Edinburgh Research Explorer

'A wee kick up the arse'

'A wee kick up the arse': Mentoring, motivation and desistance from crime

Steve Kirkwood [ID]
The University of Edinburgh, UK

Abstract

Mentoring is an increasingly popular approach for supporting people who have a history of offending. Previous research provides some evidence that it may contribute to reductions in offending behaviour and support desistance from crime. The present study analysed interviews with 33 people who used mentoring services in Scotland to examine the relationships between mentoring, motivation and desistance. The findings suggest that the offer of mentoring may translate a general desire to change into motivation by providing the means to achieve this change. Mentoring may help people develop 'hooks for change' through practical assistance that leads to positive changes and by encouraging people see the value of such changes. Mentors can also model ways of being that outline possible future selves and services can structure in pro-social activities that support stakes in conformity. The article contributes to theoretical understandings of motivation and desistance by specifying the interplay of agency and structure.

Introduction

Mentoring has become a popular way of supporting people who have been involved in offending behaviour (Buck, 2020). But how does mentoring help people to change? Previous research suggests one way mentoring helps people to desist from crime is to motivate them to change (Buck, 2017; Mulholland et al., 2016). However, the relationships between mentoring, motivation and desistance have not been fully explored. This article draws on interviews in Scotland with people with a history of offending behaviour

Corresponding author:
Steve Kirkwood, The University of Edinburgh, Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, UK.
Email: s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk

who used mentoring services to examine how mentoring helps motivate people to stop offending.

Desistance and motivation

Desistance is the process 'going straight', of reducing, ceasing and refraining from offending behaviour (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Maruna (2001) described three main perspectives on this process, emphasising maturation, social bonds and narrative identity. Maruna and Farrall describe primary desistance as a period of non-offending and secondary desistance as a change in identify from 'offender' to 'non-offender'; McNeill (2015: 201) added 'tertiary desistance' as the experience of being treated as a changed person by others. Nugent and Schinkel (2016: 570) described these three dimensions, respectively, as 'act desistance', 'identity desistance' and 'relational desistance'. They suggest the first two dimensions are within some control of the individual, while the third dimension is within the gift of others. Maruna and Farrall emphasise that desistance occurs at the intersection of agency and structure. As described by Laub and Sampson (2003), desistance is 'a result of a combination of individual actions (choice) in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences linked to important institutions that help sustain desistance' (p. 145). Such life changes include getting married, becoming a parent or getting a job (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Importantly, it is not just the 'objective' changes in a person's life that matter, but also their 'subjective' assessments of these changes (Farrall, 2002). King (2013a) highlighted that 'assisted desistance' involves helping people develop motivation, build self-confidence, make decisions and imagine a better future for themselves. Overall, 'going straight' seems to occur at the nexus of individual choices and actions, material conditions and contexts, and social interaction, together creating opportunities, laying pathways, and shaping a sense of self.

Giordano et al. (2002) provided a theory of desistance focused on cognitive transformation, which helps conceptualise the relationship between motivation and desistance. They outlined four types of cognitive transformation (1000–1002):

1. A shift in the openness to change;
2. Exposure to 'hooks for change';
3. Envisioning and fashioning an appealing conventional 'replacement self';
4. A 'transformation in the way the actor views the deviant behavior or lifestyle itself'.

This theoretical conceptualisation tracks through a number of stages. The first involves a general openness towards the possibility and attractiveness of changing. The second relates to exposure to events, opportunities or situations that are consistent with a move away from offending behaviour (e.g. a job, relationship or being a parent). The third aspect involves constructing a vision of the self that is connected to these 'hooks for change' and involves a shift in the way of being that is consistent with desistance. The fourth dimension means that the person comes to see offending behaviour as fundamentally inconsistent with their new way of being. Motivation, then, can be understood to

operate across these dimensions. For instance, motivation could involve encouraging a person to consider the possibility and value of desistance; exposing people to hooks for change, by initiating positive opportunities or helping someone to see positive futures as valuable and worth trying to attain; helping someone to see a new way of being or reflecting back their status as a changed person; or supporting someone to reflect on offending behaviour in ways that position it as unwanted, negative and incompatible with their new ways of being.

Clearly, motivation is not limited to initiating the process of reducing offending behaviour, but also committing to reducing it, sustaining a reduction or absence of offending, and building a replacement lifestyle that is free of crime (Bottoms et al., 2004; Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Motivation may involve both approach and avoidance goals. Avoidance goals may include trying to avoid the harm caused to others through crime, the risk of harm to the self by being in dangerous situations, wishing to avoid the pains of imprisonment or other criminal sanctions, avoiding the guilt and stigma associated with offending, avoiding the damage to social relationships and avoiding the loss of resources and opportunities (e.g. housing, employment). Approach goals might include seeking to build a more satisfying and rewarding lifestyle, improve relationships with others, create or reunite a family, gain legitimate employment, or otherwise find ways of living that are more meaningful and fulfilling. Ward and Laws (2010) suggested that approach goals are best for motivation to change and are strengths based.

