunity to talk to an 'outsider'; some appeared to value the opportunity to talk about something close and important to them i.e. their faith; a few participants were keen to share their experiences because they appeared to have a duty to

proselytise, they wanted others to experience the benefits they had gained by following their faith.

A final observation about this prison sample was that those who appeared to accept guilt and responsibility for their offending behaviour appeared to accept their sentence and time in prison in a more optimistic way. They appeared happier, positive, in control and spoke of hope for their future. Whereas those who appeared to deny their offences or rejected the consequences of their offending, appeared exhausted by the monotony and ruthlessness of prison life.

The community sample. Interviews that were undertaken in the community were experienced, much in the same way, as with the prison study. Participants presented enthusiastically, appeared comfortable and engaged when discussing their religious and spiritual experiences. In addition to participants, proselytising, there also appeared a genuine interest in my research. All four participants hoped that the findings from the study would go on to help and support others in a similar situation to themselves. They all reported that being involved in a religion or spiritual group was critical to surviving their prison experience. In addition I also sensed that the motivations of this group to participate in the study might also have been as a result of needing to demonstrate their changed and reformed selves, some impression management behaviours were possibly observed. I am also acutely aware however, that this observation might be as likely to be driven by my own practitioner experiences and bias.

The probation interview rooms were discrete and private, although one interview took place in a participant's house, this too was private. Where the prison study interviews were bound by strict one hour slots, interviews in the community were limited by the time participants were able to provide. All interviews in the community ran for just over 90

minutes and had to be brought to a close by myself due to time restrictions and an ethical obligation to keep the interview time to a maximum of 90 minutes.

Data analysis procedures.

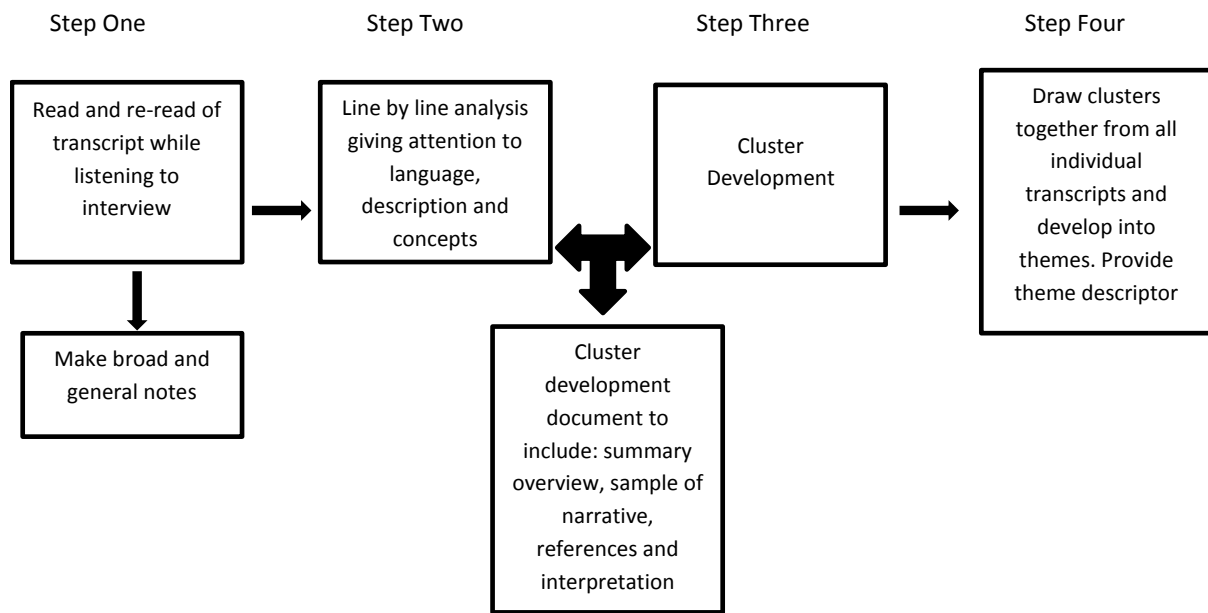
The IPA analytical process as detailed by Osborn and Smith (1998) was adopted with both studies. All steps in the process were saved electronically, with date and time features providing an electronic audit trail of the analysis. Each transcript was analysed individually and separately, with a consistent focus on transcription codes and notations, listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Transcription Notations

Recording from audio	Code used in transcript to replace audio
Inaudible dialogue	[inaudible]
Identifiable location, name or date	X
Where speaker is interrupted by listener but speaker continues with dialogue	Listeners dialogue entered in brackets within speakers text e.g. (laughs) or (tell me more about that)
Non-verbal response by speaker	[smile] or [pause]

In Figure 2, I have provided a visual representation of the steps taken throughout the whole analysis process, and describe each step in turn here.

Figure 2. Four Step IPA Process



Step one. Time was spent first reading and then re-reading the transcript. This initially took place while also listening to the audio of the interview. This first activity, allowed me to re-familiarise myself with and get a general sense of, the participant and their narrative.

Step two. Here I engaged in a close line by line analysis of the text. I used Microsoft Word and the ‘*comments*’ facility in the application, to make observational notes to the right of the page. Notes included commentary on the linguistic style of the participant, such as pauses, repetition, tone and laughter, noting also descriptions provided by the participants, which were insightful, important, or relevant to them personally. I also recorded comments in relation to conceptual observations, interpreted from the text. A short sample is provided in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Sample of Transcript at Step Two

<p>296 miserable time (not happy) at school whereas B suddenly jumped up and 297 became 'A' student (mmm) you know and again when like for instance if a 298 report came home from school I'd read through C's report and she'd get 299 maybe like a C in say science or something and I'd be saying to her well done 300 you know C is a pass you've done well at least you haven't failed if you know 301 you worked hard you have got to C blah blah blah and immediately B and 302 would pitch in yeah but I got an A what about me I got an A (mm) and it was 303 always look at me look at me and she would always steal the attention if you 304 like or try to steal C's thunder if you like (yeah) and my heart went out to her 305 I felt really sorry for her and every time I looked at her at home even when 306 we went to the church after what happened in that church we left there 307 (right) and went to a different church (ok) and I was always really angry at 308 the fact that they suggested that I would abuse either of the children 309 because I'd done nothing wrong (mmm) B it sounds horrible and it almost 310 sounds like I don't like her it's not that I'm just telling the truth like I said 311 right (okay) the fact is the youngest stepdaughter has got a tendency to be 312 an attention seeker (mmm) at all times she wants people to look at her not 313 sister look at me look at me and I recognised that right as being part of the 314 reason why they accused me if you like or not so much accused me but 315 suggested that there was something going on that I was abusing B in the fact</p>	<p>Comment [P106]: Showing how he is caring and supportive making an effort as a parent to motivate her to continue</p> <p>Comment [P107]: Slight sense of hostility to youngest daughter</p> <p><small>PHD, 14/01/2014 09:46:00 commented.</small></p> <p>Comment [P108]: Lack of understanding of needs or behaviours of youngest daughters – viewing her unsympathetically</p> <p>Comment [P109]: Sadness and sense of pity for eldest daughter as she struggled to cope with move to new school</p> <p>Comment [P110]: Constant thinking of her in this light there did not appear to be any break in this thinking when he saw her</p> <p>Comment [P111]: Shift back to issue at the previous church – no prompt or question about this but recalling anger he felt that he had been accused of abuse – possible he is identifying a period when he did not have any sexual thoughts towards his step-daughter and this is his objection to the suggestion, although he did go onto abuse her it is also possible that others around him began to notice signs of abuse – his objection to the suggestion may be also an indication of his denial</p> <p>Comment [P112]: He notes here that what he has said is not sounding too favourably to himself but that he is just telling it as it was</p> <p>Comment [P113]: This is in conflict with how he presented the girl as she grew up – although he did note that she changed in high school but again he does not appear to view the child as a child with needs</p> <p>Comment [P114]: He notes her "tendency" was explanation for her allegation to the church – minimisation of his own</p>
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This step was repeated ensuring all narrative was analysed and re-interpreted where needed. On a separate, but linked Word document labelled “Participant X Cluster Development”, I developed a summary overview of each interview, participant and key observations. The following excerpt in Figure 4 is an example of one of the prison participant’s summary overview developed following analysis of his interview.

Figure 4. Example Summary Overview

Participant Evan Cluster Development

At the time of interview participant 2, was a 46 year old male. He had no recorded previous offences therefore serving his first prison sentence. His offences include sexual activity with a child and making indecent photographs. He offended over a period of months against his step-daughter who was 15 years of age. The participant had completed the prisons accredited offender behaviour programme and was not due to complete any further work in prison but was due to be released on licence in eight weeks.

A number of experiences fuelled the offending behaviour and the participant provided explanation for this. Following a number of challenges in his life including the breakdown of his 3rd marriage, the death of his mother, his son moving out, increasing financial crisis and the increased use of alcohol, along with the belief that the victim gave consent and wanted to engage in sexual activities with him, he began to offend against his step-daughter.

The participant has had a strong and active life in a number of Baptist churches, however unusually this participants' faith became a direct permission giver for offending. Although he knew his behaviour was wrong, he continued the behaviour, due the development believing that he was being rewarded by God. He believes he is at the mercy of God's will and destiny and he experienced God rewarding him by giving him fellowship and love from other Christians at church, consequently he justified that if it was wrong to offend God would be punishing not rewarding him.

Although the participant continues to express a faith and commitment to God he has distanced himself away from the church since being imprisoned. His reasoning for this is unclear but appears to include a negative experience he had when attempting to engage in service in the prison Chapel, along with his fear that engaging with a church on release might be a lonely experience due to his previous experiences being a family event.

Step three. This third stage in the analytical process, involved the shift from observation to interpretation and the emergence of clusters or themes. This involved drawing together commentary, and interpretations, and then mapping these into meaningful clusters. For each individual analysis I saved the clusters into individual Word documents called; "Participant X Cluster Development". To ensure emerging themes remained close to the

participant’s narrative, for every single interpretation, I selected quotations or phrases spoken by the participant and added these to the cluster table, see a sample in Figure 5. Important here was the process of retaining what was idiosyncratic and important to the participant, while also developing an understanding of my own interpretation (Larkin et al., 2006). As analysis continued, the table containing clusters, participant’s quotations and key phrases, and my own interpretations, began to grow and develop. As I moved chronologically through the interview transcript, I added to the descriptors of clusters and where appropriate identified new clusters. This stage was repeated for each of the transcripts.

Figure 5. Sample of Cluster Development

Cluster	Page/Line Number	Key words/phrase	Comments/Interpretation
Offending meant feelings of rejection, undermining and loneliness were avoided. Emotional and sexual needs were met through offending	5/138-140	although I was staying with friends I would be going back to the house and spending time with my wife there (right) when my son was in bed and stuff and when I was there we carried on as normal couple	The participant experiences growing feelings of rejection and animosity from his wife in relation to being parenting her children. This leads to feelings of resentment, unhappiness and to some extent a fear of being alone however he remains unsupported and undermined. The intimacy he first developed with his wife was on only a sexual level and emotional congruence was sparse.
	6/170	resentment...was growing inside	Consequently he experienced over a long period of time negative feelings but failed to respond to these feelings adequately. Instead he avoided any confrontation, ignored his feelings and began to use alcohol to self-soothe.
	6/171-172	I wouldn't acknowledge it I wouldn't even acknowledge that resentment was there	He adopted further maladaptive strategies to achieve emotional attachment through offending against his step-daughter; here he experienced feelings of closeness, love, being needed, being in control and having the power to make his step-daughter happy again. His belief of what it is to be a man i.e. to help and "do the right thing" he distorted to justify his actions against his step-daughter.
	7/176-177	you've just got to keep going and keep trying to do the right thing (yeah) you know just trust in God	
	9/238	I thought fine leave it	
	17/487-489	there thinking while drinking about all the things that had happened over the last couple of years and the way how people have treated me as well when I'd been trying my best	He ruminates whilst drunk thinking back on the way how he has been treated over the years, he feels all he has ever tried to do is help other people and this has been rejected, alcohol plays two roles here first as a comfort for his pain but second as a disinhibitor for offending.

Step four. With all transcripts individually analysed, I then began to draw clusters from each transcript together into larger and more concrete themes. These themes were again documented on a separate document. For ease of organisation, I used a Microsoft Excel spread sheet. This process was iterative and so required continued re-visitation of original transcripts and deeper interpretation of narratives. Emerging from this process, clusters began to merge and develop into larger, clearer and definite themes. When themes were complete, a

label or title for the theme was developed. Titles were designed to represent both the essence of the participants' narrative and my own interpretation.

It is important to ensure that issues of reliability, validity and rigor are addressed with any piece of qualitative research, IPA is no different. A number of strategies were adopted to ensure that the research was carried out to the highest of standards and with the upmost integrity and rigor. These include: a) the use of a clear and standardised data collection and analysis process as outlined by Osborn and Smith (1998) was used throughout this study; b) the reading and re-reading of interview transcripts while listening to the audio of interviews also took place for each transcript. This provided additional confidence of data accuracy and was reinforced further by each participant consenting that the transcripts were accurate; c) a clear paper and electronic audit trail was maintained. This meant that all data could be identified in terms of which participant it related to, where about the data was in the analytical process and how the analysis had been reached; and d) external verification was also sought, this was achieved through engaging in regular supervision and audit checks undertaken by one of my supervisors, Dr Michael Larkin. This process was again cyclical, with feedback, discussion, and further analysis regularly taking place. Dr Larkin would read over the transcripts and my emerging interpretation, ensuring my analysis remained close to the text and providing his own observations and thoughts. I would then respond to his ideas by further analysing the data and generating further interpretation. Analysis was complete when all data had been included and developed into a relevant cluster then theme. A brief summary of each theme was then written up. While the inter-subjective nature of IPA can never fully satisfy the rigors required of some approaches more aligned to that of positivism; every effort was made throughout this research to ensure the standards of reliability and rigor were consistent with high quality qualitative research.

Quantitative Component

Data for this part of the study was collected from one probation trust area in England. The trust when compared to other trusts across England and Wales is best described, as a medium sized, high density, and semirural area. At the time of data collection, the total caseload for the trust at was approximately 3,500 cases, with about eight percent of the caseload being clients convicted of sexual offending (n=274). The sample for this study, however, was determined not by the number of cases the trust was responsible for, but rather the number of initial risk management assessments available.

The Offender Assessment System (OASys) is an electronic systematic and comprehensive risk and need assessment and case management system. All England and Wales probation and prison establishments use this tool to assess and manage those either in prison or subject to community sanctions. OASys combines static risk assessment with structured professional judgment and is divided into four main domains: an analysis of offending related factors, a risk of serious harm analysis, a summary sheet and a sentence plan (Home Office, 2006). All clients assessed as medium risk of harm, or above, require a risk management plan (*Public protection framework, risk of harm and MAPPA thresholds PC 10/2005*, 2005). A risk management plan identifies the risks a client presents or might present given a set of certain circumstances. Practitioners are required to document “clearly how the risk(s) will be managed” (*OASys manual v.2*, 2002, p. 147).

To prevent duplication or repetition, of the method used for the quantitative study in this thesis, detail of the sample, coding procedure, data collection, analysis and subsequent sample demographics, are outlined in the methods section of Chapter five.

Ethical Considerations

For all three studies, ethical approval was granted by the National Offender Management Service Research Committee and the University of Birmingham's, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

PART II
QUALITATIVE STUDIES

Chapter 3

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Meaning of Religion and Spirituality for Individuals Incarcerated for Sexual Offending

Chapter Overview

This Chapter details the experiences of nine incarcerated participants; of specific focus in this Chapter are: the religious and spiritual experiences of participants during periods of offending, desisting from offending, and while incarcerated. To explore the meaning participants made of their experiences, IPA was used. The method used in this study is carefully detailed in Chapter 2 and is not duplicated here, but instead, merely the demographics of the sample are provided.

Following an introduction to the study, I present the four main themes that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the in-depth interviews (Table 4). On the whole, findings indicate that by engaging with religion or spirituality participants were able to convey their changed identities. They were prompted or enabled to seek forgiveness from God and benefited from feeling forgiven. This meant they developed a sense of hope and optimism for the future. Participants gained comfort and a sense of belonging through practicing meditation and prayer and were able to mentally escape the prison environment and manage negative emotions associated with incarceration. I also found what potentially appeared to be an undesirable finding; that actively religious participants expressed prejudice and hostility towards other non-religious inmates. In concluding this Chapter I detail the theoretical considerations by drawing on generalised faith based literature, desistance theories, social identity theory, and stigma.

Table 4. Summary of Themes from Prison Sample

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
The common use of culturally religious concepts to describe experiences	Journey
Managing the conflict between religion or spirituality and sexual offending	<p data-bbox="1018 414 1094 452">Light</p> <p data-bbox="1018 495 1362 640">Compartmentalised identities and incongruent behaviours.</p> <p data-bbox="1018 685 1326 833">The process of forgiveness and feeling forgiven by God.</p>
Religion and spirituality in prison enables mental escape and brings psychological comfort	
Experiencing religious or spiritual affiliation in prison and the community aids a sense of belonging and improves perceived, social status	<p data-bbox="1018 1016 1283 1055">Belonging to a faith</p> <p data-bbox="1018 1070 1351 1216">Group brings intimacy as experienced by family Belonging.</p> <p data-bbox="1018 1261 1362 1355">Status is gained by belonging to the in-group.</p>

Introduction

Social organisation and hierarchy within prison populations is well documented (Sykes, 1958). Likened to that of the 'food chain' (Schwabe, 2005), only the strongest and most powerful reap social, physical and emotional rewards. Shaping this hierarchy, the prison or convict code, maintains order and dictates attitudes and behaviours of prison communities (Ricciardelli, 2014; Trammell, 2012). Casting its moral judgment on people convicted of certain types of offences (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013), those with sexual convictions are treated as the most reviled offender subgroup within the prison community (West, 1985). As well as being rejected by those inside prison, many find themselves discarded and disconnected from family and friends on the outside (Levenson, D'Amora, et al., 2007).

As a consequence those incarcerated for sexual offences are often ostracised by all and fear humiliation or violent reprisals by being identified as having a history of sexual offending. In order to protect themselves they limit social contact and deny offending histories at all costs (Schwabe, 2005). Frequently, and for their own safety, establishments segregate those with sexual convictions away from the main prison population, often housed in dedicated facilities. Isolated and marginalised, the conditions in prison are harsh and hostile (West, 1985).

Imprisonment can cause both mental and psychical harm, from the spreading of sexually transmitted infections, exposure to disease through drug misuse, increased anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation and feelings of hopelessness (Liebling & Maruna, 2013), to a greater risk of suicide (Jenkins et al., 2005). Indeed, the rate of suicide for those convicted of sex crimes, is notably greater than that of the general offending population (Jeglic, Spada, & Mercado, 2013). Given this harsh environment, it is of interest to understand if and how such people might gain relief and solace while existing in these conditions.

Although scarcely researched, religious or spiritual conversion in prison is said to bring several benefits and comforts to those incarcerated (Maruna et al., 2006). Conversion includes the rejuvenation of religious or spiritual belief, or the orientation of new ones; followed by the transformation of relationships, behaviours, thoughts and emotions (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004). Indeed, religion and spirituality as a means of coping is not an uncommon idea. As already discussed in Chapter one of this thesis, the religion and spirituality literature indicates religious involvement as being positively associated with improved mental (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013) and physical health and well-being (Powell, Shahabi & Thoresen, 2003). In a prison context, people engaged in religion or spirituality are able to better define personal crisis, manage feelings of shame, build new identities, develop a sense of purpose and empowerment, feel forgiven, have peace of mind and a sense of hope (Dammer, 2002; Maruna et al., 2006); cope with the psychological adjustment of the prison environment (Clear & Sumter, 2002); and even contribute to the rehabilitation process on release (Jensen & Gibbons, 2002). Yet, despite these important findings, to date, no study has specifically examined the role of religion and spirituality for those convicted of sexual offending. This is surprising given that this particular subgroup of prisoners face additional pressures of segregation, fear of violence, rejection and humiliation by peers and officers in prison. This present Chapter presents the findings of a study aimed to begin to address this gap.

Through in-depth interviews I aimed to explore how religion and spirituality was experienced by a population of men incarcerated for crimes sexual in nature. I aimed to examine what meaning subjects made of religion or spirituality while living in a prison context, and because I was interested in exploring unique experience and meaning, I used IPA to investigate the phenomenon. It is worth noting at this point that because of the subjective nature of religion and spirituality I have not assumed or prescribed any particular

definitions between religion and spirituality. Instead, I aimed to draw meaning from participants own interpretation of religion and spirituality.

Method

At this juncture, it would be fitting to describe the methods used in the study. However, these have been detailed earlier in Chapter 2. I therefore, provide detail of the sample used in this study.

The Sample

Although not prescriptive, between four and ten interviews are advised for an IPA study (Smith et al., 2009). Given that analysis aims to elicit individual meaning, with larger sample sizes individuality can be lost (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The sample used for this study consists of nine adult males, all incarcerated for sexual offending and either currently or previously practicing a religion. Of the nine interview transcripts, only seven were analysed in full, two participants (Ben and Mark) were only partially analysed due to a lack of in-depth data across the whole interview transcript. Elements of their interviews were found to be of value, and so are detailed where relevant.

At the point of interview, the mean age of participants was 58 years (range 29-80 years, SD 16.8). At the point of offending the mean age was 34 years (range 9-50 years, SD 11.7). Five participants had no previous offending history, two had previous general offending convictions and two had prior convictions for sexual offending. The various religions with which participants identified included; Buddhism, Christianity, Mormonism and Paganism, details of which are provided in Table 5. To ensure anonymity, participants' real names are not used. Instead random male names have been assigned to each participant.

Table 5. Description of Prison Sample

Participant	Age at point of interview	Approximate age at start of offending	Offence	Previous offending history	Religion as identified by participants
Evan	46	42	Sexual activity with a child Making indecent photographs	None	Baptist
Ben	61	31	Indecent assault	None	Buddhist
Mark	29	23	Rape of female 14 years old	Criminal damage, burglary with intent to steal, attempt to obtain property by deception	Pagan
Andrew	69	38	Meeting a child following sexual grooming Possession of indecent images Failing to comply with notification requirements	Rape, buggery, incest, gross indecency and indecent assault	Baptist
Anthony	80	36	Indecent assault, making, distributing and possessing indecent images of children	None	Christian
Nicholas	49	9	Indecent assault Making, distributing and possessing indecent images of children	None	Mormon

Greg	72	35	Gross indecency with a male child Sexual assault of a female child	Sexual Assault	Christian
Tim	42	38	Detaining of a child without lawful authority Having sex with a child	Driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol	Buddhist
Robert	70	50	Indecent assault possession of indecent images	None	Christian/Salvation Army

Results

Although participants' stories are unique, many similarities and shared experiences were uncovered. Four themes emerged from the analysis; each is discussed here in turn.

Common use of Culturally Religious Concepts to Describe Experiences

Participants regularly used the analogies of 'light' and 'journey'. They used these in two ways: first, as a mechanism to help articulate experiences in a spiritual context. Analogies helped participants to temper what were at times painful and shameful experiences. Second, these concepts were used to convey the meaning of transition from one of 'offender' salience to spiritual salience.

It is perhaps unsurprising that religious or spiritually inclined participants would use these two analogies, as they are commonly used in religious teachings and texts. Use of such analogies allowed participants to describe the challenges and difficulties they faced, as well as periods of order and stability. To consider the journey analogy first, participants used this to help describe how they moved through a specific process; the analogy allowed them to describe the hurdles, barriers, and challenges they faced along the way. Although five participants used these analogies, Nicolas and Tim used them most readily. I have therefore, selected and present here excerpts from Nicolas and Tim's interviews by way of example.

Nicolas used the journey analogy to help describe his choices to both offend and not offend, while attempting to follow Jehovah Witness and Mormon instruction and law. Nicolas described becoming disengaged with his religion when he became sexually interested in an adult female outside of his church congregation. After the relationship was over (his only sexual encounter with an adult), Nicolas began to access adult pornography through the internet. He soon, began to routinely access, download and collect indecent images of children and engage in chat room discussions about child sexual abuse.

The use of the analogy enabled Nicolas to communicate his understanding of the autonomy he had when making life determining decisions. On the one hand he described being fully autonomous and free to make his own choices. Yet in the context of his religion, the scriptures informed him that making poor choices would lead him to offending, rather than a predestined, sacred route. Interestingly, the idea of predestination appeared to only feature during Nicolas' moral dilemmas. In other aspects of his life such as work and family, Nicholas perceived himself to be wholly autonomous. Use of the journey analogy enabled him to set out the idea that the path of offending was not the path God had predetermined him to take but that an alternative route was available: "all I have to do is be good erm and if I follow a path that has been laid down".

Nicolas continued with the idea of a journey to help recollect and describe the periods he began to offend. He recalled how at first, when he began to detach from the church, he sensed falling or slipping:

"I started missing the meetings (okay) and started slipping away from the church and once you start missing one meeting you sort of, it doesn't really matter, I'll miss the next one and all this sort of thing, so erm, I started sliding away from the church".

The use of a 'slip' or 'fall' by Nicolas is an interesting one. To some degree it allows him to present his offending role as blameless. To slip, slide or fall is an unwanted and unintentional occurrence, it represents being momentarily out of control. To Nicolas however, the idea of slipping represents more than being out of control for one moment, and means more than a one off incident. It represents the beginning of his offending process; the analogy enabled him to describe how he began to offend ("if you are starting to slip...that's what starts the slippery slope again"). Nicolas described how his disengagement from the church and God,

took the inevitable downwards trajectory: “I started sliding away from the church...I let myself slide away from God”.

Nicolas’ understanding of his autonomy is re-visited when he is clear that he made a choice not to intervene or stop himself from sliding away from the church, but passively allowed this to happen. This is echoed in his recollection of how he unintentionally began to access images of younger children, he: “somehow slipped into, erm the erm, younger, in inverted commas, models”. The use of the term slipping here is used by Nicolas to suggest his passive role.

Additionally, biblical undertones resonate with the idea of him falling into sexual offending. The term ‘to fall’ or ‘be fallen’ in the biblical sense, is closely linked to the story of Adam and Eve, who fell from innocence and grace after they disobeyed God. It is perhaps not surprising therefore, that Nicolas uses biblical terminology to communicate his descent into offending. He acknowledged gaining sexual gratification from offending and was aware that his transgressions breached moral codes: “I realised I had fallen away from moral guidelines”. This further allowed some justification by Nicolas, as, like in the story of Adam and Eve, he is “only human” and therefore vulnerable to temptation. It is possible that analogies used in this way might also be mechanisms to avoid having to take full responsibility for one’s actions. The idea that Nicolas “slipped”, also allowed him to either believe, or at least convey to others, that he was a passive agent in both disengaging from the church and commencing offending.

