



Henderson, Melissa (2012) *A woman's way out: Can desistance evidence inform and improve contemporary rehabilitation strategies for female offenders?* [MSc.]

Copyright © 2012 The Author

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author(s)

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study,  
without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining  
permission in writing from the author(s)

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or  
medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title,  
institution and date must be given.

<http://endeavour.gla.ac.uk/89/>

Deposited: 13 December 2016

Enlighten Dissertations  
[http://endeavour.gla.ac.uk/  
deposit@lib.gla.ac.uk](http://endeavour.gla.ac.uk/deposit@lib.gla.ac.uk)

# **A Woman's Way Out:**

## **Can desistance evidence inform and improve contemporary rehabilitation strategies for female offenders?**



**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

Dissertation in Criminology and Criminal Justice

MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice 2011/2012

Supervisor: Professor Fergus McNeill

0705883

Submitted: 10/09/2012

Word Count: 15,915

## **Abstract**

A growing body of research has been amassed focusing on the concept of desistance from crime and recidivism. However, the majority of these studies have been carried out from predominantly male perspectives and experiences of crime. This study argues that evidence gained from female desistance research could incite a reconsideration of rehabilitation principles and strategies for dealing with female offenders. Drawing from empirical research studies and an exploration of literature surrounding female desistance and offender treatment programmes, this study examines how desistance is a distinctive process for women and is consequently worthy of an individual, gender-focused approach. Specifically, the study suggests a nuanced analysis of female routes to crime, the motivations and techniques used to aid desistance, the difficulties faced upon reintegration and a summary of the most effective treatment programmes to prevent recidivism and support reform. In particular, the study highlights the need for a gender-specific approach to dealing with women, the importance of a speculative understanding of women's re-entry and the implications this data can have for correctional practices and principles. In the conclusion, further research is suggested on the processes of desistance for women and the application of mentoring schemes in place of previous forms of correctional intervention. It is suggested therefore that the most effective means of treatment for women should be formulated in parallel with the underlying principles of a desistance approach.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Professor Fergus McNeill, whose direction and encouragement throughout the dissertation process has been of the utmost value. His insight and feedback has assisted me at each stage of the research process and have contributed greatly towards clarifying my concluding arguments. I would also like to thank my parents who have enabled me to undertake my Masters course and continue to support each of my educational endeavours. Finally, I am hugely grateful to Richard Baillie for his support and encouragement throughout my undertaking of the dissertation.

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: Female Pathways To Offending .....	3
Victimisation .....	4
Substance Abuse.....	4
Peer Influence and Relationships .....	5
Gendered Responses .....	5
Chapter 2: Desistance and Female-Focused Studies .....	6
Desistance.....	6
Female Desistance Studies .....	10
Marriage.....	10
Relationships .....	12
Employment.....	14
Motherhood.....	16
An Integrated Theoretical Model for Women .....	17
Chapter 3: Female Offenders and Rehabilitation .....	21
From Risk-Need-Responsivity to Desistance .....	21
Gender-Responsive Strategies.....	25
Acknowledging Gender.....	25
Environment and Community Support Programmes.....	26
Wraparound Services .....	27
Relationships and Relational Theory.....	29
Offender Mentoring.....	31
Summary.....	34
Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion.....	35
Figure 1: Processes leading to desistance for women .....	38
Bibliography.....	39

## **Introduction**

Within contemporary studies of criminology, research surrounding the process of desistance from crime has gained increasing momentum in relation to reassessing current probation practice and process. The perspective of a desistance approach shifts focus from a previous reliance towards working ‘on’ the offender, to working ‘with’ the offender and supporting their recovery (Maruna et al, 2004). It has been suggested that the underlying principles of the desistance approach could also effectively outline and redirect the shortcomings of current rehabilitation interventions and offender management (McNeill and Whyte, 2007).

Despite this budding interest, application of the desistance principles to augment rehabilitation interventions has thus far been quite limited, particularly in relation to women and their offending behaviour (Rumgay, 2004). Although women have been discussed in part, it is more often through gendered comparisons which commonly suggest the differences in the desistance process for men and women to be minimal (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Previous studies of desistance have attributed changes in criminal behaviour to maturation and the influence of informal social controls, such as marriage (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Maruna (2001) suggests that the role of ‘structural life events’, such as employment and parenting, are also all important contributions to this process, as well as motivation and changing self-identity (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2002). However, many studies fail to examine whether these same influences can be seen similarly affecting women; it has been suggested rather that men’s experiences have been ‘over generalised’, subsequently leading to the “invisibility of women” within criminology discourse and criminal justice practice (Cobbina, 2009: 4). More recently, due to the rising number of women in prison and an increasing recognition of their “complex and wide-ranging” needs, a reassessment of correctional policies and female offender treatment is underway in order to ascertain more effective ways to prevent female offender recidivism (The Scottish Government, 2012). Although there has been extensive attention surrounding the effectiveness of offender rehabilitation practices, research looking at women in particular has been quite restricted (Dowden and Andrews, 1999).

This research study looks to explore the contemporary, albeit limited, research focusing specifically on experiences of reform and reintegration for female ex-offenders, in order to delineate a framework of the desistance process for women. The importance of gender in relation to both experiences of desistance and rehabilitation treatment is also explored, with a view to understanding how these processes are distinctive between the sexes. The final

outcome of the study is to demonstrate whether a link can be created between empirical female desistance research and rehabilitation strategies, and effectively improve and develop these programmes for women. The topic was approached theoretically in order to highlight the lack of current credible research pertaining to female desistance and gender responsive approaches to rehabilitation programmes. There have also been few attempts to construct a model for desistance that can comprehensively explain the role of individual agency as well as wider social and economic factors, particularly in application to women (Farrall et al, 2011). Following an explanation of female desistance, this study will endeavour to develop the model constructed by Farrall et al, to incorporate current understandings of factors influencing women's desistance in order to indicate the processes that shape the nature and route of their efforts to reform.

Due to the nature of the dissertation, it was felt that accessing current literature and research studies on female desistance, rather than undertaking original research, was the most effective means of exploring the topic, this project was also subject to time constraints and accepting of the difficulty in accessing a vulnerable population. The majority of the studies used were qualitative in nature, consisting of interviews with females both in prison and post-release and spanning over a period of their initial reintegration. The use of longitudinal research studies were also regarded as the most valuable, as desistance is seen to be a developing, ongoing process, therefore those studies that covered longer time periods generated more valid results. As the studies chosen were all relatively recent, they were able to provide a broad insight into the contemporary problems women face in attempts to reform and reintegrate into late modern society, enhancing the significance of the research. This study begins by looking at routes into crime for women, suggesting that a gendered-approach to this topic can help explain the "subtle and profound" differences that are seen to exist between male and female offenders and indicate what areas need to be targeted for the most effective means of female rehabilitation (Steffensmeir and Allan, 1998: 15).

## **Chapter 1: Female Pathways To Offending**

*“The most significant and potentially useful criminological research...has been the recognition of girls’ and women’s pathways to offending”.*

-Belknap and Holsinger, 1998: 32

The focus of this study is to examine the desistance research on female offenders and discuss what kind of contribution this evidence can have on female rehabilitation principles and practices. However, before looking at the literature on women’s experiences and explanations of desistance, it is essential to gain an understanding of the factors that have influenced women’s introduction to criminal behaviour. In order for any form of rehabilitation or treatment to be effective, the context of women’s lives must be taken into account (Bloom and Covington, 1998). Women in the criminal justice system have often been neglected in terms of research, a problem seen to be justified by their lower crime rate and incidents of serious offending in comparison to male offenders (Bloom and Covington, 1998). This theory however ignores the fact that women offenders entering the justice system often become “extensive users” of the system and places greater emphasis on treatment and practices for males (Bloom and Covington, 1998:1). As a result, the majority of policies and services applied to women fail to deal with the “gender and culturally-specific problems” female offenders face (Bloom and Covington, 1998:1). More recently, greater attention has been focused on identifying the causes relating to women’s “pathways towards crime” (McIvor, 2007: 5), with socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unstable housing, and poor “child-rearing practices”, such as low parental supervision and parent conflict, seen as greater predictors of criminality amongst women than men (McIvor, 2007: 5). This research has suggested that gender is a key variable as “profound differences” between men and women’s lives help structure their patterns of criminality and deviance (Steffensmeier and Allen, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Bloom et al, 2003). It is now more commonly recognised that women have distinctive ‘criminogenic needs’ from men because of their conflicting routes into crime and their different reasons for offending (Jamieson et al, 1999). Experiences of victimisation and sexual abuse are disproportionately seen to be related to women’s offending (Hollin and Palmer, 2006), whilst other influences, such as drug addiction, unemployment and peer influence affect both women and men (McIvor, 2007). McIvor (2007) suggests however, that whilst these factors are associated with both male and female criminality, the degree to which they affect men and women is very different (McIvor, 2007).



### **Victimisation**

For women offenders, many pathways to crime are based on “survival and substance abuse”, with experiences of poverty and prior sexual and physical abuse recorded as a chief cause of female delinquency and criminality (Covington, 2001: 128). Daly (1998) reinforces the importance of past experiences of victimisation in shaping female crime careers; whilst both males and females are able to experience episodes of victimisation or abuse, female victimisation and their subsequent responses are “shaped by their status as young women”, with incidents of specifically physical and sexual abuse more commonly affecting women (Daly, 1998: 28). Experiences of abuse for women are also found to begin at an earlier age (often childhood) and last longer, therefore contributing further to subsequent offending (Daly, 1998). Bloom and Covington (1998) discuss research undertaken by Brennan and Austin (1997) on the rates of abuse amongst female prisoners in the U.S. which indicated that 80% of female prisoners had experienced some form of abuse; with 29% stating they were physically abused as children and 60% as adults, usually by a partner (Bloom and Covington, 1998: 4). Women are therefore thought to have “disproportionately high” rates of sexual and physical abuse prior to their offending, suggesting that the two are closely related (Bloom and Covington, 2001).

### **Substance Abuse**

Drug use is another pathway into crime that is particularly salient with female offenders. Whilst the degree of in-depth research evidence explaining female drug use and crime is not extensive, there are general theories that can be seen emerging. Empirical evidence has demonstrated a strong link between drug abuse and crime, with women who use drugs shown to be much more likely to be involved in criminal activity (Covington, 2002; Cobbina, 2009; Willis and Rushworth, 2003). McIvor (2007) also refers to data from a study on Drug Use Careers and Offenders in Australia (Makkai and Payne, 2003) which indicates that drug use formulates distinct roles for male and female offending; men are seen to be more likely to have engaged in criminal behaviour prior to drug use, whilst women offenders are more likely to be introduced to drug-taking habits by intimate male partners and commit crime as a means to finance their addictions (McIvor, 2007). This route to crime is therefore ‘gendered’ in that female offenders are more likely than males to commit crime as a consequence of drug use (Covington, 2002). For many women, drug abuse was also used as a coping mechanism to deal with anxiety, stress and loneliness as well as a means to gain ‘financial independence’ through dealing drugs (Cobbina, 2009; Daly, 1997). Research evidence also indicates the link

between drug use and escalating involvement in economic crimes in order to support their addictions (Cobbina, 2009). Due to the prominence of drug use associated with female offenders, desistance from crime would therefore be unlikely unless drug problems were successfully addressed (McIvor, 2007).

### **Peer Influence and Relationships**

Another significant factor influencing both male and female crime is deviant peer influences, whether it was, for example, encouragement to engage in delinquent behaviour or persuasion to take drugs (Barry, 2007; Byrne and Trew, 2008). Offending behaviour for women was often used in attempts to gain “social and symbolic capital” in the form of attention from older peers or male partners (Barry, 2007: 28). Barry suggests that “sociability and relationships” were therefore a key factor for women to begin offending, as well as the monetary benefits. In contrast, male offenders were seen regarding crime more as a means to “relieve boredom” and fitting in with peer groups (Barry, 2007: 29). Research undertaken by Byrne and Trew (2008) also focuses on the nature of gendered pathways into criminal activity and suggests that when ties to “pro-social” institutions and individuals are broken, the negative consequences of crime are reduced (Byrne and Trew, 2008: 252). In situations of strong delinquent peer-influence, crime was perceived to be both a low-risk activity and financially rewarding, “offending was experienced as a positive activity on a social and rational level” (Byrne and Trew, 2008: 253).