Panuccio et al. (2012) argued that motivation is combination of a desire to achieve something and method for achieving it; desire is not enough. Relatedly, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) stated motivation is strengthened by realistic goals. Consistent with Giordano et al. (2002), they suggested individuals initially may be motivated to desist to avoid a 'feared self', unsure what a positive future self could look like, but the development of a future self is necessary to support desistance in the longer term. For instance, Schinkel (2015) demonstrated that prison is an avoidance goal that can motivate people towards desistance; however, she described this as a 'shaky peg' rather than a 'hook for change', as it does not provide a blueprint for building a pro-social life, because it only represents an unwanted future or way of being. Therefore hooks for change can be distinguished from stakes in conformity. Hooks for change represent a reason to *go* straight whereas stakes in conformity are reasons to *stay* straight. While avoiding prison is a reason to go straight, the development of a pro-social identity and lifestyle is a reason to stay straight (i.e. it stipulates what may be gained or lost through desisting or offending). Farrall et al. (2011) emphasised that structure shapes people's situations and options, but they retain some agency. People's individual choices are shaped by social structure, and people's choices, in turn, come to create social structure (Giddens, 1984). Farrall et al. argue structures do not dictate behaviours, therefore desistance is shaped, to some extent, by people's perceptions and interpretations of their situations.

Mentoring and desistance

There is a modest, although growing, quantitative evidence base regarding the effectiveness of mentoring in the criminal justice system. A meta-analysis of youth mentoring services (not specifically in response to offending behaviour) found a positive effect on attitudinal,

psychological, developmental, social and behavioural outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011). Tolan et al'.s (2013) systematic review found mentoring had a modest yet significant effect on reducing 'delinquency', whereas Edwards et al'.s (2015) systematic review found mixed evidence for the impact of mentoring on reducing violence committed by young people. Overall, quantitative evidence of the impact of mentoring schemes on reducing offending tends to be limited to young people, with somewhat contradictory results and notable methodological limitations, highlighting the need for further research. Qualitative research may shed further light on the nature of mentoring and how it contributes to desistance.

Several qualitative studies, from different international contexts, explored the nature and outcomes of mentoring in the criminal justice system, including how these services might support desistance (Brown and Ross, 2010; Buck, 2017, 2018, 2020; Garcia, 2014; Schinkel and Whyte, 2012; Singh et al., 2018; Thelwall et al., 2010). These studies consistently emphasised the importance of the nature of the mentoring relationship, highlighting the value of mentors being non-judgemental, available, caring, trusting and listening. They also demonstrated how mentors provide practical assistance, guidance, offer new perspectives, and celebrate and reinforce small achievements. Indeed, Buck (2018) defined the 'core conditions' of peer mentoring as caring, listening and encouraging small steps. Some studies suggest that mentees need to be 'ready' to be able to benefit from mentoring. They also noted the potential for mentors to act as positive 'role models' and especially to model pro-social behaviour. Supporting mentees to see themselves as the origins of their own success was treated as compatible with the development of desistance narratives (Brown and Ross, 2010; Garcia, 2014).

Buck (2017) argued that peer mentoring may function through 'mimesis' – a process of imitation where we come to desire the desires of others. Buck (2017) suggests that mentoring offers mentees a 'template of a future life that appears attainable regardless of problematic histories' (p. 1033). The peer mentor's personal history becomes important because it shows how desistance can be achieved, which is different from how other professionals with non-offending backgrounds may be perceived from service users. Interestingly, Buck found both mentors and mentees argue that an individual must be ready and motivated to change for mentoring to be successful. However, mentoring may still play a role in the origins of this motivation. She suggested that people may be motivated through a process of imitation, yet reject the idea that they are imitating, or that the motivation was purely external, due to the cultural power of the idea that people are the authors of their own desires:

> Mentees may, therefore, find inspiration to change by looking at their mentors, but so that they do not relinquish their own role in the change process, they insist they were 'ready' all along. (Buck, 2017: 1036)

Buck argues that the role of mentoring is dialectical; both the mentee and the mentor play a part in creating and maintaining a will to desist:

> . . . mentors do not simply inspire the desire for change, nor are mentees alone with individual yearnings, but mentors can bring into reality, into action, the will of the mentee through multiple processes of inspiration, partnership, and social nurturing. (Buck, 2017: 1037–1038)

Overall, the qualitative research highlights several ways that mentoring may support desistance. While there is some evidence that mentors can contribute to desistance through practical support to overcome some of the barriers they face, such as in relation to employment, housing, relationships and addictions, a stronger theme is evident in relation to the caring nature of the relationship, listening, recognising progress, pro-social modelling and role modelling. Peer mentors could offer a 'blue print' of what desistance can look like. By being reliable, developing trust, providing some practical support and offering encouragement, mentors could help people envision a future free of offending, experience progress towards such a future, and see their efforts to desist reflected back to them.