Likewise, Tim used the analogy of a journey readily throughout his interview. Tim became a Buddhist during his time in prison (previously Agnostic). He used the analogy not only to describe his experiences with Buddhism but also his journey through life, the destructive nature of his alcoholism, right through to his recovery. Tim’s first period of

sobriety, as an adult, was experienced during the first 18 months of his current prison sentence. Tim reported developing alcoholism in his early 20's. At the pinnacle of his alcoholism, his life became chaotic and destructive. He regularly sought out women for casual sex and on one such occasion, met a 15 year old girl; he took her home and had sex with her.

Unlike Nicolas, Tim perceived the choices he made in life as wholly autonomous. He did not believe in any predestined routes; rather that he had a range of different paths available. I did observe Tim however, using the same idea of going down a slope or spiralling downwards ("my life had gone really really downhill") as he recalled the poor choices he made in life or the difficult times he faced. However, Tim used this analogy to describe the meaning of life experience in a temporal sense, rather than as a form of justification. He reflected that experiencing Buddhism and moving through life was itself an ongoing journey, that: "it's all about your, erm, your journey through life".

The journey analogy only truly comes into the fore for Tim when he described his process of recovery. He recounted how he began to tentatively rebuild his life following years of alcohol abuse. Tim had to prepare himself for the changes he had to make ("got ready for the journey") and Buddhism was a platform that enabled him to find his old self (it was a "stepping stone for me finding myself"). He was only able to begin to recover when he wanted to stop drinking: "you actually turn that corner where you want to stop being an alcoholic". The use of the analogy to describe recovery and not justify offending is perhaps not unsurprising as Tim only came to Buddhism at the point of sobriety.

The journey analogy appeared to help Tim re-tell his life story and explain how he arrived at each point in time; it allowed him to both communicate and develop his new-identity. Tim talked about turning the corner and moving away from alcoholism. He

described reconnecting with the person he once was. Tim's true identity was immobilised during his time as an alcoholic; it was only when he desisted from alcohol that he recognised this: "when you've been an alcoholic for a long time and you stop drinking and...it actually you actually turn that corner...you're back to where you were, so for me...it's like I'm a teenager again and I'm discovering things again".

Tim recognised that the alcoholic and offending behaviours of his past were not the behaviours of the person he now identified with. Indeed, when he reflected on the destructive periods of his life journey, he recalled how his 'true-self' would have rejected such behaviours: "I've really stepped over the mark, you know, this is something that 20 years ago I would have been appalled".

Buddhism enabled Tim to begin to see this 'true-self': "made me open my eyes more erm especially to myself". His journey of self-discovery was motivated by him wanting to address the issues in his life and take the positive and intended route of his life journey: "I wanted to get my life back on track".

Tim also used the analogy of 'light' to describe improvements in his knowledge or the process of gaining deeper insight into new ideas. Central to Buddhism is the idea of enlightenment; again, it is perhaps not unexpected that Tim should use light as an analogy to help explain his own enlightenment. Tim described, in particular, his recovery from alcoholism using this analogy. There is a point at which Tim recalled how he was unaware of why he had become an alcoholic but then in a sudden moment, he was enlightened and everything began to make sense and become clear ("it was kind of light bulb moment"). Tim alludes to the idea that he previously had the knowledge ("of how to live without alcohol"), as the light was already on, it was just not bright enough for him to see, again: "it was another light bulb moment well the light bulb got brighter".

This provides further insight into Tim's awakened identity. Tim already had the knowledge and insight regarding his own wellbeing. Indeed, he did not claim that Buddhism taught him anything new, but that it had somehow illuminated what was already there. Without this illumination however, he believed he would not have made the necessary changes. Indeed, Tim used the light analogy to articulate how he could not see what was going wrong in his life:

“I would've blindly gone (right okay) erm and not realising and this is part of the reason why I ended up going down the route I was, because I couldn't see what was going wrong, I was kind of self so self-destructive as it was that I couldn't see anything that was there”.

In simple terms, the use of analogies, as presented by participants', appears to be a useful linguistic tool, which enabled participants to articulate their experiences to others. Although I have focused here on the narratives of Tim and Nicholas, they were typical of the remaining participants. They too used analogies not only to convey their story in a more palatable manner but it enabled them to distance themselves from their offending selves. It is perhaps unsurprising that participants used analogies such as 'journey' or 'light'. Such religious concepts have been used in scriptural and spiritual narratives to assist in the explanation of human existence and moral dilemmas for centuries.

The use of these analogies appears to have a secondary purpose; they appear to have enabled participants to engage in a greater reflective and validation process. The use of analogies assisted participants to make sense of their identity transition from a salient 'offender' identity, to one, more religiously or spiritually prominent. This appeared important to participants, as it enabled them to make sense of both painful and shameful experiences, as well as experiences of recovery and restoration.

Managing the Conflict between Religion or Spirituality and Sexual Offending

Within this next theme, I focus on five of the nine participants (Evan, Andrew, Anthony, Greg and Robert). This is because all five sexually offended during periods of active participation with their church. They described holding positions of authority within their church including; youth leaders, lay preachers, or organisers of church activities. I wanted to explore how these five participants experienced being active in the church, while sexually offending. Two subordinate themes emerged: 'Compartmentalised identities and incongruent behaviours' and 'The process of forgiveness and feeling forgiven by God', each will be considered in turn here.

Compartmentalised identities and incongruent behaviours.

Emerging from the analysis, participants presented two separate and distinct identities; one being, their core forgiven non offending-self and the other a temporary and historic offending-self. Identities were separate and participants did not recognise offending behaviour as associated with their core selves. Rather, offending was a fleeting anomaly to their central, core and true-self. They were able to present non-offending identities with confidence, because central to their transformed self was the belief of being forgiven by God.

Participants made concerted efforts to communicate their core-being and true selves as decent ("I don't swear at all I don't blaspheme", Greg), virtuous ("I never swear I have never sworn I don't drink and I don't smoke", Andrew) and honest ("I've never had as much as parking tickets or a speeding fine or anything like that in a whole 46 years on this planet", Evan). They did not perceive themselves to be like a typical prisoner, who were inhumane ("just animals", Robert) and inferior ("a little bit more dare I say intelligent and have a better background than most of the people in here", Andrew). Although, participants perceived themselves to be superior to other inmates, they were not sanctimonious, in the sense that,

they recognised they were not perfect: “I do try not that I am sinlessly perfect I don’t think that is possible” (Anthony).

On some level, all participants experienced conflict between their offending behaviour and their engagement with religion or spirituality; they had an acute awareness that their offending behaviour was wrong. Andrew, with hindsight, viewed his behaviour as insincere: “it was totally hypocritical of me...I was a total hypocrite you know I knew what was right and what is wrong”. At the time of offending, he developed strategies to support the view that his offending-self and religious-self were distinct and different: “I think I managed to compartmentalise my faith and what I was doing at other times (right okay), which is why I said totally hypocritical”.

Andrew held the belief that sexual offending was wrong; however the stereotyped schema he held about ‘sexual offenders’ was one of a violent and callous stranger. Thus, his schema was not conflicted by his own behaviour, as he believed his sexually abusive behaviour was mutual, consenting and loving. By maintaining this belief he preserved his self-schema and identity, confirming he was not a real ‘sexual offender’: “It weren’t someone off the street...it was basically in the family... mutual masturbation with the boy and heavy petting and touching with the girl.... I was madly in love with her”.

Yet, when Andrew began to accept he had sexually abused his daughter, he was shocked and appalled at his behaviour. I observed through his narrative, the conflict he experienced, as he attempted to wrangle with the idea of his core-self being associated with sexually abusive acts:

“I just can’t even understand why at the moment I made these children [pause]...and you know I just [pause] I’m just appalled by it... it was possible to say I will of [sic] ruined their lives... I I I had created victims”.

Andrew was, able to sooth himself of this pain because he believed he would be forgiven: “God knows that I am truly sorry for what I have done”.

Several of the participants’ crimes went unreported for decades. This helped participants, to some degree, manage any conflict they felt in relation to their offending-self and their true-self, by simply ignoring the offending. Anthony, for example, viewed his behaviours as historic, and contextualised within an isolated period of time. He therefore, did not need to reconcile his religious identity with his offending one, because he believed his offending was the result of exceptional circumstances. The passage of time resolved any conflict. In addition, Anthony used justifications to help maintain his self-schema, by minimising the abusive behaviours and taking little responsibility for the sexual assaults. He explained his offending behaviour as having been a result of his busy life (“it was just one of the many things in my life because I lived a busy life”), and being young at heart (“I was younger (okay) I was in my 50s, I was still pretty young at heart”). Not only does he believe that his youthfulness meant he was free spirited, he convinced himself that his behaviours were innocent and harmless. Anthony presented the offence as mutually consenting:

“I never took [her] anywhere except counselled her after church and dropped her home and gave her a cuddle in the car, and that it basically, and then she started to chase me, she her car was found outside my college where I was lecturing, waiting for me and she would follow me home...there was no assault on her, she was cooperative in everything”

Greg also reported spending many years not thinking about his offending, thereby, keeping his offending-self separate to his core-self. Following his recovery from cancer, Greg put everything, including his offending behind him: “I came through cancer eventually got back and picked up life again”. He too, satisfied the conflict of his abusive behaviours with justifications that his offending was harmless, quick and gentle: “I just slipped my hand in...I

just stroked her I didn't grope her...took my hand away and nothing was said not thinking what effect it would have upon her...just one incident two minutes”.

Greg also drew on statements from others to support his belief that his offending was not so serious: “my barrister said that the offences you have committed are relatively minor”. Indeed, in the narrative used to detail the run up to his offending he was the victim of misfortune and circumstance. This allowed him to believe he was not a bad person. His actions, he believed, were not carried out as a result of some calculated and predatory intention; rather he was an upstanding and moral Christian, who made one mistake: “because I am a practicing Christian...doesn't mean to say that I am perfect”.

The ability to ignore, minimise, or contextualise offending or deviant behaviour was not experienced by all participants. Robert found it difficult to manage his two identities. On the one hand his non-offending identity was a public and open entity, but his offending-self was secretive, private and something that preoccupied him for many years: “it was always something that was in private that because it was so shameful...it was almost a Jekyll and Hyde”. Indeed, as much as Robert tried to put his offending behaviour to the back of his mind, he was unable to: “it had been on my mind all those years and I suppose I'd had tried to however ashamed of it I was, I tried not to think”. Robert attempted to separate his offending-self with his core-self by blaming external and supernatural powers: “daemonic...evil forces at work in me”. This was, in the long term however unattainable, and is reflected in his experiences of feeling unfulfilled with his life. He asks himself soul searching questions: “I've got practically everything I could want, er we had recently bought a new car, and I was walking back from church thinking, I am not happy what is wrong, what is missing”. It appears that only when the offences officially came to light, that Robert was able to begin to accept and address his offending-self.

Evan was unusual to the group in that, although he maintained two separate identities, his offending identity was, in part, fuelled by his experiences with the church. Evan experienced a number of challenges in his life such as; a marriage break-down, bereavement and financial problems. Unable to cope, Evan sought emotional and sexual comfort from his step-daughter. Parallel to his offending, Evan gained support and comfort from his local church (“I became this big person in the church respected and everything was so good”) receiving positive and warm fellowship from his church peers (“I was always being blessed and it was the first time I started to feel happier”). He believed God was rewarding him (“I felt like it was God you know in a sense saying it’s okay”), rather than punishing him for offending: “I should be being punished for what I’ve done (right) but instead I’m getting fellowship”. Evan was able to reconcile and continue both offending and attending church by believing God endorsed his behaviour, he felt: “it was almost as if God was saying to me this is the right this is the way”.

Evan also made sense of his behaviours by reinforcing his view, that men are innately weak (“and God saying because you’re a man you’re human”) and vulnerable to female sexuality (“one evening she came up to me and pretty much pounced on me basically”). Evan’s justifications and distorted use of his environment enabled him to offend while retaining a non-offending view of himself.

The Process of Forgiveness and Feeling Forgiven by God.

Another important mechanism that allowed participants (in particular Christians) to move on from their crimes and develop new non-offender identities was through the process of seeking and receiving forgiveness. The importance of feeling forgiven for any indiscretion, including sexual offending, was essential. Participants were acutely aware of both the stigma attached to having committed sexual offences (“if you mentioned the word sex offender people run a mile” Robert) and of having to face rejection from their own family (“my family

have chosen at the moment not to forgive me which is their choice” Greg). But, it was not until they experienced forgiveness they could reject the stigma and deal with their isolation. Greg, for example, was able to move on with his life because he knew he had been forgiven by God (“I know I’m forgiven”) he experienced forgiveness which provided optimism for the future.

Feeling forgiven had significant dramatic effects on participants’ self-esteem. It enabled them to process their offending behaviour to such an extent that they believed they were completely restored to a position of non-guilt, and therefore an equal member of society once again. For example, Anthony reconciled his offending behaviour because he was forgiven: “I’ve had to come to terms with it and say God has forgiven me and God has forgiven me and accepted me”. Yet not only was Anthony able to come to terms with his offending behaviour, he believed he had also returned to the position of non-guilt, prior to his offending, because God’s forgiveness had completely eradicated the whole incident from his life: “God has wiped it out I’ve wiped it out”. Anthony believed that God forgave him and importantly accepted him, enabling him to move forward with his life: “it is...not going to exist in a way that it conquers me and controls me”, and raise his levels of esteem. However, it is also possible that this process might have enabled him to disassociate from having to take responsibility for his offending behaviour.

Likewise, Greg was also able to move on with his life following God’s forgiveness. Greg was not held back or wracked with guilt about his offending behaviour: “I’m not screwed up by it”. Indeed, even while those around him disowned him, Greg described having a great sense of peace: “I really do I get a great sense of peace...I have got quiet confidence”. A belief in God’s acceptance meant that both Anthony and Greg felt they were not alone, were no longer guilty for their crimes, and although were serving out their punishment, they had hope for a positive future.

Perceiving oneself to be forgiven by God did not automatically restore all participants' sense of self-worth; rather it was a process that took time. Robert for example could not comprehend how God could forgive those who sexually offended; he perceived his own crime to be of the worst kind: "I couldn't understand how God could forgive someone...the slime at the bottom of the pond". Initially, he was unable to fully restore his sense of self-worth as he was unable to forgive himself and continued to hold onto the shame of his offending history: "I couldn't forgive myself and it's taken two years I hadn't forgiven the sin I hadn't forgiven what I did". So although Robert accepted God had forgiven him, the shame he felt about his behaviour prevented him from moving on. It took him almost two years to begin to deal with his feelings of shame and forgive himself: "I hadn't forgiven what I did but, I'd been able to forgive myself".

Forgiveness, for some participants was automatic ("you only have to ask once" Andrew) and everlasting ("forgiveness is eternal" Nicolas). Yet for others, forgiving oneself was less straightforward, and required time. Forgiveness, on the whole however, allowed participants to be restored and free to move beyond their past offences, feeling able to release themselves from shame and guilt.

This theme developed the idea that during periods of sexually offending those participants who engaged in religious or spiritual activities rationalised conflicting behaviours by developing separate identities. Their true and core non-offending self was non-deviant, virtuous, honest, kind and hardworking. Their offending identities on the other hand were historic, deviant, temporary, a result of external forces, but importantly now forgiven.

It is possible that by presenting themselves in this way, and believing that God had forgiven them, participants created distance between an offending identity and current non-offending identities. By presenting the flawed and problematic identity, as historic and one

which even God has moved on from, participants did not need to engage in excuses or justifications for their true-selves. Their renewed identities were fully repaired and restored.

Religion and Spirituality in Prison Enables Mental Escape and Brings Psychological Comfort

Many prisoners struggle to cope with the transition of being free to being incarcerated. Participants in this study were no different, reporting issues of social isolation and negative emotions such as: anger, frustration, isolation, loss, betrayal, fear, powerlessness, guilt, shame; loss of family and friends' support; and for some just coming to terms with the consequences of their offending behaviours. The prison code, dictates that discussing such feelings with other inmates is unwise as this shows weakness and vulnerability. Within this theme I present how the participants used religion and spirituality to seek comfort and emotional support while in prison. To illustrate how participants adopted strategies to mentally escape, I begin by exploring the practice of meditation first, followed by prayer.

Three participants (Tim, Ben and Mark) reported being able to mentally escape by meditating, however, I will predominantly focus on the experiences of Tim and Ben, as their accounts provides the greatest richness and depth. Across all three interviews meditation was reported as helping participants to escape mentally, to places of beauty and nature. They were able to liberate themselves beyond the harsh physical boundaries of prison and experience freedom. This in turn, reduced negative feelings, brought a sense of control back into their lives, and allowed them to feel connected to the outside world.

When incarcerated, having a sense of control is important; every part of prisoners' lives is dictated and determined by prison authorities, i.e. the time to eat, sleep, work, what to wear and so on. Here, I observed that for an hour at a time participants were able to let their minds relax and escape their environment. For Tim, meditation allowed him to feel connected

to anywhere he chose in the outside world. I gained a sense from Tim that he was no longer constrained by the limitations of both the physical prison walls and the boundaries of his own body: “so I’m stuck here where I am inside this body and these boundaries...when I meditating I can be wherever I want to be at any time doing anything...I’m everywhere and nowhere (right) at the same time”.

With no one to connect with either inside or out of prison, it was important Tim felt connected to something. Meditation allowed him to feel that prison no longer limited him, he became attached and a part of the outside living world:

“I’m connected to everything that’s around me as it were, although I’m still here, so to me I’m not in prison anymore, because I’m still connected to, you know, say a bird flying over there flapping its wings, or even the far reaches of outer space...because I’m touching the air which is now touching space”

He presents the idea of being bonded to a bird in flight, this perhaps chimes of the desire not only to be psychically released but also free spirited. Indeed, the meaning of feeling connected to wide open spaces, as wide as space, itself is clearly important for Tim.

Likewise, Ben escaped to the expansive open spaces of the countryside, during his meditation. Ben became engaged with the practices of Buddhism during his prison sentence. Previously he identified as a Christian, but when he was imprisoned he converted to Buddhism. It was through meditation that Ben was able to experience traveling to different places, outside of the prison walls. Ben visualised being with his pet dogs. Again the importance of being connected to life outside of prison strongly resonated with Ben. The experience felt real to him, his senses were stimulated; sight, sound and touch were all experienced. Being attached with others who provided him comfort and love was extremely important; he became visibly upset when talking about them:

“I can go on journeys in my mind...I can be outside of this prison and they can be with my dogs (really) seriously I can really be with them, I can feel my feet going down the path, I can see everything clear, I can see my dogs, I can look around them I can see the lakes and the winds... [sigh]”

Meditating to a familiar and safe environment brought great comfort to Ben, allowing him to temporarily escape prison. He was liberated from incarceration and free to roam the wide and beautiful spaces of nature, rather than suffer the drudgery of prison life:

“It takes me out of this place it takes you out of erm this monotonous life because that’s the only punishment that I can see here is the sheer boredom of the place and the cleanliness of the place it is filthy”

Both participants were introduced to Buddhism and the art of meditation while in prison. They both experienced the process of learning to meditate a challenge (“it’s hard it’s hard... it isn’t easy it takes time” Ben), both needed time and support (“but you need guide [*sic*] to be guided” Tim). Although a challenge, the importance of being able to mentally escape for these participants cannot be underestimated; they felt attached to something in the outside world, liberated and in some control.

The practice of prayer brought similar experiences for participants, such as Robert, a Christian. He experienced a revival in his beliefs and began to practice rituals such as praying in the morning, this helped him escape the discomfort of problematic emotions. Robert’s mental health significantly deteriorated (“I was in a very low place erm I found I learnt a great lesson”), both as a result of his arrest, incarceration and acknowledgement of his offending behaviour. He became so unwell that he considered taking his own life and in the early stages of his prison sentence was placed on suicide watch. In addition Robert was very mindful of how he was viewed by others in the prison (“slime at the bottom of the pond that’s

how the main prisoners treated us”) yet, found the activity of prayer reduced his anxiety and enable him to cope. With his rejuvenated faith he recovered: “I came out of my very depressive state and became more aware that Jesus was there”. To help him face each day in prison he would pray: “saying the Hail Mary's first thing in the morning is such a calming effect...peace of mind erm it helps me to relax”. Likewise he could unburden himself of his experiences in prison by praying to God. He would hear things in prison, from other prisoners, which repulsed him, he coped with this experience through prayer: “it is God's problem not mine so I can just come away from it, erm not forget it but say right Lord I can't take this I can't deal with it, you have it”. Robert believed he was able to evade the discomforts of prison life, by passing them onto a higher being.

Likewise, for Andrew just waking up in a prison cell was a daily challenge; he prayed just to get through the day. Andrew, a Baptist, was facing an indeterminate prison sentence; he felt disassociated from other prisoners, and unable to talk to them: “I put on a bright face...but inside of me I am hurting you know, it doesn't take much for me to burst into tears”. Even though he had experienced two other prison sentences, at 80 years of age, his current sentence was particularly difficult. He felt despair at not knowing when he would be released, and that his time was wasting away in prison:

“The nearest I've got to being in hell is being back in prison again...I don't know when I'm going to get out I've got no light at the end of the tunnel...this prison is hard...overcrowded and it is horrible the punishment here is being here time going quickly for me is me getting older (it's meaningless) it's meaningless”

It is in this context that the value Andrew places on being able to draw some comfort from the activity of prayer is great. Every morning, he would awaken feeling unable to cope with having to face another day. He communicated this to God through prayer feeling strong enough to make it through the day. Like Robert, Andrew was able to mitigate negative

feelings and concerns by talking to God. He reported that the anxiety of the situation would have affected his mental health had he not had the ability to pray each day:

“I say a few prayers and I just put it to God and I get over it every day...I am praying for I will find the strength to carry on with this day...I would have probably had a nervous breakdown by now if I hadn't had someone to pray to everyday”

Experiencing moments of relaxation, peace and calm in prison are rare, particularly for this subgroup of prisoners. Yet through the practice of religious and spiritual activities, such as meditation and prayer, participants were able to achieve a sense of peace and take one day at a time to face the challenges of incarceration.

Experiencing Religious or Spiritual Affiliation in Prison and the Community Aids a Sense of Belonging and Improves Perceived, Social Status

Within this final theme, two subordinate themes emerged, I consider each in turn: ‘Belonging to a faith group brings intimacy as experienced by family’ and ‘Status is gained by belonging to the in-group’.

Belonging to a Faith Group brings Intimacy as Experienced by Family

Belonging.

As a consequence of a sexual offending history, participants reported experiencing rejection both by others in prison and by family and friends. Amongst this group, feelings of social and emotional isolation were great. Importance was therefore, placed, in the main by Christian participants, on being affiliated with their religious community. Participants described others who were religiously associated or affiliated to their church, as being like, their family. Indeed, for most, the only people who maintained contact during their incarceration were people from their religious community.

This was highlighted most by Andrew's case, who was serving his third prison sentence. He recalled the only people who maintained support throughout each prison sentence were the people from his church: "I feel part part of the Christian family since in fact since the people who have stood by me when I came out of prison [REDACTED] [REDACTED]". Indeed, his church affiliates remained the only source of care and compassion who he viewed as his only family.

Like Andrew, others experienced the corrosion of emotional support from family and friends but an increase in support from religious peers. This tolerance and acceptance by religious associates came as a surprise to some. Nicolas, while on police bail, attempted to reject church friends by telling them of his sexual offending history and pending criminal charges. He was surprised, but also pleased, when they insisted on continued contact: "I told them of my offence...thinking they'd run away...they were still friendly towards me". For Nicolas this acceptance was extremely important it validated his self-worth, he was able to begin to believe he was worthy of being part of a community, in spite of his sexual offending history.

Robert experienced a similar experience while in prison. He was also welcomed into a new church, and was shocked by the acceptance of a fellow worshiper: "he said come to my church... we will accept you for what you are not for what you have done, and I was...gobsmacked". Robert had been rejected by every member of his family; he had been moved away from his friends and was extremely isolated in prison. Being accepted in this way meant he could consider a future and a chance to become part of a community once again.

Interestingly, participants' religious support networks, although developed in prison, were not limited to periods of incarceration. Relationships extended beyond their prison sentence and were anticipated to play a role in participants' lives, post prison. This is

demonstrated in the recollection of Greg's experience. His religious support network was not only expecting his return but were ready to embrace him: "they know I will be going back there and I know I am welcome back". Assistance from religious affiliates featured strongly in participants' release and rehabilitation plans, helping them with practical ("The Salvation Army captain... said...I'm going to find you accommodation now" Robert), emotional ("they will do anything to help me on release and they will be mentors and friends with no questions" Andrew), and rehabilitative support ("when I get out I will be able to...ring up one of the bishops...and say look can you come and chat to me pray with me...just to help me get my focus" Nicolas). Participants were reassured therefore, with the notion that their church community would help, support and guide them on release.

Although having a sense of belonging was achieved once affiliated with a religious or spiritual community, the journey to affiliation was not smooth and not all participants were made to feel they belonged or were welcomed by religious groups in prison. In the first instance, access, into a religion was a challenge. Some found it difficult to penetrate and access religious communities ("it was very very hard to get...into the religious and regime" Tim) or where not supported to convert ("I felt that door had been closed" Robert). Nicolas was outright refused entry into services of his religious denomination; and was disappointed that he had not been given any opportunity to show he had changed:

"For some reason they just won't allow me to attend the meetings here...I am a bit narked too about it I thought it was about...being repentant of my sins erm and I don't think that they have given me the opportunity"

Even when access to prison church activities was achieved, for some, the experiences were inadequate and substandard, when compared to their community experiences. Evan in particular, who eventually disengaged from his religion following an altercation with a

church visitor, experienced dissatisfaction with church in prison. This was perhaps due to a unique and specific altercation. There was a volunteer visitor at the prison who happened to be from his own religious community; Evan expected him to share information regarding his family. When the visitor would not share this information, being bound by child safeguarding practice, Evan took this as a personal rebuke and felt unable to continue attending prison services. Following this incident, Evan disengaged, feeling the environment to be oppressive and difficult to communicate with God:

“Because of the oppressive nature of being in prison...I found it very difficult to communicate with God I didn't feel like I was getting any kind of any kind of input back... since I came into prison I have kind of isolated myself”

Andrew was unable to access services of his particular religious denomination. He was a Baptist and the minister at the prison who delivered Baptist services was from a different denomination. Although he was able to engage in some religious services on a Sunday, he felt these services were inferior when compared to his community experiences. As a Baptist, Andrew enjoyed the spontaneity of a service, whereas in prison, he felt services were scripted and delivered by ministers with little time to give quality services. Being unable to practice his faith in the manner he was used to, meant that spiritually, Andrew was unfulfilled:

“I do go to chapel here every Sunday but I am a Baptist and I'm afraid I don't like reading stuff off card that is not what I believe in (okay) as a Baptist it's very much off-the-cuff stuff...which is why I don't particularly like going down there but is the only option I have right now...you know their hearts might be in the right place but when you take our Minister you know he rushes in...it's parrot fashion...you know that's meaningless” .

