

Book Review of *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*

Derrick Franke

University of Maryland, College Park

*After Crime and Punishment:
 Pathways to Offender Reintegration*
 By Shadd Maruna and Russ Immarigeon

2004. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.
 ISBN: 1-84392-057-3

Around 600,000 prisoners are released to the community every year in the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). Recent analyses have found that a striking 68 percent of them will return to prison within three years (Langin and Levin, 2002); reentry to prison, it seems, has become nearly as common as reentry to the community. Moreover, the number of state prison admissions due to parole violation doubled from 17 to 35 percent between 1980 and 1999, and continues to rise (Hughes et al., 2001). These dismal numbers highlight apparent failures of the justice system and/or community programs to successfully reintegrate offenders. This might come as little surprise; since the early 1970s we have read about the structural and psychological obstacles inhibiting successful ex-offender reintegration, and how the justice system remained ill-equipped to solve them (see Irwin, 1970).

Only recently, however, have these issues begun to receive focused attention from academics, policy makers, and practitioners. In *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*, Shadd Maruna and Russ Immarigeon have compiled a thoughtful collection of essays designed to both inform the reader of the many challenges facing reintegration and, more importantly, to advance a strategy for developing successful reentry practices. The chapters, though written by a diverse selection of authors who employ equally diverse approaches to the study of crime, share a common thread; they each rely heavily on theories of desistance, placing their contributions to reintegration practice within the larger context of why people desist from crime.

As a whole, the chapters in this volume outline a prescription for using desistance research to “correct the theoretically incomplete” (ix) and largely unsuccessful justice system policies currently in place. Taking what we already know about desistance, Maruna and Immarigeon claim, researchers and practitioners can better guide

reintegration policy. In this sense, the book is less about offering new explanations of desistance and reintegration and more about reorganizing current theories and facts into a coherent agenda for designing successful reentry practices. The chapters therein provide the necessary tools for this theory driven approach.

To accomplish this goal, the book is organized into four parts. The first pays special attention to the process of desistance, laying the theoretical foundation for the rest of the book. Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel begin by explaining the process of reintegration and how reentry interventions are ultimately intended to reduce recidivism after release. The authors point out, however, that current practices often fail to achieve this goal, because they are not grounded in theoretical explanations for why people desist from crime. In other words, most policies are guided by some vague idea that surveillance combined with some form of guidance can promote desistance, without incorporating the known correlates of desistance themselves.

Moving past this narrow and atheoretical conception, Maruna et al. draw an interesting parallel to the medical world to show how desistance and official intervention should be understood as complimentary; professional help (in the form of antibiotics, for instance) can speed the process to recovery from an infection, but the antibiotics go only so far. It is the body’s *natural* functions that overcome the infection, with the *assistance* of medication. Similarly, the authors argue that offender reentry can be understood in the same context.

Finally, this essay addresses the concept of desistance in more detail; indeed, what it means and how it is defined continues to incite debate amongst criminologists. Past understandings have typically viewed desistance as simply the termination of offending. More recently, desistance has been understood by reductions in either the frequency or seriousness of offenses (LeBlanc and Loeber, 1998). Still others argue that desistance is the causal *process* that supports and maintains the constant state of non-offending (Laub and Sampson, 2001). The chapters in this volume, however, most directly reflect a fourth definition of desistance, one in which crime cessation is necessarily accompanied by changes in personal identity. In other words, true desistance occurs

only when individuals cognitively change their role or identity from one of 'delinquent' or 'criminal', to one of a 'changed person' or 'productive member of society' (Lemert, 1951; Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002).

The next essay begins the book's focus on processes of desistance by addressing the important roles of informal social control, social support, and the community. Bazemore and Erbe discuss how these concepts reflect the principals of restorative justice, paying particular attention to the community's role in reintegration. The community, for instance, can take a lead role in conveying a sense of usefulness and belonging to ex-offenders while also encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves and for others. Ultimately, the authors argue that reentry interventions based on restorative justice principals can both foster desistance and strengthen communities.

Many of these concepts are revisited by Farrall, whose essay explores the effect of social capital on desistance. Interestingly though, Farrall examines these issues through the lens of probation, a component of the justice system not commonly associated, let alone studied, within the reentry context. Indeed, offenders need not have been incarcerated to experience similar impediments to desistance, and probation officers serve as a possible resource. The author argues, however, that this resource remains largely untapped due in large part to the prevailing philosophy of the institution. Whereas probation officers tend to focus on past offending behaviors, Farrell argues that they should instead focus on *desistance* related factors such as increasing legitimate future opportunities. Thus, the brunt of this chapter explains how probation officers can actually go about 're-activating' offenders' social capital (e.g. improving family relationships and preparing them for jobs) to allow for these opportunities.

The next part of the book takes a step back and examines the methodological issues surrounding reintegration research. Bushway, Brame, and Paternoster focus on the measurement of two key elements of reentry, one signifying failure and the other success – recidivism and desistance. The authors show that not only are studies of desistance and recidivism related theoretically, they are also related methodologically. In fact, they argue that trajectory models (the preferred method of desistance research) and survival models (the preferred method of recidivism research) measure the same thing – the propensity to offend. With that in mind, the chapter advances an empirical strategy to reentry research that incorporates recidivism within the larger context of offending over the life course. In this sense it fits nicely within the context of this book, providing a strategy to model the reintegration process.