### **Gendered Responses**

Whilst there are many similar factors that influence male and female behaviour, the difference in the extent of these factors and the distinct effects they have suggests that pathways to crime are ‘gendered’ (Covington, 2001). Steffensmeier and Allan (1998) suggest that a “gendered theory” of crime allows for a better understanding of both male and female patterns of offending, by taking into account the organisation of gender, motivation for offending, access to criminal opportunities and the context of crime (Steffensmeier and Allan, 1998: 17). This concept reinforces the need for gender-specific treatment programs aimed at aiding successful desistance (Covington, 2001). Bloom and Covington (2001) suggest that the majority of programmes within the criminal justice system fail to respond to these differences and have yet to produce effective gender-responsive policy and programmes (Bloom and Covington, 2001). As women enter the criminal justice system in different ways and for varying reasons, their response to treatment and intervention will also be distinct from men (Bloom and Covington, 2001). Therefore, a greater use of the current empirical evidence of female

desistance could be effective towards informing and enhancing the rehabilitation methods currently being used to combat female recidivism. Bloom and Covington (2001) suggest that the present justice system has thus far neglected the 'gender-specific' treatment programmes necessary to support the needs of female offenders and motivate their desistance from crime. A more detailed discussion of gender-responsive strategies to rehabilitation is given during chapter three of this study.

## **Chapter 2: Desistance and Female-Focused Studies**

*“Desistance has no end state where one can be; rather, it is a perpetual process of arrival”*

- Maruna, 2001: 26

This chapter aims to provide a general overview of the desistance work to date as a platform from which the literature on female desistance can then be considered. More specifically, this chapter will outline the main theoretical approaches associated with desistance arguments and serve to highlight the notable lack of female focus within this research.

### **Desistance**

When attempting to tackle the problems surrounding offender recidivism and the complexities of community re-entry, desistance studies are proving increasingly significant. The term 'desistance' has struggled to ascertain a concrete definition within criminology debates, however it essentially describes the offender's development towards abstaining from criminality; “the change process involved in ending offending” (McNeill & Whyte, 2007: 47). McNeill and Whyte (2007) suggest that an understanding of this desistance process, exactly how, when and why ex-offenders alter their behaviour, is crucial in order to determine the best means of intervention and rehabilitative treatment. Maruna (2001) suggests that, rather than a definite ending to offending, desistance is better understood as a “long-term abstinence” from criminal behaviour, with focus placed on maintaining a new crime-free identity rather than the transition to ex-offender status (Maruna, 2001: 26).

Desistance is better understood as a continuing process of development, rather than a single event (McNeill & Whyte, 2007; Maruna, 2001). Maruna et al (2004) suggest there to be two distinguishable aspects of desistance; primary and secondary desistance. The former refers to a natural, offence-free period during a criminal career whilst the latter suggests a more permanent change in one's perspective on and engagement with offending behaviour, involving the move away from criminal activity combined with a change in self-identity towards the label of 'ex-offender' (Maruna et al, 2004: McNeill & Whyte, 2007). It is this concept of 'secondary desistance', that has gathered the most notable empirical research within this area.

In seeking to explain desistance, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1940) offer a biology-based perception of desistance with their suggestion of "maturational reform" contributing to eventual changes in crime cessation (Glueck & Glueck, 1940; Maruna, 2001). This theory falls into the ontogenic paradigm, in which an offender is seen "aging out" of crime, with time being the key factor in altering their criminal behaviour (Maruna, 2001), "Aging is the only factor which emerges as significant in the formative process" (Glueck & Glueck, 1940: 105). Research on age distribution indicates it to be inversely related to crime rates; offenders are seen to reach their criminal peak during adolescence until eventually stopping by age 30 (Weaver and McNeill, 2010). The maturational reform theory is also built upon by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) who reaffirm that as an offender ages, their deviant behaviour levels off and eventually ends regardless of their circumstances (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In this view, age has a "direct, natural and invariant effect" across all economic and social conditions and suggests desistance to be a natural process (Maruna, 2001: 29; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1990). As the majority of these empirical studies are based on male aging as a predictor of desistance, it remains open to question how the aging process affects female desistance.

Whilst age remains a significant correlate of desistance, many criminologists argue that it lacks a true explanation of the cessation process (Maruna, 1999; Laub and Sampson, 1992). Attributing desistance to age and maturation theories alone ignores the influences of social controls and institutional processes, Maruna (1999) suggests instead that agency and choice are central components, "families, jobs, age or time cannot change a person who doesn't want to...change" (Maruna, 1999: 5). Maruna (1999) continues stating that using theories which rely on age or a single normative pattern alone as an explanation of the desistance process fails to explain the "considerable heterogeneity" of developmental pathways, causing many criminologists to look elsewhere for a more thorough explanation (Maruna, 1999: 6).

Another theoretical approach suggests the desistance process is strongly influenced by social bonds or “informal social controls” (Maruna, 2001:30). This theory proposes that informal ties to employment, family and education can heavily impact changes in offender behaviour during their life course (Maruna, 2001). Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that the presence of these bonds provides the individual with a “stake in conformity” and a reason to “go legit” (Maruna, 2001:30; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Their research suggests that the social ties embedded within adult life transitions, such as job stability or marriage, can account for variations in criminal conduct and are significantly related to changes in adult crime; “the stronger the adult ties to work and family, the less crime and deviance” (Laub and Sampson, 2004). It is therefore not employment or marriage itself that creates desistance but the “structurally induced turning points” that are associated with them, effectively providing a catalyst for lasting behavioural changes (Laub and Sampson, 2004:11).

Further desistance research suggests that life transitions alone are unable to account for changes in criminal behaviour. Giordano et al (2002) proposes that individual “cognitive shifts” and consequent changes in behaviour and attitude are imperative towards the desistance process (Giordano et al, 2002: 991). They claim that for desistance to occur, a “cognitive openness to change” is essential and, when combined with social “hooks for change”, can trigger an adverse attitude towards crime and influence the envisagement of a reformed “replacement self” (Giordano et al, 2002: 999). Giordano et al (2002) stipulate that this “symbolic interaction” perspective resolves the problems associated with using social control theory alone to account for desistance. This approach instead offers an explanation for many individuals who have “pro-social experiences” and persist in offending as well as those who manage to desist despite a lack of these traditional support frameworks (Giordano et al, 2002: 992). This concept of a “replacement self” is seen as imperative towards the eventual construction of a new “non-criminal identity” which is an essential part of the desistance process and can be seen relating back to Maruna’s (2001) concept of secondary desistance (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 50).

Despite this growing research on desistance studies, there is still limited knowledge focusing specifically on how female offenders desist from crime, with few studies offering empirical research evidence specifically addressing the female desistance process. Those research projects that have included women in their analysis usually focus on addressing gender differences and comparisons rather than on studying women’s desistance alone (Baskin and Sommers, 1998; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). Perhaps in consequence, many researchers suggest there are few differences between male and female desisters, but reach that conclusion on the basis of limited evidence on women’s desistance (Sommers et al, 1994)

Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) state that comparable studies examining the same influences on male desistance for females are lacking as there is less sufficient longitudinal data focusing on criminal women to effectively provide a comprehensive analysis (Giordano et al, 2002). Despite this, there is a growing body of research which argues that female pathways into criminal activity differ from men's, suggesting that their pathways out, or their desistance process, may also be different (Giordano et al, 2002).

Research by Graham and Bowling (1995) looks specifically at gender differences, suggesting that women on average make a faster transition out of offending behaviour than their male criminal counterparts (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Women were seen as being twice as likely to desist from crime if they no longer lived at home; whereas the opposite effect was recorded for men (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Their research indicated that aspects of social development were more strongly related to female desistance but not to males desistance; for women, becoming economically independent through employment and completing education were strong correlates of desistance, men however were recorded as less likely to mature and achieve associated responsibilities as quickly as females, consequently making them less likely to desist early on (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Research by Barry (2007) in a Scottish study of desistance also found similar discrepancies between male and female offending behaviour. The majority of women in the study became disillusioned with a routine criminal lifestyle much faster than male offenders, realising the benefits from offending were only short-lived (Barry, 2007). Barry (2007) also notes the disadvantages for offending were twice as problematic for women, with the fear of being caught and convicted being seen as key reasons for their decision to desist (Barry, 2007). Women were also recorded as having greater concern for the effects of their offending behaviour on their reputations in the community, on their ability to be good mothers and on their relationships with family and friends (Barry, 2007). More recent research undertaken by Petras et al (2010), reinforces this idea of gender differences in both participation and frequency of offending. By analysing the effects of offending patterns between males and females, substantial differences in both offending participation and frequency were observed, with women committing fewer crimes and less often throughout their lives in comparison to men (Petras et al, 2010). Denver's (2011) suggests therefore that while men and women have similar turning points that may affect their criminal trajectory paths, the degree to which these different elements influence patterns of offending is distinctive for male and female offenders (Denver, 2011).

Overall, the majority of empirical research on desistance has been focused on observing and explaining male desistance, with only limited research conducted on female reform. Whilst some desistance studies have explored the gender dynamics in desistance, few have focused

on the underlying methods of desistance for women or desistance from a purely female perspective (Cobbina, 2009). This study attempts to bring together the literature that does centre on female experiences in order to delineate a more extensive theory for female desistance with a view to eventually informing rehabilitative practice and policy for successful reintegration and maintenance of ex-offender status. Research into the main indicators of desistance for males, such as marriage, relationships and employment, are all analysed in these subsequent research studies in relation to female offenders in order to understand their motivations for desistance and the methods used to maintain a non-criminal identity.

### **Female Desistance Studies**

*“...Respondents were locked into a deviant social world, with little stake in conventional life or conventional identity”*

(Sommers et al, 1994).

### **Marriage**

One of the most common arguments for desistance has been the influence of marital attachment as a trigger in changing criminal behaviour (Laub and Sampson, 1993). For Laub and Sampson (1993) particularly, the social capital and social controls afforded by marriage were seen to be the most influential in limiting deviance, representing the beginning of a crucial turning point away from crime (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). However, a missing element of the studies on desistance and marriage is the lack of longitudinal studies focusing specifically on the effects of marriage and desistance for women. Laub and Sampson can be seen briefly touching on this area in their research, suggesting there are differences in the effects of marriage between the genders; “men marry ‘up’ and women ‘down’”, indicating that female partners can be a stabilising force, assisting in changing male criminal behaviour (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 45). Broidy and Cauffman (2006) suggest that a closer examination of this theory is required; marriage effects should also be applied to female trajectories of crime in order to determine whether equivalent “institutional ties” are as influential on female offender transitions or not (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). Their research has focused on analysing which key factors influence female offending trajectories, generate desistance and encourage reform in the context of the early twentieth century (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). A comparison of female desisters and non-desisters is made, exploring the role of social capital within marriage by measuring the

offender's marital status and examining the influence of marital quality on their offending behaviour (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006).

The data for the research was originally compiled by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1934) in their investigation of female offending which consisted of extensive life history data with over 400 post-parole female participants over a five-year period (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). The data was then re-examined by Broidy and Cauffman and analysed to consider influences such as marriage and motherhood on female desistance as well as the impact of individual agency. The results of the study suggest that for women, desistance is more strongly associated with the move towards a 'quality' marriage and conventional husband rather than marital status alone. Results from the study indicated that only 6% of women desisters were married to the same man prior to their offence (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). A much higher percentage of female desisters were also recorded as having a 'conventional' husband post-parole; 24.2% in comparison to only 5% of non-desisters, Broidy and Cauffman advise therefore that obtaining a "high quality marriage" post release will considerably increase the chance of desistance (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 10-11). Rutter (1996) reinforces this argument, stating that marriage alone has no significant effect, "it all depends on the type of person whom you marry...and the sort of relationship that is achieved" (Rutter, 1996: 610).