Prison establishments were not always able to accommodate all of participants' religious and spiritual needs, or at least, meet their expectations at all times. Participants acknowledged that there were likely to be a range of explanations for this including a lack of funding, limited resources, security, prison regime, personal expectations and so on. In saying this, where expectations and needs were met, the benefits experienced by participants were great. They were able to feel part of the wider supportive community, for many this was experienced to the same intimacy levels of a family and relationships extended beyond the prison walls, providing emotional and practical support, beyond release. Unlike family however these relationships offered some additional security in terms of safeguarding practices.

Status is Gained by Belonging to the In-Group.

Just belonging to a particular religion was, for several participants, insufficient. Pro-active engagement was also important, it was important because of the social status this brought. In the community, while affiliation aided feelings of belonging, being seen to be an active member in the church also aided a sense of status, purpose and authority. This is evidenced most in Evan's narrative. He had been deeply engaged in a religious group for most of his adult life, and offended while actively practicing as a Christian. Evan believed that being involved in church activities such as organising music, youth plays and fundraising activities was part of this duty as a Christian: "I got involved with music there tried to help with all the plays try to help with everything any fundraising...did everything I could I worked hard". Playing a lead role in the organisation of church activities improved Evan's sense of self-worth, he earned the respect from others within the community, which in turn made him feel important, needed and of value: "I became this big person in the church respected and everything was so good". This was particularly important to Evan as within his own family

(“no matter what I did I wasn’t ever allowed to really be a parent I was never really allowed to have erm any input on any decision-making”) he felt powerless and redundant.

Equally, status, responsibility, and power, for Anthony, was a recurring theme throughout his life. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In custody, however, status was not achieved in the same way, yet, it was as equally important to participants’ identities and feelings of worth. While opportunities to take a religious lead role or organise activities were not readily available, status and a perceived sense of superiority was achieved by just being associated with a religious group. Indeed, presenting oneself as devoutly religious, further increased ones status. As already noted, participants were aware of the prisoner hierarchy within the prison, they knew they were for example at “the bottom of the feeding chain” (Robert). Yet this subgroup differentiated themselves further, by presenting the idea that when compared to non-religious others, belonging to a religious group (according to the prison hierarchy) was superior. I found this to be the case with Andrew, Anthony, Greg and Robert. They categorically opposed the idea that they were like other prisoners. Instead they presented others as immoral, inferior and unintelligent: “all they want to talk about is sex...I’m not like that” (Andrew); “they were just animals” (Robert); “the walls are plastered up with half naked over virtually naked women”

(Greg); and “prison has been an eye-opener really because some of them very simpleminded” (Anthony).

Being affiliated to a religious group in prison appeared to give participants permission to present themselves as superior to others. This seems to have occurred in light of the view that they perceived their religious group to be virtuous, moral and superior when compared to non-believing prisoners. Although this appears from an interpersonal perspective to be a somewhat callous outlook, it is plausible that this is a process by which participants attempt to distinguish themselves from the “slime at the bottom of the pond”. By viewing others of a non-religious denomination in this way, participants are able to perceive themselves as more socially accepted and even socially elevated, thus distancing themselves from the social stigma associated with incarceration and indeed, sexual offending.

Discussion

Through the analysis of in-depth interviews I aimed to explore the experiences and meaning made from those engaged in religious or spiritual activities while incarcerated for sexual crimes. While there is a great deal of literature demonstrating the benefits of engaging in religious or spiritual activities, no research to date examines the perspective solely from those convicted and incarcerated for sexual offending. This study therefore offers a unique perspective of this subgroups experience.

As presented in this Chapter, I found that by engaging in religion and spirituality while in prison, participants were able to draw on religious or spiritual language and concepts to help articulate their experiences of offending and desisting. This helped them make sense of their identity transition from one of ‘offender’ to ‘non-offender’. Thus by making sense of their offending identities, participants were motivated to seek forgiveness and develop new ‘non-offender’ identities. In addition, participants were able to mentally escape, and benefit

from psychological comfort. They developed bonds with others in their church, improving a sense of belonging, and social status. Consequentially participants' viewed their new identities as repaired and restored, bringing a sense of optimism, hope and efficacy for their future, even during incarceration.

In an effort to illuminate participants' experiences of incarceration and entry into a desistance process, I draw on two prominent theories in applied psychology (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and stigma (Goffman, 1963).

In his 1958 study of prisoners held in a maximum secure prison in New Jersey, Gresham Sykes, established that the 'pains of imprisonment', were not just the simple loss of psychological liberty (Liebling & Maruna, 2013). Sykes outlines the five main pains of imprisonment. These include: loss of liberty, deprivation of goods and service, frustration of sexual desire, deprivation of autonomy and deprivation of security. Reflected in the experiences of the participants in my study, they too spoke of how being confined to a prison institution and then further restricted by a prison cell, only served to endorse their loss of liberty. Indeed, their caged existence was a constant reminder of the lack of worth society placed on them. They felt deprived of any intimacy with family or friends, and their time in prison only served to corrode what remained of any social and emotional support networks. Forced to live with others, also shunned by society, participants reported living in a state of fear, feeling deprived of any sense of safety or security. In an effort to escape these pains, participants turned to religion and spirituality. Indeed, it was through the participation of religious and spiritual activities, that participants were able to mentally escape, regain feelings of belonging, reinstate autonomy, control and feel much more attuned and socially accepted within a community. One explanation for this experience might be understood through the lens of social identity theory.

Social identity theory is concerned with an “individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Tajfel and Turner argue that through the affiliation of particular social groups, people are able to define and make sense of themselves and others, through their social status and identity in society. Social groups are value laden; they and their members experience positive or negative attributes and characteristics. Ultimately the social ranking of a group is determined by society’s positive or negative perspective on the groups’ attributes or characteristics. Indeed, individuals within groups compare their own group(s) attributions and characteristics, to those of others. This in turn impacts on members of the group, whose sense of self becomes shaped on the social status of the group. Thus, when social identity is unsatisfactory, because the affiliated group is of a lower social status, individuals attempt to either improve their group or join another more prestigious one (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Where society, or a group within society, perceives difference in a negative, adverse or stereotypical manner, the attributes and characteristics of the group become stigmatised. Discrimination and prejudice between groups is nothing new (Allport, 1954; Brown, 2010). Individuals within the group can become viewed in light of the stereotyped attribute, rather than as unique person in their own right (Goffman, 1963). The consequences of this prejudice includes; stigmatisation and stereotyping. Stigmatisation can cause significant harm to those in receipt of such treatment, including: negative social, economic, political and psychological damage (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Similar experiences were reported by the participants in this study. They found themselves affiliated with two very low social status groups, and to some extent were doubly stigmatised. In the first instance, when convicted and imprisoned for a crime a person becomes labelled an ‘offender’. The terms ‘offender’ and ‘ex-offender’ are steeped in

stereotypical and typically disproportionate notions (Dabney, Dugan, Topalli, & Hollinger, 2006; Haegerich, Salerno, & Bottoms, 2013; Nee & Witt, 2013). The second categorisation participants in this study experienced was the association of a subgroup linked to their offence type, i.e. sexual. This group also has many labels and derogatory terms associated including; ‘nonce’, ‘paedo’, and ‘monster’ (Hanvey, Wilson, & Philpot, 2011; Marshall, 1996). Values associated with these stereotypes include the idea that ‘sex offenders’ are inevitable recidivists (Levenson, Brannon, et al., 2007), are unreformable, depraved and deviant (Pickett et al., 2013). I observed participants make great efforts to present and distinguish themselves from such stereotyping. Instead, by self-categorising into more socially accepted groups, through affiliation with the positive stereotypes of a religious or spiritual group, participants were able to adopt the positive characteristics such as being devout, honest and good.

Given that social identity theory supposes that humans strive to achieve a positive sense of self and are therefore motivated to improve or at least maintain levels of self-esteem. It is perhaps unsurprising that I observed participants make such effort to affiliate with social groups in which they perceived themselves more akin to. For those moving away from offending, affiliation with groups that elevate or complement a sense of self or at least a desired sense of self, are clearly important. Affiliation enables people to begin to develop and generate new narratives which support reformed identities (Maruna, 2001). New identities serve to provide distance between the reformed self, and the old offending self. I observed participants’ eagerness to convey this change. As a result of religious or spiritual affiliation, not only did they develop a new sense of self, but this was corroborated by their disassociation with lower status ‘offender’ out-groups. I observed this most when participants referred to other non-religious prisoners, in derogatory terms such as ‘simpleminded animals’. Now belonging to a more socially prestigious religious and spiritual in-group,

participants perceived themselves to share the in-groups' positive attributes and characteristics. Such internal change meant participants perceived themselves to be reformed, no longer deviant, and had absorbed the positive traits of the new in-group.

Social identity theory also tells us that members of an in-group will ultimately take on the behaviours and attitudes of their preferred group. Where an in-group perceives themselves as superior to an out-group, behaviours such as dehumanisation, social stereotyping and prejudice towards the out-group can occur (Tajfel, 1982). In a prison context, the social hierarchy is complex, and defined by the prison code, some groups are superior to others (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013). For example the social status of those convicted of committing sexual offences, is much lower than for those guilty of car theft. Even those convicted of sexual crimes are sub-divided, further. Those convicted of crimes against children are ranked socially lower than those convicted of sexual crimes against adult women. Amongst this current group of participants, all were convicted of crimes against children. I observed throughout their interviews and analysis of the data, attempts to manoeuvre and improve their social status. One of the interesting ways participants did this was by presenting their own prejudicial views about others. Participants accepted the socially ranked status of their offence category, i.e. a 'child sex offender'. Therefore, in prison, they were unable to present themselves as superior to other inmates. Instead, they were derogatory about other inmates' lack of morality or etiquette, limited education and lower socio-economic status. Presenting such hostile attitudes towards other inmates is perhaps an undesirable characteristic. However, when viewed in the light of social identity theory, it is perhaps understandable. Participants appear to wrangle and attempt to rid themselves of the social stigma and affiliation with the out-group they find themselves in. Through the motivation to improve a sense of self, and become affiliated to an in-group, participants in

this study made great efforts to distinguish themselves, not according to their crimes, but according to their religious or spiritual affiliation.

This use of religious and spiritual affiliation to operate as a platform to change social status and identity is a potentially important one, particularly given that the benefits expressed by participants were clear and explicit in terms of social status and group membership. By contrast, the benefits in terms of spirituality itself were more nuanced. One of the influencing factors in the desistance process is identity or cognitive transformation (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), yet because the shift in one's identity, experienced as a result of identifying with religious and spiritual groups, has been somewhat overlooked in the literature (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010) and is indeed, silent in terms of those convicted of sexual offending (Kewley, Beech, & Harkins, in press); the more generalised desistance and faith based literature is drawn upon here in an effort to make sense of the study's findings.

Consistent with Sedikides and Gebauer's (2014) explanation of religiosity and the self, the findings in this study show that religious affiliation and practice serves to meet self-needs such as; self-esteem, control, uncertainty reduction and meaning. Participants in this study, prior to conversion, self-harmed, attempted suicide and sexually offended as a result of their low self-worth. While in prison and when associated with religion or spirituality, their levels of esteem and self-worth improved. Likewise, when participants report the trauma of being imprisoned, their religious and spiritual practices brought them a sense of peace and control. Sedikides and Gebauer explain how religiosity reduces uncertainty about the self and the world; participants equally described feeling comforted by the knowledge that they had secured a positive afterlife through the act of seeking and feeling forgiven. Furthermore, religious and spiritual affiliation meant that participants' were able to make sense of their

lives and their offending. Indeed, it provided them a narrative which gave meaning and conveyed personal transformation.

Although participants did not use the term ‘identity transformation’, they frequently expressed the notion of internal change, personal reform or the reconnecting with the true self. This identity transformation process was presented in two parts; first, participants experienced an initial loss of identity, following arrest and incarceration. Indeed, their new stigmatised ‘sex offender’ identity was imposed upon them. Second, through religious or spiritual affiliation they were able to rebuild or resurrect their true identity. While their new found religious or spiritual affiliations enabled them to meet self-needs as categorised by Sedikides and Gebauer’s (2014), it also empowered them to rid themselves of the identity associated with stigma.

In order to fully combat the stigma of their offending label and validate their transformation, participants relied heavily upon their divine experiences. Participants appeared to achieve identity transformation in three ways. First, their new found religious or spiritual affiliation provided them a new socially accepted group with which to attach to (Stryker, 1968). Presenting oneself as belonging to a particular group is as much a signal to others about social identity, as is belonging to the group. Second, religious or spiritual affiliation provided participants access to analogies, symbols, and language that enabled them to better communicate their identity transformation to others (Marranci, 2009). Third, through affiliation with a religious or spiritual group, participants were not only able to develop new non-offending identities or narratives (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) but could justify their transformed self. They did this by claiming their capacity to change was not only a result of their own doing, but a result of God’s intervention and sanction. Their change was because God had redeemed them.

This use of external corroboration is echoed in Maruna's (2001) description of redemption scripts. Participants used the same redemption script format as those in the Liverpool Desistance Study, first, beginning their narratives by establishing their core goodness, honesty and morality. Participants made efforts to convince the interviewer and document an almost hyper-morality (Maruna, 2001) and upstanding citizenship. They then went on to describe how their offending was a result of external forces, far beyond their control. Indeed, it was only through the intervention of an outside force that they were able to cease offending and become their new reformed self. In Maruna's desisting sample, endorsement of the changes participants made, came from family, friends even criminal justice professionals such as the police. The participants in this study however, had no such outlet to provide validation of change. Absent of any support, testimony came from a higher power.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the experiences of men incarcerated for sexual crimes, while engaged in religious or spiritual activities. Four themes emerged from this study, revealing two significant findings. First, as with other similar studies, belonging to a religious or spiritual group was found to be positively associated with bringing purpose, empowerment, hope and peace of mind (Dammer, 2002; Maruna et al., 2006). Second, engaging with religion or spirituality assisted participants to break away from the stigma attached to their offending histories. This in turn helped them to develop new non-stigmatised identities.

The correctional context which participants in this study were drawn from is a unique and distinct one. Incarcerated individuals face significant and specific threats, often resulting in harmful consequences (Liebling & Maruna, 2013). The risk and harm experienced by those convicted of sexual offending might be perceived as greater than the general prison population (West, 1985). Understanding how people cope and recover from such experiences,

particularly for those convicted of sexual offending, is important for two reasons. First, irrespective of offending history, all humans have the right to dignity, equality and respect (Laws & Ward, 2011). Ward, Gannon and Birgden (2007) provide an unprecedented argument for preserving the human rights of all including those with sexual convictions. They assert that human rights are universal; all humans should be supported in their pursuit of personal goals, without the interference of others, including those with sexual convictions. Notwithstanding the legitimate occasions where the State is required to restrict individual freedom; this should be achieved in such a way that freedom and autonomy to pursue personal goals such as education, relationships or employment are facilitated (Ward et al., 2007).

The second reason pertains to the view that by increasing the levels of stress, isolation, fear and anxiety amongst those convicted of sexual offending might trigger maladaptive coping strategies, potentially jeopardising rehabilitation opportunities and placing others in harm's way (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009; Ward et al., 2006). It would appear that the unintended consequences of current prison regimes might place those vulnerable to stigmatisation at greater risk. Opportunities which might reduce or alleviate these potential harms should therefore be encouraged and sought, even during periods of incarceration. The findings from this study are therefore, important. They suggest that for stigmatised individuals, at least, being offered the opportunity to access and engage with religious or spiritual activities and groups, might provide the conditions needed to promote self-change and liberate themselves from the stigma and label attached to sexual offending, thus, develop new non-offending identities. In addition, while incarcerated people are provided comfort and solace within what is typically understood to be a hostile environment.

Chapter 4

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Meaning of Religion and Spirituality for Individuals Convicted of Sexual Offending and Living within the Community

Chapter Overview

This Chapter details the religious and spiritual experiences of four participants living in the community, while attempting to reintegrate and desist. In keeping with the overarching research question, this Chapter explores participants' experiences during periods of sexual offending, desisting from offending and where relevant during periods of incarceration. Again, discussion regarding method has been covered in Chapter 2 and so will not be duplicated here, instead only an overview of the sample demographics will be included. This Chapter however, details the finding which emerged from the analysis of these interviews and are summarised in Table 6. I discuss how religious or spiritual communities might provide an environment conducive to one that promotes the factors needed to trigger and support the desistance process. Findings of this study appear to: improve social capital; help develop new non-offending identities, and provide opportunities to repair the harm caused to others.

Table 6. Summary of Themes from Community Study

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
‘I am not a Sex Offender and I Won’t Reoffend’ but Risk Factors Persist	<p data-bbox="810 331 1209 369">Offender and religious identity</p> <p data-bbox="810 414 895 452">Denial</p> <p data-bbox="810 497 874 535">Risk</p>
The Changeable Nature of Faith	<p data-bbox="810 577 1374 667">Rejection is felt at the loss of religious networks</p> <p data-bbox="810 712 1358 801">Difficulty accessing new faith networks in the community</p> <p data-bbox="810 846 1374 1003">Religious affiliation provides humanity in a harsh context; in prison it is essential for survival</p> <p data-bbox="810 1048 1374 1249">During periods of offending, religious practice was just going through the motions coupled with feelings of pain, guilt and shame.</p>
Engaging in Faith Provides Comfort, Hope and Protection Following Sexual Conviction	<p data-bbox="810 1294 1342 1384">Seeking forgiveness brings psychological benefit.</p> <p data-bbox="810 1429 1401 1518">Relationship with God is dynamic and human rather than spiritual.</p> <p data-bbox="810 1563 1382 1653">Religious practice brings comfort and group affiliation.</p>

Introduction

Almost all of those convicted of sexual abuse are eventually released back into the community. In England and Wales, in 2011, less than half a percent of those sentenced received a life sentence, the remaining received, on average, a 53 month prison sentence and approximately 40% of those convicted for sexual offending received community sanctions, such as, community sentences, suspended sentence orders, fines or other disposals (*An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales, 2013*). In spite of their inevitable return back to the community, society struggles to accept those convicted of sexual offending. This is possibly a result of a 'moral panic' (Silverman & Wilson, 2002) perpetuated by the media and in particular the tabloid press (McCartan, 2010). For example where inaccurate information is reported about risk in this way members of the general public begin to develop unnecessary fears (Levenson, Brannon, et al., 2007). Indeed, current and previous governments fuel this panic further, by passing legislation to exert maximum control programmes on those convicted of sexual offending. This might not be so problematic had such control programmes been empirically tested for effectiveness (Thomas, 2010). While it is without doubt that sexual abuse is one of the most abhorrent and harmful crimes known to our society; the disturbing irony of such frenetic social, media, and political response, might cause more harm than good. So much so, people might find themselves resorting to previously maladaptive coping strategies associated with sexual offending.

The fears of those returning back to the community are well documented. Often, they anticipate hostility and rejection (Russell, Seymour, & Lambie, 2013), resulting in isolation. Those convicted are often shunned by family members because they fear the consequences of association or cannot come to terms with the harm caused. Meaningful relationships become scarce as people with sexual convictions choose to withdraw themselves from potential situations where relationships might develop (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008). In addition,

registration or notification requirements impede opportunities for relationships to develop (Levenson & Cotter, 2005) whereas others are unable to function effectively within intimate adult relationships (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997). Such intimacy deficits, feelings of loneliness, social isolation and fear, are not only psychologically harmful to the individual but have the potential to contribute to further sexual offending (Craig, Browne, Browne, & Beech, 2008), thereby, hampering any effort to effectively reintegrate back into the community.

Community reintegration for those convicted of sexual offending is therefore, both complex and sensitive; requiring action from the returning individual and the cooperation and willingness of a community to receive them. Without both parties commitment to the process, reintegration is impossible (Anthony, Samples, de Kervor, Ituarte, Lee, & Austin, 2010). While criminal justice practitioners can help bridge the gap between the returning individual and the community, this task cannot be achieved alone (Weaver & McNeill, 2015); particularly given that not all communities can accept or support those convicted of sexual offending. Understanding which communities might be appropriate, adequately resourced, and willing to support a reintegration process is therefore, essential. The study presented in this Chapter, attempts to begin to explore the experiences of those who have drawn on the support of religious or spiritual communities in an effort to support their reintegration back into society.

Method

As previously stated, I do not intend to detail any methodological explanations, rationale or processes at this juncture. These are detailed earlier in Chapter 2. I do at this point, however, provide detail of the sample used in this study.

The Sample

This community sample consisted of four adult males, all religiously active at the time of interview. The range of religions participants identified with included: Christianity (Catholic and Anglican) and Jehovah's Witness.

The mean age at the time of interview was 58 years (range 50-68 years, SD 7.58). At the point of offending the mean age was approximately 45 years (range 25-64 years, SD 16.9).

Two participants had no previous records of offending and two had previous convictions for sexual offending, these are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7. Description of Community Sample

Participant	Approximate Age at point of Interview	Approximate age at point of Offending	Offence	Previous Offending history	Religion as described by Participants
Ryan	50	25	Indecent assault male child under 13 years	Indecent assault x 2 male children under 13 years	Christian/Catholic
Norman	58	53	Attempted abduction female girl age 5 years and breach of SOPO	Attempted abduction and indecent assault female child 6 years old possession of indecent images of children	Jehovah Witness
Edward	55	39	Indecent Assault male and female children between ages of 1-15 years	No previous	Christian
Stuart	68	64	Possession of indecent images of children	No previous	Christian/Anglican

Results

Three themes emerged from the analysis of this group; each theme is described here in turn.

‘I am not a Sex Offender and I Won’t Reoffend’ but Risk Factors Persist

This first theme provides some insight into the narratives participants used to explain their offending behaviour. Of interest, however, is the conflicting nature of the narratives. On the one hand participants do not recognise or associate themselves, in the present tense at least, with an identity of someone likely to commit further sexual offences. Yet on the other hand, three of the four participants (Ryan, Edward and Norman), were notably mindful of the presence of acute and persistent conditions, directly linked to sexual offending, thus, making them potentially vulnerable to future offending.

Participants used self-narratives to convey their perceived current self. For all participants these conflict between three domains, including: not fully accepting responsibility for their crimes; believing that there will be no future offences; and acknowledging the presence of a number of significant risk factors. I found that participants’ narratives moved between a continuum of acceptance and denial. They reported persistent and acute factors associated with their offending past, along with a confidence that they would never reoffend. Such dichotomy in their narrative perhaps demonstrates the complexity of how participants make sense of their sexual offending. Participants clearly struggle to rationalise and come to terms with their behaviours yet present themselves as changed and with new non-offending identities.

I found this dichotomy to be most striking in the cases of Norman and Ryan and for the purpose of discussing this theme shall concentrate on their accounts. I discuss Norman first. Norman, a Jehovah’s Witness, was convicted of the attempted abduction of a five year old girl from a local playground, he also breached his Sex Offender Prevention Order.

Norman was unable, during his interview at least, to accept responsibility for his current or previous contact offences. He did accept responsibility for accessing images of child abuse, online. Yet even this acceptance was limited, in that he “wouldn’t say pornography really, I’d say it was more being towards eroticism than than pornography”. When introducing his contact offences, which included child abduction and indecently assaulting a child; Norman denied any sexual motivation, claiming there was very little evidence (“evidence is extremely thin”), and while minimising the gravity of the sexual assault he blamed the victim:

“it involved sexual touching of a child (mm) ok and the touching was the contact of my leg fully clothed on the back of her her leg (mm) while she alleged, I put, she saw me put my hand over my penis erm the entire incident lasting no more the 20 seconds”.

Yet, in stark contrast to Norman’s denial, he disclosed without apparent discomfort a sexual attraction to children: “I don’t deny that I have had problems with paedophilia since I came of age 13/14”. Norman clearly identifies with the idea of being a paedophile, although, regularly interchanges the term paedophile with ‘problem’. Norman perceived this “problem” as being innate and integral to his sense of self, he viewed the condition as permanent. In an effort to rationalise and explain his sexual deviancy towards female children, Norman deemed his paraphilic interest to be a biological condition (“it’s an illness”) and a genetic one: “why did I get this problem and you [*brothers*] didn’t, you see (mmm), now whether there’s a genetic erm side to this or not, I just do not know”.

The idea that Norman is a paedophile (although not clinically diagnosed) is an important one to him. He presents the difference between a person who has no sexual interests in children but chooses to commit sexual assaults, and himself, who he claims has not committed any sexual offences, but, is sexually orientated towards children. This curious dichotomy prevails throughout Norman’s narrative, on the one hand, he is able to be open

and accepting of the levels of sexual interest he has in children, so much so that he perceives this as being integral to his biological makeup. On the other hand, he is unable to accept or acknowledge that he ever acted on his sexual motivations by sexually assaulting children.

It is possible that one of the reasons Norman is able to identify with the concept of paedophilia, yet at the same time distance himself away from any criminal behaviour, is that Norman's sense of self is strongly affiliated with his faith. He promotes his sense of self to others, as one deeply entrenched with religiousness ("I can't divorce my life from my religion, you see I just can't") and he asserts that would never breach his moral boundaries, even though he has sexual desires to do so. This was because he has the strength of his religious and spiritual beliefs and standards. Indeed, at the point of interview, Norman's religious identity was presented as extremely strong; he and his religion he believed were one.

Although identities and actions appear as contradictions in Norman's testimony, identity is likely to be a psychological mechanism which enabled him to cope, rationalise, and explain to others his offending behaviours. For the purpose of the interview I did not challenge any perceived contradictions but rather observed and accepted his narrative, as his truth. Norman believed he was now able to manage his 'problem' ("I have really got on terms with it now...it's not a problem now"), but because there is no 'cure' for his condition, he would always need to manage himself. While he believed he was now managing his sexual deviancy effectively, this he argued had not always been easy.

Without effective treatment or medical support, it was difficult to understand how Norman had managed his problem. Especially given that he reported how difficult it was to manage sexual fantasies and desires. Norman described how the pull to act on his sexual interests was very strong. He was adamant he had never acted on any desires, but described a

constant motivation to return to his innate sexual orientation. He used a useful analogy to describe the challenge he faces:

“It’s a thing that is almost elastic that you can, you know, you can pull away from it and it can come back and you’ve got to pull away from it again, its its you know it’s a problem you know its its a problem”.