In Giordano et al.'s (2002) terms, mentoring may motivate people to desist from crime through: helping people consider the possibility of desisting; exposing people to hooks for change and helping them to see them as such; helping them figure out a new pro-social way of being and reflect back to them the positive steps they have made; and helping them reflect on their new lifestyle and how incompatible it is with offending. In addition, the practical support may help them see their material circumstances change, which demonstrates progress and motivates them through confirming that change is possible, and may also expose them to further pro-social sources. The present study analyses interviews with people who have experienced mentoring to further examine the role of mentoring in motivation to desist from crime.

Methodology

The mentoring services

This article presents an analysis of interviews with mentees undertaken within an evaluation of six mentoring services in Scotland (Mulholland et al., 2016). The services intended to 'provide prolific young male offenders and women offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes' (Mulholland et al., 2016: 8). The services varied in the geographical regions of Scotland they covered, target groups (e.g. gender, age, nature of offending history), main referral sources (e.g. prison and / or community), service objectives, the profile of mentors (e.g. volunteers or paid staff; only some included peer mentors with criminal records), and the way they operated.

The services described themselves as based on the needs of individual mentees, and offered a range of support including practical support, one-to-one meetings, groupwork, structured courses and sign-posting to additional services (Mulholland et al., 2016). Contact between mentors and mentees varied from weekly to five times a week depending on what was required. The nature of practical support included accompanying mentees to other agencies (e.g. housing, social work, GP surgeries, drug and alcohol treatment services), and sometimes involved meeting mentees at the prison gate on release and being with them for much of that day. Meetings varied from unstructured opportunities to discuss whatever mentees chose, through to more structured sessions with agreed goals. Topics ranged widely and included relationships, finances, employment, use of time and offending. Meetings took place in a range of settings, often incorporating

pleasurable social or leisure activities, such as having lunch at a café, playing pool or football, or going for a walk or to the gym.

Mulholland et al. (2016) noted that the services undertook practical support tasks that fall outside some definitions of mentoring, but were seen as appropriate given the needs of mentees, and are in line with descriptions of other mentoring services in the criminal justice sector (e.g. Brown and Ross, 2010; Buck, 2017; Hucklesby and Wincup, 2014; Singh et al., 2018). Mulholland et al. (2016: 11) stated that, on the advice of the Scottish Mentoring Network, the services could be understood as taking a 'mentoring approach' rather than being pure mentoring services per se.

Using a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with 69 mentees and 35 mentors, and quantitative assessment information, Mulholland et al. (2016) found the services contributed to positive outcomes for mentees. They made the most difference to attitudes and motivation, notably mentees' willingness to engage with mentors and readiness to address problems in their lives. There was also evidence that the services helped mentees address issues in their lives, such as housing, employment, family circumstances and drug misuse. The present article examines some of the interviews with mentees from this research in greater detail to explore how mentoring influences motivation to desist from crime.

The data

Following completion of the evaluation, transcripts of the interviews with mentees were analysed in more detail to explore how people understood and accounted for their experience of mentoring and its relationship with desistance from crime. The interviews focused on mentees' experiences of mentoring, the activities that were involved, and how their lives had changed since engaging with mentoring. This article presents an analysis of the 33 interviews (5 women and 28 men) for which full transcripts could be provided.

Coding and analysis

I coded the transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10 in relation to a range of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), focusing on issues that related to desistance or the mentoring service. Themes included: desistance, motivation, employment, housing, education, family and confidence. The present article focuses on how mentees talked about their motivations to change, to desist from crime or to engage with the mentoring service. The analysis is informed by discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; McKinlay and McVittie, 2009), focusing on how people talk about the nature and sources of motivation.

Findings

I coded the overall theme of 'motivation' into sub-themes relating to different stages of motivation and present these in order: (1) initial motivation to change, (2) the offer of

mentoring as a motivating factor, and (3) how mentoring helps build and maintain motivation.

Initial motivation to change

In line with previous studies (Brown and Ross, 2010; Garcia, 2014; Kavanagh and Borrill, 2013; Walker and Bowen, 2015), several mentees reported a desire to change their lives for the better, with some stating that mentoring only works if people want to change. Consistent with previous research, the desire to change usually related to being tired of the nature of their lifestyle (Carlsson, 2012; Presser, 2004), wishing to avoid further prison time (Gadd and Farrall, 2004) and / or wishing to be a good parent (Giordano et al., 2002; Schinkel, 2019). For instance:

> INT: how did you first find out about this. . .?
> M1: I went into jail and I spoke to somebody as I went in, I just said I wanna change my life about instead of going intae jail, I'm sick of going to jail and getting sentences all the time eh.