However whilst Broidy and Cauffman's results reflect Sampson and Laub's (1993) research, they suggest that the way in which marriage affects the desistance process is different for men and women. As few of the women in the study were recorded as marrying 'conventional' men, it is doubtful this type of spouse would be able to exert the same degree of conservative influence that Sampson and Laub describe females do for male desisters (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). Broidy and Cauffman suggest instead that marriage for the women sampled is not just a means of induced social control, but has the ability to "legitimate women's sexual behaviour", reducing their likelihood of re-offending and committing sex crimes (the most common crime recorded for women in the study); if women are married they are less likely to use crimes such as prostitution as a form of financial means (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 16). For Broidy and Cauffman, female desistance is characterised by an acceptance of the behavioural limits imposed on women by society and the acceptance of 'traditional' female roles, "forging a path to desistance by embracing conventional social norms may be central to women's desistance" (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 16). Social capital, gained through social sanctions such as marriage, is therefore central to desistance as it enables women to gain access to "conventional social roles" and indicates a movement away from their previous, criminal identity (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 15). Giordano et al (2002) reiterate this idea,



suggesting that when making a significant lifestyle change, many women embrace traditional manifestations of the “wife role” in order to obtain the structure and social acceptance that this role offers (Giordano et al, 2002: 1050). Broidy and Cauffman stipulate that for women, the desistance process can be a “double-edged sword”, representing both personal success and the acceptance of social behaviour norms which consequently limit their opportunities (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006:16). Despite the relevance of the research by Glueck and Glueck (1934), the context of Broidy and Cauffman’s research allows for a contemporary more insight into the influence of marriage for female offenders currently in the criminal justice system.

### **Relationships**

Research by Leverentz (2006) is another example of an empirical study focusing specifically on female offenders. Leverentz also looks at the implications of romantic relationships for female desistance, with the research study exploring female ex-offenders re-entry and the impact these relationships has on their desistance from crime. By analysing different studies that relate to marital spouses and, in contrast, romantic relationships in general, a better understanding can be concluded about the types of relationships that play a dominant role in female offender reform. Leverentz (2006) suggests that the social bonds created through these different relationships are complicated, they may be both “destructive and conventionalizing” at different stages in time (Leverentz, 2006: 459). For male desistance, women often play a significant role as a “stabilizing force” in the offender’s life, subsequently influencing their movements towards a conventional lifestyle. Their relationships with ‘pro social’ women provides a “stake in conformity”, altering their routine activities (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Giordano et al, 2002; Leverentz, 2006). In contrast, men often have a more negative role and are usually influential in female criminality rather than desistance (Leverentz, 2006).

The study involved 49 interviews with female ex-offenders and their partners, all at different stages of the re-entry process. Leverentz states that the only criterion for the interview respondents was a “desire to change one’s life”, rather than any official records of desistance (Leverentz, 2006: 468). This could impact on the validity of the data somewhat, as the true length of time without criminal activity is difficult to ascertain and no official comparisons are made between those who were recently released and more long term recidivists. As stated within the study, the evidence is also limited as all respondents were contacted from a half-way house for post-release offenders, therefore only providing an insight into one small population of female ex-offenders (Leverentz, 2006). One aspect of the research methodology that is beneficial however is conducting multiple interviews over a year-long period, allowing

for observations of changing romantic relationships and a more accurate portrayal of how these social bonds evolve and impact reform.

As well as providing a new insight into the way in which romantic relationships impact female recidivism, the research also highlights significant issues with the traditional application of social-bond theories to female desistance. Previous research indicates that only 'quality' social bonds to 'pro-social' spouses promote changing identities (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Rutter, 1996), however many women in this study were able to form beneficial and supportive relationships with men and women with previous drug use and criminal behaviour histories. Leverentz also suggests that relationship social bonds are better thought of as a "dynamic characteristic", with the ability to both deter and promote desistance depending on when it is analysed (Leverentz, 2006: 484). One of the most significant aspects of the study is the indication that for many women, a complete avoidance of all romantic relationships is often the best route to desistance, disputing previous theories that suggest women must embark on social attachments in order to successfully reform, "It is precisely the absence of one particular social bond that is necessary for a women's successful re-entry" (Leverentz, 2006: 484). This point validates the importance of 'personal agency' above social control as a means of successfully desisting from crime as well as the benefit of relationships besides romantic ones (Leverentz, 2006).

'Avoidance strategies' have also been recalled by some women, expressing their need to move away from previous peer networks in order to disassociate themselves from delinquent influences. Research by Sommers, Baskin and Fagan (1994) suggests that severing previous destructive relationships was common with the women in their studies, along with physically removing themselves from previously 'high risk' locations, "I don't socialise with the people...I don't go to the areas I used to be in" (Sommers et al, 1994: 143). This result was also found within Cobbina's (2009) study of motivators for female desistance, with 94% of female desisters in the study relocating from their previous neighbourhood upon release from prison (Cobbina, 2009:171). Whilst this research is accurate in its suggestion of female offenders benefitting from severing ties with negative peer groups and relationships, other studies also indicate the importance positive social support networks can have, "peer groups offer important stimuli towards positive change" (Rumgay, 2006: 413). Relationships with "pro-social community representatives" and the exposure to positive role models can also be effective in promoting desistance (Rumgay: 414).

## **Employment**

Increasing criticisms about traditional explanations of desistance as being attributed to social control theories alone has led to greater research on individual agency (Opsal, 2012). An American research study by Opsal (2012) looks at women's experiences with employment post release and the influential effect it has on their ability to maintain desistance. Whilst previous research has established the significance of the work place for men's lives upon leaving prison (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Uggen 1999), there is little known about whether employment affects women in the same way (Opsal, 2012). Drawing on Giordano et al's (2002) earlier work on 'hooks for change', Opsal suggests that women use job opportunities as a hook to help formulate "pro-social identities" and how employment affects their process of reform (Opsal, 2012: 379). This concept proposes that individuals are able to choose proactive opportunities when presented with these hooks for change, aiding in their cognitive transformation and providing an opportunity to claim alternative personal identities (Giordano et al, 2002, Rungay, 2004). Opsal's research also indicates how challenges faced by women as a result of unstable employment can adversely impact their attempts to reform and is often related with the resurgence of their criminal behaviour (Opsal, 2012).

The evidence for the research study was accumulated from interviews with 43 women who were recently released from prison and currently living as parolees. Like Leverentz (2006), multiple interviews were conducted with each woman in order to gauge how their desistance progressed and to gain a broader picture of their re-entry back into the community.

Respondents were questioned about the concerns they had post-release, what sources of support were available to them, their experiences with employment and the challenges they confronted outside of prison (Opsal, 2012). These in-depth, personal accounts are highly useful in gaining a greater understanding of female desistance and their lives post release, particularly as there are limited studies analysing this topic from a female perspective.

As with previous research studies, the women interviewed by Opsal had all expressed a desire to change and conform, "I got another chance and Im gonna' do it this time, because I want change" (Opsal, 2012: 388). Upon release, the majority of women in the study actively sought employment as a means to transform their situations and their self-identity. This movement is reflective of Giordano et al's (2002) suggestion that as well locating an initial 'hook' for change, individual attitude as well as opportunity is imperative in order for the creation and maintenance of a non-criminal 'replacement self' (Giordano et al, 2002). As well as employment being critical to their welfare, many respondents in the study suggested that a good job was 'symbolic' and synonymous with the ability to remain "on the straights" (Opsal, 2012: 389). ). Colleagues and connections made through employment can also serve to

constrain criminal behaviour by acting as a form of social control as well as providing strong social bonds which help manifest ties to conventional society (Sampson and Laub, 1993). As the research study took place over a year, Opsal also identifies the characteristics of those women in follow-up interviews who were able to remain proactive in changing their lifestyles, “sustainers”, and those that either relapsed into crime or had difficulty maintaining a stable conventional lifestyle, “rejecters” (Opsal: 390). Women described as “sustainers” had managed to remain successfully employed, were able to support themselves financially and had a positive outlook for the future with a focus on achieving long-term goals, “I just want to move up in my job, I definitely want to be making more money. I just want to be happy” (Opsal: 390). Employment could therefore be argued to be a key process in both fostering and maintaining female desistance.

Most participants had similar starting points in their employment and attitude to maintaining work, however follow-up interviews indicated that not all women were able to maintain this attitude, struggling with unstable employment and doubts about the rewarding quality of working. It was predominantly women in this “rejecters” category who subsequently reengaged in criminal behaviour (Opsal, 2012). These women were seen experiencing multiple difficulties in maintaining employment as well as an increasingly negative attitude towards work and obtaining a conventional lifestyle. Some women had to leave their jobs whilst others were fired, leading to an increase in their economic marginalisation and lack of conviction in ever changing their identities, with many women expressing a “renewed reengagement” with their deviant self (Opsal: 394). These struggles, combined with many returning to alcohol or drug use as a coping mechanism, lead some women to suggest their return to prison was inevitable, “Any day...you could be homeless or in prison again. It’s like a constant fight daily not to go there” (Opsal: 395). Opsal suggests that these women had stopped using employment as a hook and had thereby challenged their access to a crucial opportunity for change. As work was a key contribution to the formation of a new self, unexpected or sudden unemployment hampered their ability to alter their identity (Opsal, 2012). A lack of community and social support was also a problem for the majority of women in the study. Opsal remarks however that support from family members was the key contributor to the majority of women who failed to maintain desistance, “This sense of being alone and without support seemed to amplify the struggles of these women” (Opsal: 398). This final point suggests that the maintenance of social relationships is still a crucial factor, able to strengthen and influence multiple factors associated with desistance. Narrative evidence from the study suggests that the majority of women used work as a means to craft a changing self-identity. Therefore, connecting women to post-incarceration employment should be a high priority. Furthermore, prison programmes for women should be providing

better means for attaining vocational skills and education that will successfully impact women's ability to achieve higher-paid, more quality work upon release. (Opsal, 2012). As the study was undertaken with American parolee's, further research within the U.K. is necessary to indicate whether these experiences are common for the majority of female offenders.

### **Motherhood**

Children and parenting roles have also been linked to the process of desistance, particularly in regard to women's desistance processes. Research by Graham and Bowling (1996) found that amongst women in their study, childcare and motherhood were strongly tied to reform (Graham and Bowling, 1996; Giordano et al, 2002). Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph's (2002) research on female desistance and cognitive theories reiterate this idea, suggesting a focus on children and parenting as a possible opportunity for change. Personal agency is also a key factor here as individuals have to both be exposed to this hook for change and willingly take up the opportunity it provides, this concept is central to Giordano et al's argument; "mere exposure to a given stimulus/catalyst is often not a sufficient bridge to conformity and sustained behaviour change" (Giordano et al, 2002: 1038). The role of motherhood in relation to desistance is also a highly gendered concept, with women more likely to place emphasis on children as an instigator for change; within the study, 26% of women's narratives focused on children in comparison to only 7% of men's (Giordano et al, 2002: 1039). Giordano et al also suggest that desistance and identity reform may be more successful when the individual focuses on the "positive attributes" of the motherhood (or any other) role, providing a stronger basis from which to build a "replacement self" (Giordano et al, 2002: 1040). Rumgay (2004) reinforces this idea, suggesting that the role of the 'mother' can provide a "script" by which conformist "pro-social roles" can be enacted (Rumgay, 2004: 405). The research suggests that children are also able to provide a means of obtaining new social networks that have a positive influence on the women's identity reform and act as a resource for mutual support; "...I find that the strongest friendships that survive are with the mothers of the children that my children go to school with...the other involved mothers" (Giordano et al, 2002: 1043, Rumgay, 2006).

A more recent qualitative study by Kreager, Matsueda and Erosheva (2010) also argues the importance of the motherhood role in assisting female desistance from crime and other 'high-risk' behaviours (Kreager et al, 2010). They suggest that motherhood, rather than marriage characterises the primary "turning point" in female crime trajectories, this could once again reinforce the idea that individual agency and cognitive transformations, rather than social control forces, are significant in the female desistance process. Results of the research

indicate that marriage in fact fails to inhibit delinquent behaviour for the women sampled, possibly due to the lack of stable marriages found amongst these women in poorer communities, indicating that marriage may not be a striking or influential event in their lives (Kreager et al, 2010).