Although Norman remained steadfast that he had not sexually offended, it is important that he was able to acknowledge, at least, his sexual orientation towards children. It is possible that denial served as a mechanism which allowed him to maintain acceptable levels of self-worth. Indeed, Norman’s openness to discussing his paraphilic interests and the need to ‘cure’ himself may perhaps mean that he is open to the idea of treatment and working positively with professionals. Indeed, Norman reported making unsuccessful efforts to get professional help with his sexually deviant interests in children (“for the first time in my life to be able to admit to these problems”), he disclosed to his doctor asking for help (“I need help now”) but was told that there was no help on offer because there is “nothing out there to deal with it really”. Even when he went to prison he did not receive help: “I expected someone to kind of come along psychiatrist psychologist or whatever and discuss the things that you know that...I’ve admitted to”. Norman must have experienced frustration and despair after gaining the confidence to disclose to his doctor and criminal justice professionals but then to be offered no help. The experience saddens Norman, because as a result of his sexual orientations, he ultimately chose to offend. The experience of not receiving medical help allowed Norman to distance himself from taking responsibility for offending. Because he believed he made the effort to get help from professionals, but was unsupported, he perceived he was not responsible for his later actions. Had he received the help that he needed from his doctor he believed he would never have offended.

“I don’t believe anymore that it’s a problem that should lead to criminality (right ok) and you know and, I think if I could have got help, it never would have led to criminality (mmm), you know, cos I’m not a criminal at the end of the day I’m not a criminal”

Like Norman, Ryan also presented himself as a person who believed he would never re-offend. Yet, Ryan was mindful of the unaddressed areas linked to his sexual offending. Indeed, Ryan’s whole identity was shrouded by terms linked with risk and danger. The language used to describe himself included a range of criminal justice phrases. While he viewed his sexual orientation towards children as a problem, he nonchalantly described himself as a ‘danger’, ‘risk’, ‘MAPPA level’ and ‘frightening’:

“I don’t know what MAPPA level erm I am, I think I’m 2 now...we used to say in prison that we had been de-nounced...I know I am a danger...I don’t want to become frightened of children (no) they’re the ones that should be frightened of me...but I don’t want to become a leper er like I said that would raise my risk levels”.

Ryan had, it seemed, been openly engaged with professionals in the criminal justice system for many years, having had three prison sentences, engaged in several offending behaviour programmes, and worked with public protection units even after his sentence had ended; it is perhaps unsurprising that his identity had to become infiltrated by the language of professionals within the system. Yet, the frequent and casual manner to which Ryan used such terms to describe himself and situations he faced, was alarming.

While the narrative Ryan used to describe himself might appear particularly punitive, it is possible that this served an important protective function. Ryan identified with having a sexual orientation towards a specific type of child (“an altar boy...the criteria blue eyed blonde hair”), this preference was realised when he had responsibilities for children in his care:

“it really was triggered when I actually went to the monastery because there was a prep school there and I was surrounded by, they gave me the worst jobs Father A erm, gave me Wednesday afternoon PE... had to supervise the boys showers and things and getting changed...the eroticism and things began”.

Viewing himself as a risk and danger to children might have served as a self-management strategy to curtail Ryan’s behaviour. While this approach might have prevented Ryan from acting on his sexual desires towards some children, identifying so readily with such harmful labels may have harmed his sense of self-worth. In addition, Ryan excluded himself from life in general, he was on constant guard for children; such constant vigilance might also have heightened his thinking about children. Therefore, with a negative self-image, isolated from adult social interaction and living with a constant fear of children, Ryan appeared to be putting himself at greater risk of harming himself or others.

“...see what I don’t want to become which is easy for me to become because of the life I’ve led is a hermit, (mm), because then I feel then I’ll just run down to booze busters and get a bottle (yeah) and end up sitting here unsocially on my own”

Even sitting alone in his own house, Ryan experienced risky situations; on one occasion two school boys were sat on the wall outside his house, he believed this to be a situation he should immediately remove himself from;

“I had to ring PPU [*Public Protection Unit*]... I saw 2 boys dressed in black school uniform sitting on our wall and I thought oh no, so I went into the bathroom came back and they’d gone but then I heard them in our hall”.

From Ryan’s account, there was no immediate risk to these children; indeed, his history would indicate he would not unexpectedly attack or assault them. He was however, mindful

of his ability to groom young boys. Even being in close contact with a child was a problem for Ryan, he was aware that he could use the opportunity to deploy grooming strategies:

“I slip them money (right) grooming (yeah) erm befriended the parents, erm went out socialising with the parents, stayed in and offered to babysit, erm but...I had a goal (right) and I knew I knew even knew then erm what I was doing (mmm)...took me into their homes really they trusted me implicitly”.

Even the threat of an indeterminate sentence was not a strong enough deterrence, he could only hope he would not offend again: “I don’t want to offend again I [sigh] I hope never ever go down that road again and I can’t go back into prison again (mmm) cos next time I’ll be in for life I’ll be IPP’d [*Imprisonment for Public Protection*]”. Even though Ryan was acutely aware of the things he should avoid and the strategies he should adopt to manage himself and his feelings, he continued to place himself in danger and did little to address his acute risks. By failing to deal with the risks that were present in his life, such as feeling out of control, being isolated and lonely, and turning to alcohol as a comfort; he continued to increase or at least maintain the levels of risks he himself identified.

The second powerful narrative to Ryan’s identity was his ‘addicted self’. Abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs had been a constant feature in his life. So much so that he believed he would be an alcoholic until he died (“I still have the problem with the drink I’m an alcoholic until the day I go up the chimney”). He did not view himself as a person who had the strength to tackle the issue and would never be able to recover. Although at the point of interview, Ryan had been abstinent from alcohol for four weeks, this he knew was temporary: “I’ll be off the wagon again”. The misuse of alcohol is of dual concern: first, for Ryan’s health and well-being; but second, it is a risk linked to offending, Ryan used alcohol as a disinhibitor in the commissioning of his offences (“it [alcohol] was giving me the actual confidence”), while under the influence of alcohol Ryan:

“went and picked him [victim] up erm from his mother’s house on the pretext of taking him to church, I had me [*sic*] dog collar on and everything, and I took him down to the prom and I started the offending on the promenade, and then I took him up to a place called X in X town, which is a very secluded area erm and I gave him oral sex, the poor lad was terrified”.

The alcohol not only helped Ryan to carry out the offence, it also helped sooth periods of depression (“I suppose a touch of depression I was out of control (mmm) totally out of control”) helping him gain control of himself and others.

In the process of coming to terms with his actions and behaviours, Ryan had begun to recognise the significant role he played in his offences. This was important because it appeared to have strengthened his determination and commitment to not offend again. For example, at the time of offending, Ryan perceived that there was a relationship developing between him and one of the victims (“a friendship grew and it grew over about 18 months”). With Ryan’s new insights he recognised this was in fact the “long grooming process”, which he had manufactured. However, Ryan’s response to this revelation, while was one of commitment not to sexually abuse, was also maladaptive in that it added to his negative self-image, and gave him further permission to continue to abuse alcohol.

Ryan and Norman’s offending and non-offending identities appeared at times both unstable and unclear. Yet, consistent across all participants were the narratives used to express their religious or spiritual identities. Ryan’s, experiences of Catholicism, although were somewhat indoctrinated (“inbred into me”), were a part of him (“I could never deny the faith”). Although at the point of interview Ryan was however, disconnected from his faith community, he longed for the opportunity to be able practice his faith and be involved with the religious community:

“I love the community spirit...(mmm) especially at the X you know the brothers together, I miss being close to God (right), you know, to go into a church and look at the tabernacle where the blessed sacraments are kept and just have 15 minutes of your own time, I miss little things”.

For Norman, his religious faith remained central to his whole life, indeed, the core of his being: “I can’t divorce my life from my religion you see I just can’t”. His life was so engrained with a relationship with God, that unlike Ryan, everything else around him was meaningless, even the church community itself:

“if the church disappeared tomorrow as it almost has to some degree in my case, what am I left with, I’m left with what I should have had in the first place, in the first instance, in fact I’m left with what I went looking for in the first instance, which is a relationship with a God that I know exists”.

Stuart’s religious identity was also strong. He had throughout his life practiced a Christian faith (“all the way through my life religion was always there”) when travelling with his career in the Navy would seek out a church: “I’d go and find a local church; no matter what denomination it was, if it was Anglican so much the better”. He held responsibilities in the church: “I was what’s called a Reader in the Anglican Church in X Country erm, which permitted me to conduct the services of morning and evening prayer, and to preach at those services”. This was important to Stuart as he enjoyed many aspects of church life, such as the rituals (“the ritual of the Sunday worship”), the ceremonial dress (“the robes, the vestments and that sort of thing”), as well as the community coming together (“it was something you came to do together to do as a congregation, as a family”). Following his arrest and subsequent conviction, Stuart lost the ability to practice his faith. This had a detrimental effect on his well-being. Unable to function, he compared the experience of losing his religion to the numbness felt when receiving a general anaesthetic: “you lie on this trolley

and you're looking up at the ceiling and they're putting this thing into your arm and they say, count to ten".

Finally, Edward's faith only became an important feature in his life, after he stopped sexually offending, however, his faith had become fundamentally integral to his core self: "I have to talk about a Christian faith because that's what I am". Edward believed that God allowed him to experience Christianity and ultimately forgiveness. Previously he was an atheist ("had been for 30 odd years an atheist (right) I was completely convinced by that"), whereas now he fully identifies with Christianity. Recently converted, Edward views himself as a work in progress: "it's not going to be a five minute job cos its one heck of a mess". To some degree, he continues to hold some negative views of himself, these cause him distress but he is touched by God's grace and forgiveness of his 'sin':

"I'm a terrible person, erm I'm a terrible person with faith you know, er I'm a sinner, a very awful one so it's, excuse me for preaching a little bit, but it's by the grace of God (right) and that's the truth (aha) [J touches his chest and begins to cry] excuse me".

It is important to Edward that his past still requires examination and understanding. He believes that one day he will unravel his "mess" and believes that the best way to do this is to start with "the truth, and start cleaning up the mess and that's important". Christianity for Edward is not only a new way of life but a mechanism to begin to resolve who he was in his past.

In summary, this theme reveals that participants' sense of self resonates strongly with a religious identity; in the first two cases a religious identity which has been lifelong and integral to their core being. On the other hand, participants wrangle with a damaged and harmful self connected with sexual offending. 'Offending identities' do appear dormant and

latent rather than historical. Indeed, many of the factors which brought participants closer to offending in the first place still prevail.

The Changeable Nature of Faith

The second theme to emerge from the data considers the strength of participants' faith. They found this to be dynamic and changeable, with faith fluctuating dependent on the environment or context. All participants, apart from Edward experienced some loss or rejection from their religious communities following conviction and while living in the community. However, while in prison, participants reported how religious and spiritual communities were stronger, and indeed, indispensable for prison survival, making their faith stronger. This theme provides brief insight into the experiences of those practicing their faith during periods of offending, but this does not include an account from Edward, as he only began practicing his faith post offending.

Rejection is felt at the loss of religious networks.

Prior to and during their offending, Norman, Stuart and Ryan were active members of their churches. They were leaders and preachers, and enjoyed the benefits associated with a wide social network within their congregation. As a result of their offences coming to light, being arrested and subsequently convicted all three were excluded from attending and being involved in church activities. Indeed, as a consequence, they also all lost valuable social networks, friendships and supportive relationships. This loss was experienced differently by each participant.

Stuart was not required to formally leave his church, but was ostracised by his church community: "some church people from the parish have you know, were really quite erm anti-me, really you know very much so erm and we lost, as a result of it eventually our main social life". This became a problem both in terms of him attending church, and because he

and his wife socialised with church peers outside of worship, they both lost a vital source of social contacts:

“So we lost our social life...overnight, which was a huge part of our social life...you know...erm, so there was this double whammy thing.....and I couldn't go to my, felt I couldn't go to my local Church at all”

Unlike many in Stuart's situation, he was fortunate to have the continued support of his wife and adult children. Yet, even with this, the period of time spent on bail was traumatic: “it was 18 months of this shame...the family knew straight away, and they were very supportive”. Feeling rejected by his religious community, impacted on Stuart's relationship with God. Although he felt his faith did not fully leave him (“because I'm back to it”), the “physical practice of faith totally stopped”. Unable to practice his faith, Stuart was afraid and ashamed:

“I think it was just totally destroyed emotionally, by the whole experience of being arrested and the shame of what I'd done ...erm, and that it was eventually going to come out, you know, and be made public”.

The experience of losing his religious network left Stuart feeling out of control and distant from others around him. Losing his religious fellowship was such a psychological blow for Stuart, he stopped engaging in personal religious practices and his own faith weakened. Stuart's whole life was committed to supporting and worshipping with others, who he saw as family, at his church (“something to do together as a congregation, as a family”), without it, he was disoriented and unable to function.

Norman also lost the support of his religious network. However, he experienced this in a different way to Stuart. It was different in that, although important, to Norman fellowship was not the defining aspect of his faith. The loss of his religious network did not interfere

with his faith, per se, or even his relationship with God. Indeed, it made no difference, in that respect. Norman was formally expelled from his church: “I was disfellowed by the Jehovah fellowship (right) erm but it was 2 years ago erm but that didn’t, as far as living my life was concerned, it just didn’t it just didn’t make any difference”. Unlike Stuart, other fundamental activities of his faith, such as reading texts, praying and having a relationship with God, continued, irrespective of the loss of community. In saying this, Norman still missed having the opportunity to engage in church fellowship, as fellowship was still an important feature of Norman’s religion. Norman attempted to maintain contact and fellowship with others in the church by listening through teleconferencing software (“I listen to the meeting to the entire lot as if I’m sat in the hall”). This was a vital opportunity to maintain some sense of connection to others in his church: “crucial absolutely crucial”. Norman was desperate to be accepted back and described the challenges faced by himself and the leaders in his church:

“I’m struggling hard to get back into the congregation (right), but they’re struggling to know how to deal with it, you know, because I don’t think certainly in X County there’s ever been anything like this...they’re struggling to deal with it because erm (you mean your offending history is that what you’re) they’re struggling to deal with what to do with me”.

On the one hand while Norman was rejected by his religious community, his faith remained strong. However, in being banished from engaging in fellowship with others, Norman experienced a deep sense of emptiness.

Difficulty accessing new faith networks in the community.

When living in the community, being excluded from attending church activities or meetings, either formally or informally was an issue for this group. For those who lost contact with family or had additional health complexities, accessing alternative social networks was an even greater challenge.

This challenge was possibly most notable for Ryan. He had been in and out of prison on a number of occasions. When attempting to access religious support, back in his community, he faced several barriers. To gain permission to attend church services Ryan contacted his local church leader. He disclosed his offences and was required to sign a covenant of care, this meant he would agree to provide a full disclosure to the local minister and only attend adult church services. In spite of Ryan returning the signed documents, he never received a response: “I heard nothing from K right erm ever since I signed the form (right and how long ago was that) oh when was it a while back erm 2008 (ooh right) so I’ve had nothing”. Ryan interpreted the lack of response by the church as a resource issue (“sadly the support isn’t so readily available out here”) however, he did not follow this up.

In prison, arrangements to accommodate prisoner’s religious needs are generally facilitated by prison staff or volunteers working within the prison. Yet, in the community, the responsibility rests with the individual. However, even when individual effort is made to engage with religious communities, for those socially outcast and already rejected by one religious community; bridging the gap between what was experienced in prison and the community, can be difficult.

Religious affiliation provides humanity in a harsh context; in prison it is essential for survival.

Three of the four participants in this study (Ryan, Edward and Norman) had experienced prison life. They reported that having the opportunity to access religious support while in prison was an essential resource that helped them cope with the prison environment. For example, Edward and Ryan both experienced acute health conditions, such as alcoholism and poor mental health. Religious and spiritual support was therefore critical to just getting through their prison sentence. Edward was serving his first prison sentence and throughout his life had experienced recurring episodes of mental instability. Being able to practice

Christianity possibly saved his life, but certainly helped him cope: “I don’t think I would have survived without it... gone completely bloody crazy, I think I’d have killed myself”.

In prison, access to one’s preferred denomination was not always possible. However, for Ryan, he felt: “lucky when I was in HMP X the Benedictines are actually the chaplains there”. Not only was he able to access and therefore practice his own faith, but was able to benefit from contact with his own religious social network. Having the support and connectedness from his own unique community was clearly important to Ryan. In spite of the offences he had committed, he felt that his church, and the people in it, remained supportive of him. This he believed was because they forgave him: “they knew exactly what I’d done...but they were particularly supportive Sister X in HMP X is brilliant erm the holy Rottweiler [laugh] er and she will tell you to your face I don’t like sex offenders but I’ll forgive ya”. Ryan’s religious peers made significant efforts to maintain contact and support with him during his incarceration, by visiting him; “even when I first went to jail erm even though it was the lads from X town they were two other priests they used to come and visit me ...they didn’t turn their back”. Important to Ryan, was the fact that he was not rejected by his peers; instead they provided support and care. His church peers assisted him with resettlement arrangements: “they arranged when I came out was I could go to mass in the local convent...they actually went out of their way to make arrangements”.

The act of being removed from society and imprisoned is a strong signal to those convicted of crime. It asserts that society will not tolerate behaviours deemed criminal and rejects those proven to be guilty. Although, prisoners are rejected from society outside of prison; inside prison, a sense of belonging can still be experienced. Edward found a connection (“united purpose”) with others from the religious communities in prison. On the one hand he was able to engage in religious worship and practice; however, as a result of this unity, he found comfort and care from people he least expected this from:

“there’s genuine care and I’m proud to say, I mean I am proud of the guys [inaudible] prison with the worst possible people in society, including me I’m part of it, we are the worst and what do I find people who genuinely care for each other (mm), people who genuinely put themselves out for each other (mm), and for no they’re not getting their parole any easier (mm) they’re not getting nothing”.

It is interesting that Edward makes the point that even those who he perceived had committed the most heinous of crimes were still able to provide care and humanity to others. This is important to Edward for a few reasons: first, it is possible that by thinking of others in this positive way helps him cope with the idea of being in prison. Prison can be a frightening place, often individuals fear for their own safety and security, and those with convictions for sexual offending are often more at risk. Believing that others are able to provide “genuine care” possibly gave Edward a sense of reassurance and comfort. Second, it is also because Edward believed he too was one of the “worst of the worst”, he had hope that even he might be restored.

Edward believed that where compassion and humanity was given to others by those in religious community in prison the kindness would be reciprocated. Indeed, Edward appeared to feel more able to express compassion and humanity to others as a result:

“I think that anybody in the chapel that will come through (right) that will come through the genuine realness (yea yeah) of people (yeah) yeah it makes you more of a human being (aha) and the community helps and that support (right) and you see it in other people”.

During periods of offending, religious practice was just going through the motions coupled with feelings of pain, guilt and shame.

Three of the four participants (Norman, Ryan and Stuart) were engaged in religious practice during periods of their offending. All three men were active members of their churches, with responsibilities such as leading services and preaching to congregations. None of the

participants were able to reconcile their offending behaviours and their faith. Indeed, each participant described how, during periods of offending, the personal worship and duties carried out during these times became meaningless.

Ryan described his experiences by explaining how he would be externally displaying the symbols of a religiously devout person (“the uniform”), attend services and go through religious routines, however, on the inside; this was all empty gesticulation:

“I was wearing the uniform (right), I was going through the motions, erm but no I was going through the hours as we call them (mmm), going to mass every day but somehow the flame inside me had gone down to a cinder (right), a glowing cinder”

During periods of offending, all activities associated with religion became purely superficial. To describe the strength of his religious commitment, during periods of offending, Ryan used the analogy of an internal burning flame. The strength of the flame represented the strength of his religious commitment. During periods of offending, the flame became a “glowing cinder”, almost fully extinguished. While Ryan maintained that his religious commitment was not fully lost as there remained a “glow” inside of him, he observed how to others, he would have appeared engaged. Externally to others he believed he appeared devout.

As for Stuart, during periods of offending, preaching “got very hard towards the end with this guilty secret behind me”. In keeping with Ryan’s experience, the internal commitment to his religion diminished but the external symbols served as a mask to others. For Stuart, religious symbols such as robes and cassocks were important, providing a layer of protection between his offending self and his religious self. Although Stuart describes the wearing of robes as a means to provide authority, they also acted as a mechanism to conceal himself and his “guilty secret” from others:

“One of the reason for wearing robes, cassock and surplus or whatever, is, it doesn’t hide the person...but it gives you that, a bit of authority that’s it’s not you that’s saying it, it’s coming from the church, the Bible or God or whatever...erm”

The availability of external symbols provided him the confidence to deliver the services to the congregation; when wearing the robes, the messages were God’s and not his. This is likely to have provided Stuart with some temporary comfort. However, like Ryan, Stuart’s religious commitment had also diminished; he too was not able to fully engage with God in any meaningful way. He became somewhat removed (“I’d become stale, I’d been doing it for 25 years”), and as his offending behaviour increased, this conflicted with his religious commitment, and soon became unbearable; “I came to the point where I couldn’t really do it anymore... I didn’t want to be up there, dressed in robes...erm...everybody thinks you’re whiter than white”.

Norman uses the analogy of ‘physical pain’, to give an account of how he experienced religious meetings during periods of offending:

“I couldn’t sit in a meeting without my heart being ripped in two, you know the hypocrisy from me, you know (right), I mean I could be choked you know sat in a meeting, I couldn’t just switch from one to another and just sit in a meeting and feel free, and you know (right), my heart was in a knot (right), my mind was in a knot (ok), you know the freedom, you know, I just felt awful (right), you know, I felt awful about it”

This use of a physical analogy helped him demonstrate the strength of feelings experienced during this time. In addition to physical pain, he was emotionally (“heart being ripped out”) and mentally (“mind was in a knot”) affected by his guilt.

Norman described why he experienced such pain. He articulated that the feelings of sexual attraction he felt towards children were not feelings he wanted to encounter. Instead,

these left him feeling out of his control, trapped and imprisoned by his disorder (paedophilia). Describing the experience in this way might help provide support to Norman's belief that his behaviours were not his own choosing and were a result of his "problem". By articulating his experiences in this way, the listener gains a sense of how painful the contradiction of offending and attending church was, for Norman. Indeed, it allowed him to present to others the humanity within him. Norman, like Stuart and Ryan, realised that others would not have observed this internal conflict. Yet, he notes that while he was able to fool people within his meetings, he knew he was not able to fool God: "because you can kid people but you can't kid ya God anything". This knowledge however, only exacerbated his feelings of pain and dread, because Norman knew he had not only broken human laws, but broken God's law too. For Norman this carried a far greater consequence.

Following periods where Norman would access images of child abuse, and then attend religious services, he would feel: "terrible absolutely terrible if I'd done something wrong, I'd been looking at pornography of any sort, which was my problem, if I'd been looking at pornography of any sort". The only way he appeared to cope with this experience was by separating out his offending self from his religious self. Norman articulated this as like living a double life. However, he found switching between the two personas difficult. Norman reported being unable to stop his offending behaviours, not because he did not want to, or had not tried, but because he believed he was unable to: "you know I was leading this double life, and its one to, how do you break free from it (mmm) because of I tried trust me". Presenting the experience of being in a trap, unable to break free or escape his condition, allowed Norman to reinforce the belief, and present it to others, that his sexual offending behaviours were innate and not his fault.

The negative effects of living this "double life" meant that Norman was able to present to others that they outweighed any benefits he might have experienced. Indeed, as a

consequence of his “problem” Norman too, was suffering, in pain and trapped. Norman perceived and presented himself as the victim of circumstances. Although Norman was clear that his behaviours were wrong, it was important that he expressed how the hypocritical existence he had to live caused him extreme discomfort.

Engaging in Faith Provides Comfort, Hope and Protection Following Sexual Conviction

This third theme incorporates a number of aspects important to participants. First, is the process of forgiveness, not only fundamental to their faith, but forgiveness was an essential element to their reparation process. Participants reported how this enabled them to move on from their offending past. Second, this theme also considers the relationship participants had with God, they reported a dynamic and changeable relationship, which for some was more human than spiritual. Finally, religious activities such as meditation, prayer, reading religious texts and disclosing to religious peers all had positive psychological functions for participants.

Seeking Forgiveness Brings Psychological Benefit.

Forgiveness, being a fundamental aspect of their faith, was important to all participants. For example for Norman being forgiven gave him hope that he would achieve everlasting life: “if I’m forgiven...my problem you know cos this won’t exist in the new system that’s coming you know after Armageddon”. But forgiveness and the act of seeking forgiveness also brought psychological benefits for participants. Forgiveness is a process that requires someone to forgive and someone to be forgiven; and participants in this study experienced a need to be forgiven by a number of different people, including their family, their victims, themselves and by God. The complexity of forgiveness was articulated by all participants.

Ryan reported the desire to seek forgiveness from God, his victims and his church peers. Forgiveness from his peers was important as it allowed him to retain a place in his

religious community. Indeed, he was forgiven by them and they committed to supporting him: “we will never close the door (mmm right) and I thought there is family you know fair enough I’ve voluntarily excluded myself (mmm) erm but they’re still there”. This brought comfort and reassurance to Ryan. In spite of his offences, he was able to continue to receive the love and support from his religious community.

Ryan also sought to repair the damage he had caused his victims by seeking forgiveness from them too. Forgiveness was clearly linked to reparation for Ryan, although forgiveness also appeared to be driven by his own need to feel forgiven. Ryan recognised that wanting to be forgiven was futile as he believed he would never be forgiven by the victims: “I’ve got to ask forgiveness from three other people (mmm) but it will never come”. Ryan responded to the notion of the idea of seeking forgiveness in this instance might be motivated by self-interest alone:

“I want to try to explain why I did it (right) you know [sigh] I don’t think they would forgive me erm but maybe it could put some of their pain at rest (mmm) I don’t think it would it would probably open up old wounds, erm yes I see where you are coming from, yes it would, be selfish but, I just feel there is something missing (right), erm and we haven’t been able in any shape or form to make atonement”.

It was important to him, that he was able to provide an explanation to his victims regarding why he offended against them. Yet, his reasoning for wanting to do this exposed a stereotyped perception of ‘victim’ and a limited appreciation of the potential effects of such a process. For example, Ryan made a number of assumptions, that the victims would not forgive him; that they were in pain, and his explanation would be the solution to ease that pain. Without doubt, sexual abuse is traumatic and harmful; indeed, it often leaves those abused with a myriad of complex, lifelong physical and emotional problems. However, many victims also go on to recover and survive the trauma of their abuse. This in itself

demonstrated a lack of insight regarding the complexities of how victims respond to sexual abuse. In saying that, Ryan appeared unable to move forward without having the opportunity to repair the relationship with his victims. While God had forgiven him, he was unable to fully repent and make atonement without repairing the relationship with the victims. This frustrated Ryan because being able to repair the damage he caused was an important part of reintegrating back into the community.