Here, the desire to change is connected to a tiredness of the negative side of offending behaviour; the experience of prison functions as a negative motivation to change (an avoidance goal). For some this was combined with changing circumstances or views, such as becoming a parent and the valuing of this role, which contained the seeds of more developed pro-social futures:

> INT: How do you think you came to that kinda realisation, that it was maybe the drink that was causing you to get in trouble?
> M2: Eh just, I think I always knew it was drink but just selfish and just wanted tae keep daeing it. I wouldnae go . . . but since having the baby and that it's different now.
> INT: Is it, has that had quite a change in your outlook of things?
> M2: The mare I drink the mare time I am gonna spend away fae him, go back to jail so I don't want that.

Becoming a parent meant that drinking, committing offences and being imprisoned took on another meaning: spending time away from your child. As Schinkel (2015) suggested, prison acts as a motivation for desistance, but more as a 'shaky peg' than a 'hook for change', a feared future rather than a blueprint for a better life. This extract hints at a possible future life that could be embraced as a route away from offending.

The offer of mentoring as a motivating factor

Several mentees described how the offer of mentoring figured in their motivations to change their lives. Their accounts illustrate the complex relationships between internal drives to desist and the offer of support from others:

INT: so whenever you started did you feel fairly positive about, what, what might happen? You said, you said you had decided what you wanted to change.

M3:   Aye, well you get to that certain point in your life where it's either am gonnae change or I'm just gonnae do the same thing, eh, it's not the way I wanted to live so I knew myself that I wanted to change and I got a lot of help and support. Some people obviously, there is obviously gonnae be negative people in your life, you cannae help that but some people like my peers and that were like that 'aw wait til you're back inside and all the rest of it noo' like that, you're never gonnae do anything, you're, moan get oot get mad fir it and the rest of it, but they're [mentors] always like that 'you don't need tae, you can always better yourself, we'll help you with this, we'll help you with that'. And I've got a few qualifications and that's from here. I was already qualified, I've got, um, I wasnae stupid or anything, I've always like, done what I needed to do, but I was just started [sic] jumping aboot with the wrong crowd. And I thought aw they're my pals, they cannae be daeing me any harm. But, turns oot they were, but that's only through like my own lifestyle my own choices that that's the road I went down.

The mentee describes his own desires – 'it's not the way I wanted to live so I knew myself that I wanted to change' – but implies this comes at a time in one's life, highlighting the role of maturity: 'you get to that certain point in your life where it's either am gonnae change or I'm just gonnae do the same thing'. The account references various influences, such as 'help and support', including mentoring, and sources that question the individual's motivations or were negative. In line with Maruna's (2001) findings, the mentee implies he has enduring positive qualities – 'I wasnae stupid or anything' – but was negatively influenced by those around him: 'but I was just started [sic] jumping aboot with the wrong crowd'. The desire to change comes with a realisation about the 'truth' of these influences: 'And I thought aw they're my pals, they cannae be daeing me any harm. But, turns oot they were'. However, he still describes his situation as, to some extent, a product of his own choices: 'but that's only through like my own lifestyle my own choices that that's the road I went down'. Paths into and out of crime are both partly due to individual agency and external influences. In this account, the decision to desist is his own, yet he receives help, support and encouragement.

This supports Farrall et al'.s (2011) argument, building on the work of Giddens (1984), regarding the dualism of structure and agency; people's individual choices are shaped by their social context, yet their decisions recreate and reshape those same social structures. Buck's (2017) work on mentoring and mimesis suggests that people imitate others, yet because of the strong social convention of 'choosing your own path', they deny that they are miming, instead presenting their decisions as their own, even while acknowledging external influences. This partly explains why mentors often describe their work as 'role modelling' whereas mentees do not (see Tolland and Malloch, 2019).

The relationship between internal motivations and external motivators is evident in the following extract:

INT: Can you remember why you wanted to get involved? Was it just cos you wanted to change?

M4:   I wanted to change my life really. Em, because I was just back in the homeless unit and actually seeing [mentor] walking by, believe it or not I was at a window again and I'd seen [mentor].

INT: [Laughs] I can remember you telling me that, yeah.

M4:   Yeah I was at the window and I seen her [sic] and honestly I just wanted a change.

INT: Yeah sure, okay.

M4:   I says to her, I says, obviously I asked her, 'are you still doing the mentor kinda hing?' She says, 'yeah'. 'Could you basically get me involved?' She was like that, 'why do you want to get involved?' I says, 'cos I want to change my life really'. Cos I was just sick of the way it was, em just fed up. Eh but obviously she got me involved with [mentor], only a week and I was meeting up with [mentor].

INT: Right, I see that's great isn't it? That it happened so quickly. Em and did she tell you like, did you have anything when you started? Like did you think this is what I want to be at by the time I finish it?