Theoretical perspectives on female desistance are also examined by Rumgay (2004). Rumgay's analysis of "cognitive scripts" could provide insight into how changes in behaviour can be triggered by a specific event or experience, such as motherhood. This ability to obtain a socially recognised 'script' can allow individuals to gain both social acceptance and forge a credible identity and also supports the concept of 'secondary desistance' (Rumgay, 2004: 409; Maruna, 2001). Applying this script concept to changes in criminal identity suggests that offenders must develop maintenance strategies in order to sustain reform and must ensure to perform their required role appropriately, "the new lifestyle must become saturated with the behavioural routines of conventionality" (Rumgay, 2006: 410). Furthermore, the increased participation in these conventional roles will effectively strengthen an individual's commitment towards the desistance process (Sommers et al, 1994). Rumgay also proposes that for female offenders, obtaining and upholding a reformed identity is particularly difficult if they have experienced past victimisation or abuse as they will be unfamiliar with the normal behavioural procedures necessary to support it (Rumgay, 2006). This point would clarify the idea that creating influential, positive support networks upon release from prison is essential in maintaining reform.

### **An Integrated Theoretical Model for Women**

Recent research by Farrall et al (2011) looks at the structural and individual-level processes that impact offender's lives in order to formulate an integrated perspective of desistance and form a theoretical basis for further research. This model focuses on the processes which influence the "speed, nature and direction" of individual efforts to reform, by analysing the cultural contexts and institutional factors which shape the offender's environment, or the "macro-level structures and meso-level influences" (Farrall et al, 2011: 218). Previously desistance had been thought of as a 'naturally occurring' development within the individual, however more contemporary research has suggested that rehabilitation processes are able to influence the rapidity and ability for offenders to desist (Farrall et al, 2011), therefore whilst desistance "exists independently of interventions" it can, however, be supported and accelerated by them (McNeill, 2009: 17). Whilst previous research regarding individual desistance centres mainly on structural aspects, Farrall et al (2011) propose that desistance is

better understood as a consequence of the “interplay between individual choices and...wider social forces” which are beyond the offenders control (Farrall et al, 2011: 224; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). In light of the previous research on female desistance within this study, Farrall et al’s integrated perspective is reviewed here with a gendered focus, looking at what features would be altered to support an explanation for female desistance.

Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter and Calverley’s (2011) focus on the ‘macro-level’ influences on desistance and the situational context in which it occurs is similar to the contributions made by Bottoms’ (2006) research, which attributes an understanding of desistance to structural influences and the formation of an individual’s reformed identity, whilst also stressing the significance of accounting for “individual agency and innovation” (Farrall et al, 2011: 225). Bottoms (2006) remarks that desistance cannot be fully understood by social bonds alone, the concept of “human agency” must be taken into account (Bottoms, 2006: 244). Farrall et al (2011) begin their integrated model by looking at general ‘macro-influences’, those which have a slower rate of change and occur at different times, such as economic situations, social values and the concept of parenthood and marriage (Farrall et al, 2011). Farrall et al (2011) also take into account the role of family and the subsequent emotional support and practical help they provide in their framework for desistance (Farrall et al, 2011). In relation to women offenders, the prospect of family bonds and social networks is a particular area of influence and operates as a crucial stimulus for their reform.

The second macro-level influences are those seen to change at a slower rate, these include changing economic situations, social values and changing ideas about parenthood, maturity or marriage (Farrall et al, 2011). Marriage is often regarded as a crucial aspect of male desistance, with women providing an influential form of social control (Laub and Sampson, 1993). For female offenders, the quality of the marriage and having a ‘conventional husband’ are more influential in comparison to marital status alone (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). Broidy and Cauffman (2006) question the true effectiveness of marriage as a form of social control as the majority of women in their study were unlikely to acquire a ‘conventional’ spouse. The influence of a ‘quality’ marriage is also difficult to measure as what constitutes as a quality partnership may vary for each individual (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). This study suggests therefore that marriage acts as a trigger for desistance in its provision of social capital rather than as a means of control, as it allows women access to “conventional social roles” within the private sphere (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 15). The final macro-level influence includes “shocks to the system” which appear suddenly and could be crucial for some offenders. Effects of economic recession, sudden loss of income or housing or the death of a family member are all “shocks” which will invariably impact on an individual’s ability to

desist (Farrall et al, 2011: 227). For women, unstable housing and financial problems were a common cause of crime noted in the desistance research, therefore tackling these issues with effective treatment or intervention is imperative towards their chances of desistance (Covington, 2002). Farrall et al (2011) suggest the other aspect of their model, individual differences such as gender and ethnicity, also significantly influence the opportunities and directions of offender's lives, impacting their routes into and out of crime (Farrall et al, 2011). The majority of female offenders entering the criminal justice system have abusive or unstable backgrounds and are often affected by a history of drug and alcohol problems (Covington, 2002). Although these problems are "rooted in individual pasts", they consequently impact on present offending behaviour and relationships and future identities (Farrall et al, 2011: 228).

Farrall et al also take into consideration "routine social interactions and relationships" and the impact relationships can have on the desistance process, "relationships...are dynamic and can change and develop over time...influencing hopes and desires" (Farrall et al, 2011: 228). The support and validation gained from these relationships are also crucial in reforming individual identities, as well as impacting individual resolve to withstand setbacks and to grasp opportunities that could influence successful reintegration (Farrall et al, 2011). The 'social capital' gained from these interactions is also regarded as a key element of the desistance process; it places value on social networks in their ability to form trustworthy relations and "norms of reciprocity", create means for social responsibility and facilitates "efficacy and productivity" (McNeill, 2009: 50). This idea is significant for women in particular, who typically value the creation of social bonds and connections a great deal more than men (Covington, 2002). Broidy and Cauffman (2006) however, argue that whilst social capital is a key influence among female offenders, the interaction between social capital and personal agency is crucial to effectively influence the desistance process, "the ability to craft a conventional social identity is at the centre of the desistance process, with access to social capital playing a secondary role" (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006: 16).

'Motherhood' was also seen in the desistance research as a crucial element for women's desistance; in motivating them to abstain from criminal behaviour and create a "pro-social identity" as a good parent (Rumgay, 2004: 405), as well as providing them with new social networks and a source of support (Giordano et al, 2002). Socially accepted identities, such as 'mother', are also seen providing a 'script' by which women are able to enact and live up to this conventional role (Rumgay, 2004). A woman's perception of how readily available this script is will also determine their confidence in their capability to successfully enact this role, enhancing the women's sense of self-belief and value (Rumgay, 2004). This influence was



more specifically found with female offenders; men in contrast often gave more prominence to prison or treatment as a catalyst for change and focused on children and family in a more general sense (Giordano et al, 2002). These distinctions could make an argument for the theory of changing cognitive processes and identity as being more readily related to female offenders changing behaviour; women are seen moving towards “hooks” that will lead to a more conforming lifestyle, whilst male offenders in contrast require different incentives for real change (Giordano et al, 2002: 1054). Personal agency is therefore increasingly becoming a central aspect of the desistance process (Giordano et al, 2002). Finally, the model refers to the “existential point” of the offenders’ future lives (Farrall et al, 2011; 229). Farrall and colleagues suggest that the extent to which the ex-offender is able to achieve their goals is in part reliant on the opportunity for them to form “legitimate identities” and in their ability to reintegrate successfully into society (Farrall et al, 2011: 229).

For Farrall and colleagues, their central focus is on the relationships between offenders’ agency and identity and the structural properties of social systems which ultimately impact their desistance (Farrall et al, 2011). Research by Mouzelis (2008) also links the concepts of agency and structure, research from which Farrall et al have drawn upon in their discussion. Mouzelis (2008) argues that individuals make choices based on their understanding of relationships to others and within the context of social institutions, an idea consistent with the research on female desistance (Mouzelis, 2008). Farrall and colleagues suggest that an individual’s perception of both social structures and their immediate surroundings are what influences their choices. Therefore in regard to women’s desistance, positive social role models and a safe, supportive environment for the administration of treatment are crucial aspects (Covington and Bloom, 2006). For the majority of desisters, there is a delayed understanding of the social world and normative roles, therefore new “rules of engagement” and behaviours have to be understood and learnt along with an adjustment of self-perception in order to successfully desist from crime (Farrall et al, 2011: 231).

### **Chapter 3: Female Offenders and Rehabilitation**

*“Criminals are ipso facto beyond the moral community”*

-Waddington, 2003: 395

*“A great benefit of the desistance literature is that it updates the moribund precepts and dogmas of the...risk need approaches”*

- Ross and Brown, 2010: 37

This chapter intends to explore how the evidence gained from the aforementioned desistance studies on female offenders can enhance the understanding and development of female rehabilitation efforts to aid in their desistance and reintegration. Whilst previous studies have explored the development of desistance-focused probation practices (McNeill, 2003), there has been limited research as to how the desistance paradigm for rehabilitation can be applied to female offender’s interventions and treatment and whether the empirical evidence on desistance can inform rehabilitative strategies for women.

#### **From Risk-Need-Responsivity to Desistance**

There is mounting research that indicates the growing problem of female rates of imprisonment and recidivism throughout the western world (McIvor, 2010), however the majority of studies which analyse forms of rehabilitation and supervision programmes in relation to reducing reoffending rates has rarely focused on ‘what works’ with female offenders (Trotter et al, 2012). Ward and Maruna (2007) suggest that in order for rehabilitation measures to be successful they must combine three key elements; a clear account of the underlying rehabilitation principles, an understanding of the original causes of criminal behaviour (to direct treatment) and the implications for interventions (McNeill, 2012). Trotter (2006) contributes to these measures, suggesting features such as an optimistic outlook towards the offender’s ability to change, easily accessible treatment, a reinforcement of ‘pro-social’ values and a focus on skill development as all being key characteristics of successful interventions, particularly for female offenders (Trotter et al, 2012). Trotter, McIvor and Sheehan (2012), in their research on support studies for women, claim that these principles of intervention are all consistent with the desistance paradigm of offender rehabilitation, which places emphasis on individual strengths and maturing out of offending behaviour (Trotter et al, 2012). McNeill (2009) stipulates that treatment interventions need to

be supportive of the desistance processes, which ‘belongs’ to the individual desister, rather than focusing on providing correctional management, that in turn ‘belongs’ to a professional expert (McNeill, 2009). In this respect, McNeill (2009) advocates an approach to interventions with offenders formulated on an understanding of their “individual change processes” rather than being treated as a “type” of offender, with generalised interventions (McNeill, 2009: 18). Prior to the use of desistance research, contemporary correctional practices and theory have been characterised by dominance towards risk-based approaches and assessment, as well as “cognitive-behavioural interventions” in an attempt to manage offender ‘risk’ behaviour (Brown and Ross, 2010: 36). Before suggesting the strengths of applying a desistance-focused approach, it is useful to summarise the key points and inconsistencies of the risk-need-responsivity (herein RNR) approach in light of the evidence regarding female desistance.

The RNR model, developed by Bonta and Andrews (1990), has commonly been regarded as the primary model upon which offender assessment and treatment is based (Andrews et al, 2011). Whilst the model does have its strengths; in dispelling the suggestion of crime as being predominantly amongst more socially disadvantaged groups and stating the importance of a positive worker-client partnership (Trotter et al, 2012), it also has its weaknesses, particularly in its translation to practice (McNeill, 2012). The risk principle of the model is concerned with individual levels of ‘risky behaviour, which subsequently delineate the level of treatment they are given based on the probability and level of harm the offender poses (Howells, 2000), therefore, “the level of service should be proportional to the level of assessed risk” (McNeill, 2009: 24). Those programmes that do follow the RNR approach to practice are often slated as overemphasising risk-reduction and as having a lack of attention towards addressing the offender’s individual goals or aspirations, “they have focused on criminogenic needs to the exclusion of other needs” (McNeill, 2012: 6). Ward and Maruna (2007) suggest another key principle of RNR is targeting treatment at those factors which have been demonstrated as reducing reoffending (McNeill, 2009). However, interventions that follow this approach are also seen failing to recognise offender motivations for criminal activity or the positive social opportunities that could be effective in reducing recidivism (McNeill, 2012). This aspect is particularly important in regard to female desistance, as the opportunities provided by stable employment were regarded as crucial in aiding their desistance process (Opsal, 2012).