The issue of forgiveness is pertinent to Edward too. Edward, however, had accepted that he could never seek or receive forgiveness from his victims, and so overcame this by seeking forgiveness in an indirect way:

“They will forgive you when you forgive yourself, will you (right) and to me it’s become a matter of courage to say yes ultimately with repentance (mmm), I have to repent will I keep walking away, and as I walk away say I can forget that, cos forgiving is also forgetting (right), it’s putting it behind you”.

Edward believes it is unlikely he will ever receive forgiveness from his victims; he therefore, seeks forgiveness indirectly. He begins first by forgiving himself; he stops carrying the burden of guilt and allows himself to put the offences behind him. To do this he compartmentalises the incidents to being in the past, they do not define the person he is today. It is important to Edward that this process helps him move forward: “you can’t move forward erm you can’t live in harmony and peace you can’t live [inaudible] if you’re not forgiven”.

Finally, for Stuart being forgiven is important both religiously and for his relationships with others. However, Stuart struggles to accept how and why people were able to forgive him. It is interesting that perhaps Stuart perceived his crimes or himself to be so abhorrent that he was unforgivable. This is perhaps also a concern that he believed he did not

deserve to be forgiven. Stuart's self-worth was possibly so low that he did not perceive he had the right to be forgiven and treated as an equal amongst others. Indeed, he was amazed when an individual from the church forgave him ("here's a young woman...knows what I've done and has forgiven me and I thought this is just mind blowing") the people in his new church were so warm and welcoming: "we don't mind what you've done or who you are, you are part of Christ's family and Christ forgives". Stuart, in spite of his initial shock at being forgiven, felt as a result, fully integrated and accepted by the church. This was important for him as before he had felt so rejected, socially isolated and destroyed by his previous religious community, he was now almost fully restored back to his status prior to offending.

Being forgiven by God was important to Stuart; yet again he struggled to understand why God would forgive him. Because of his acceptance that God forgave him, his faith became stronger: "funnily enough it's strengthened erm...although I've let God down and his church down in a very visible way...erm.....in the I've had to accept the forgiveness of God". The unexpected offer of forgiveness from friends, family and God, appeared to spur Stuart's self-belief and confidence further.

Interestingly, Stuart highlighted the lack of opportunity to seek and receive forgiveness, from the legal system or those in society:

"I've seen the forgiveness of people, my partner, well my wife, my family, friends, you wouldn't believe, people I would have thought would have been just totally virulent against me, haven't been, and others have, you know, and there was this huge divide between people and the law and God's forgiveness, and reconciling those two, is still very difficult for me".

Even though Stuart has served his sentence, been punished and been forgiven and accepted back into his family and community, he is not able to be fully restored back to a position prior to offending because legal and social restraint prevent this ("church and Christ forgives,

the law and society doesn't"). This distinction is important to Stuart as he was keen to make amends and repair his wrong to society. He wanted to fully restore himself to his former good upstanding citizen status but felt prevented from doing this fully: "I couldn't have sinned really in a much worse way erm...and God forgives, but there was this huge contrast with what the law has done to me...and what half of society is doing to me". This highlights that although Stuart was somewhat protected by the forgiveness of his family and close friends he remains ostracised by society at large.

Relationship with God is dynamic and human, rather than spiritual.

It was only Ryan who provided insight of the nature of his relationship with God. He experienced the relationship in a very personal and human sense, it was a relationship that allowed interaction, discussion and even an occasional argument: "it's just rant and rave and disagreeing with some of the things that are actually in the book, (right) because some of the stuff doesn't make sense". Ryan provided descriptions of his interactions with God in a humorous way, he described how he would just "rant and rave" to God about things that were happening in his everyday life.

Presenting a relationship with God in this way allowed Ryan to depict the humanistic nature of his experience of God. It made it somewhat real and earthly, rather than metaphysical. Indeed, having a human relationship with God for Ryan made it tangible and present. Ryan had limited close human relationships and so this relationship perhaps went some way to fill that void. He paralleled the conversations he would have with God to that of his father: "its basic things that you would talk to your dad about you know". Such analogy is perhaps not uncommon in the Catholic Church. While, Ryan may well experience a father-son relationship with God; he would also be familiar with the father-son concept. Thus, articulating his relationship with God in this way normalised the relationship.

Other participants shared their experiences with God, but more in terms of how they experienced the strength of their faith in God's existence, rather than their relationship with, him per se. In spite of Ryan's positive relationship with God, his faith has waned over time. This was a result of a combination of aspects throughout his life including; offending, alcoholism, and exclusion from the church community. Ryan described his faith as having been much stronger in the past. As previously noted he used the analogy of a light or flame, to represent the strength of his faith. At the time of interview Ryan's faith was not very strong, although not as weak as it had been when he was offending ("it's on gas mark five...once I get sorted out with the priest it will go up (yeah) it won't go to ten again if goes up to ten then I've got wings"), whereas when he was offending, he described the flow of his faith as a: "glowing ember". Although Ryan did not expect his faith to ever be fully restored (at least not until he goes to heaven), he did acknowledge that it had grown stronger. Since he was released from prison, his faith has been growing: "ever since I was and came out and went to X Town it's been glowing and growing". Ryan noted only two circumstances where his faith will be fully restored; these include being able to reconnect with a religious community and when he dies and goes to heaven.

Similarly to Ryan, Stuart's faith became much weaker during periods of offending and in the early part of his sentence: "I came to the point where I couldn't really do it anymore". Indeed, during periods of great distress Stuart's "faith went out of the window as well...erm...or the manifestation of faith". It was only when he began to re-establish himself back into the community that his faith became restored again: "my faith has come back and is strengthened because...this church adopts the WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get". It is interesting that the strength of Stuart's faith was not determined by any relationship with God but was more strongly associated with how engaged and accepted within the community he was. In fact, Stuart was the only participant who did not discuss the idea of faith in God, in

terms of an individual or personal relationship. Religious commitment to Stuart appeared to be driven and motivated by experiences in the community and fellowship with other Christians, rather than being determined by a relationship with God.

Edward had also experienced the changeable nature of faith. Edward's faith however, had moved in an upwards trajectory, his faith had only strengthened throughout his life. Edward was, in the relatively early phases of a conversion, and so this is perhaps to be expected. From a very early age, Edward was not interested in being religious or believing in God. Indeed, for the majority of his life he did not believe in God: "I had no faith then (right ok) none at all (right interesting) I was was [*sic*] I had been for 30 odd years an atheist, (right) I was completely convinced by that". Prior to his conversion he had considered religion, but decided it was not for him:

"I tried to go back to have some faith to have something to hold onto and it hadn't worked, you can't force it (no), I couldn't do it, I'd tried going to church a few times tried talking to a few of the locals and so it didn't work".

It was only at his conversion did the idea of God begin to pervade his being. Edward described a force external to him, pushing this new idea. Edward reported how he began to consider the idea of having a faith in God. This he reported was a gradual process: "it was just a nice day, and I thought oh oh I believe in God, in Christ yes oh ey, what what, and I was just surprised". Edward illustrated how his conversion experience was a process, one which he had to wrangle with the idea of there being a God at all. He put the idea off, then revisited the idea again:

"Right I'll give it a week, it'll go in a week, I'll give it a week, this will not be around in a week, you know this is stupid, of course it's a load of old nonsense, Edward you worked that out years ago, what the hell you doing with this in your head".

Initially, Edward was unable to accept the notion of a God. It was interesting to hear Edward express his conversion experience in this way. It was perhaps indicative of him attempting to demonstrate how the conversion was truly supernatural; something that was out of his control. In a sense, because it defied his logic, but was such a real experience, it had to be true. Edward presented himself as someone who was logical, a computer programmer and very skilled at analysing and working out difficult problems: “analytically can be quite good work out problems can write programmes and so on”.

Yet, Edward’s conversion was a process of acceptance rather than challenge. Edward’s conversion experience was more of a process of osmosis, rather than him attempting to wrestle with the conflicts of logic. Edward called this “sinking through”. He recalled allowing the information and ideas of God to seep into him and cut through the chaos. He continued to experience this through meditation:

“Through this meditation the quietness and prayer, something sink through the mess (right), expecting there to be just more mess, expecting nothing magical to happen whatsoever, perhaps to end up in some horrible cess pit somewhere (mm), that’s what I expect, but let go, let it out (mm), an then I saw the moon”

Even as Edward went through the process of letting go and accepting his conversion; he expected nothing but more “mess” to remain. For Edward “mess” represents his poor mental health, yet, he experienced a state of calmness. Through a process of acceptance rather than questioning, everything appeared to make sense to Edward: “all the bits that have been all horrible confusion kind of fell off (right), like a feel or dissipated at the same time (mm) just gone just gone and you think wow wow that’s it”.

A meaningful conversion was shared by Norman too. Norman appeared to use his conversion experience as a testimony to others, that God is true, real and logical. It was

important to both participants that others perceived them as logical and scientific individuals; giving strength to their conversions.

Norman provided an account of his conversion. After the birth of his son, he was determined to find out the truth about God. He believed that because he went about this in a logical way, that he was thorough and rigorous in his investigation, that the findings he discovered were strengthened by that fact;

“I was no pushover for anything because I was so determined, I came to a point in my life where it either did or it didn’t exist...I was going to find it, I was going to get to the bottom of it, I was either going to be completely frustrated, or if God did have an organisation on earth, I was going to find it”.

Norman appeared to want to convey the idea that his ideas were not simply faddish or that he was drawn to religion because of some superficial ideal. Important to him was that I understood he was motivated to find the real truth about his God, because what he found was to him logical, and therefore the truth:

“You know and things that seem to throw other people to do Jehovah’s Witness, like blood and stuff like that you know, I thought no, I’m going to really look and find out why, you know if God’s got a prohibition on something, what does it really mean (right), you know there’s nothing illogical about God, he’s utterly logical”

Religious practice brings comfort and group affiliation.

The final aspect within this theme was the importance participants placed on engaging with religious or spiritual activities. They were important in two ways; first, they represented important rituals that were integral to being affiliated to a given religion e.g. taking communion, prayer, reading biblical texts. This meant that by engaging in activities participants were able to identify themselves and to others as being part of a particular

religion. Second, the process of the activity i.e. meditating, reading, praying, worshipping with others, brought comfort to participants.

Being able to worship together with others of a shared faith was important to both Ryan and Stuart; they likened this to being part of a family. Engaging in activities together brought a sense of closeness and bonded them to others:

“I like the ceremonial [*sic*] I love the community spirit is [*sic*] there (mmm), especially at the X, you know the brothers together, I miss being close to God (right), you know to go into a church and look at the tabernacle where the blessed sacraments are kept, and just have 15 minutes of your own time, I miss little things (mmm) like that” (Ryan).

“It was a focus point of the sacrifice of Jesus ...and it was something you came to do together to do as a congregation, as a family, something like Sunday to receive the bread and wine, the body and blood...there’s also the erm, what’s the word I’m looking for, the...the erm ritual of it, the robes, the vestments and that sort of thing ...” (Stuart).

While Ryan was unable to engage in fellowship he maintained certain rituals. He stated this was because doing them brought him comfort, because they were so engrained in his life. Ryan, claimed to have “kept the old monastic hours”, because it was such an integral part of him: “I’m thinking it’s inbred into me, you know, I could never deny the faith”. Likewise Stuart recalled and recited creeds and evening collects, by way of bringing comfort: “I can still say the evening collect we said and the grace that we said in my school days [laughs]... they become kind of a comforting thing that’s always there”

Meditation and prayer was used to communicate with God and help participants focus on specific ideas, but also bring additional psychological benefits. For Edward, prayer helped him gain better perspectives on situations (“it gives you a perspective”) in light of his poor mental health history, this was critical to assist him in maintaining good wellbeing and

general health. Likewise where he was unable to deal with a situation or problem, by discussing this with God, even giving up the problem to God, through prayer, he was able to receive guidance and focus. In essence prayer helps him problem solve:

“I’ve been thinking about I can’t get this out of my head, you know what is it what’s really going on, show me Lord, show me, shine a light, show what’s going on [Edward claps his hands with each word]”.

For Ryan, meditation and prayer served to help him relax: “I’ll just chill (right) and it puts me not always but most of the time into the right frame of mind”.

Finally, by adopting religious or spiritual values, participants appeared to be motivated to present to others with transparency. There was a sense that by being open and disclosing offending histories to others, participants felt a sense of freedom and liberty. Notably, both Ryan and Edward experienced a significant sense of wellbeing and satisfaction in their life as a result of being able to fully disclose secrets they had maintained for many years. For Ryan disclosing both his sexual offending and his homosexuality was liberating. Whereas for Edward being able to disclose his sexual offending and to some extent the difficulties he experienced with his mental health, helped him move forward with his life. Both Norman and Stuart (although not to the same degree as Ryan and Edward) appeared to experience positive outcomes from being open with others during their time on accredited offending behaviour programmes; as well as when disclosing their offending to new faith communities.

Even though Ryan had significant physical challenges, taking medication as a result of his stroke and continuing to battle with alcoholism, he stated he was the happiest he had ever been. Ryan puts this down to the fact that he was no longer in denial to others or himself about his sexuality and his offending past:

“I found myself (ok) I’m happy with who I am (right ok), I know my limitations now see I was living in denial about being gay...I’d been deceiving people and myself for years (mmm) and I’m not prepared to do it anymore”.

The opportunity to disclose to others about his offending brought him relief, although he could not openly disclose to all, given the risk of harm to himself, once he got to know a friend he would disclose:

“...after I get to know them I will disclose, like S erm in X Town he was one of the first people I ever disclosed to (mmm), and he was fine, you know he said thank you (mmm), and that was a weight off my shoulders”

For Edward, disclosure offered him the opportunity to take responsibility for his offending. He felt very strongly about this and at the point he was arrested he made no effort to minimise or reduce culpability: “I pleaded guilty erm because I was”. He wanted to shoulder the full blame for his offending self: “I take all of the blame for my offending myself”. Indeed being able to take responsibility and disclose fully to the authorities meant he was able to move forward with his life. Edward provided an analogy to describe his experience; he used the analogy of ‘light’; another religious concept. Edward explained that moving through a process of disclosure and honesty can be a frightening one. He noted that light shines or highlights things that you might not want to consider about yourself. This can be upsetting. However by eventually beginning to tell the truth, he felt, was like light flooding everywhere, everything can be seen and so there can be no more lies (i.e. the darkness has gone):

“Shining the light, it is a light in the darkness, (right) shines the light in the darkness and some lights that are shone in the darkness you don’t like what’s in the corner...so the light comes on there’s nowhere anymore that isn’t light”.

It is interesting that this new light also enabled Edward to see others differently too:

“Faith does, it gives you a new light to look with as well...the old view was light comes out of your eyes then you see by the light it is a bit like that that...I don't look at people being miserable to each other I see them happy and positive and brave and courageous (right), you see literally do see the good in people (mm) even your enemies”.

The light served as a tool for him to see others in a more positive way. He no longer viewed others negatively but saw the good in other people, even people he did not like. It is perhaps unsurprising that Edward testifies to others about his faith by using the analogy of light, again the idea of light, is central to many stories and texts used to convey the Christian message:

“Don't light a lamp and put it under a bushel... equally you don't light the lamp so it can be seen you don't light it for the particular reason look at me aren't I great (no) that's the humility coming in”.

Discussion

In this study, I explored the religious and spiritual experiences of four men convicted of sexual offending, by using IPA. At the point of interview, participants were living in the community, as opposed to being incarcerated for their offences. I aimed to explore the meaning participants made of religion and spirituality while they attempted to reintegrate back into the community and desist from crime. This current discussion, therefore, centres on these findings and in particular, three main aspects which emerged from participants' experiences, including: transformed identities; the importance of social relationships and connectedness to others; and the opportunity to signal change through seeking forgiveness.

What appeared of great importance, to this group of participants, was their desire to demonstrate and express their changed, new, and non-offending, way of life. The changes, they reported, were in the main, a result of their involvement with religious or spiritual

activities and communities. Participants used religious affiliation to express their reformed selves, from 'sexual offender' to 'non-sexual offender'. The relevance of this identity transformation, in terms of the desistance process, is best represented by the findings of the Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna, 2001).

Maruna (2001) collected the life stories of 50 people convicted of a number different crimes, including: selling drugs, stealing cars and burglary. Following his analysis, Maruna was able to make a distinction between the self-narratives of those persisting with offending, and those desisting from crime. He found the narrative identities of those persisting to offend to contain 'condemnation scripts'; these were narratives in which individuals presented themselves as being helpless to external forces, inevitable recidivists and victims of circumstance. Whereas, the narratives of those desisting from crime contained 'redemption scripts'; these narratives were full of hope and purpose. Desisters portrayed the 'real me' and core self, as good and honest, whereas, their offending selves or their 'old me' was a distinct and separate identity, a temporary result of environmental factors. Desisters were able to make sense of their offending selves in ways that enabled them to present their future selves with optimism. Essentially, they were able to rationalise how and why they offended, and in most cases believed they were a better person as a result of going through the process.

In this present study, however, I was unable to find such clarity with participants' narratives. I was unable, with any confidence at least, to distinguish those desisting or persisting from sexual offending. On the one hand, participants appeared to reflect a desisting narrative, by presenting religious identities in a clear and well-defined way. Their religious or spiritual self was presented as, their 'core self', a person who deep down was good and honest. Yet, on the other hand, offending narratives also permeated participants' sense of self. This was most notable in participants; Norman and Ryan. Aspects of their offending selves governed self-narratives and at times conflicted with their religious identities. They spoke

about their offending identities in past, present and future tenses. They also experienced feeling out of control and fearful of the presence of internal and external factors, which they believed, had led them to sexually offend, in the first place. In keeping with what now appears to be condemnation scripts, both participants deemed themselves as victims of circumstances as well as victims of the system. So while they both articulated a commitment not to offend in the future, they also expressed concerns regarding the persistence of high risk conditions such as paedophilia and alcoholism.

In saying this, participants were able to make some sense of their offending histories and sexual deviancies by explaining them through the lens of their faith. Their religious narrative was presented in two interesting ways. First, they made use of religious concepts such as 'light and dark', 'good and evil', ideas frequently referred to in Christian teachings. Participants were able to use these concepts to articulate personal enlightenment or the change from an old self, to a newly reformed self. Second, they were able to convey their changed selves by demonstrating how they had been forgiven. Again, as forgiveness is a concept central to the Christian faith, participants were able to present their changed selves as being facilitated by God.

While I felt at times, it was disconcerting for participants to present conflicting narratives regarding their motivation not to offend versus a persistent sexual attraction to children; self-narratives and life stories are by their very nature, dynamic. They change over time, in response to events and situations (Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 2001). Indeed, given that self-narratives are used to make sense of who we are and where we have come from, perhaps it is only to be expected, as with the participants in this study, that shifting narratives might at times collide. Certainly, narratives are a form of story-telling; they help people present their own interpretation of the journey they have travelled. If people struggle or are unable to make sense of their circumstances, it is plausible for narratives on occasion to be

presented with some sense of incongruence. Indeed, it is possible that at the point of interview, some members of this group were yet to develop full non-offending self-narratives, and where perhaps at an earlier stage of their personal transformation.

It is however, also feasible that participants were not desisting at all, but were somewhere between persistence and desistance (or at least intending to persist). Making the transition from ‘offender’ to ‘non-offender’, necessitates a process which is both personal and internal, and is therefore, difficult to observe and measure (Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004). Exploration of the process of intermittency, was out of scope for this current Chapter, even though this is an important and under-researched phenomenon, needing further examination (Piquero, 2004). It is possible, that participants presenting dual and often conflicting narratives might have been mid-way through their journey of personal transformation, and wrangling with making sense of who they are.

The second area of interest which emerged from this study was the value participants placed on the relational aspects of engaging with a religious community. Prior to engaging with their religious communities, participants were socially and emotionally isolated. Not only rejected by family and friends, due to their offending, but, as a result of imprisonment were removed from any remaining, meaningful social bonds. It was only through their affiliation with their religious communities that participants were exposed to any relationships which granted support and comfort. Although accessing religious communities was at times problematic (some participants experienced rejection and hostility from some church communities), they were able to join new communities and develop important bonds. In terms of the desistance process, this was is an interesting finding, because essential to helping people move to a more desistance motivated stance, the establishment and maintenance of positive social bonds are required (Weaver & McNeill, 2015). Weaver and

McNeill, pertain that, without such attachment, to and with, formal and informal social networks, a return to prior offending behaviour is probable.

The role of criminal justice institutions and the relationships developed between professionals and their clients, are vitally important (McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, & Maruna, 2012). However, desistance occurs away from the criminal justice system (Farrall, 1995). For those returning to the community, we must therefore, look to non-criminal justice communities to provide opportunity to develop people's social capital (Owers, 2011; Weaver & McNeill, 2015). Social capital exists within the structures of relationships and is best defined as a resource developed between relationships with people (Coleman, 1988). Social capital is acquired through formal and informal social networks, and developed through reciprocity and trust (Putnam, 2001). Increasing a person's social capital is reported to bring many benefits, including: improved information sharing and access to employment opportunities (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006); improved wellbeing and hope (Cattell, 2001) and an increased sense of unity and citizenship (Adler & Kwon, 2002). For those attempting to reintegrate and desist from crime, family relations and networks are an invaluable source of social capital (Mills & Codd, 2008). However, as highlighted by the experiences of participants in this study, people convicted of sexual offending tend to lose all support including that of their family. Here I found, it was the religious and spiritual communities who were the remaining and sole providers of any social support to participants.

A final and important aspect which emerged from this study was the opportunity for participants to signal their desistance, through affiliation with a religious community. Participants had the opportunity to experience redemption, be forgiven and be welcomed back into a community. Thus signalling their changed selves, to the real world, rather than within the confines of a criminal justice institution (Maruna, 2012, p. 76). Such opportunities to signal change are rare for those re-entering the community, particularly following a prison

sentence for sexual abuse. Instead, it is often more commonplace for people to be stigmatised by having to face formal disintegrative shaming sanctions (Robbers, 2009). Such sanctions signal, redirect and re-label 'criminal' identities; thus, preventing people from ever being fully reintegrating back into society (Maruna, 2011).

It is of interest that communities who react to crime and deviance through stigmatisation and shame tend to devalue the person; this in turn threatens their identity and forces them to seek out others to neutralise harmful labels (Braithwaite, 1989). At worst this approach is likely to fuel further criminal behaviours. Communities who utilise reintegrative shaming, promote respectful labels, and recognise the person, fundamentally, as a good person who has done a bad thing tend to engage in justice activities, which, focus on restoration and reparation. Braithwaite (2000) provides a useful example of one such reintegrative community; the Pashtuns. This Afghan ethnic subgroup, use civilian, rather than state driven ceremonies, called *Nanante*, to facilitate a process of reparation between the perpetrator, the victim and the community. Ceremonies are inclusive, with all working together to repair the harm to the victim and restore the perpetrator back into the community. This example of restorative justice, demonstrates that a reintegrative shaming approaches must include all stakeholders affected by the crime and aim to heal and repair the damage caused by the crime (Strang & Braithwaite, 2001). Participants in this study had experienced stigmatisation, from their own families and their returning communities. However, through their engagement with religious communities and the process of forgiveness, they were able to engage in a process of reintegrative shaming.

Rituals that support reintegration should help to de-label and reinstate a person's identity to a time prior to their transgression (Maruna, 2001). The forgiveness process appears to support the principles needed for a restorative and reintegrative shaming process and culture. While, there is a great deal of literature detailing and evidencing both the

processes, and health and well-being benefits of, forgiving others (for a useful reviews of the literature see Exline, Worthington, Hill and McCullough, 2003 and McCullough and Witvliet, 2002), much less is known of the components required and the experiences of those seeking, receiving and feeling forgiven (Ashby, 2003; Krause & Ellison, 2003).

Ashby (2003) suggests that the four stage process of those seeking forgiveness is similar to that of those looking to forgive others. The first stage requires the seeker to acknowledge that their actions caused harm to another person(s); they must therefore, take and accept full responsibility for their behaviour meaning they should no longer blame the victim or minimise their role in the offence. The second stage requires the seeker of forgiveness to make the decision to seek forgiveness; here they commit to the restorative nature of reparation. Thirdly, they make an apology to the injured person; this must take full responsibility for their actions. Finally, regardless of the form or content of the forgiveness, the seeker must receive and accept the forgiveness given. Even in cases where forgiveness cannot be directly sought or given (as with the participants in this study, who for legal and public protection reasons were unable to make contact with their victim(s)), then the process of forgiveness can occur internally. Following the third stage, the seeker should turn inward or to a higher being to request forgiveness.

Participants in this study navigated their way through this process, some with more success than others. For example, while, Stuart struggled to accept God's forgiveness, Edward recognised he was unable to attain the forgiveness of his victims and so sought forgiveness from God instead. Both having completed all steps in the process, felt an immense sense of peace, restoration and comfort. It was of critical importance that this process facilitated the opportunity to signal to others in their community that they had been forgiven. Indeed, receiving verbal confirmation of this acceptance "we don't mind what

you've done or who you are, you are part of Christ's family and Christ forgives" (Stuart); signalled full reintegration and equality as a citizen once again.

Conclusion

In summary, four participants convicted of sexual offending articulated their experiences of engaging with religious and spiritual communities while attempting to rehabilitate back into the community. Through the analysis of their narratives, I found at least three factors required to foster and promote the desistance process were accessible through engagement with religious and spiritual communities. Although, it is unclear if all four were maintaining a desistance process they all articulated benefits from engagement with religious and spirituality communities. First, through religious conversion, practice and affiliation with a religious group, participants were able to transform their identities; they were able to develop new narratives which empowered them to present as changed and reformed. Second, all participants in the study were socially isolated and outcast from friends and family; they had limited social resources and access to pro-social networks was negligible. Through engagement with a church, they became more active in the community and developed connections with others, this resource meant they were able to benefit from emotional and practical support. The third factor provided a restorative platform for participants. The Christian ideology (dominant to participants in this study) required them to take responsibility for their offences and begin to take steps to repair the damage they had caused to others. This process was enabled through the process of seeking forgiveness. Although they could not do this directly with victims, they could seek forgiveness from their God, their congregation and themselves. This in turn allowed participants to express remorse, empathy and signal to others a desire for repentance.