M4:   Well at the point I didnae really know so, I didn't know where I wanted to be at, I just wanted, I just knew I wanted to change basically

The mentee reports a desire to 'change [his] life', but the details of what this might look like were unclear. Seeing the mentor shifted this general desire into concrete actions, and engaging with mentoring helped crystallise a vision of what this change might look like. As stated by Buck (2017), the desire to change is dialectical, with both mentees and mentors playing a role in its creation. Desistance occurs in the relationships between agency and the social responses of others (Maruna et al., 2004). In the terms of Panuccio et al. (2012), mentoring offered the means that could turn a desire into a motivation. The end of the extract hints at the possibility for mentoring to help transform a general wish to change into a more well-developed vision for the future.

The power of the offer of such help is clear in the account of this mentee:

M5:   when you come out of prison I mean, I had my ex-girlfriend to go and see and my folks were coming as well but [mentor] offered to pick me up, 'I'll come pick you up and we'll have lunch and then give you a little talk and see later on'. When he told me about that, I was almost goose bumps, [interviewer], honestly almost goose bumps there was actually somebody that was gonna do something for you. Like here I am I'm just some guy that's in prison, made a horrible mistake but it's, when people go in and then they leave they still have that mentality, oh I'm a bad person, I'm this, I'm that. I think it makes a hell of a difference just to have someone to talk to when you get out, that's not from your past, you know? From a more positive aspect in your life you know?

As the mentee explains, the offer of help is more than the practical assistance it provides; it is also a symbolic gift, it communicates to the mentee that they have positive qualities and deserve to be cared for. This provides an antidote to the perception of the self as a 'bad person' that the criminal justice system can project upon an individual

(McNeill, 2019). As illustrated by Barry (2015), recognition is important for countering negative labelling, and includes relational aspects that emphasise people's inherent worth and supporting them to overcome structural barriers.

Some mentees argued that mentoring should not be available to those who do not want to change:

> M5: it's [mentoring] a good thing even if somebody doesn't want change, it might spark an idea in their head you know, it might get them ready to do it. Um but for the most part I would say to them, only if you want change, if you want better. . . yeah. It will fucking help.

In this extract, the dilemmas of motivation are evident. In a somewhat contradictory statement, mentoring both is and isn't appropriate for those who don't want to change. This mirrors the way that, as Buck (2017) explained, motivation has to both come from within and can also be 'sparked' by outside influences. Drawing on the work of Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009, cited in Buck, 2017), she suggested the will to change is intertwined with and dependent upon the belief that change is possible. In this way, an internal motivation to change may also be reliant on an external influence that demonstrates change is achievable (e.g. a mentor).

How mentoring helps build and maintain motivation

Several interviewees discussed how mentoring can help build and maintain motivation to desist, such as through providing practical help, helping them to think positively about the future, reinforcing progress, and structuring in incentives to maintain a prosocial lifestyle. For example, here the mentor's help supported a pre-existing intention to change:

> INT: And I mean, how did you feel about it at the start? Did you feel it sounded like something you wanted to do or. . .?
>
> M6: It's exactly what I wanted to do, I knew I needed to get out, get a wee bit of help and that, know what I mean. I knew I needed a wee kick up the arse to get me on my feet just get out and aboot and try and look for a job and that's exactly what [mentor has] been helping me do, know what I mean. Keeping me all together.

Mentoring is described as important for the change process, and yet 'exactly what I wanted to do'; mentoring is presented as part of the desired change. The mentee presents himself as active, and retains original agency, but the mentor provides additional support and encouragement: 'a wee kick up the arse'.

Some of mentees described how mentors helped them think positively about the future:

> INT: Em, what other things have changed since you've been working with [mentoring service]? So what's sort of different for you?

M7:   Well the other day there ma baby was just born, so that's a big relief.

INT: Congratulations.

M7:   Cheers, so that's a lot of relief in my life, so it is. That's making me no want to dae anything else. Just need to get a joab now. And I've put in for a house and that, so they've made us think positive and to move on and think of bigger things. Know what I mean, so I've been enjoying it.

While becoming a parent is described as motivating, mentoring is presented as supporting this to envisage a better future and work towards it. Hunter and Farrall (2017) suggest imagined future selves help people work through what they ought to do based on who they want to be. Mentoring appears to help people think through what is needed to become the person they wish to be, such as a parent with a job and a house, free from offending.

Accounts of desistance often feature people who believe in the individual's ability to change (Maruna, 2001). In this regard, motivation involves another person demonstrating belief, empathy, listening or simply being there, which helps the individual continue fighting an uphill battle. This is illustrated in the following account of being knocked back from job applications:

INT: I mean you were saying there that [mentor] sort of gave you motivation to go. . .

M5:   Yeah he basically, what I meant by that is um like I would tell him, 'Look [mentor] man, I'm fucking tired of this shit. You know everyone I call I'm getting.'.. Sorry for the swearing.

INT: No that's fine.