Trotter, McIvor and Sheehan (2012) also speculate on the appropriateness of the RNR model and related cognitive behavioural approaches in dealing with female offenders. They suggest that the link proposed by the RNR model between “cognitive deficits” and offending behaviour effectively instils the belief that women’s problems with crime are due to their own

“deficient thinking”, ignoring the influence of social or economic factors (Trotter et al, 2012: 7). Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2004) suggest that this approach holds women accountable for their oppressive conditions in an effort to regulate their behaviour, switching the focus from the real problems of the “social and economic constraints on offender’s lives” to offenders personally (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004: 91). Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2004) also argue that the underlying principles of the RNR approach are devised primarily from samples of male offenders, therefore consequent practices “ignore and dismiss the effect of gender and diversity” (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004: 91). Greater consideration for women’s economic and social disadvantages could subsequently have a significant impact in determining the type of treatment most effective for female offenders, rather than the traditional focus on the level of “re-offending risk”, which is usually central within male studies (Howells, 2000).

The ‘needs’ principle of the model is concerned with tackling offender “targets for change”, found within the treatment programme, commonly referred to as “criminogenic needs” (Dowden and Andrews, 1999: 439). This principle is similar to the desistance approach in its attempt to focus on individual factors that are seen to be related to the causes of criminal behaviour (Howells, 2000). Although these needs are similar for men and women, female offenders have different and more complex needs than males due to different motivations, opportunities and gendered lifestyle experiences (Trotter et al, 2012). A crucial aspect of rehabilitation and treatment for female offenders therefore, is the recognition and assessment of these needs, in both an individual and general sense (Howells, 2000). One of the key problems with this approach is the risk assessment aspect of RNR, which redefines ‘needs’ as ‘risks’ related to reoffending, subsequently removing focus from factors which have a direct connection to limiting recidivism (Trotter et al, 2012).

The ‘responsivity’ principle of the RNR programme addresses the ‘how’ of treatment interventions (Howells, 2000). Previously, women have been managed in the same way as male offenders and afforded the same rehabilitation treatment, however, evidence from the desistance research indicates the obvious requirement for a response-based rehabilitation system, which acknowledges the “distinctive features of female offenders” (Howells, 2000: 7). In contemporary approaches, this suggestion has become more widely recognised, highlighting the significance of desistance research in its ability to delineate both the specific needs and successful means of intervention for women offenders. In order to move beyond this focus on risk reduction and criminogenic need, Blanchette and Taylor (2009) suggest the consideration of ‘gendered pathways’ both in and out of crime, recognition of the importance of relationships for women and a ‘strengths-based’ approach in dealing with their

rehabilitation (Blanchette and Taylor, 2009). From the previous analysis on the desistance literature, the advantages of implementing desistance research to inform rehabilitation practice and principles for women are made evident.

The desistance perspective takes an alternate approach in interpreting and influencing offender interventions than previous rehabilitation theories (McNeill, 2012). McNeill (2009) explains how a desistance-based form of rehabilitation forefronts processes of change rather than focusing on means of intervention, starting from what the offender is experiencing, rather than what interventions do to the offender (McNeill, 2009). This approach consequently has certain implications for probation work, requiring changes in treatment strategies; as desistance is an “inherently individualised and subjective process”, approaches to treatment must accommodate any issues of diversity or identity (McNeill, 2009: 27). The development of ‘hope’ and motivation are also crucial when working with offenders (McNeill, 2009), particularly in regard to women because of common issues with self-esteem and feelings of isolation (Covington, 2002). This approach also proposes a need to focus on desistance in the context of relationships significant to the offender, both with their probation worker and family members, as well as locating the offenders’ strengths and resources and developing them to support change (McNeill, 2009).

Whilst the application of a desistance paradigm of treatment has been analysed in relation to male offenders, it could be argued as being even more beneficial in targeting the needs of women; the key features of the desistance process emphasise working ‘with’ offenders rather than ‘on’ offenders, encouraging individual agency and self-respect, as well as providing a source of hope and motivation towards the formation of non-criminal identities (McNeill, 2006; Weaver and McNeill, 2010). Whilst these are all influential aspects for males, they are particularly pertinent when applied to women. Treatment within the desistance paradigm also aims to support and encourage meaningful relationships for offenders (McNeill, 2012), an aspect which is particularly significant for female offenders in regards to their family ties and social relationships and the influence they have on reform. This approach also seeks to work on developing human and social capital (McNeill, 2012) which are both imperative for the female desistance process. McNeill (2009) suggests that as well as building social capital by encouraging bonds with family, developing community networks should also be a key feature of probation services, assisting to influence desistance and to allow individuals to see themselves as “positive contributors to communities, rather than risks or threats to them” (McNeill, 2009: 35). The ability for women to build social networks and skills to locate employment is an important aspect in the creation of a new, reformed identity (Blanchette and Taylor, 2009). Desistance from crime has been explained as a process initiated by an

opportunity to create a “pro-social identity during a period of readiness to reform” and is subsequently maintained by suitable support networks and forming resilience strategies (Rumgay, 2004). Rumgay suggests then that aspects of the desistance process can successfully inform characteristics of female rehabilitation programmes (Rumgay, 2004). This study attempted to explore this suggestion further, firstly through the exploration of desistance literature surrounding female offenders and subsequently the effect this evidence can have on rehabilitation interventions. It is therefore suggested that a fusion between the desistance evidence and an understanding of rehabilitation programmes can effectively generate new guiding principles for enhanced rehabilitation strategies and treatment for women (Rumgay, 2004).

### **Gender-Responsive Strategies**

One of the key criticisms of the criminal justice system and treatment interventions has been the predominance of practices driven by the ‘what works’ agenda, which is not seen to be responsive enough to women’s distinctive needs (Gelsthorpe, 2007). Covington and Bloom (2006) suggest that a “gender-responsive” focus to policy and intervention programs is crucial in order to advance the outcomes of criminal justice practices for women (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 3). As previously discussed, women have distinct pathways into crime with behavioural and social differences to men, interventions that are tailored to their particular needs and offending patterns is therefore crucial (Gelsthorpe, 2007), “Programs which focus on male criminogenic factors are unlikely to be as effective in reducing reconviction among women offenders...they fail to address factors which are unique to, or more relevant for, women who offend (Hedderman, 2004: 241). Gelsthorpe (2007) establishes that developing a gender-appropriate condition is an important prerequisite in promoting social inclusion and citizenship, and the consequent related relationships, in assisting offender reintegration and promoting their desistance from crime (Gelsthorpe, 2007). By applying a desistance paradigm of offender treatment to female-focused needs, the construction of a gender sensitive approach can be more developed more conclusively.

### **Acknowledging Gender**

Covington and Bloom (2006) propose the guiding principles for a gender-responsive approach; one which recognises concerns over the supervision, treatment and management of female offenders and can serve as a directive proposal for gender-focused treatments and services (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Firstly recognition of the gender differences within

the criminal justice system is crucial; with women and men exhibiting differences in offending behaviour, abusive histories, responses to treatment and supervision and varying levels of risk (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2004) argue that previous treatment programmes have been validated on the basis of all male studies and have consequently generalised, or even ignored, women entirely (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004). Simply adjusting the assessment of risk and need to incorporate gendered criteria is ineffective in reflecting the range of differences for male and female offenders (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004). Therefore, in order to successfully develop and distribute services, treatment and supervision, gender differences must be acknowledged and taken into consideration (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Trotter, McIvor and Sheehan (2012) suggest that previous treatment programmes advocated a ‘male-centric’ approach to the worker-client relationship, with workers often challenging “pro-criminal” comments and behaviours (Trotter et al, 2012: 15). Research with women offenders indicates a ‘strengths-based’ approach, recognising the context of female offending rather than challenging their behaviour, is a far more productive method, indicating a key difference between men and women in the criminal justice system and reinforcing the need for gender-specific approaches (Trotter et al, 2012: 15). Advocates of this strengths-based approach suggest that interventions with female offenders can be complicated due to previous victimisation and mental health problems, therefore “gender-neutral” methods of intervention and treatment often fail to tackle the consequences of self-destructive behaviour and the “oppressive societal ideologies” that are typical of female offenders lives (Mahoney and Daniel, 2006: 75).

### **Environment and Community Support Programmes**

Another principle for effective female focused interventions is the creation of a secure and supportive environment where the services are administered (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Covington and Bloom (2006) suggest that many female offenders have experienced past histories of abuse in destructive environments, the criminal justice setting must therefore work to ensure it does not recreate these kinds of surroundings, “a safe, consistent and supportive environment is the cornerstone of a corrective process” (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 4). The issue of women’s previous volatile environments suggests a need for “self-management strategies” rather than a focus on external control and supervision (Rumgay, 2004: 415). As well as the treatment environment, Covington (2002) claims developing support within the wider society is also necessary to help female ex-offenders transition out of jail and back into the community successfully (Covington, 2002). Evidence from the desistance literature suggests sustaining a reformed identity can only be achieved if opportunities for change are evident upon reintegration (Covington and Bloom, 2006).

Women are seen to face greater stigma as ex-offenders as well as fewer economic opportunities, a lack of specialised services and often sole parenting responsibilities. These additional burdens can often interfere with their ability to fully reintegrate into a community and uphold a non-criminal identity (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Covington suggests that the ‘caring capacity’ of these communities needs to be increased in order to respond to issues which affect female ex-offenders and impact their desistance process (Covington, 2002), “The community is the site of the relationships of citizens. And it is at this site that the primary work of a caring society must occur” (McKnight, 1995: x). Community support programmes for women are therefore a crucial means by which women can connect to significant resources which provide economic support, education, job opportunities, positive role models and community-based addiction programmes, “these are the critical components of a gender-responsive prevention program” (Covington, 2002: 139). Covington (2002) suggests that as well as the “preventative function” these gender-responsive strategies have, community-based programs offer added benefits to the female offenders children as well as being valuable to the wider society (Covington, 2002). Community-based sanctions have become more commonly associated with female treatment, with many suggestions that this method of offender management could be an effective alternative to re-incarceration and impact on the rising levels of female imprisonment (Covington, 2002). For the majority of female offenders, prison has been implemented as a “respite facility” rather than a means of punishment, which can ultimately lead to damaging vulnerable women further (Nugent and Loucks, 2011: 5). Austen, Bloom and Donahue (1992) suggest the most efficient community support strategies enforce women’s coping abilities and decision-making skills with an “empowerment” model in order for them to work towards self-support (Austen et al, 1992 quoted in Covington, 2002: 140). The most promising community support programmes will attempt to combine supervision with services that concentrate on the specialised needs of female offenders in a “structured, safe environment where accountability is stressed” (Austen et al, 1992: 21). As well as these factors, Austen et al stress the need for ‘women-only’ programs, with individualised treatment plans and an improved assessment of women’s particular needs (Covington, 2002).

### **Wraparound Services**

These community sanctions are often referred to as “wraparound” services for women which aim to provide a “holistic and culturally sensitive plan” for each individual, drawing on a coordinated range of services within the community (Covington, 2002: 140). Holistic methods of service provision have often been endorsed as the most effective means to tackle the “multiple and complex needs” of female offenders, providing the best outcomes for



women as well as lowering reoffending rates (Pate, 2010). The concept of these wraparound models encapsulates the idea of “wrapping necessary resources into an individualised support plan” (Malaysiak, 1997: 12). Wraparound services are best suited to those who have a variety of complex needs and could be a crucial element of the desistance process for women. Covington (2002) concludes that these community-based wraparound services are useful for two key reasons; firstly, as valued relationships and connections are a critical aspect of a woman’s life, this approach to service interventions places emphasis on maintaining ongoing relationships and working within female offenders “existing support systems” (Covington, 2002: 141). It also provides vital support for parenting; stable housing and child welfare as a large percentage of female offenders are sole or primary caregivers to children (Covington, 2002). This is also in line with the desistance evidence, which suggests the importance of the motherhood role in both motivating desistance and maintaining a reformed identity and the necessity of including women’s support networks in treatment, “co-ordinating systems that link a broad range of services will promote a continuity-of-care model” and limit reoffending (Covington, 2002: 141). A comprehensive approach such as this would allow for sustained stable treatment, recovery and support services, which begin at the start of a woman’s custody and continue through her reintegration back into society (Covington, 2002).