PART III
QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Chapter 5

The Relationship between Sexual Offenders' Risk and Official Risk Management

Processes

Chapter Overview

In light of the positive findings, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, I was particularly interested to examine the degree to which practitioners included religious or spiritual activities as a mechanism of support during the risk management process. This Chapter therefore, outlines a study in which I analysed 217 risk management plans with the aim to understand how risk was assessed and managed. I expected to find risk management plans to incorporate a combination of control and supportive mechanisms to manage risk. However, I found significant inconsistencies, including: limited use of specialist sexual offending risk management tools and an underutilisation of communities and faith groups to assist in the reintegration of clients through the risk management process.

Introduction

Effective risk assessment and management of people convicted of sexual offending, is an essential role for correctional practitioners. In recent years the risk assessment and management field has seen the development of several systematic and comprehensive case management tools (for an excellent review of the chronological development of these tools, see Bonta and Andrews (2007)). These instruments help practitioners, not only assess clients risk and need, but also assist them in designing meaningful, relevant, dynamic and robust, supervision and management strategies (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). In light of this well-established body of research (Craig, Beech, & Harkins, 2009), correctional practitioners should, be able to (a) identify the factors linked to a person's likelihood of future offending and desistance from crime, and, (b) plan, measure and respond to, changing risk, need, strengths and protective factors. How effective, practitioners are at interpreting and implementing, results of these tools in a 'real world' context is however, somewhat unclear (Bonta & Andrews, 2007), and to some extent ignored (Gendreau, Goggin, & Smith, 1999).

When assessing adult offenders, in England and Wales, a structured risk and need assessment and management tool, called, the Offender Assessment System (OASys) is used (Howard & Dixon, 2013). For those convicted of a sexual offence, probation and prison officers, use a combination of OASys and a specialist sexual and violence risk classification tool, called the Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000) (Thornton, 2007). A combination of tools is used because when used in isolation, OASys does not operate effectively as a predictor for sexual recidivism (Howard, Barnett, & Mann, 2014).

OASys

OASys combines static risk assessment with structured professional judgment, and is divided into four main domains: (1) an analysis of offending related factors; (2) a risk of serious harm analysis; (3) a summary sheet; (4) a sentence plan (*Offender assessment system OASys user*

manual (Revised July 2006), 2006). The first section of an OASys assessment, considers the risk of reconviction, through an assessment of ten factors, empirically linked to offending. These include: accommodation, employment training and education, financial management and income, relationships, lifestyle and associates, alcohol misuse, drug misuse, emotional well-being, thinking and behaviour, and attitudes. The second part of OASys includes the assessment of the client's risk of harm, and the practitioners proposed strategy to manage this risk, known as a *risk management plan* (RMP). The third element provides an automatically calculated score, summarising the prediction of future nonviolent offending. The final section, the sentence plan, addresses any responsibility needs or interventions required throughout the clients' sentence.

An OASys assessment is completed on all adult offenders in England and Wales, during different points in their sentence. An assessment is completed pre-sentence, to help magistrates and judges determine appropriate sentencing, prior to parole hearings, after significant interventions are completed, where significant change occurs in the clients life and post sentence (Howard & Dixon, 2012). Continuous assessment assists practitioners to respond to change and to determine risk of harm, an individual might present, at any given time. Risk of harm, is determined by the potential imminence of an event, as well as, how serious the harm might be should a re-offence occur (*Home Office, 2002. OASys Manual V.2*). All clients who are assessed as medium risk of harm, or above, require a RMP (*Public protection framework, risk of harm and MAPPA thresholds PC 10/2005*, 2005). A RMP, (also known as rehabilitation, intervention, supervision, case management or re-entry plans), should identify the risk(s) a client presents or might present, given a specific set of circumstances. Practitioners are required to clearly document: "how the risk(s) will be managed" (*OASys Manual v.2*, 2002) in the RMP. This present study looks to examine the RMP process of offender management.

The empirical examination of RMPs is to date, limited. However, findings from the few studies available, show that practitioners tend to either exclude identified risks altogether or fail to address them fully in subsequent plans (Bonta & Wormith, 2007). Bosker, Witteman and Hermanns (2013), found in their examination of 300 general offender Dutch probation cases that where criminogenic needs were first identified, a goal to deal with them was not consistently found in subsequent intervention plans. They also found probation officers failed to use evidence based approaches when developing plans. In another study examining the Client Management Classification system (CMC), Harris, Gingerich, and Whittaker (2004), found some probation officers failed to follow guidance when carrying out assessments and recidivism rates were lower in cases where assessors were supervised by staff trained to use CMC. In another study of 62 probation officer case files ($n=77$), the Wisconsin Risk and Need instrument, and taped interviews with clients, Bonta, Rugge, Sedo, and Coles (2004), found probation officers did not include identified risks in subsequent case management plans, nor did they address identified criminogenic needs adequately during supervision. The quality of OASys RMPs, to my knowledge, has yet to be empirically tested. It is therefore, unclear, if the findings from studies of other risk management tools would be replicated with cases in OASys.

Although, the standards to which RMPs are completed, are not overly prescriptive, probation and prison guidance, sets out best practice and ways to improve the quality of the plans for those who present a risk of harm (*Public Protection Framework, Risk of Harm and MAPPA Thresholds PC 10/2005, 2005*). Practitioners are encouraged to use the following headings to help them incorporate all of the relevant factors needed for a robust RMP. The headings include:

- Other agencies involved;
- Existing support/controls;

- Added measures for specific risks;
- Who will undertake the actions and when;
- Additional conditions/requirements to manage the specific risks; and
- Level of contact.

The assessment and management of clients convicted of sexual offending are subject to internal and external scrutiny, as well as multi-agency management arrangements. In addition, cases are often subjected to intensive community orders or licence conditions, and so are only allocated to experienced and qualified probation and prison officers. I expected therefore, that cases where the client is convicted of a sexual offence, RMPs would be of the highest quality, consisting of a robust risk assessment, based on documented evidenced identified risks. To test this, I carried out an analysis of the RMP's, of clients who were convicted of sexual offending, within the England and Wales. First, I looked at the initial section of OASys. This part of the assessment directs assessors to consider which of the ten criminogenic factors are related to their clients offending history. Considering a range of risk factors is critical when assessing the likelihood of sexual reoffending, because not one risk factor, in isolation, has been adequately identified to determine sexual recidivism (Cortoni, 2009). Probation and prison officers using OASys, are guided through questions which relate to general risk factors. Both acute and stable dynamic risk factors are easily brought to the attention of assessors, through a series of prompt questions. Following the identification of risk(s), practitioners are required to translate these risks into the next stage in the assessment and formulate the RMP. I therefore, hypothesised that risk factors, as identified in the first part of OASys, will be referenced, detailed and addressed in the subsequent risk management plan.

I also wanted to understand the extent to which sexual risk factors were identified and addressed. Although, there are a number of general risk factors that feature in the OASys assessment, which can be linked to sexual recidivism, such as: pro-criminal association, poor social networks (Cortoni, 2009), unstable lifestyle, rule violation, poor employment history and reckless behaviour (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004), practitioners are not directed to the full range of sexual risk factors, known to be associated with sexual recidivism, such as sexual arousal to children or sexual preoccupation (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998). Instead, to support assessment and enhance their OASys assessment, practitioners use tools such as the RM2000, and for clients required to engage in an accredited offender behaviour programme, the Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN) (Webster et al., 2006). Indeed, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) provide extensive joint prison and probation training events, for staff working with this client group and using specialist tools. Only those practitioners who are appropriately trained, supervised and supported, are allocated to tasks involving the risk assessment and case management of those convicted of sexual offending (Position Statement for the Assessment, Management and Treatment of Sex Offenders, 2010). My second hypothesis was therefore, that practitioners would identify, detail and address specific sexual risk factors in subsequent RMPs.

I wanted to understand the degree to which practitioners were able to bring together their own findings from different assessment tools and interpret them into a meaningful risk management strategy. The UK government's 'Position Statement for the Assessment, Management and Treatment of Sex Offenders' (2010), states, that: "all male sex offenders supervised by NOMS will be assessed using RM2000 at the pre-sentence stage, and following any events that might alter the RM2000 score. This assessment will inform sentencing recommendations, sentence planning, parole recommendations and risk management" (p.5). I therefore, also hypothesised that all RMPs completed for those

convicted of sexual offending, would contain a reference to the clients RM2000 classification and some meaningful interpretation of this assessment.

In addition to the clear identification of both general and sexual risk factors and the use of specialist risk assessment tools; good quality RMPs should include a combination of control and support strategies to manage clients' risks and needs. Indeed, the OASys manual is explicit with this requirement, prompting practitioners to include positive factors or interventions that have reduced previous risk such as: community groups to support community integration and faith groups (OASys Manual v.2, 2002, pp.152-153). It is imperative to consider, for example, a client's support network, as a protective factor, because, this helps practitioners, clients and the community, take a 'glass half full' perspective (Smith, 2006). This also incorporates external agencies and communities into a holistic risk management approach to working with clients. Thus sharing the responsibility for rehabilitation, not only meeting the needs of local communities, in relation to public protection, but also the needs of the client (Lowenkamp, Lovins, & Latessa, 2009). In this present study I therefore, also looked to examine the extent to which support derived from community groups, non-statutory or faith groups also featured in the management of those convicted of sexual offending. I hypothesised that along with control strategies, RMPs would include positive support and strength based strategies, practitioners would document individual people, or, groups known to the client in the community such as family, community or faith based groups.

This study aimed to understand how well the risk of sexual recidivism is assessed, documented, and managed by practitioners in their RMPs. I specifically aimed to: understand if identified risk factors were transposed into RMPs, consider the degree to which the RM2000 tool was used to assist practitioners articulate a predicted classification of reconviction, and understand the level to which non-criminal justice institutions (such as

interventions, community groups or faith groups) were used to support those convicted of sexual offending reintegrate back into their community.

Method

Sample Selection

The sample of 217 RMPs was drawn from one probation trust area. At the time of data collection, NOMS was divided into 42 probation areas, spread across England and Wales. Each area was coterminous with police force boundaries, and was served by a total of 35 probation trusts. Each trust was funded by NOMS to deliver a range of services including: offender management, assessment and advice to courts, supervision of community orders and licenses, working with victims and the delivery of interventions (The Role of the Probation Service, 2011).

The sample size for this study was determined by the number of available initial OASys assessments of those convicted of a sexual offence. Due to the restrictions of local software, only cases where a completed initial OASys assessment within the previous three years was available. This initial search generated 267 cases. In an effort to increase the sample size, the database storing accredited programme case records was also accessed. This allowed the search to extend beyond the three year analysis restricted by local OASys software. A manual search of all those clients referred to a sexual offender treatment programme prior to the three year cut off point, were identified and retrieved from OASys. This second search generated a further 212 cases. Although, a total of 479 cases were identified, a large volume of cases were either duplicate records, or due to the limitations of local OASys software, appeared to be incomplete records. Consequently, 217 OASys records were deemed complete and fully accessible. Two hundred and seventeen RMPs were extracted manually and anonymised in preparation for coding.

Participants

All clients sampled were adults convicted of at least one sexual offence. In this sample 72% were recorded as being White, 22% of cases ethnicity were unrecorded, one percent Black, one percent Asian, one percent Indian, one percent Mixed race and three percent White Other background. The average age at the point of sentence was 44 years ($SD = 14.94$). The majority of the sample was male with only one female participant.

The terminology and language used to describe each offence type has been directly copied from OASys into Table 8. The recorded index offence for this sample includes: 27% ($n=59$) convicted of internet offences, 18% ($n=38$) sexual activity with a child, 16% ($n=35$) rape and attempted rape, 11% ($n=24$) sexual assault and 9% ($n=19$) exposure. Seventeen percent ($n=36$) make up the remaining smaller numbers of contact and non-contact offences which include: indecent assault, abuse of trust, public indecency, miscellaneous sexual offences, breach of order, intent to commit a sexual assault, grooming, incest, affray and voyeurism. Three percent ($n=6$) of cases had no recorded offence type, however, the index offence was corroborated by cross referencing with other sources such as the risk management plan or alternative case management systems.

Table 8. Sample Demographics

Variable	Whole Sample	
	n	%
Age		
20-24yrs	24	11.06
25-34yrs	47	21.66
35-44yrs	37	17.05
45-54yrs	49	22.58
55-64yrs	39	17.97
65yrs+	21	9.68
Ethnicity		
White	156	71.9
Asian of Asia British – Indian	1	.5
Mixed – White and Asian	3	1.4
Black or Black British	2	.9
Not recorded	48	22.2
White – Any other white background	6	2.8
Asian or Asian British – Any other Asian background	1	.5
Index Offense Type		
Unrecorded	6	2.8
Exposure	19	8.8
Rape	34	15.7
Indecent image of children	59	27.2
Gross/indecent assault	7	3.2
Sexual activity with a child	38	17.5
Sexual assault	24	11.1
Abuse of trust	2	.9
Attempted rape	1	.5
Public indecency	2	.9
Misc sexual offenses	8	3.7
Breach of SOPO/Non-molestation order	7	3.2
Intent to commit sexual assault	1	.5
Grooming	4	1.8
Incest	1	.5
Voyeurism	3	1.4
Affray	1	.5

Data were less complete for victim demographics, see Table 9. However, 45% ($n=97$) of victims were children aged between 0-15 years and 20% ($n=44$) aged 16 years and over. Ten percent ($n=23$), of the victims were male, and 50% ($n=116$) female. In terms of the relationship between the participant and the victim, the sample included 25% ($n=54$) stranger

assaults, 40% ($n=86$) knew or were related to their perpetrator and 36% ($n=77$) of the relationship status were unrecorded.

Table 9. Victim Demographics

Variable	Whole Sample	
	n	%
Gender		
Male	23	9.9
Female	116	49.8
Not recorded	94	40.3
Age category		
Not recorded	76	35.0
<5 years	8	3.7
5 to 11 years	37	17.1
12 to 15 years	52	24.0
16 to 64 years	42	19.4
65+ years	2	.9
Victim relationship		
Friend	6	2.8
Other acquaintance	22	10.1
Other family member	27	12.4
Sibling	2	.9
Son/Daughter adult	1	.5
Son/Daughter child	17	7.8
Spouse/Partner live in	4	1.8
Spouse/Partner live out	7	3.2
Stranger	54	25.0
Not recorded	77	35.5

Data Coding and Analysis

RM2000

RM2000 is a risk classification tool used for adult males convicted of at least one sexual offence; it has separate indicators for both sexual and overall violent recidivism (Thornton, 2007). RM2000 was developed for use in the United Kingdom and is used by the police, prison and probation services in England and Wales (Craig et al., 2009). A recent RM2000 study of 4,946 cases, with a follow up period of two and four years, following release from prison or at the start of a community sentence (Barnett, Wakeling, & Howard, 2010). They found those in the higher risk categories offended at a faster rate than those in the lower categories They found: one percent ($n=5$) of those categorised as low risk; two percent ($n=38$) of the medium risk category; three percent ($n=42$) of the high risk group; and seven percent ($n=25$) of the very high risk group, were reconvicted for a further sexual offence within two years. As Barnett et al. (2010) note, their findings were lower than previous studies had found, but were in keeping with the findings of Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2009) meta-analysis. In addition, they also highlight how reconviction data is not believed to be a true representation of actual offending and so findings are likely to be an underestimation of actual offending behaviour.

In order to gain as full a picture as possible of the sample, risk data was collected using both the OASys risk of harm assessment, and the risk of reconviction (sexual) classification, using the RM2000(s) tool. OASys risk of harm data was extracted using local software. However, RM2000 categorisation was retrieved manually, as at the time of data extraction; RM2000 data was not routinely included in the OASys assessment.

RM2000 scoring is undertaken in two stages and against a number of variables. Stage one includes the rating of three items: age, number of sexual sentencing appearances, and

number of criminal sentencing appearances. Points are awarded to these items and the offender is categorised into one of four risk categories i.e. low, medium, high or very high. Stage two of the process requires the scoring of four aggravating factors including: sexual convictions against a male, a stranger, the offenders' marital status and convictions for non-contact sexual offences. Where any two of these aggravating factors are present, the risk categorisation is raised one level, if all four are present the risk categorisation is elevated by two levels (Thornton et al., 2003).

I am trained to use RM2000, and so used information gathered from OASys to retrospectively categorise each case. Unfortunately a second rater was unavailable for inter-rater reliability purposes. The only item where limited information was available for this study was the item referring to marital status. Where the marital status or relationship history of the client was unclear, this item was not scored. In cases where this item was not scored, the missing data did not affect the final categorisation of any case. Unlike with other studies involving this procedure (Barnett et al., 2010; Langton, Barbaree, Hansen, Harkins, & Peacock, 2007), I did not need to inflate the category in order to compensate for any underscoring as a result of missing data. In this present study, when considering RM2000 classification, the largest group fell in the low risk of reconviction classification 42.4% ($n=92$). Assessment of risk of harm, through OASys, demonstrated less than one percent ($n=2$) of the whole sample were assessed as posing a low risk of harm, and 53.9% ($n=117$) assessed as medium risk of harm. Each category is detailed in Table 10.

Table 10. Risk of Harm and Risk of Reconviction

Risk Tool	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Not Recorded
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
OASys Risk of Harm	0.9 (2)	53.9 (117)	41.5 (90)	1.4 (3)	2.3 (5)
Risk Matrix 2000(s)	42.4 (92)	41.0 (89)	13.8 (30)	2.8 (6)	NA

Risk Management Plan Coding Framework

To enable the analysis of RMP's, I developed a coding framework (Appendix 7); this was based on guidance set out in the OASys User Manual and the Public Protection Framework, Risk of Harm and MAPPA Thresholds PC 10/2005. A total of eight items were included in the framework. Six of the eight items required a numerical score. For five items a score of zero, one or two was possible. Where a score of zero was given, this meant that the item was not present in the RMP. A score of one, meant that the item was present but little detail was included. A score of two, meant that the item was included and that the practitioner had provided good detail and description of the item. For one of the six items a score of zero, one, two or three was possible. A score of zero meant that zero percent of the risk factors identified in the first part of OASys featured in the subsequent RMP. A score of one, meant that up to 50% of the risk factors featured in the subsequent plan. A score of two meant that between 51% and 99% of the risk factors featured in the subsequent plan and a score of three meant one hundred percent of the risks identified also featured in the plan. The final two items required only a yes or no answer. In total, a score of 13 was possible.

To ensure rater reliability, a second rater was recruited. The second rater, [REDACTED], was independent from this research project. She was however, a research officer responsible for the regular auditing of offender case management tools such as OASys. During the rating process both raters were blind to any identifiable

factors in the RMP including names, locations and dates, at the time of scoring. However several weeks prior to scoring, I had anonymised all RMPs and so had had initial sight of identifiable detail.

To safeguard against erroneous items or an undefined scoring criteria, a short pilot test of the framework was carried out. Here I first coded 20 cases, while the second rater independently coded the same 20 cases. On completion, we met, discussed and recorded our scores. Following this initial discussion, some adjustment to the examples provided for each of the items in the coding framework was needed at this stage. This test process was repeated a second time with a further new 20 cases. We again met, discussed and recorded our scores. At this second stage in the testing process, we were satisfied that the scoring criteria were clear. We both continued to code the whole sample independently. Because of the volume of RMP's and to prevent drift, we met again on three separate occasions to compare our scores. Although the scoring criteria were overall found to be consistent between both raters; there were occasions when a RMP featured detail that had not been accounted for in the framework. This was to be expected given that RMPs are subjective and unique, making predictability of RMP content difficult to fully estimate. On the occasions where a discrepancy of two or more points occurred, a discussion took place to investigate and reach an agreement regarding the score. An exact match of the total scores for each plan was not expected, as some subjectivity was accepted. However, a minimum tolerance of, plus or minus, one point was required to satisfy raters that the framework provided enough consistency.

Results

This study aimed to explore four hypotheses:

- (1) Risk factors, as identified in the first part of OASys, will be referenced, detailed and addressed in subsequent RMPs.
- (2) All RMPs will contain a reference to the clients RM2000 classification and some meaningful interpretation of this assessment.
- (3) Practitioners will identify, detail, and address sexual risk factors in subsequent RMPs.
- (4) Along with control strategies, RMPs will include positive support and strength based strategies, practitioners will document individual people, or, groups known to the client in the community such as family, community or faith based groups.

Before the results of each hypothesis are presented, a brief summary of the quality of RMPs is provided (see Table 11). The quality of RMPs was rated between a score of zero and ten; with zero being the poorest quality and ten being of best. My analysis found that the average quality score for plans in this sample was four. I deemed only 30% ($n=56$) of the plans to be of good quality reaching a score of six or more, and within this subsection, only four percent ($n=8$) of plans reached a quality score of between eight and ten. Although a maximum of 13 could have been scored, no plan scored above ten. The majority of plans, 74% ($n=161$), scored between zero and five, with 24% ($n=53$) scoring between zero and two.

Table 11. Frequency of Quality Scores

Quality Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	9	4.1	4.1
1	15	6.9	11.1
2	29	13.4	24.4
3	31	14.3	38.7
4	38	17.5	56.2
5	39	18.0	74.2
6	29	13.4	87.6
7	19	8.8	96.3
8	4	1.8	98.2
9	3	1.4	99.5
10	1	.5	100.0
11	0	0	
12	0	0	
13	0	0	
Total	217	100.0	

All analysis was conducted using SPSS, version 21. I was only able to compare the presence of eight risk factors collected from the first section in OASys, as local software limited the collection of all ten risk factors. I believe a comprehensive picture was still achieved without the presence of the domains; financial management and emotional wellbeing. Table 12, presents the frequencies at which each of the eight risk factors were identified in the first section of OASys, and then, in the subsequent RMP. Analysis shows

that the risk factor ‘thinking and behaviour’ was a factor identified as most linked to harm, with 73% of clients ($n=159$) having this identified. However in subsequent RMPs, less than half 45% ($n=98$), identified ‘thinking and behaviour’ as a risk factor requiring management. The greatest difference between the two assessment points can be seen with the risk factor ‘lifestyle’. Initially practitioners identified ‘lifestyle’ as a risk linked to harm in 68% ($n=147$) of cases, yet ‘lifestyle’ featured in only 18% ($n=40$) of the subsequent risk management plans.

Table 12. Frequency of Risk Factors in First Part of OASys and in Subsequent Risk Management Plan

Risk Factor	Frequency of Factor Present in First Part of OASys ($n=217$)	Percent	Frequency of Factor Present in ‘Risk Management Plan’ ($n=217$)	Percent
Accommodation	80	36.9	19	8.8
Alcohol	45	20.7	33	15.2
Attitudes	118	54.4	56	25.8
Drugs	15	6.9	8	3.7
Employment, Training and Education (ETE)	82	37.8	22	10.1
Relationships	133	61.3	54	24.9
Lifestyle	147	67.7	40	18.4
Thinking and Behavior	159	73.3	98	45.2

As detailed in Table 13, in the first stage of the assessment process, five (2.3%) cases did not have any risks identified as being linked to harm. However in the subsequent RMP

phase, this failure increased to 32% ($n=69$). On average, practitioners identify four risk factors, at the first phase of the assessment process; however, this average decreases at the RMP stage, with practitioners, on average, highlighting only two risks. The results differ significantly between these two means as demonstrated by my t-test results. The first hypothesis considered, that all risks identified in the first part of OASys, would be referenced, detailed and addressed in the subsequent RMP. The hypothesis was not supported. I found that practitioners identified a greater number of risk factors in the first part of the OASys assessment ($m = 3.59, s = 1.75$) compared to the number of risk factors featured in the risk management plan ($m = 1.52, s = 1.41$), ($t = 18.69, df = 216, p \leq 0.05$).

Table 13. Total Number of Risk Factors Identified in the First Part of OASys Compared to Subsequent Risk Management Plan

Total Number of Risk Factors	Frequency of Total Number of Risk Factors in the First Part of OASys ($n=217$)	Percent	Frequency of Total Number of Risk Factors in Risk Management Plan ($n=217$)	Percent
0	5	2.3	69	31.8
1	27	12.4	46	21.2
2	26	12.0	53	24.4
3	47	21.7	27	12.4
4	46	21.2	14	6.5
5	32	14.7	7	3.2
6	25	11.5	1	0.5
7	7	3.2	-	-
8	2	.9	-	-

Risk Management Plans

Risk Matrix 2000 and Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN)

I expected, all RMPs to contain a reference to clients RM2000 classification along with some meaningful interpretation of this assessment. When coding the RMP, I gave a score of zero where there was no mention of RM2000; a score of one where a RM2000 categorisation was mentioned, and a score of two where there was some sense of interpretation. Analysis found that 92% ($n=200$) of plans did not feature any detail of the clients RM2000 classification. There was only one case where the RM2000 classification provided some interpretation, the remaining three percent ($n=7$) only listed the tool. The hypothesis was therefore, unsupported. To understand whether there was any relationship between the quality of risk management plans and the actual RM2000 categories, I carried out a bivariate correlation. I found no relationship between these two variables, $r(217) = .006, p < .001$.

Although I did not hypothesise whether any RMPs would include detail or make comment regarding clients with a completed SARN assessment, I did include this in the exploration of the plans. I found no plan to contain any reference to current or previous SARN assessments. This is perhaps unsurprising given that I analysed initial assessments only. It is unlikely that in addition to the completion of a full OASys assessment that a SARN would also be completed at this early stage. Likewise, only cases mandated to a Sexual Offending Treatment Programme, require the completion of a SARN assessment (Position Statement for the Assessment, Management and Treatment of Sex Offenders, 2010). That said it would not be unreasonable to expect those clients with a requirement to complete an accredited offending behaviour programme, for the assessor to at least note in the plan that a SARN assessment would be completed in the near future.

Sexual Risk Factors

The third hypothesis, expected practitioners to identify, detail and address sexual risk factors in RMPs. I gave a value of zero where no sexual risk factors were identified, a score of one where sexual factors were identified and a score of two where specific sexual risk factors were identified and detailed strategies were provided. Marginally, the majority of cases listed at least one sexual risk factor in the plan 49% ($n=106$) however, 48% ($n=104$) failed to list any sexual risk factors at all. Only three percent ($n=7$) of plans provided some detail and strategy linked to managing specific sexual risk factors. The hypothesis was therefore, unsupported.

Support Networks

The final hypothesis looked to test, if RMPs included positive support and strength based strategies, along with control strategies, to manage those convicted of sexual offences. To understand this, I first looked to see if support featured in the RMPs, or if control mechanisms were used more frequently. In 27% ($n=58$) of RMPs, control measures were the only measure used to manage identified risk. However, the majority of plans 73% ($n=159$) incorporated both support and control as a strategy to manage risk. I analysed this data further by categorising who practitioners identified as providing the support. Where support was only provided by criminal justice statutory agencies (such as the Police, Probation and Prison Service) I scored this with a one, where a range of non-criminal justice agencies were engaged in providing support (such as Educational Institutions, Health Authorities) I scored a two. A large percentage of plans, 71% ($n=153$), used only criminal justice statutory agencies to assist their clients rehabilitation. Only 3% ($n=6$) used a diverse range of agencies to provide support.