M5:   That's the moment, that's the moment, at the moment I'm like, 'Man, I'm fucking loosing my head here every job that I go to I'm getting knocked back um I'm trying honesty is the best policy and I'm trying no honesty is the best policy, you know I'm trying every which way and nothing's working'. He's like, 'Aye man, you just gotta keep doing it'. Like I can't remember the exact words of inspiration but just having somebody there to like keep going, it did make a different [sic].

Here, the interviewer uses the word 'motivation', but the mentee redefines it: 'what I meant by that is.'. . . The mentee describes his own efforts to overcome the issue, and the mentor is presented as agreeing with him and encouraging him: 'Aye man, you just gotta keep doing it'. In the mentee's terms, the important thing was 'just having somebody there to like keep going'. The presence of the supportive person is presented as more valuable than what they did or said. Desistance not only involves the behaviours of the individual, but crucially the response of society and the potential to access opportunities (McNeill, 2006). Here, the role of the mentor is to offer recognition for the mentee's attempts to improve his situation, despite the persistent societal barriers to accessing opportunities (Barry, 2015; McNeill, 2019; Nugent and Schinkel, 2016).

Mentors can also help motivate people through praising them for progress or 'small steps' (Buck, 2018):

INT: How did you, how d'you know that she saw that potential? [Inaudible]

M8:   She would tell me, she used to tell me when I'd done good [sic] how good I'm doing, and, and she used to always, cos of my past history with my work and stuff she would always, like, she always like praised me on, like if I'd done something good, like maybe my life was a bit chaotic, she always used to praise me on saying, 'Oh you've done something good', when I didnae really feel like it was that good.

In the mentee's description, she was not only praised for achievements that were obviously good, but also for things the mentee did not see as good. Here motivation was generated by helping mentees see the good in their achievements, reinforcing the belief that they can do well. This is an example of relational desistance, as someone reflects back to the individual how they are progressing and changing (McNeill, 2015; Nugent and Schinkel, 2016), and pro-social modelling (Trotter, 2009), which includes practitioners identifying and praising people's positive efforts.

The mentees describe motivation as a complex phenomenon, involving both internal drive and external support. This is illustrated by the following extract, in which the mentee responds to the interviewer's question about how the mentoring service helped him to get where he was now:

M3:   Just encouragement like sometimes, obviously, everybody gets that day where they are like I cannae be arsed daeing anything, pardon my language, just cannot be annoyed daeing anything just don't. And they'd be phoning you being like that 'where are you?' am like that 'I'm in my bed', 'well we're coming tae pick you up', 'no I'm no coming the day', 'we're coming tae pick you up', know what I mean? You cannae be sitting in the hoose daeing nothing all day, what's the point in that? And just keeping you motivated, keeping your mind on different things and just keeping you going, know what I mean? Cos what else you gonna do? But aye looking back I coulda just fell [sic] into the exact same path, like I came oot an went oot at the weekends while my pals went oot every night getting drunk and all the rest of it. But cos I was daeing things during the week when it came to the weekend my pals were like 'do you wanna come oot and get drunk?' I was like that, naw cos if I go out and get drunk what if I end up causing trouble and then I'm no gonnae be able to go karting on Monday, I'm no gonnae be able to play fitball on Monday, know what I mean?

The mentee normalises his occasional lack of motivation – 'everybody gets that day where they are like I cannae be arsed daeing anything' – to manage the idea that his own attitude was problematic. This is important as he suggests that a person must be willing to work for something for it to come true. Normalising his own (temporary) lack of motivation therefore functions to present himself as otherwise committed to change, allowing him to maintain the position that internal motivation is necessary for change. Motivation is presented as having an ebb and flow, with mentoring supporting people through the low points. At times in this account, the pressure to engage is external, pushing against the mentee's unwillingness to move ('no I'm no coming the day', 'we're coming tae

pick you up'). However, he also internalises the position of the mentoring service, that it is not feasible to be 'sitting in the hoose daeing nothing all day'. His narrative portrays a life that has commenced on a trajectory away from offending, partly attributable to mentoring. He connects positive developments in his life with the support of the mentoring service to keep engaged and the structuring in of pro-social activities that provide reasons / excuses not to fall back on old patterns of negative behaviour, which Shapland and Bottoms (2011: 256) refer to as 'diachronic self-control'. Several other mentees described how mentors helped connect them with positive opportunities and activities, including training courses, volunteering, job placements, football, fishing, swimming, going to the gym or simply socialising with others. Many emphasised that this helped them avoid situations they knew could lead back to offending.