Research undertaken by Trotter, McIvor and Sheehan (2012) analysed the effectiveness of rehabilitation services offered to female offenders in Victoria, Australia, both during incarceration and post release, in order to delineate the success of different treatment programmes and services. The evidence was not dissimilar to that of the desistance studies in its suggestion that women found “reliable, holistic, collaborative” and strengths-focused services the most constructive for helping their efforts to reform (Trotter et al, 2012: 15). Research suggests that alcohol and drug misuse are frequently related to female offending as factors that both initiate and perpetuate the problem and therefore must be considered in treatment (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). Programmes which aim to tackle these problems are a crucial resource for assisting women’s reintegration and reducing reoffending rates. These programmes need to provide services focusing on both mental health problems and substance abuse issues, as well as being individualised in treatment and responsive to specific needs (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). Within Scotland growing problems with women and drug abuse, increasing imprisonment and rising prison suicide rates has led to a series of reviews and recommendations for a more effective approach to treating female offenders (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). Upon the recommendation of an Inter-Agency Forum, set up to create better services for women in the criminal justice system, ‘Time Out’ centres were established to provide support for women, primarily those with addiction problems, “women should be able to get ‘time out’ of their normal environment without resorting to ‘time in’ custody”

(Malloch and Loucks, 2007: 96). The 218 Centre in Glasgow was opened in August 2003, in an effort to shift penal preference away from punishment and towards rehabilitation instead (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). The 218 Centre is an example of the type of approach advocated by the desistance research in its adoption of a holistic and gender-appropriate method to the treatment of vulnerable female offenders, “218 has developed a model of intervention based on a recognition of the distinctive needs of women” (Gelsthorpe, 2007: 53). The priorities of the 218 Centre were to tackle the social circumstances that often cause women to offend as well as providing a safe, supportive environment in which women can address their criminal behaviour and the reasons behind it (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). Another key aspect of the centre is the employment of staff from a range of agencies, ensuring an experienced worker could address a multitude of issues common to women in the justice system such as mental health problems, relationship issues, drug addiction or poverty (Malloch and Loucks, 2007).

An emphasis on building relationships between the workers and the women and providing holistic care was also a crucial aspect of the centre’s approach, setting it apart from other means of treatment interventions. Malloch and Loucks also stress the unique aspect of the 218 Centre’s emphasis on women exclusively; the programme was designed with a focus on female-specific treatment and the creation of a safe surrounding in which to deliver it (Malloch and Loucks, 2007: 101). Research with women undertaking the service also indicates its effectiveness; 83% of those interviewed about their experiences with the service claimed to have decreased or stopped drug and/or alcohol use, whilst 67% of women stated how attending the 218 Centre had had “direct improvements” on their health and well-being (Malloch and Loucks, 2007: 102). The Centre has also attempted to facilitate problems with community reintegration through developing links with the ‘Routes Out SIP intervention team’ as this is seen to be a particularly problematic element for women post-incarceration (Malloch and Loucks, 2007). McNeill (2012) reinforces the significance of this aspect of the 218 Centre, claiming that successful rehabilitation needs to “mediate relationships” between both the changing individual and the communities where this change is taking place (McNeill, 2012: 16). Programmes such as this demonstrate the impact women-focused approaches can have, as well as the significance of tackling the broader, underlying issues that categorise the majority of women in the criminal justice system (Malloch and Loucks, 2007).

### **Relationships and Relational Theory**

Another key aspect of a gender-responsive service is an understanding of the significance of relationships and their influence in promoting the desistance process for women (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Covington and Bloom maintain that the effectiveness of any system or

programme will be enhanced by the inclusion of this relationship concept (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Evidence from the desistance research also indicates the significant role of forming support networks and social bonds in an effort to enforce reform and aid resilience to personal and social hardships which could facilitate the desistance process (Rumgay, 2004). Rumgay suggests that rehabilitation efforts should attempt to develop a “broader infrastructure of support” in which offenders can contribute, rather than having a sole focus on “fixing” individual failings (Rumgay, 2004: 415). Refining the offender-worker relationship is also crucial; findings in research by Trotter et al (2012) indicate that offenders viewed the most successful services to be those in which they developed a pro-social relationship with their worker, who was shown to be encouraging and supportive towards attempts to change and provided practical assistance (Trotter et al, 2012). This reinforces the claim made by desistance evidence that a “pro-social and strengths-based focus” was the most effective approach in dealing with female offenders (Trotter et al, 2012: 13). The need for an inclusion of gender differences is also evident as strategies shown to be effective with male offenders, such as challenging behaviour and discussing the details of their crimes, failed to help women (Trotter et al, 2012), instead they need to be treated in a “non-authoritarian, co-operative setting...where women are empowered to engage in social and personal change” (Gelsthorpe, 2007: 51).

The centrality of relationships to women’s lives is also reflected in relational theories of female development; “females are far more likely than males to be motivated by relational concerns”, with the loss of valued relationships playing a more prominent role in their offending (Steffensmeier and Allen, 1998: 16). This model suggests that a woman’s “primary motivation” is the formation of strong bonds with others and stems from the studies on the different ways men and women develop psychologically (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 6; Pate, 2010). Relational theory has developed out of an increased recognition of the significance of gender differences (Covington, 2002). This suggests that relationships are crucial as women develop a sense of self through connections with others, such as family and children, “connection, not separation, is thus the guiding principle of growth for girls and women” (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 6, Covington, 2002). Interventions which uphold this connection will be the most effective at treating female offender’s needs, reaffirming the strengths of community-support programmes, which limit issues of separation and isolation, and gender-focused practices. Desistance evidence also advocates the significance of close, personal bonds and forming compassionate relationships as crucial in supporting and maintaining female desistance (Rumgay, 2004; Gelsthorpe, 2007).

A recent evaluation of the pilot Willow Project (Nugent et al, 2010) described the project's emphasis on the importance of building relationships between the workers and the women attending (Pate, 2010). The Willow Project, based in Edinburgh, is aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable women at risk of offending or currently involved in the criminal justice system (Nugent et al, 2010). Many of the women felt that building a supportive and mutually respectful relationship with the workers had a significant impact on their offending behaviour and improved their outlook on life (Nougent et al, 2010). The Project also helped the women to gain self-confidence and assist in realising, and reacting appropriately, to violent or destructive aspects of their lifestyles that influenced criminal behaviour (Nougent et al, 2010). One participant in particular suggested that the self-esteem she gained from the Project along with the support from the workers had helped her "realise her self-worth" and motivate her to leave an abusive partner (Nougent et al, 2010: 4). Project's such as this are consistent with the approach advocated by the desistance research; the importance of an "altered self-concept" and changing identity is essential towards effective reform efforts, therefore rehabilitation strategies which motivate and endorse these adjustments in behaviour to facilitate new identities are key factors towards promoting desistance (Rumgay, 2004: 415). A crucial aspect of this support network is not only assisting in the formation of these reformed identities but also the "explicit endorsement" of the conventional identity that is being sought (Rumgay, 2004: 416). In sum, the Willow Project was identified as fulfilling an obvious gap in female offender treatment as well as being a feasible alternative to prison (Pate, 2010).

### **Offender Mentoring**

Along with a gender-specific approach, one of the key proponents for successful re-entry for ex-female offenders is the provision of effective community-based interventions (Covington, 2002). One of the most relevant and fairly under-researched means of offender resettlement and reform is the use of mentoring schemes. Although it is fairly under-developed and there is little insight as to how effective this approach can be, it has been recognised as being particularly influential in women's desistance and community reintegration (Brown and Ross, 2010). In light of this study's focus on female rehabilitation and desistance, mentoring as a means of rehabilitation is particularly relevant because of its incorporation of a desistance approach, "mentoring programmes... provide one mechanism for facilitating this transition process" (Rumgay, 2004: 415). Offender mentoring is a form of "social programme intervention", which makes use of community volunteers in its provision of service to vulnerable female ex-offenders in order to deliver a wider range of post-incarceration services (Brown and Ross, 2010). The programs have a focus on individual strengths; involving

intensive contact between mentors and mentees and aims to address a variety of needs so the individual can develop effective coping strategies to aid reform and resettlement (Trotter, 2011). Brown and Ross (2010) in their research on a women's mentoring programme in Victoria, Australia, analyse how difficulties faced by women upon release, specifically in relation to social capital, can be recognised and treated through mentoring services in order to facilitate their desistance from crime (Brown and Ross, 2010). Trotter (2011) also analyses the success of various mentoring schemes in Australia and suggests their approaches to intervention and subsequent outcomes were consistent with previous research about the effectiveness of implementing mentoring programmes (Trotter, 2011).

Both mentoring and desistance focus on the significance of building social capital; this relates to the individual's social connections and ties, participation in society and "embeddedness" in relations of trust (Brown and Ross, 2010: 38). Brown and Ross suggest this lack of social bonds to be a "key deficit" experienced by women post-release; "the absence of social connections as a result of offending, imprisonment and deliberate choice", which subsequently affects their ability to successfully reform (Brown and Ross, 2010: 31). Many women leaving prison are severely isolated with few social contacts and find it difficult to establish new positive connections upon release because of their prison background (Brown and Ross, 2010). As discussed in the desistance literature, many women employ 'avoidance strategies' by limiting contact with peers or severing relationships in an attempt to avoid criminal behaviour, "gender dynamics mean that it is often necessary for women to shed themselves of certain types of relationships in order to move out of offending" (Brown and Ross: 2010, 48: Opsal, 2012). Unlike men, for women offenders intimate partners and relationships are often a source of 'risk and stress' and a key component in their offending behaviour (Brown and Ross, 2010: 48, Opsal, 2012). Previous forms of rehabilitation have often focused on building 'human capital', such as employment opportunities or education skills alone, however desistance research indicates the necessity of interventions that provide not only a means of human capital but also social capital (Brown and Ross, 2010). A desistance framework for rehabilitation suggests that desistance occurs during an interface between aging and maturity, changing social ties and the subsequent narrative constructions offenders build as a result (McNeill, 2006). This approach stresses that it is not purely changes and life events that incite reform, but what these changes mean for the offenders involved (McNeill, 2006). Mentoring could consequently be seen "activating social capital", as the mentor and mentee become embedded in a relationship that could provide both practical and emotional capital for the ex-offender (Brown and Ross, 2010: 43). Another beneficial aspect unique to mentoring is the construction of a close relationship between mentors and mentee's due to the high level of contact during treatment, Brown and Ross

(2010) suggest that this effectively “emulates ‘normal’ familial or friendship relationships”, which is an aspect not often found between professional workers and their clients (Brown and Ross, 2010: 36). As the offender places greater significance on the relationship, they will endeavour to retain their mentor’s approval and align themselves with appropriated social and personal values (Rumgay, 2004). The mentor is therefore able to help create and validate the individuals creation of a non-criminal identity, Rumgay (2004) stipulates that it is this ‘validation’ of a pro-social identity that is a crucial aspect of the desistance process for women (Rumgay, 2004), “Most of my life people just said that I’m useless and hopeless...she gave me confidence, she made me believe in me” (Brown and Ross, 2010: 45).

Research undertaken by Salgado, Fox and Quinlan (2011) found similar positive results in their analysis of the mentoring schemes in Rhode Island Woman’s Prison Mentoring Programme (Salgado et al, 2011). Women saw involvement with the programme as a positive step towards change and an ability to gain new opportunities, with mentors providing an important form of both social and practical support (Salgado et al, 2011). One of the key aspects of mentoring is its early intervention approach; offenders are usually involved in the scheme three months prior to release and then straight after leaving prison, allowing for a “seamless set of systems” during their time in the criminal justice system and beyond, which prove essential for effective reintegration (Salgado et al, 2011: 294). The desistance literature has also discussed the importance of a supportive community to ensure female reintegration is successful (Covington, 2002), Brown and Ross (2010) stipulate that mentoring can have an important role in “breaking down the barriers of ignorance and fear” that are usually evident in community perspectives towards ex-offenders, particularly in the case of women (Brown and Ross, 2010: 45).