I also considered if practitioners included support from noncriminal justice agencies, groups or individuals. I found 60% ($n=129$) of the plans did list some support from a non-

statutory source, in the main this was from family and friends. A further 3% ($n=6$) provided good detail of how that support would manifest during the clients rehabilitation. Only one plan referenced support from a faith community. Thirty eight percent ($n=82$) of plans, failed to provide any support to the client from family, friends, community or faith groups. The hypothesis is therefore, unsupported.

High Risk of Reconviction

In light of these findings, I was interested to consider the nature of RMPs for those clients assessed as high risk of reconviction. In one study, after a five year period, 26% of those with a high risk classification were reconvicted along with 50% of those in the very high risk category (Thornton, 2007). The risk management of this group is therefore, likely to need far greater focus and require a significant allocation of resources, compared to those of a lower risk classification (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). I therefore, analysed the higher risk group to determine the quality of their RMPs.

Findings show inconsistencies in the way how assessors record and document strategies to manage those in this high and very high risk subgroup (Table 14). In 83% ($n=30$) of the high and very high sub-category, a RM2000 categorisation was not listed. In the 17% ($n=6$) which did list a RM2000 category, there was no interpretation of what the risk level meant for the management or rehabilitation of the client.

In terms of identifying sexual risk factors for this sub-group, 55% ($n=20$) did list a sexual risk factor, however, no detail of these factors was provided nor any clarity of how the risk would be managed. Of particular concern, for 44% ($n=16$) of the RMPs no sexual risk factor was identified at all.

When considering the item of 'support', the majority of cases, 58%, ($n=21$) recorded some form of support in their plan. However, very few provided detail of that support. In

36% ($n=13$) of plans only control tactics were listed as a strategy to manage the client. The final item worth noting was the lack of non-statutory support for this sub-group. Forty four percent ($n=16$) failed to list any non-statutory support, although, this was more notably void with the very high risk individuals.

Table 14. Analysis of High and Very High Risk Cases

Risk Management Plan Items	High RM2000 ($n=30$)		Very High RM2000 ($n=6$)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
No RM2000 Category Listed	25	83.3	5	83.3
RM2000 Category Listed	5	16.7	1	16.7
RM2000 Category Interpreted	-	-	-	-
No Sexual Risk Factors Listed	12	40	4	66.7
Sexual Risk Factors Listed	18	60	2	33.3
Sexual Risk Factors Detailed	-	-	-	-
No Support Measures listed only Control Strategies	12	40	1	16.7
Support Measure Listed	16	53.3	5	83.3
Range of Support Measures and Detail Provided	2	6.7	-	-
No Non-Statutory Support Measure Listed	11	36.7	5	83.3
Non-Statutory Support Measures Listed	18	60.0	1	16.7
Non-Statutory Support Measure Detailed	1	3.3	-	-

Discussion

In this study I looked to explore the RMP process for those convicted of sexual offending. I analysed 217 RMPs, taken from a case load of one probation trust within England and Wales. No other study has examined OASys RMPs in this way. Analysis found practitioners consistently underrepresenting the risks they identified in the first stage of their assessment, by failing to document and address each risk, in subsequent RMPs. In addition, and counter to expectations, sexual risk factors were also poorly addressed. Practitioners did not record in RMPs, the utilisation of specialist sexual offender risk of reconviction tools. I did find

assessors list some support mechanisms for their clients, however, the use of control mechanisms dominated plans. Where support was mentioned in plans, very little detail of how the support would be used was found. Finally, OASys guidance advise practitioners, where appropriate, to include communities such as faith groups to act as a mechanism of support. Given that 68% of the UK's prison population identify with a religious denomination (Baverman & Dar, 2013), I was surprised to find the use of a faith community group as a protective factor in only one case.

Ministry of Justice and NOMS policy and practice guidance, clearly stipulate that practitioners, managers and agencies involved in the assessment and management of those convicted of sexual offending, should ensure risk management plans are robust, detailed and based on evidence. To find such an inconsistent follow through from the identification of risk and need is concerning. However, these findings are consistent with other international studies such as: Bonta and Wormith (2007), Booker et al. (2013), Harris et al. (2004), and Bonta et al. (2004). I am unable to draw general conclusions to these findings, as further exploration from the perspectives of practitioners and managers is required; however, I am able to consider some potential explanations to my findings here.

Assessor bias is a particular issue with the risk assessment of clients convicted of sexual offending. Insufficient awareness of sexual risk factors, poor or lack of training, inadequate supervision, or poor policy and guidance, might offer some explanation for both the overestimations of risk and the inconsistent application of strategies to manage known risk factors (Bonta & Wormith, 2007). Indeed, a number of previous studies, show practitioners failing to use evidence based knowledge when developing intervention plans (Bosker et al., 2013); support sex offender policy without scientific justification (Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2010); demonstrate harsh and negative views of those convicted of sexual offences (Higgins & Ireland, 2009); and influence the outcome of parole eligibility depending

on the personal views of the assessor (Freeman, Palk, & Davey, 2010). These studies help show that where the personal views of practitioners and assessors are negative towards those convicted of sexual offending; outcomes tend to be adverse for the client. Although professional judgment enables the consideration of individual characteristics and subtle dynamics of a case, where decisions are made with bias and prejudice, as opposed to being based on evidence, they are likely to be inaccurate (Beech, Craig, & Browne, 2009).

Clinical override, involves practitioners overruling the results of static risk assessment tools based on professional judgment, by either inflating or deflating the static risk prediction. A number of studies show practitioners overwhelmingly escalate the prediction of risk for those convicted of sexual offences, to excessive levels (Ansbrosio, 2010; Wormith, Hogg, & Guzzo, 2012). Practitioners in this sample do not appear to have used the results from specialist risk assessment tools to guide their assessment and develop clients RMP. Instead they appear to have relied solely on unstructured professional judgment; which has been found to be a substandard practice (Craig & Beech, 2010). Given the dominance of control mechanisms found in these plans, it is possible that assessors overestimated their client's risk. Overestimations in risk can lead to the adoption of overbearing and onerous management strategies, as well as inappropriately targeted treatment interventions (Smid, Kamphuis, Wever, & Van Beek, 2013). This practice is detrimental to both the client and criminal justice agencies, as costly resources are deployed (Bonta, 2007). It is therefore in the interests of all parties that robust risk management processes' use both specialist actuarial tools and structured professional judgment, to provide comprehensive risk management plans (Craig et al., 2008).

Many assessors in this sample, provided limited detail in their plans of how they aimed to help develop or utilise clients support network(s). Indeed, beyond the use of criminal justice professionals, such as the *offender supervisor* or *programme facilitator*,

support was limited. This was notable in the higher risk subgroup. This is surprising given that prison and probation practice and policy advises practitioners to promote the development of pro-social networks through meaningful community integration as specified by the Good Lives Model (Ward & Stewart, 2003), desistance theories (Laws & Ward, 2011; Maruna, 2001), and risk need and responsivity principles (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011). One explanation to these findings might be due to the values practitioners place on the RMP process itself (Day & Ward, 2010).

The approach of criminal justice providers in England and Wales, over recent years, has moved towards one which favours a public protection model. Such a model tends to adopt punitive and controlling strategies to the sentencing and management of clients. This approach sees public protection as its highest priority and the treatment of clients as its lowest (Connelly & Williamson, 2000). Research highlights the difficulties experienced by professionals working in such context; requires them to balance professional responsibility, with their client and the public, along with their own personal values and beliefs, about what is right and just (Day & Casey, 2009). Where criminal justice practitioners' hold values which centre on helping and assisting client change, ethical tensions are experienced. This may be due to the opposing punishment context of the criminal justice system in which they operate. Whereas those who share a public protection value base, might experience difficulties when required to carry out tasks, such as, developing rehabilitation plans based on supportive community strategies. It is possible that practitioners in this sample held public protection values or those that are unsupportive of strengths based rehabilitation strategies. Holding public protection values might also explain the limited use of non-statutory community and faith based groups as support mechanisms. Strengths based strategies, in part; focus on developing individuals' sense of agency and integration within the community. Indeed, engagement with faith and community groups, serves wider goals by providing

alternative pro-social networks otherwise absent from offenders' lives (Giordano et al., 2008).

Poor quality RMP's serve to increase the risk of those convicted of sexual offending when helping them reintegrate back into their community (Willis & Johnston, 2012). RMPs are an essential tool in the assessment and management process and should be (a) based on a combination of evidence gathered through the use of specialist actuarial risk assessment tools and structured professional judgment and (b) used to inform the client, case manager and multiagency partners involved, of the strategies developed to manage risk and develop strengths. I speculated that given the high level of scrutiny, in which clients convicted of sexual offending face that the quality, reliability and accuracy of their RMPs, would be to a high standard. Findings however, did not demonstrate this. Instead I found: an inconsistent approach to the identification of sexual risk factors and strategies designed to tackle them; a limited use of specialist risk assessment tools; and a lack of diversity in the use of support networks, to help clients fully reintegrate back into their communities.

Conclusion

To my knowledge, this is the first study of its kind which examines the RMP's of those convicted of sexual offending, in England and Wales, therefore, bringing new knowledge to the field of risk management. I was surprised by the findings in this study. I had expected practitioners to have embraced strengths based approaches and include noncriminal justice agencies, as a part of clients' strategy to help with reintegration back into their communities. Of particular concern are perhaps the findings for the subgroup with a high risk of reconviction classification. This group are most at risk of repeat offending and so to find the quality of their RMPs to be substandard is unacceptable.

PART IV
DISCUSSION

Chapter 6

Discussion

Thesis Aims

This thesis aims to explore the significance of religious and spiritual affiliation as a means of supporting the desistance and reintegration process of those convicted of sexual offending.

To explore this aim, my research questions were designed to generate a better understanding of the lived experience of religion and spirituality, and of its meaning for this specific population. The thesis also aims to examine, for those who are religiously inclined, how religious or spiritual communities and activities are incorporated into formal risk management processes.

Summary of Findings

Review of the Literature

In this first Chapter, I presented the findings of a systematic review of the literature, which examined the relationship between faith and crime. Although the literature revealed an inverse relationship between religious involvement and crime, it focussed on causal relationships between faith and adolescent/non-offending populations. In terms of the rehabilitation of those convicted of sexual offending, the literature was silent. Indeed, the significant lack of examination into the “etiological importance of religion to the study of sexual offenders is disturbing” (Eshuys & Smallbone, 2006, p. 287).

Emerging from this review therefore, were two research problems. First an understanding of the role religion and spirituality might play for those convicted of sexual offending while attempting to rehabilitate is needed. Second, an understanding of the extent to which practitioners include communities such as religious or spiritual groups into the risk management process is also needed. To best explore these problems I set out in Chapter 2, the

rationale for mixing methods. Three studies were undertaken, two qualitative and one quantitative.

Qualitative Studies

Prison sample.

In Chapter 3, I presented the findings of the first of two qualitative studies. This examined the experiences of a population of men convicted of sexual offending, and incarcerated for their crimes. All nine participants took part in in-depth interviews, each exploring their experiences of engaging with religion or spirituality, both in and out of prison. By using IPA to collect and analyse the data, participants were able to give an account of the meanings they made of their experiences. In doing so, four themes emerged from the study and are detailed in Table 15.

Table 15. Summary of Themes from Prison Sample

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
The common use of culturally religious concepts to describe experiences	Journey Light
Managing the conflict between religion or spirituality and sexual offending	Compartmentalised identities and incongruent behaviours. The process of forgiveness and feeling forgiven by God.
Religion and spirituality in prison enables mental escape and brings psychological comfort	
Experiencing religious or spiritual affiliation in prison and the community aids a sense of belonging and improves perceived social status	Belonging to a faith group brings intimacy as experienced by family Belonging. Status is gained by belonging to the in-group.

Each theme was presented in detail, in this Chapter. I considered existing desistance theories to explore my findings, and discovered a notable presence of a number of the factors needed to promote the desistance process. For example, participants reported how engagement with religion and spirituality was important to the process of personal change. I found that where participants had engaged with religious and spiritual communities, new positive pro-social self-narratives were developed (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). I found they did this in a two ways. First, the accessibility of

religious or spiritual language and concepts enabled participants to articulate their reformed selves, and make sense of their offending behaviours. Participants had previously experienced difficulty when both explaining and understanding how and why they sexually offended, yet, with access to religious ideas and language, they were able to explain how and why they had changed. To support this change, they also believed they had been validated, by a higher being. Second, with their newly transformed selves, participants were able to begin the process of seeking forgiveness. This process served three functions. First, it helped them evaluate their behaviours, take responsibility for their actions and empathise with their victims; second, it helped them consolidate and validate both to themselves and to others, that their new identities were forgiven and therefore, restored; finally, for Christian participants at least, it enabled them to be fully reintegrated back into their religious communities.

The idea of belonging to a supportive community was another important aspect found by the study. Even though the process of desistance is an individual one, it always occurs within a social context (McNeill, 2012) I found that belonging to a religious or spiritual community assisted participants in two distinct ways. First, participants, like many others convicted of sexual offending, faced isolation, rejection from family and friends and had no support networks either in prison or on the outside. Opportunities to gain or improve social capital were therefore, scarce. Yet, when affiliated with a religious or spiritual community, the benefits of accessing support and feeling part of a family unit were important. Participants reported that their religious peers would provide accommodation on release, transportation home from prison, and support at home. Given that one of the important factors that helps people maintain a life free from crime is having access to social capital (Weaver & McNeill, 2015), this finding is important. The second way, belonging to a religious or spiritual group helped participants, was while residing in prison. Convicted of sexual offences, participants experienced being stigmatised and labelled. They were treated harshly by other prisoners, and

categorised into the lowest of social groups. One way participants overcame the negative consequences of belonging to an out-group, was to affiliate themselves with a more socially acceptable in-group. By associating with religious or spiritual groups, participants were then able to distance themselves from the label, 'sex-offender', and begin to take on the characteristics of a more positive in-group. This in turn improved feelings of, self-esteem and self-worth, and helped participants to develop new improved identities.

Community sample.

In Chapter four, I presented findings of the second of the qualitative studies. Unlike in the previous Chapter, this sample included men living in the community. Several themes emerged from this data, and are summarised in Table 16.

Table 16. Summary of Themes from Community Study

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
'I am not a Sex Offender and I Won't Reoffend' but Risk Factors Persist	Offender and religious identity
	Denial
The Changeable Nature of Faith	Risk
	Rejection is felt at the loss of religious networks
	Difficulty accessing new faith networks in the community
	Religious affiliation provides humanity in a harsh context; in prison it is essential for survival
Engaging in Faith Provides Comfort, Hope and Protection Following Sexual Conviction	During periods of offending, religious practice was just going through the motions coupled with feelings of pain, guilt and shame.
	Seeking forgiveness brings psychological benefit.
	Relationship with God is dynamic and human rather than spiritual.
	Religious practice brings comfort and group affiliation.

In an effort to consolidate these findings, with the current desistance literature, I presented a discussion centred on three main aspects of participants' experiences these included: transformed identities; the importance of social relationships and connectedness to

others; and the opportunity to signal change through seeking forgiveness. Essentially, participants were able, through their affiliation with a religious community, to develop new and reformed identities. Although their narratives were at times more akin to a persisting identity, this I interpreted was a reflection of the transient nature of identity transformation. That is, in order for a person to develop a new identity, stories have to be developed and therefore, changed to reflect the experiences, situations, and personal understanding of their life. Involvement with a religious community helped participants to articulate and make sense of this process of change, not only to themselves, but to others too.

The second key area discussed in Chapter 4, was the social capital benefits participants gained by engaging with religious or spiritual communities. Although while in prison, participants found religious and spiritual communities accessible; when living out in the community, this was a very different experience. They found accessing new religious groups in the community a great challenge. However, for those who were able to penetrate a community and overcome stigma, they were able to benefit from greater resources of social capital. Finally, the process of forgiveness was also discussed in this Chapter. This process was an important feature for both the community and participants themselves. The process not only helped them rid themselves of any unhelpful stigmas or labels, but, helped them signal to others that they were restored and reformed. This ritual of forgiveness was also, a valuable means by which the community were able to accept returning participants back.

Quantitative Study

In Chapter 5, I presented the quantitative study. This explored the extent to which religious and spiritual communities were used during the formal risk management process, of those convicted of sexual offending. Given the importance religious and spiritual communities, appeared to participants in Chapters 3 and 4, I was interested to understand if criminal justice practitioners placed equal value on these communities during their management of clients.

To explore this issue, I analysed the risk management plans (RMP) of 217 clients convicted of sexual offending. I explored a number of areas within the RMPs including: the strategies practitioners used in response to identified risk factors (general and sexual); the extent to which specialist sexual offending risk management tools were used; and how well utilised communities, such as faith groups were, to assist in their clients reintegration. Findings demonstrated a number of concerning areas. The quality of plans was poor, not all of the risks identified by practitioners featured in their subsequent RMPs, leaving a number of known risks unaddressed. Likewise, in relation to specialist sexual offender risk assessment tools, 92% of plans did not reference their clients risk classification, and 48% of plans did not record specific sexual risk factors. A good proportion of plans incorporated both control and supportive strategies. However, the degree to which non-statutory agencies such as, community groups were used to provide support to individuals was disproportional. In the main, support was provided by criminal justice agencies. Very few RMPs included support from third sector groups and only one plan identified support from a faith community group.

A final finding of this study was in relation to one particular subgroup within the sample; those assessed as high risk of reconviction using the RM2000 tool. Given the high profile, greater resources, and multi-agency involvement of those assessed as high or very high risk of reconviction, I expected this sub-group to have the greatest quality RMPs. This expectation was however, not realised. Instead 83% of this subgroup did not have any detail of the RM2000 categorisation and 55%, although listing a sexual risk factor, did not detail strategies to address the risk. Indeed, 44% did not identify any sexual risk factors at all. Fifty eight percent of this subgroup did have some form of support identified in their plans; however, detail of the support was sketchy and limited to statutory agencies.

Findings in this particular study are of concern for two reasons: First, RMPs are a tool used to record and communicate the strategy developed to manage a client's risk within and

between agencies. Plans therefore, need to be detailed enough for others to understand exactly what the risk is, and what the strategy is to deal with it, e.g. who is responsible, what will they do, when will they do it etc. The lack of detail within RMPs, in this study is of concern. The second issue, aside from a wholesale absence of religious communities being used to support individuals reintegrate back into the community, was the general lack of support identified from non-statutory groups and communities. In order to help reintegrate a person back into the community, the community in which they hope to return to has to be engaged in the process; as the process is clearly reciprocal. Yet, findings in this study show (as documented within RMPs at least), practitioners: favour drawing support from criminal justice agencies only; lack any consistency and robustness in risk assessment and; use control strategies over strategies designed to improve and develop a client's protective factors.

Theoretical Implications

By drawing on the desistance, rehabilitation, and faith-based literature, I propose that involvement with religion or spirituality might offer an appropriate environment to assist those convicted of sexual offending to reintegrate back into the community. Before I detail why I believe this to be the case, it is worth warning that these propositions must be contextualised within formal risk assessment and management processes, because as already documented in Chapter 1 of this thesis, a religious environment can also act as a target for someone motivated to abuse. Indeed, for a person who is motivated to sexually offend, who is deficient of protective factors (de Vries Robbé, Mann, Maruna, & Thornton, 2014), and has a number of psychological vulnerabilities (Beech & Ward, 2004) a religious context, can become an opportunity for abuse. Criminal justice practitioners, when supporting the reintegration of those convicted of sexual offending, should therefore, always guide their decision making process and inform risk management planning, with robust risk assessment. Ensuring equal attention is given to the assessment of risk and the exploration a client's pro-

social networks or activities; should pro-social networks be absent, at least a plan to help develop protective factors and strengths should exist.

That said, I maintain that for those religiously inclined, a religious or spiritual community can support the desistance process for those convicted of sexual offending by, a) acting as a catalyst to the desistance process, and b) helping to maintain the process of desistance. Although the value of religion and spirituality is not a new proposition for supporting the desistance process; Giordano et al. (2002) who claimed that a religious community is one of the most powerful ‘hooks for change’ (a catalyst for cognitive transformation required for long term behavioural change), for those with histories of sexual abuse, this community might provide much more than an initial ‘hook’.

The primary phase of desistance.

According to Maruna (2001), the desistance process occurs in two distinct phases: A primary phase where crime stops, and a secondary phase, where the person transforms identity and roles, demarking a clear change in the self. This first phase requires certain conditions, such as a ‘hook’ or a trigger to promote a person’s interest in change (Giordano et al., 2008).

These conditions are often stimulated when a person faces a life changing event, they begin to question who they are, or what they have done, and they often spend time reflecting and self-evaluating (Göbbels et al., 2012). The prison environment is one place where these three conditions are most likely to occur. Prison is perhaps one of the most hostile and harsh places for those convicted of sexual offending to exist (Schwaebe, 2005), usually facing segregation from the general prison population, for their own safety (Priestley, 1980). People from the prison faith community such as chaplains, or prison volunteers, may be the first people within prison with whom, prisoners feel safe. Indeed, initial reasons for attending religious groups are not always for spiritual or personal change; engagement may be to feel safe, to mix with others outside of prison and gain material comforts (Clear et al., 2000). Access to a religious

group or spiritual belief system might therefore, provide a ‘hook’ to the first phase of the desistance process. However, in isolation this is inadequate.

The second phase of the process requires a more substantial and meaningful change. It is one that requires both internal transformation and external support from others. How a faith or spiritual community might reinforce this second phase, is considered here by first examining the period of re-entry.

Supporting re-entry.

Perhaps the most difficult phase of the desistance process for those convicted of sexual offending is the re-entry phase (Göbbels et al., 2012). The public perception of ‘sexual offenders’ is one of risk and dangerousness; they are perceived as untreatable and incapable of change (Payne, Tewksbury, & Mustaine, 2010). In addition, criminal-justice policy and practice characterise people convicted of sexual crime, in terms of risk, danger and persistence. Because the primary method to deal with those convicted of sexual offences is to manage, treat and punish (McNeill, 2004), utilising support from those outside of the criminal justice circuit, is a practicable option.

Support from friends and family, who do not hold true stigmatised labels can be invaluable during re-entry however, often those convicted of sexual offending are socially isolated and separated from family following court sanctions (Robbers, 2009; Tewksbury, 2005). Locating others within the community who are willing and skilled to work with such stigmatised people during periods of reintegration is a challenge. Skills to support people moving through a behavioural change process requires: empathy, collaboration, (Durnescu, 2012); a tolerance for the inevitable lapses (Prochaska & Diclemente, 1983); and a belief that people can change (Maruna et al., 2004).

Given that faith communities champion humane kinship through altruistic activities (Kotze, 2013) and promote virtues such as respect, care, compassion and forgiveness, such association might foster and support the de-labelling process required to maintain desistance. Indeed, many faith-based organisations dedicate their work to support and reintegrate people back into the community, often supported by committed volunteers (Phillips, Whitehead, Groombridge, & Bonham, 2011). In fact, a provision outside of a persons disconnected family, and distinct from formal criminal justice agencies, may not only stimulate the desistance process, but also offer a non-threatening support network (Clear et al., 2000). Religious and spiritual communities could therefore, provide access to people, who are able to dismiss the stigmatised label associated with sexual offending and facilitate a process of change (Maruna et al., 2006), during periods of re-entry and reintegration into new communities.

Developing new networks.

The second phase in the process of desistance requires people to seek out new networks and to develop new or existing pro-social relationships. Promoting association within a faith community, might enable people to distance themselves from anti-social association and interact and network with pro-social others (Kerley & Copes, 2009). Such a model has been successfully integrated into many communities across the United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada. For example, Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) work specifically, in this way, with those who have committed sexual offences (Hanvey et al., 2011). COSA was originally founded by a Christian Minister who gathered support within his local community to work with people at high risk of sexual recidivism. Current COSA volunteers are drawn from a wider community, and faith is not a dominant feature, although the values of the original circle remain.

Religious and spiritual communities informally replicate this model. Not only does engagement with a faith community provide spiritual connection for those seeking this, but it can provide alternative pro-social networks otherwise absent from those previously engaged with crime (Giordano et al., 2008). While the many activities within religious and spiritual groups centre on worship or practice, many social activities also take place, allowing for interaction and development of new networks and opportunities. There are likely to be varying degrees, of acceptance and tolerance, even within faith communities. However because most faith communities promote inclusivity and unity, it is expected that such groups might go some way to mitigate the risk of exclusion and instead increase networking opportunities.

Redemption.

In order for individuals to reconnect with the true self (Giordano et al., 2008) rationalise old behaviours (Maruna, 2001), or re-invent a whole new identity (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), there exists the need for redemption (Maruna, 2009). Redemption is, however, a reciprocal process requiring two willing parties. For those wishing to change from a position of deviancy to one of good moral standing, a ‘moral mediator’ between offender and community is required (McNeill & Farrall, 2013). Religious and spiritual communities can provide this bridge between prison or court sanctions and the community. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, many faith-based organisations, such as, the Community Chaplaincy, Langley House Trust and St George’s Crypt already provide this service, with volunteers meeting people still in prison, assisting them by mediating barriers such as housing, employment and providing a contact for release (CLINKS, 2014).

This moral mediation can act as a platform to re-inventing a new identity through exposure of new ways of thinking and viewing the world. Many faiths encourage the re-invention of self-narratives, assisting people to deal with their past regressions, by

acknowledging their guilt and moving forward to a new life rather than being paralysed by feelings of shame (Clear et al., 2000). Here, people can begin to develop narratives which define themselves as ‘non-offenders’ (Göbbels et al., 2012). This also allows people the opportunity to give back to society, to advocate on the behalf of others and truly make amends for their actions.

Reparation.

Those in the final maintenance stage of desistance tend to have a desire to bring meaning to their life (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010) along with the need to give back to others (Maruna, 2001). Faith communities are notoriously driven to help and support the communities they serve. While many religious and spiritual organisations’ missions might be to proselytise non-believers, this is not their sole aim. Many endeavour to reach out and aid the most marginalised of society. Indeed, where a sense of purpose and duty is experienced, for those convicted of crime, this tends to be gained by those active in the church (Clear et al., 2000). The considerable charitable energies employed by faith communities might therefore, serve as a pathway for reforming offenders in which they can begin to meet their own needs to give back to society. This process is mutually rewarding, as others in need are supported and encouraged, and the giver self-rewards for assisting others (Kerley et al., 2011).