Overall, the mentees present a desire to change as a necessary ingredient for mentoring to be effective. However, this desire, and related motivations, do not solely reside in the individual or come out of nowhere. The desire can be presented as the product of changing circumstances, particularly negative experiences of going to prison or the positive experience of becoming a parent, yet the mentoring service helps crystallise these motivations, take them to another level or maintain them, through reflecting back the belief that change is possible, providing ongoing support, structuring in pro-social activities, and encouraging people to persist in their efforts.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings demonstrate that mentors can help develop and sustain people's motivations to desist from crime and improve their lives. In Giordano et al'.s (2002) terms, mentoring contributes to an 'openness to change'. The accounts suggest mentees may have a pre-existing *desire* to change, but the offer of mentoring can translate this into *motivation* by providing the means to achieve this change. It may help people develop 'hooks for change', through practical assistance leading to positive changes, and encouraging them to see such changes as valuable. A mentor can model pro-social behaviour and ways of being that outline possible future selves for the mentee. Structuring in pro-social activities can help develop stakes in conformity that outweigh anti-social alternatives, so that mentees come to see their old behaviours as incompatible with their developing self.

Mentees attribute inspiration to their mentors, yet retain their position as the original agents of the desire to change (Buck, 2017). Motivation develops in the dialectical relationship between mentees and mentors, as mentees desire to change their lives, but mentors crystallise this by providing the vision and means to turn this into a reality. As argued by Mullins and Kirkwood (2019), identity desistance occurs through relational desistance; through social interaction people develop and test emerging identities, find reinforcement or resistance. Mentors help people envision potential future selves, experience reinforcement for positive changes, see life developments as valuable, and find encouragement to persist in the face of barriers. In this regard, it is worth distinguishing between pro-social modelling – which encompasses a range of practices including being honest and reliable, demonstrating empathy, voicing views about the harms of crime, and praising positive efforts and achievements (Trotter, 2009) – from role-modelling, which involves demonstrating a way of being, and may be most relevant for peer-mentors

(Buck, 2020). Further research could helpfully examine the differences and overlap between pro-social modelling and role-modelling within mentoring, especially when comparing peer- and non-peer mentors.

Although mentors offer relational forms of recognition (Barry, 2015), this may be thwarted by persistent challenges to desistance. The development of future identities can be frustrated by structural barriers (King, 2013b), such as the difficulties in finding employment referred to in the interviews. Mentors often have to try to fix problems that sit outside the criminal justice system (Tolland and Malloch, 2019). It may be difficult to maintain motivation in the face of constant knockbacks, suggesting the need to address these issues, and a wider advocacy role for mentors to address systemic issues.

Within this study, due to the small sample size and limited demographic information, it has not been possible to examine how gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability or other aspects of diversity figure in mentoring. As highlighted by Buck (2020), mentoring is gendered, and at times can reinforce 'masculine' and 'feminine' stereotypes (e.g. boxing for men and fashion for women), while also providing opportunities to connect via gendered spaces or even challenge gender norms. Future research could usefully pick up on these topics, notably in relation to role-modelling.

The inconsistent evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring is partly explained by variations between mentoring services, but also because mentoring's role in desistance is subtle, reliant on the ever-changing interplay between the mentee's circumstances, commitment to change and subjective assessment of their situation, and the mentor's practical assistance, positive reinforcement and encouragement to look to the future with hope and optimism. Its success is also highly dependent on the social context, such as access to employment, housing and social acceptance. While mentoring practice and policy can be informed by the findings of the present study, such as the important role of mentors in building and sustaining motivation, and helping people to envisage and structure in pro-social ways of being, further research needs to explore the nature of mentoring practice more closely, identifying relationships between aspects of interaction, the needs, circumstances and views of mentees, and the wider social context.

ORCID iD

Steve Kirkwood ![ID] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1508-0835

References

Barry M (2015) On the cusp of recognition: Using critical theory to promote desistance among young offenders. *Theoretical Criminology* 20(1): 91–106.

Bottoms A, Shapland J, Costello A, et al. (2004) Towards desistance: Theoretical underpinnings for an empirical study. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 43(4): 368–389.

Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77–101.

Brown M and Ross S (2010) Mentoring, social capital and desistance: A study of women released from prison. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 43(1): 31–50.

Buck G (2017) 'I wanted to feel the way they did': Mimesis as a situational dynamic of peer mentoring by ex-offenders. *Deviant Behavior* 38(9): 1027–1041.

Buck G (2018) The core conditions of peer mentoring. *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 18(2): 190–206.

Buck G (2020) *Peer Mentoring in Criminal Justice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Carlsson C (2012) Using 'turning points' to understand processes of change in offending. *British Journal of Criminology* 52(1): 1–16.

DuBois DL, Portillo N, Rhodes JE, et al. (2011) How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, Supplement* 12(2): 57–91.

Edwards D and Potter J (1992) *Discursive Psychology*. London: SAGE.

Edwards P, Jarrett C, Perkins C, et al. (2015) *Mediation, Mentoring and Peer Support to Reduce Youth Violence: A Systematic Review*. Available at: http://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/Systematic_Review_Series/Pages/Mentoring.aspx

Farrall S (2002) *Rethinking What Works with Offenders*. Cullompton: Willan.