Whilst the extent of success for mentoring schemes is still relatively unknown, the research that has accumulated on them thus far has indicated its ability to help women achieve desistance and successful reintegration, warranting greater research on the processes and principles of mentoring programmes (Brown and Ross, 2010). Brown and Ross’s (2010) research reinforces previous findings that suggest the disruption of social networks is a crucial and distinctive element in both women’s offending and desistance, positive mentoring could therefore be key in re-building social networks, developing positive relationships and developing self-confidence (Brown and Ross, 2010). This reinforces Covington’s earlier principle that in order for women to change, “incarcerated women need to experience relationships that do not repeat histories of loss, neglect and abuse” (Covington, 2002: 130). Brown and Ross (2010) conclude by claiming that this study has identified pathways for women to acquire practical assistance and for processes that promote psychological changes

to trigger and sustain a “pro-social personal identity” (Brown and Ross, 2010: 48). Mentoring is arguably one of the most suitable interventions for dealing with the distinct needs of female ex-offenders and one of the most congruent to the desistance framework for rehabilitation.

### **Summary**

In regard to effective rehabilitation, a gender-responsive approach of comprehensive and wide-ranging services is seen to be a crucial starting point for female offender treatment and services, moving away from the reliance on RNR focused approaches (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Previous emphasis on risk management has advocated the use of external supervision of offenders, yet evidence from the desistance research indicates the volatile nature of a reforming offender’s environment and the subsequent need for “self-management strategies” rather than forms of external control, particularly in the instance of women (Rumgay, 2004: 415). Rumgay (2004) suggests instead the significance of developing coping strategies to survive high-risk environments and improve chances of recidivism, “coping strategies are integral to successful resilience” (Rumgay, 2004: 416). The above literature also suggests the importance of including gender when constructing treatment models for men and women, with particular focus on the necessity of a ‘strengths-based’ model for females, shifting the focus from “targeting problems to identifying issues” and promoting self-help and coping strategies (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 10). The importance of supportive relationships and the motivation and networks they provide is also critical in reducing female reoffending, by providing women with the incentive and opportunity to change their behaviour. Both the strengths-based and relationship-based approaches are supported by the desistance theory of offender supervision, reinforcing its potential for treating women (Trotter et al, 2012). In sum, to ensure the most effective means of treatment for women in offender programmes, all services need to be “gender-responsive”, in both their design and delivery of treatment, maintain a holistic approach, create a safe and supportive environment and integrate an understanding of women’s underlying causes for criminal behaviour to successfully inform and enhance services (Malloch and Loucks, 2007: 94). All services and treatment should also address the practical needs of women which influence their offending, such as housing, childcare services, transportation and employment skills (Covington and Bloom, 1998). With these key aspects of treatment in mind, the construction of a desistance-based programme for female offender treatment is arguably the most effective.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion**

This dissertation sought to analyse the existing empirical research pertaining to female desistance specifically, with a view to explore whether modelling a framework of the desistance process for women could inform and improve rehabilitation strategies. Whilst this approach to desistance and rehabilitation is not entirely unique, during my research stages I failed to locate any previous study that provided a similar amalgamation of female desistance and rehabilitation efforts and whether the former could inform the latter. The study began with an exploration of the 'gendered nature' of women's pathways into crime to give an understanding of the background profiles of women within the criminal justice system. Problems with substance abuse, victimisation, childhood abuse and deviant relationships were all seen as strongly correlated to women's experiences of offending, with drug use seen to be a particularly salient issue with the majority of female offenders (Covington, 2002). Locating the causes behind female offending prior to a discussion of the desistance evidence and rehabilitation strategies helped to identify areas of 'criminogenic needs' that would require treatment in order to facilitate reform (Dowden and Andrews, 1999). These results also reinforced the idea that criminal activity begins for different reasons for men and women as a consequence of gendered experiences and opportunities, therefore if pathways into crime are distinct between sexes, pathways out must be as well, indicating the need for differentiation in treatment and intervention (Giordano et al, 2002).

Although locating research studies which focused on female offenders specifically was difficult, those that were found were able to specify key triggers for women's reform and could together provide a framework to explain women's desistance more fully. The prospect of marriage as a trigger for desistance has long been advocated, however mainly in relation to male offenders (Laub and Sampson, 1993). Evidence from the desistance studies discussed suggests that the effect of marriage is not as significant or influential for women; whilst females are seen to have a positive effect on male offenders the opposite is true for females, as men are often key contributors towards their offending behaviour (Covington, 2002). Therefore it is suggested that marriage is only a motivation for desistance for women if they are seen to marry a 'conventional husband' (Broidy and Cauffman, 2006). Motherhood, rather, was seen as a much more significant influence for women and was strongly linked to their processes of reform (Graham and Bowling, 1996). Research suggested that parenting roles were influential in terms of cognitive changes for women, as the application of a 'motherhood role' allowed for the formation of a positive, replacement identity and provided



new means of support networks within their immediate environment (Giordano et al, 2002). Employment opportunities were another aspect that affected female offenders in a similar, constructive way; many women had financial difficulties prior to entering the justice system or were financially dependent on a partner, obtaining employment upon release was therefore crucial in allowing women to look after themselves as well as acting as another opportunity to form “pro-social identities” ( Opsal, 2012: 379) which are no longer compatible with prior deviant behaviour (Giordano et al, 2002). Employment and motherhood roles were seen providing crucial “hooks for change” allowing women the chance to alter their offending behaviour and maintain desistance (Giordano et al, 2002: 999). These roles enabled woman to claim a more conventional identity which, when publically recognised and validated, will support their efforts to change (Rumgay, 2004). Another aspect of women’s desistance brought out in the literature is the significance of relationships and social bonds. These social connections to family, friends and wider networks in the community are crucial in helping women cope with the difficulties of reintegration post-release (Rumgay, 2004). However, whilst these aspects are influential, much of the empirical evidence on female desistance suggests personal agency and the desire to change is in fact the most momentous feature in aiding women’s movement towards a reformed identity.

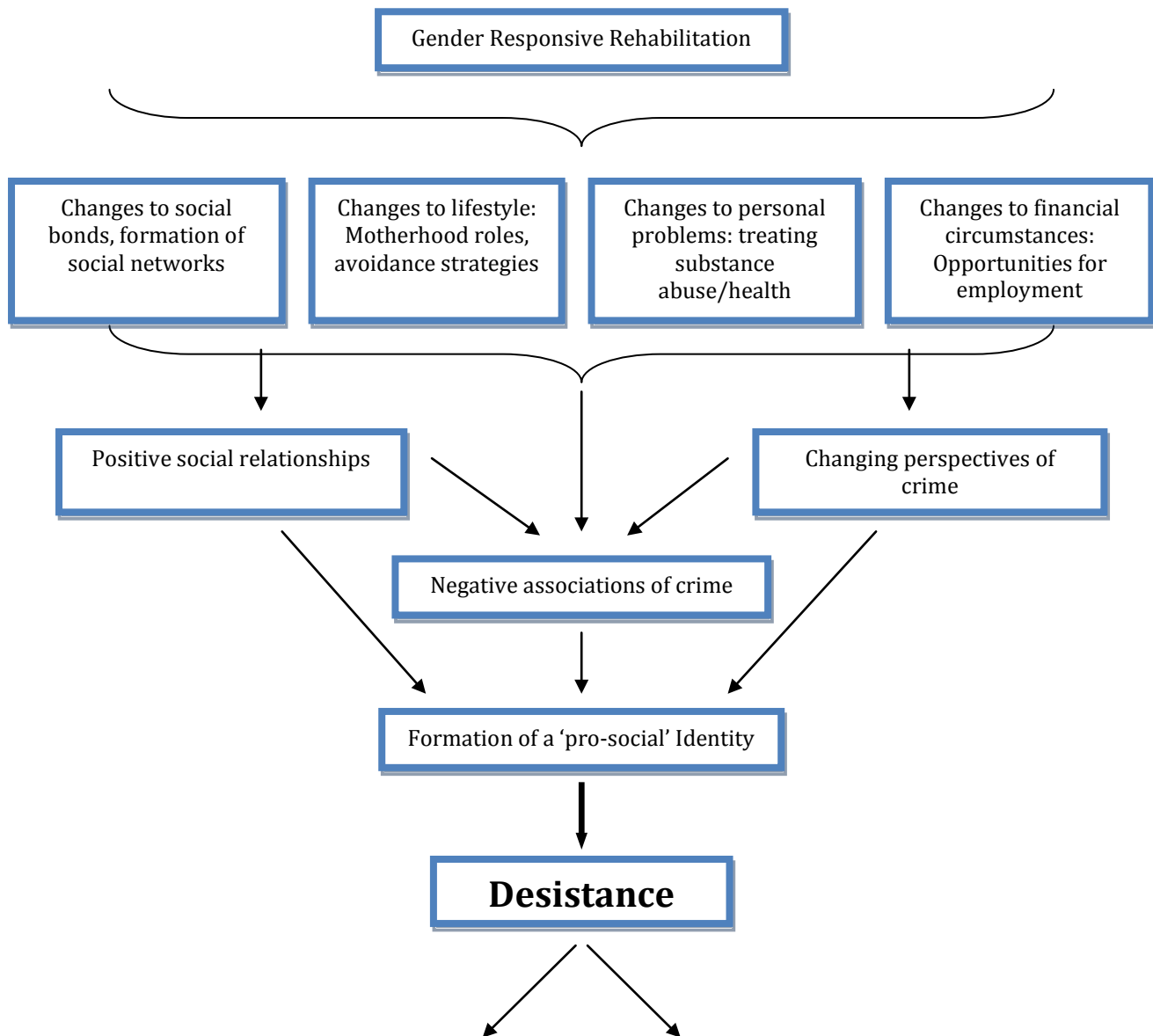
The study then went on to discuss the key aspects of a suitable gendered-approach to women’s services, with a view to exploring how desistance-led programmes could contribute to current principles and practices for female rehabilitation. The research suggests that in order for treatment interventions to benefit female offenders they must be responsive to gendered needs as well as practical problems, be holistic in application, focus on women’s strengths and recognise the significance of social support networks, “it is essential for women to have a physically and psychologically safe, welcoming and healing space for their recovery process” (Covington and Bloom, 2006: 16). The significant role support networks have suggests that for rehabilitation to be influential, efforts should be focused on working ‘with’ the individual to help them contribute to wider society, rather than “fixing individual shortcomings” (Rumgay, 2004: 415). Farrall (2002) reiterates the importance of this aspect for women, arguing that personal agency will be strengthened when individuals are able to access sufficient social and economic support (Farrall, 2002). For women, the centrality of social ties and family bonds in their reform process is one of the most distinctive aspects of both their offending and desistance (Covington and Bloom, 2006). This would appear to stipulate an approach to female supervision beyond a focus on purely cognitive responses that has typically characterised provisions for men (Sheehan et al, 2007). The desistance paradigm facilitates this idea, along with a strengths-based approach towards working with offenders and establishing positive, influential relationships between the worker and participant,

providing emotional assistance as well as practical help (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 29). Therefore, based on the evidence for women's desistance and effective means for female rehabilitation, it is suggested that desistance principles could in fact be even more effective in application to women offenders than they are for males, and could successfully enhance female rehabilitation practices.