Desistance theories tell us that change occurs over a period of time and involves psychological, social and environmental mechanisms (Göbbels et al., 2012). A faith community might provide opportunities in which some people can access these means. Such a community might provide the initial inspiration to change, offer pro-social adult networks, guide those convicted of sexual offending to new ways of thinking about themselves and others around them, and provide hope for a positive future. This however, must all occur alongside robust and empirically tested risk assessment. Without the systematic assessment

and appreciation of clients' risks, needs, and motivations; people may well misuse religious text, distort its religious meanings and compromise the goodwill and care of a faith community, to become a place to groom victims and ultimately re-offend.

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical implications, this thesis highlights some practical suggestions too. The 'voice' of people convicted of sexual offending, in relation to experiences of desistance at least, is very rarely heard. This thesis therefore, helps bring into focus some of the issues and potential solutions, for those convicted of sexual offending, and those managing them. The experiences of participants in the studies of this thesis, inform us that, while in prison, some of those reintegration challenges can be mitigated. Findings show that by exposing people to social opportunities that build internal capacity, develop skills, and extend external support networks, are likely to help strengthen their resilience and plans for reintegration back into the community. This does mean that criminal justice practitioners need to be cognisant of the variety of support and community groups on offer for those in custody. This might require practitioner awareness to be raised in three ways: a) practitioners developing an understanding of the unique challenges faced by those incarcerated for sexual offending b) practitioners being regularly appraised of what is available to meet their clients' needs, inside prison, and c) be able to facilitate, support and perhaps introduce clients to new groups or networks, outside of the criminal justice system.

In saying this, this problem also extends out into the community where implications for practitioners and agencies are possibly greater. As found in Chapter 5, practitioners tend to rely on criminal justice and statutory agencies to provide support to those reintegrating back into the community. Yet, in Chapters 3 and 4 participants never spoke about the importance of statutory agencies in this way. Instead, important to them were family, friends and their social networks in churches and spiritual groups. One of the difficulties faced by

participants when living in the community was the challenge of accessing faith communities. For those who lacked personal resolve to do this alone, the challenge was greater. Therefore, in order that people are supported fully when returning to the community or joining a new one, practitioners need to include non-statutory community groups into the formal RMP process.

Crime and the rehabilitation from crime is a complex process. It is therefore, essential that no one agency attempts to deal with these issues in isolation (Berry, Briggs, Erol, & van Staden, 2011). This does mean that practitioners must strive to coordinate and engage clients in activities from networks wider than the criminal justice system, and perhaps include those from faith and spiritual communities. This should help practitioners to develop more holistic, detailed and meaningful, good-life, treatment, rehabilitation or reintegration plans (Siegert, Ward, Levack, & Mcpherson, 2007). In essence, the responsibility for helping people reintegrate back into the community, should not just fall on criminal justice agencies, but should be the responsibility of all agencies and communities (Ward & Laws, 2010).

By encouraging and supporting people with sexual convictions to access religious and spiritual communities, there are of course, safeguarding implications. I have highlighted throughout this thesis, that there will always be some with continued malicious intent, who will use the goodwill of community groups, to gain access to potential victims. It is vital that groups such as religious or spiritual communities must therefore, be supported by criminal justice partners. This might be by groups being given access to information, information such as the potential risks of an individual or specific safeguards that might be needed to protect others. Clearly, there are a number of challenges with this idea. First, the confidentiality of a client is important. Sharing such sensitive and confidential information, with communities or institutions outside of the criminal justice system, is problematic and would need to be overcome. Second, while many religious communities do have safeguarding policy and

practice in place, many informal smaller groups do not. Finally, resources are often an issue for many smaller community groups, leaving questions unanswered regarding training and supervision of staff or volunteers and record keeping or managing information.

A final point worth noting is that, sexual offending behaviour, like all offending behaviour occurs, in part, as a result of people, deploying maladaptive strategies in their pursuit of life goals (Ward & Stewart, 2003). It is therefore an essential task that correctional practitioners, do not overly rely, on controlling and restrictive strategies, but also coordinate activities which help develop personal goods (Ward & Maruna, 2007) and promote protective factors (de Vries Robbé et al., 2014). This is of course, a challenge. The culture within which criminal justice practitioners operate, has over recent decades increased both the number and severity of measures designed to prevent the most 'dangerous' of individuals to commit crime in the future (Kemshall & Maguire, 2001). Indeed, with the added public pressure and moral panic, which demands those convicted of sexual offending, to be severely punished (McCartan, 2010); it is unsurprising that interventions used to manage and protect the public tend to be punitive, controlling and restrictive (Farmer & Mann, 2010). However, practitioners are privileged with the ability to provide and facilitate opportunities for clients to access new social networks, and develop skills that help them achieve life goals. By enabling the access to religious or spiritual communities, should a client be religiously inclined, might help support this process and by default mediate some risks (Ward & Laws, 2010).

Strengths and Limitations

There are, of course, a number of limitations to the studies presented in this thesis, including: the difficulty with generalising the prison sample; the idiographic nature and small sample sizes of the qualitative studies; the lack of idiographic focus to the quantitative study; the use

of self-report from participants; the lack of longitudinal and recidivism data; and the inevitability of researcher bias. I discuss each limitation in turn here.

While there is no intention to claim the findings from the qualitative studies can be generalised, it is worth noting why some of the characteristics from the prison sample might limit such consideration. First, all participants had offended against children, how these findings might be represented by a sample of people who have offend against adults, is unknown. Second, the age (mean age = 58 years) of this population is not representative of the wider sexual and general offending population. Indeed, the time lag between offending and conviction for this sample was found to be decades. This characteristic is unlikely to reflect a larger offending population. A final characteristic worth noting is that five of the nine men disclosed being active members of their church communities during periods of sexual offending. Although only one offended against a member of the church, another gained access to a victim through the church and the remaining three offended against family members while being church active. Setting aside the two participants who abused their position of power as church leaders, it is unclear if a characteristic of active church affiliation and sexual abuse might be reflective of the wider sexual offending population. As already discussed in the literature review, the religious and spiritual experiences of those convicted of sexual offending, pre and post offending, is limited.

For some, the small sample size and subjective approach used in IPA, is perceived to be a fundamental weakness of empirical research. Indeed, such criticism is central to decades of debates, regarding nomothetic and idiographic approaches (Hermans, 1988). Essentially, critics argue that small sample sizes fail to generalise findings and cannot establish any general scientific principle, therefore rendering it immaterial (Eysenck, 1954). However, the establishment of new laws or generalisation of findings is of course, not the purpose of IPA. Instead, small sample sizes assist researchers to examine and explore, in detail, the unique

and idiosyncratic experiences of participants; thus giving a “voice to the concerns of participants” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 102).

The opposite can be said for the quantitative study in Chapter 5. This study it could be argued was limited by its nomothetic approach. While, the use of a larger sample and statistical analysis provided an informative and interesting picture; it did not answer or explain why, findings were so. The answer to that question would need a very different approach. While nomothetic and idiographic approaches each have their own limitations, they also each serve a particular purpose. In this case, a quantitative approach was needed to establish the quality of plans on a wholesale level.

A further limitation to this thesis is the use of self-report. Participants can attempt to present themselves to an interviewer in a particular way. This is usually presented in a more favourable light and is known as socially desirable responding (Furnham, 1986). It is possible that within a forensic setting, clients distort the truth, to place themselves in a more favourable light. In the main this is because they perceive some benefit or positive outcome such as, early parole, or a reduced sentence (Tan & Grace, 2008). While there is always the possibility that participants in these studies were not wholly truthful throughout their interview, there were very few benefits to them distorting the truth. Analysis of the data was carried out with an eye to the risk of social desirable responding, and interpretation was made accordingly. Throughout the analysis, reflections of my feelings were recorded where I believed participants were responding in a socially desirable manner.

A third limitation relates to a call for desistance studies to be longitudinal in their design (McNeill & Weaver, 2010), this thesis fails to respond, to this appeal. This thesis would have been much stronger had the option been available to use a longitudinal design and capture recidivism rates. As it was, the time frame apportioned for the completion of this

thesis, prevented such a design. Had an opportunity been available to include recidivism rates of those convicted for sexual offending, at least a five year time lag would have been required. Although, most people convicted of sexual offending are never re-convicted, there is still a small recidivism rate, of up to and post, a five year period (Harris & Hanson, 2004). Indeed, without recidivism data it is unclear if any of the participants, following their interview, committed further sexual offences. Of course the prevalence of sexual abuse does not equate to the convictions recorded for sexual crime (Craig et al., 2008) and so official recidivism data should be used with some caution, in any event. In saying this, the inclusion of recidivism data would have been an interesting addition to this present study.

There is no such research design which is value free, as all carry some risk to influence or bias (Janesick, 2003). However, for some the epistemological position adopted throughout this study, which embraces the inevitable researcher bias, might be deemed a limitation. As discussed, in Chapter 2 I reflect on the risk that my own professional experience, personal beliefs and gender, might have influenced my research. First, participants' responses might have been influenced by me. I disclosed to participants that I was a criminal justice practitioner, as well as doctoral researcher; this in itself might have either shut down certain responses or caused participants to give me answers, which they thought I wanted to hear. Likewise, the answers they gave me, being a woman, might have been very different had a male researcher interviewed them. The second, way my research might have been compromised, was during the analysis and interpretation stages. Having worked with people convicted of sexual offending for many years, it is inevitable that I will have brought to my analysis, attitudes and beliefs about participants levels of honesty, offences, possible risks, likelihood of recidivism and so on. Although such bias can never be fully eradicated, there were a number of strategies I adopted to help alleviate them. These

included: engaging in regular supervision, auditing of data, bracketing off prior feelings and thought, and keeping the interpretation close to the text.

There are also, several strengths to this thesis. First, all studies respond to gaps highlighted in the literature. Currently little is known of the desistance process with regards to specific sub-populations, such as those convicted of sexual offending (McNeill & Weaver, 2010), this gap persists in the faith literature also. Likewise, studies to date, have failed to explore and examine the quality and content of RMPs, in OASys and for those convicted of sexual offending.

A second strength is that the thesis focuses on lesser explored elements of the desistance process. The desistance literature is rich in terms of studies which examine the internal and psychological perspective of change. Less well explored are the social concerns in relation to facilitating and supporting the desistance process (McNeill, 2012). This thesis brings to attention the importance of strengthening peoples social capital (McNeill & Weaver, 2010) through engagement with non-criminal justice institutions such as faith communities.

A third strength to this thesis is its relevance to practice. Findings are not only of interest to those within an academic field, but, have genuine application to forensic and clinical practice. The insight gained from participants in Chapters 3 and 4, would be of interest to practitioners working with clients convicted of sexual offending. While, the challenges expressed by participants will perhaps come as no surprise to those working with this population; the value and meaning they placed on institutions outside of statutory bodies, might. Likewise, the findings in Chapter 5 are also unique. The analysis of RMPs of those convicted of sexual offending, in England and Wales, is the first of its kind. Criminal justice agencies with the responsibility for the management, reintegration and sentence planning of

this population, would benefit from understanding the issues that might have influenced the findings in this study.

A final strength to this thesis is the method used to collect and analyse the narratives of participants in the qualitative studies. Criminological research tends to focus on positivistic philosophies, often driven by government funded programmes (Jones, 2009). While there is an important and valuable place for this type of research, there is a void within the discipline, which fails to capture the voices of those experiencing 'criminal justice'. By using small sample sizes, I was able to explore in great detail, the unique and subjective meaning, participants made of their experiences during offending, while being incarcerated and during their time attempting to reintegrate back into the community. Indeed, because, knowledge is developed incrementally, through the examination and re-examination of single cases, over time a fuller picture can be gained. This thesis begins to validate what is currently known in the desistance literature, but also, on a small scale helps to progress understanding of the role of non-criminal justice communities, for those convicted of sexual offending.

Suggested Future Research

Criminal justice practitioners can (and do) play a pivotal role in supporting people convicted of sexual offending, with dignity, respect and equality. However, to support practitioners in their practice, we must first understand their experiences of supervising and supporting marginalised and stigmatised populations. Further research should therefore, explore the meaning prison, probation and police practitioners' make of working with people with sexual convictions. Future research questions should ask: What are the experiences of those working with people convicted of sexual offending who claim through their religious conversion, they are protected from future risk?; What are the experiences of practitioners working with religious and spiritual communities, while supporting their clients?; What are practitioners' experiences of fostering social capital with clients who have no or limited family or social

networks?; How do practitioners balance the development of their clients' strengths, while enforcing control requirements during the risk management process? Exploring practitioner experience will help develop our understanding of how practitioners can best nurture hope, optimism, and self-efficacy with clients (Woldgabreal, Day, & Ward, 2014).

Restoring people back into the community following a period of punishment requires engagement from both the individual and the community; it is a collaborative process (Maruna, 2011). Successful re-entry is only possible when a community allows the returning person to fully reintegrate and contribute to society (Burnett & Maruna, 2006), otherwise they remain marginalised. Future research should therefore, concentrate on examining the experiences of those convicted of sexual offending and engaged in a religious or spiritual community, while rehabilitating back into the community, but over a considerable period of time. While we can learn a great deal from those engaged in religion and spirituality, understanding how their experiences have impacted the desistance process, can only be fully understood by examining their experiences over time. Future studies should therefore, be carried out to include a number of time lags, preferably at five year intervals. Indeed, worthy of further examination are the periods of intermittency, experienced by many people moving through a process of change. Essentially, the process of desistance is a fluid one, understanding how and why people move between desistance and persistence is an area that has received little attention, but is a phenomenon requiring much greater exploration (Piquero, 2004).

Finally, in order that people are given the opportunity to formally demonstrate, their offending behaviour is in the past, and rid themselves of stigma; examination and modification of legal structures and systems are needed. For example, within the United Kingdom, for those serving more than a four year custodial sentence, their crimes can never become spent (*New Guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974*, 2014). As it

currently stands, the Act provides no formal opportunity for people to be fully reintegrated into society as a non-offending citizen. Modernising legal frameworks in line with a strength based approach could provide a symbolic gesture, for those committed to living a life free from crime, in order that they can be truly recognised as an equal member of society.

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Appendix 1

Manuscript Accepted for Publication

Elsevier Editorial System(tm) for Aggression and Violent Behavior

Manuscript Draft

Manuscript Number: AVB-D-14-00074R1

Title: Examining the Role of Faith Community Groups with Sexual Offenders: A Systematic Review

Article Type: Literature Review

Keywords: sexual offenders; rehabilitation; desistance; faith groups. Corresponding Author: Mrs. Stephanie Kewley,

Corresponding Author's Institution: University of Birmingham

First Author: Stephanie Kewley

Order of Authors: Stephanie Kewley; Anthony Beech; Leigh Harkins

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the role of faith-based communities and activities in helping those convicted of sexual offending, desist from crime and reintegrate back into their communities. Here it was found that much of the current research is limited to non-offending juvenile populations. Where research has been carried out on adult offenders, these tend to be custodial cases and exclude those convicted of sexual offending. The role of religious and spiritual groups in helping people convicted of sexual offending to desist from crime, while reintegrating into the community is therefore, unknown. A number of parallels between the factors needed to promote desistance from sexual offending and the conditions encountered when engaged with a faith community are outlined. We would note that a religious and spiritual environment can: promote motivation to change, provide access to pro-social peers, offer moral guidance, provide a support network and help bring meaning into people's lives. The potential for people to use faith-based communities or organizations to facilitate offending, are also considered. Finally, implications for probation work and future research are also discussed.

Appendix 2

Criterion for Systematic Review

- Only empirical studies examining a relationship between religion/faith and offender/crime were included
 - Studies examining sexual offences committed by clergy or professionals within the church were excluded
 - Studies which examined outcomes for communities or faith based organisations were excluded
 - Young offender studies (<18) were excluded
 - Only published peer reviewed papers were included (books, literature reviews, theses' etc. were excluded)
-

Appendix 3

Participant Flyer Advertising the Study



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

School of Psychology

Participants for study needed

Are you involved in a particular religious, faith based or spiritual organisation? Have you engaged in a faith based intervention in custody or within the community? Have re-discovered a previous faith but are not attached to any formal faith based activity?

I am looking to carry out in-depth interviews to analyse how effective religion and faith is in reducing recidivism and lapsing behaviours amongst men who have committed a sexual offence. I am also interested in exploring how religion is experienced by individuals during periods of offending. If you feel you are a potential participant for my study, I would be grateful if you could contact me.

Interviews will take place in [REDACTED]

For more information, please speak with [REDACTED], in the psychology department who has an information sheet with more detail.

Appendix 4

Participant Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF
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School of Psychology

Participant Information Sheet

Full title of the project: Religiosity and its role in the Desistance process

Date of the project: Oct 2012

Name of Researcher: Stephanie Kewley

Researchers Supervisor: Dr Leigh Harkins

1. Invitation

You are invited to participate in the above study. The purpose of this information sheet is to ensure you have a good understanding of the study and your role in it before giving your consent to participate. It is advised that you read over this information sheet fully. If you have further questions or queries you can contact the researcher or the researcher's supervisor, contact details are at the end of this information sheet.

2. What is the purpose and background to study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how religious affiliation or religious activity is experienced by offenders who have committed a sexual offence. The study also aims to examine how helpful religiosity is in assisting offenders live an offence free life.

The study is being undertaken as part of Stephanie Kewleys' PhD programme of study. Stephanie Kewley is employed by Cheshire Probation Trust as an Area Programme Manager but is completing this study independently from Cheshire Probation Trust as a PhD student of the University of Birmingham.

3. Why have you been approached to participate?

You have been approached to participate in this study because either your Probation or Supervising/Prison Officer, or the leader of your religious group has suggested you might be interested in taking part in this study.

4. Do you have to participate?

No. You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. Your Probation/Supervising Officer or religious leader will be informed of your choice by the researcher but this is only to enable arrangements for the interview, alternatively [REDACTED] will be the contact person who will arrange the interview. You can choose to participate and then opt out at any stage in the process. You are under no obligation to participate in the research and can change your mind at a later date. There will be no negative consequences should you choose not to take part.

5. What will you need to do?

The Principal Researcher will arrange with you a convenient time to carry out a one to one interview. The interview will last approximately 1 hour, if you and the principal researcher feel more time is needed, a further interview may be arranged. Interviews will take place at [REDACTED]

6. What are the benefits, risks or disadvantages to participating?

There are no direct personal benefits to you engaging in this activity. However you may gain more understanding and insight about yourself, your faith and your offending behaviour.

This may assist in the plans you have already made to never offend again.

Your engagement in this study will assist the development and understanding of how religious affiliation assists offenders to desist from offending.

You will also assist the increase of knowledge, particularly in relation to the scarce religiosity literature for sexual offenders.

You will also assist the researcher in generating sufficient reliable data to enable her to publish her findings and write up her PhD Thesis.

7. What measures are in place to ensure confidentiality?

Your details will be taken by the researcher only for audit and in gaining consent.

In the final thesis document and in any other documents produced during this study all details of participants will be anonymised. No person will be identified as part of this study and in the use of any direct quotes; authority to use the quotation will be sought from the source.

The researcher will share information about the content of the interviews and questionnaires

with the supervisor named at the bottom of this information sheet.

A coding system will be used to identify an individual to a transcript; this password protected database will be held only by the researcher with a copy being made accessible to the researchers' supervisors if required.

Interviews will be audio recorded for ease and accuracy. Following all interviews copies of transcripts will be written up by the researcher or possibly by a confidential transcription company (who will not have access to your personal details; only your interview recording) and a copy sent to the participant to read over and give further consent for the use of the material. Arrangements about where and who this will be sent to will be agreed by yourself and the principal researcher at the interview. Participants can request the removal of data or withdraw from up to 6 months after receiving a copy of their interview transcription. This is because after this point data will have been analysed and submitted for publication.

8. How will confidentiality be ensured?

Data stored by the researcher such as transcripts of interviews will be catalogued under a coded system so data will be stored anonymously. Once notes are transcribed and participants are satisfied with the accuracy of the notes, tapes/audio files will be destroyed.

There are some limits to full confidentiality; you will be asked questions about your offending history. If you report a previously unknown crime or disclose that you intend to hurt yourself or others, this will be reported to the appropriate authorities such as your Probation Officer, Prison Officer or the Police.

9. How will the data be stored?

Data will be stored on the principal researcher's PC which is password protected. Any data sent to University of Birmingham will be done so electronically or through recorded delivery. University of Birmingham's systems are also password protected.

10. Who is funding the research programme?

This research is self funded by the researcher as part of her PhD.

An application for partial funding has been made to the National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA).

11. Who will review and approve the study?

The researcher is supervised by the supervisor listed below at University of Birmingham, she will provide guidance and support to the researcher.

National Offender Management Quality Assurance for Research has given their permission for this study to be undertaken as have the Senior Management Team [REDACTED]

This research has also been reviewed by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham.

12. Who can you contact if you have further questions?

Principal Researcher

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Appendix 5

Participant Consent Form



Consent Form for Participants

Full title of project: Religiosity and its role in the Desistance process

Date of project: December 2012

Name of Principal Researcher: Stephanie Kewley

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions, which have been fully answered.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant.....Signature..... Date.....

Name of Researcher...Stephanie Kewley...Signature.....Date.....

1 copy to be given to the participant
1 copy to be kept by the researcher

Appendix 6

Interview Schedule

General introduction followed by offence focussed questions

1. Tell me about your offence - Prompts – what, when, where, why, how
2. If the offender has been through treatment: What risk factors have you identified as concern for yourself? Or what areas do you feel are still outstanding?
3. How are you now managing X risk factors?
4. What is different for you today compared to when you were offending?
5. How do you view your future in relation to abstaining from offending? (thoughts and feelings)

Religious and spiritual focussed questions

1. Tell me about your religious practice, beliefs, association? Prompts – how long, how often, who with, how did this come about?
2. What does it mean to you to belong to X group? Prompts – why is this important?
3. What does it mean to you to do X practice? (e.g. pray, meditate, read the scriptures)
Prompts – why is this important, how do you feel when you X?
4. Why are your religious beliefs important to you, what do they mean for you? Prompts – why are these important, believing in X how does this make you feel about you, your life your future, your past etc.?
5. What role does your religious [faith/practice/beliefs/association] play in your management of risk [thoughts/feelings behaviours]?
6. Have you experienced any lapse/relapsing behaviours?
7. If so what role has your religious [faith/practice/beliefs/association] played during those times?
8. What is different from the time you were offending to none offending in terms of the role religiosity plays for you?

Future Focussed

1. How do you see your religious [faith/practice/beliefs/association] being a part of your future life?

De-brief

Appendix 7

Risk Management Plan Coding Framework

1. Does the RM2000 Category feature in the Risk Management Plan?

Score 0 if the RM2000 Category is not referenced anywhere in the RM Plan

Score 1 if the RM2000 Category is referenced e.g.

Mr X is assessed as low risk on the RM2000

Score 2 if the RM2000 Category is referenced and a description in relation to how this score relates to the likelihood of future risk is documented e.g.

Mr X scored low on the RM2000(C) Mr X shares many risk characteristics of sexual offenders, for whom over a 5 year period 7% were reconvicted for committing further sexual offences.

2. a) How many Risk of Serious Harm risk factors in section R1.1 does the assessor identify?

Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>
ETE	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lifestyle and Associates	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drug Misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alcohol Misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinking and Behavior	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attitudes	<input type="checkbox"/>

Total

b) How many Risk of Serious Harm risk factors from R1.1 are referred to in the Risk Management Plan?

Accommodation

ETE

Financial

Relationships

Lifestyle and Associates

Drug Misuse

Alcohol Misuse

Thinking and Behavior

Attitudes

Total

Calculate (b) as a % of (a) and score as follows:

0 = 0%

1 = 1-50%

2 = 51-99%

3 = 100%

3. Are the Risk of Serious Harm risk factors (listed in 2b) detailed in the Risk Management Plan?

Score 0 if none of the risk factors which have been assessed as a cause for concern are listed in the RM Plan

Score 1 if the practitioner has included some but these are only listed and it is unclear how these will be met e.g.

Mr X to address his offending behaviour

Score 2 if of the factors listed (answer 2b) the practitioner has clearly set out how to specifically address these factors

4. Has the practitioner detailed any specific sexual offending related risk factors, in addition to the generic risks identified in section R1.1?

Score 0 if no additional sexual offending related risk factors are noted or if general risk language is used e.g.

Sexual gratification

Score 1 if the practitioner notes additional risk factors however these are only listed with no specific measures to address these or if language is generic and none specific e.g.

Risk Factor – Sexual preference for Children

Triggers to sexual offending

Score 2 if the practitioner identifies and details specific sexual offending related risk factors and provides a clear outline of additional measures to address these specific risks e.g.

Mr X has disclosed a sexual preference for children. An added measure includes Mr X commencing and completing the community sex offender programme; this will provide him the opportunity to develop his understanding of how he can

manage/address his sexual preference for children and assist him to develop strategies to cope with this preference. He will be referred to the programme prior to release by his probation officer and commence the programme within x weeks on release from HMP X.

5. Has the practitioner included a range of support measures (statutory agency/public services/educational bodies)?

Score 0 if the practitioner has not included any support measures, the RM Plan features only control measures e.g.

Curfew, restrictions on movements, restrictions on residence, reporting requirements etc

Score 1 if the practitioner has included support measures however these only include measures to be delivered by criminal justice statutory agencies e.g.

Mr X will work with accredited programme staff to assist him to develop relapse prevention strategies or Mr X will meet with his probation officer who will support him to address his unemployment need

Score 2 if the practitioner includes a range of support measures that are in addition to criminal justice statutory services interventions and a description of how the will be used is recorded e.g.

Mr X will attend a local education service open day with the view to register onto a course in order that he might develop skills in X subject. This will assist Mr X in seeking opportunities for future employment along with meeting other adults with shared interests

6. Has the practitioner included the use of any non-statutory agencies, groups or networks as a means of support (family, faith, community groups, local interest groups, voluntary work)?

Score 0 if no non-statutory agencies, groups or networks are referenced or if practitioner notes for example that family is supportive but do not know about offences

Score 1 if the practitioner has included non-statutory agencies, groups or networks as a measure however no detail of how these will be used is provided e.g.

Mr X continues to attend church

Score 2 if the practitioner includes non-statutory agencies, groups or networks as a measure along with a description of how they will be used e.g.

Mr X will join the local community walking group, this will help improve his physical health along with encouraging Mr X to develop new adult relationships and help him regain his interest in walking

7. Are faith or faith communities mentioned anywhere in the RM plan?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. If Yes to No 7, has the practitioner identified this affiliation as a potential risk or a protective factor?

Risk	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protective	<input type="checkbox"/>