Farrall S, Sharpe G, Hunter B, et al. (2011) Theorizing structural and individual-level processes in desistance and persistence: Outlining an integrated perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 44(2): 218–234.

Gadd D and Farrall S (2004) Criminal careers, desistance and subjectivity: Interpreting men's narratives of change. *Theoretical Criminology* 8(2): 123–156.

Garcia J (2014) The importance of the mentor-mentee relationship in women's desistance from destructive behaviors. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 60(7): 808–827. DOI: 10.1177/0306624X14568257

Giddens A (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giordano PC, Cernkovich SA, Rudolph JL, et al. (2002) Gender, crime, and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology* 107(4): 990–1064.

Hucklesby A and Wincup E (2014) Assistance, support and monitoring? The paradoxes of mentoring adults in the criminal justice system. *Journal of Social Policy* 43(2): 373–390.

Hunter B and Farrall S (2017) Emotions, future selves and the process of desistance. *The British Journal of Criminology* 291: 291–308.

Kavanagh L and Borrill J (2013) Exploring the experiences of ex-offender mentors. *Probation Journal* 60(4): 400–414.

King S (2013a) Assisted desistance and experiences of probation supervision. *Probation Journal* 60(2): 136–151.

King S (2013b) Transformative agency and desistance from crime. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 13(3): 317–335.

Laub R and Sampson R (2003) *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press.

McKinlay A and McVittie C (2009) *Social Psychology and Discourse*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

McNeill F (2006) A desistance paradigm for offender management. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 6(1): 39–62.

McNeill F (2015) Desistance and criminal justice in Scotland. In: Croall H, Mooney G and Munro M (eds) *Crime, Justice and Society in Scotland*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 200–215.

McNeill F (2019) Mass supervision, misrecognition and the 'Malopticon'. *Punishment & Society* 21(2): 207–230.

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

Maruna S and Farrall S (2004) Desistance from crime: A theoretical reformulation. *Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie* 43: 171–194.

Maruna S, Lebel TP, Mitchell N, et al. (2004) Pygmalion in the reintegration process: Desistance from crime through the looking glass. *Psychology, Crime and Law* 10(3): 271–281.

Mulholland C, Eunson J, Murray L, et al. (2016) *Evaluation of the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund*. Edinburgh. Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/9184/downloads

Mullins E and Kirkwood S (2019) Co-authoring desistance narratives: Analysing interactions in groupwork for addressing sexual offending. *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 21: 316–333.

Nugent B and Schinkel M (2016) The pains of desistance. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 16(5): 568–584.

Panuccio EA, Christian J, Martinez DJ, et al. (2012) Social support, motivation, and the process of juvenile reentry: An exploratory analysis of desistance. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 51(3): 135–160.

Paternoster R and Bushway S (2009) Criminology desistance and the 'feared self': Toward an identity theory of criminal desistance. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 99(4): 1103–1156.

Presser L (2004) Violent offenders, moral selves: Constructing identities and accounts in the research interview. *Social Problems* 51(1): 82–101.

Schinkel M (2015) Hook for change or shaky peg? Imprisonment, narratives and desistance. *European Journal of Probation* 7(1): 5–20.

Schinkel M (2019) Rethinking turning points: Trajectories of parenthood and desistance. *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology* 5(3): 366–386.

Schinkel M and Whyte B (2012) Routes out of prison using life coaches to assist resettlement. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 51(4): 359–371.

Shapland J and Bottoms A (2011) Reflections on social values, offending and desistance among young adult recidivists. *Punishment and Society* 13(3): 256–282.

Singh S, Cale J and Armstrong K (2018) Breaking the cycle: Understanding the needs of women involved in the criminal justice system and the role of mentoring in promoting desistance. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 63: 1330–1353.

Thelwall M, Buckley K, Paltoglou G, et al. (2010) Sentiment strength detection in short informal text. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 61(12): 2544–2558.

Tolan P, Henry D, Schoeny M, et al. (2013) Mentoring interventions to affect juvenile delinquency and associated problems: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 9: 1–158.

Tolland H and Malloch M (2019) Role-models or gateways to resources? Contemporary confusions in mentoring practice. *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* 58(4): 496–512.

Trotter C (2009) Pro-social modelling. *European Journal of Probation* 1(2): 142–152.

Walker K and Bowen E (2015) Mentoring serial and high-risk perpetrators of intimate partner vio-
    lence in the community: Engagement and initiating change. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental
    Health* 25: 299–313.
Ward T and Laws DR (2010) Desistance from sex offending: Motivating change, enriching prac-
    tice. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health* 9(1): 11–23.

Author biography

Steve Kirkwood is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Edinburgh. His research
interests relate to identity, justice, crime, citizenship and belonging. He has conducted research on
criminal justice social work, restorative justice and the integration of refugees, published in a range
of international journals.