In terms of moving towards more valuable practices, mentoring programmes were analysed as one of the most sufficient for addressing the multiple needs of vulnerable women and as being most in-line with the desistance paradigm. Evidence from desistance studies could therefore reinforce what factors are the most crucial to address and indicates what the objectives of mentoring should be (Brown and Ross, 2010). Based on the research evidence for the success of mentoring in Australian prisons, it is suggested that these programmes could provide, at the very least, new skills towards building positive, social relationships (Brian and Ross, 2010). Mentoring schemes and the relationships they provide have the ability to reinforce the offenders capability to construct pro-social, conventional identities, Rungay (2004) suggests therefore that this programme could supplement the gap in provision for women, offering a "third-way" between male-focused strategies and complete disregard (Rungay, 2004: 416). An analysis of the success of the few mentoring schemes implemented within the U.K. is therefore a necessary focus for future research and could subsequently indicate provisions for future treatment. In order to summarise this studies argument, Figure 1(overleaf) briefly outlines the key influences and processes for female desistance as a consequence of mentoring programmes.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 is an adapted version of Byrne and Trew's (2008) model to indicate the desistance process for women specifically.

**Figure 1:** Processes leading to desistance for women.

## Bibliography

- Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J. and Stephen Wormith, J., (2011) "The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model: Does Adding the Good Lives Model Contribute to Effective Crime Prevention?" in *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*. Vol. 38(7)
- Austin, J., Bloom, B., and T. Donahue. (1992) *Female offenders in the community: An analysis of innovative strategies and programs*. Washington: National Institute of Corrections.
- Barry, M. (2007) "The transitional pathways of young female offenders: towards a non offending lifestyle" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *What Works with Women Offenders*
- Baskin, D. R. and Sommers, I. B. (1998) *Casualties of community disorder: Women's careers in violent crime*. Boulder: Westview
- Belknap and Holsinger (1998) "An Overview of Delinquent Girls: How Theory and Practice Have Failed and the Need for Innovative Changes" in R. T. Zaplin (ed) *Female Offenders: Critical Perspectives and Effective Interventions*. Maryland: Aspen Publication
- Blanchette, K., Taylor, K. N. (2009) "Reintegration of Female Offenders: Perspective's on 'What Work's'" in *Corrections Today*,
- Bloom, B. and Covington, C (1998) *Gender-Specific Programming for Female Offenders: What is it and why is it important?* The Centre for Gender and Justice: California
- Bloom, B. and Covington, C. (2001) *Effective Gender Responsive Intervention in Juvenile Justice: Addressing the Lives of Delinquent Girls*
- Bottoms, A. (2006) "Desistance, social bonds and human agency: A theoretical exploration". In P-OH Wikstrom and RJ Sampson (eds.) *The explanation of crime: Context, mechanisms and development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Broidy, L.M. and Cauffman, E. E. (2006) *Understanding the Female Offender*.  
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/216615.pdf> accessed 20/08/2012
- Brown, M. and Ross, S. (2010) "Assisting and Supporting Women Released from Prison: Is Mentoring the Answer?" in *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 22 (2)
- Brown, M. and Ross, S. (2010) "Mentoring, Social Capital and Desistance: A Study of Women Released From Prison" in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol. 43(1)
- Burgess, C., Malloch, M., McIvor, G. (2011) *Women in Focus: An Evaluation*. Report for South West Scotland Community Justice Authority, The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research. Accessed 20/08/2012,  
<http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/documents/Women%20in%20Focus%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>
- Byrne, C.F. and Trew, K.J., (2008) "Pathways Through Crime: The Development of Crime and Desistance in the Accounts of Men and Women Offenders" in *The Howard Journal* vol.47 (3) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing ltd.

- Chesney-Lind, M. (1997) *The Female Offender: Girls, women and crime*. California: Sage Publishing
- Cobbina, J. (2009) *From Prison to Home: Women's Pathways In and Out of Crime*. Missouri: U.S. Department of Justice
- Covington, S.S. and Bloom, B. E. (1998) "Gender Responsive Treatment and Services in Correctional Settings" in E. Leeder (ed.) *Women and Therapy*. Vol. 29(3/4)
- Covington, S. S. (2002) *A Woman's Journey Home: Challenges for Female Offenders and Their Children*. Institute of Relational Development, US Department of Health and Human Services
- Covington, S and Bloom (2006) '*Gender Responsive Treatment and Services in Correctional Settings*'. accessed 20/08/2012  
<http://casat.unr.edu/docs/CovingtonandBloomGenderresponsivetreatmentandservicesincorrectionalsettings.pdf> .
- Daly, K (1998). "Gender, Crime, and Criminology". In M. Tonry (ed.) *The Handbook of Crime and Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Denver, L. (2008) *Desistance and Developmental Life Course Theories: Research Summary*. Arlington: Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice. Accessed 18/08/2012, <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/DesistanceResearchSummary.pdf>
- Dowden, C. and Andrews, D. A. (1999) "What Works for Female Offenders: A Meta Analytic Review" in *Crime and Delinquency*. Sage Publications ,  
<http://cad.sagepub.com/content/45/4/438.full.pdf+html> <accessed 1/09/2012>
- Farrall, S. (2002) *Rethinking What Works with Offenders: Probation, Social Context and Desistance from Crime*. Collompton: Willan
- Farrall, S. (2004) "Social capital and offender reintegration: Making probation desistance focused. In S. Maruna, and R. Immarigeon (eds.) *After crime and punishment: Pathways to offender reintegration*. Collompton: Willan
- Farral, S., Sharpe, G., Hunter, B. and Calverley, A. (2011) "Theorizing structural and individual-level processes in desistance and persistence: Outlining an intergrated perspective" in *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*. 44: 218
- Gelsthorpe, L. (2007) "Sentencing and Gender" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *What Works with Women Offender.s* Devon: Willan Publishing
- Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S.A. and Rudolph, J.L., (2002) "Gender, Crime and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation" in *American Journal of Sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Glueck, S. + Glueck, E. (1940) *Juvenile Delinquents Grown Up*. Oxford: Commonwealth Fund
- Gottfredson, M.R. and Hirschi, T. (1990) *A General Theory of Crime*. California: Stanford University Press

- Graham, J. and Bowling, B. (1995) *Young People and Crime*. London: Home Office.
- Hedderman, C. (2004) 'The "criminogenic needs" of women offenders' in G. McIvor (ed.) *Women Who Offend*. London: Jessica Kingsley
- Hollin, C. and Palmer, E. (2006) "Criminogenic need and women offenders: A critique of the literature" in *Legal and Criminal Psychology*. Vol. 11 (2) 179-195
- Howells, K. (2000) *Treatment, Management and Rehabilitation of Women in Prison: Relevance of Rehabilitation Principles*. Forensic and Applied Psychology Research Group, University of South Australia
- Jamieson, J., McIvor, G. and Muray, C. (1999) *Understanding Offending Among Young People*. Edinburgh: The Stationary Office
- Kreager, D. A., Matsueda, R. L. and E. A., Erosheva (2010) "Motherhood and Criminal Desistance in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods" in *Criminology*. 48: 221-258
- Leverentz (2006) "For the love of a good man?" in *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. Vol. 43
- McIvor, G., Trotter, C., Sheehan, R. (2009) "Women, resettlement and desistance" in *Probation Journal*. Vol.56 (4) 347-361
- McKnight, (1995) *The careless society: Community and its counterfeits*. New York: Basic Books.
- McNeill, F. (2003) "Desistance-focused Probation Practices" in W. Hong Chui and M. Nellis (eds) *Moving Probation Forward*, Pearson Education Ltd.: Edinburgh
- McNeill, F. and Whyte, B. (2007) *Reducing Reoffending: social work and community justice in Scotland*. Michigan: Willan
- McNeill, F. (2009) *Towards Effective Practice in Offender Supervision*. SCCRJ Report, University of Glasgow
- McNeill, F. and Weaver, B. (2010). *Changing Lives? Desistance Research and Offender Management*. The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research
- Mahoney, A.M and Daniel., C. A. (2006) "Bridging the power gap: Narrative therapy and incarcerated women" in *The Prison Journal* 86(1) 75-88
- Malysiak, R. (1997) "Exploring the theory and paradigm base for wraparound fidelity". *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 7(1): 11-25.
- Malloch, M., and Loucks, N. (2007) "Responding to drug and alcohol problems: innovations and effectiveness in treatment programmes for women" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *What Works with Women Offenders*. Devon: Willan Publishing
- Maruna, S. (1999) "Desistance and Development: The Psychosocial Process Of 'Going Straight'" in *The British Society of Criminology*. Vol (2)
- Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*. Washington: American Psychological Association

- Maruna, S., Immarigeon, R. and Lebel, T. (2004) "Ex-offender Reintegration: Theory and Practice", in S. Maruna and R. Immarigeon (eds.), *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*. Cullompton: Willan
- Makkai, T. and Payne, J. (2003) "Key findings from the drug use careers of offenders (DUCO) study, *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 237*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Criminology
- Mouzelis, N. (2008) *Modern and Postmodern Social Theorising*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Nugent, B., Loureiro, T. and Loucks, N. (2010) *Evaluation of the Pilot at the Willow Project: Executive Summary*. Edinburgh: Lothian and Borders Criminal Justice Authority
- Nugent, B. And Loucks, N. (2011) "Female offenders in the community: The context of female crime" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *Working with Women Offenders in the Community*. Willan Publishing: Oxon
- Opsal, T (2012) "Livin' on the Straights': Identity, Desistance and Work among Women Post-incarceration" in *Sociological Inquiry*. Vol.82 (3) 378-403
- Pate, K (2010) *A Model and Framework for Working with Women Offenders: A multi-faceted partnership approach*. Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority
- Petras, H., Nieuwbeerta, P., and Piquero, A. (2010). Participation and frequency of during criminal careers across the life span. *Criminology*, 48, 607–637.
- Rumgay, J. (2004) "Scripts for Safer Survival: Pathways Out of Female Crime." in *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. 43: 405-419.
- Rutter, M. (1996) 'Transitions and Turning Points in Developmental Psychopathology: As Applied to the Age Span between Childhood and Mid-adulthood', in *Journal of Behavioural Development*. Vol. 19 (3) 603-26.
- Sampson, R. J. and Laub, J. (1993) *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Sampson, and Laub (2004) "A general age-graded theory of crime: Lessons learnt and the future of life course criminology" in *Advances in Criminological Theory* (Volume13,2004): *Testing Integrated Developmental/Life Course Theories of Offending*, edited by David Farrington.
- Salgado, D. M., Fox, J. B., Quinlan, K. (2011) "Community mentoring in the United States: An evaluation of the Rhode Island Women's Mentoring Program" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *Working with Women Offenders in the Community*. Willan Publishing: Oxon
- Sharpe, G. and Gelsthorpe, L. (2009) 'Engendering the agenda, girl, young women and youth justice *Youth Justice*, 9(3), 195-208
- Shaw, M and Hannah-Moffat, K (2004) "How Cognitive Skills Forgot About Gender and Diversity" in G. Mair (ed.) *What Matters in Probation?* Cullompton: Willan Publishing

Sheehan, R., McIvor, G. and Trotter, C. (2007) "What does work for women offenders?" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *What Works with Women Offenders*. Devon: Willan Publishing

Sommers, I., Baskin, D. And Fagan, J. (1994) "Getting out of the life: crime desistance by female street offenders" in *Deviant Behaviour: An interdisciplinary journal*, 15:125-49

Steffensmeier, D. and Allan, E. (1998) "The Nature of Female Offending: Patterns and Explanation" in R. T. Zaplin (ed.) *Female Offenders: Critical Perspectives and Effective Interventions*. Maryland: Aspen Publishers

Trotter, C (2011) "Mentoring" in R. Sheehan, G. McIvor and C. Trotter (eds.) *Working with Women Offenders in the Community*. Oxon: Willan Publishing

Trotter, C., McIvor, G. and Sheehan, R. (2012) "The Effectiveness of Support and Rehabilitation Services for Women Offenders" in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 65 (1) 6-20

The Scottish Government, "Prison statistics and population projections, 2011-12". accessed 02/09/2012,  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/06/prisonernumbers29062012>

Uggen, C. and Kruttschnitt, C (1998) "Crime in the Breaking: Gender differences in desistance", in *Law and Society Review*, 32 (2): 339-66

Waddington, P. A. J. (2003) "Policing, public order and political contention" in T. Newburn (ed.) *Handbook of Policing*. Cullompton: Willan