Piquero then revisits the common criminological fact that offending careers are typically characterized by stops and starts. As such, he begins by explaining these stops and starts under several theoretical orientations. Using these theoretical foundations, he then highlights a number of possibilities for empirically studying the 'intermittency' of crime over the life span. This chapter shows particular relevance to the study of reintegration processes as ex-offenders typically 'relapse' multiple times on their road to recovery.

The volume's next section turns to applied research on desistance, paying special attention to policy implications implied in the work. Bouffard and Laub begin by examining the relationship between military service and later offending behavior. While providing evidence that military service may indeed promote desistance, they importantly also discuss *how* such service could serve as a reintegrating instrument. In particular, they argue that by promoting discipline and structure, the military may help individuals overcome childhood disadvantage, discontinue drug use, attain higher levels of education and secure stable employment. As a side note, this chapter represents the book's only empirical analysis using quantitative data.

Taking a more psychological approach to the study of desistance, Burnett explores the subjective domain of reoffending. In particular, he studies the relationship between an offender's expectations of further offending and actual subsequent offending. The main finding from this chapter, that property offenders are typically ambivalent or uncertain about their future chances, signals important implications for reentry policy which the author addresses. A recurring theme surfaces again, one that stresses the potential for positive relationships to promote desistance; for example, bonds formed with criminal justice workers can serve to promote offenders' self-awareness and self-determination to change. In short, this essay suggests that reentry policies should explicitly address relationship building.

Next, McIvor, Murray, and Jamieson suggest that the process of desistance from crime might be different for females than it is for males. While many aspects of desistance transcend gender such as maturation, transitions, lifestyle changes, and relationships; the reasons given by each sex as to why they stop offending differ considerably. Related to this, McIvor et al discuss the social construction of offending for males versus females, providing interesting insight into the gendered process of desistance.

Finally, the book turns to a review of desistance-focused reintegration research. The remaining three

essays discuss studies of ex-offenders and the issues they face when returning to the community. Richards and Jones introduce the recently expanding ‘convict perspective’ to the study of prisoner reentry. This approach is spearheaded by ex-convicts turned criminologists and focuses on the problems and solutions to reentry from the *prisoners’* point of view. In this essay, the authors draw on interviews of ex-prisoners, which explore the structural impediments facing their life after release. Economic, legal, and social barriers endemic of the ‘incarceration machine’ often present insurmountable obstacles to ex-convicts contributing to their parole failure or recidivism. Importantly, the authors recommend various policy changes that could better prepare prisoners for reintegration; though some are quite lofty and perhaps unattainable, their recommendations not only coincide with desistance theories but also hold a unique value to research and program implementation in the sense that they come directly from the experiences of ex-convicts who have navigated a successful reentry.

Taxman, Young, and Byrne then examine a new and innovative national program called the Reentry Partnership Initiative (RPI), a community justice model focused on strengthening informal social controls. As such, this essay presents the volume’s most comprehensive assessment of the community and the crucial role it can and should play in reentry. Though bereft of empirical results, this chapter details the model’s implementation while also addressing the challenges of moving from theory to practice.

Finally, an essay by Uggen, Manza, and Behrens extends reintegration research in two important ways. First, the authors suggest that in addition to the commonly studied spheres of work and family, civic participation may also represent an important reintegrative domain. In fact, Uggen et al. argue that a general ‘law abiding citizen’ role may subsume work and family roles and that every effort should be made to reinforce rather than limit citizenship. As such, this work relies on the assumption that the relationship between adult role transitions and crime is ultimately a function of having either a ‘deviant’ or ‘conforming citizen’ self-concept.

It is important to note that some argue against this assumption; Laub and Sampson (2003), for instance, argue that desistance need not involve changes in self-image or the realization of a ‘new self’. In fact, they find evidence that many times offenders never subscribed to a ‘deviant’ self-concept in the first place. However, these definitional contradictions should not obfuscate the overriding contributions of this volume. All agree that structural impediments pose significant problems

to offender reentry, just as all recognize the importance of commonly known correlates of desistance such as informal social controls, social bonds, and relationships.

Admittedly, this volume lacks strong quantitative analyses of the desistance process, particularly in the realm of reintegration research. The reader, looking for applications of the methodologies advanced in part two, will find none. Perhaps the methods section of this volume would have been a better fit had the authors outlined qualitative approaches instead; indeed, what the reader finds throughout the book is a heavy reliance on the narrative accounts of few as opposed to the statistical analysis of many. For a more comprehensive treatment of the latter, one should look to other recent volumes which contain, for example, broad analyses of aggregate prisoner characteristics, changes in parole populations, the impact of parole variation on national and state-level recidivism rates, and incarceration’s deleterious effects on key institutions like work, family, and neighborhoods (see Travis and Visser, 2005). However, what Maruna and Immarigeon’s volume lacks in quantitative support, it makes up for in first-hand accounts of how real people (both ex-offenders and corrections staff) understand and approach the often impossible task of successful reintegration. In fact, this is the author’s explicit strategy from the start, one that has distinct advantages. As Shover writes in his forward, “at a time when increasing numbers of investigators know offenders only as coded categories in electronic datasets, the value of first-hand knowledge of them and their lives is considerable” (x).

Moreover, in chapter after chapter the book weaves a common thread of theoretically driven explanations and, importantly, theoretically driven solutions to the understandably complicated problems inherent in trying to encourage past offenders to offend no more. The connection of theory to practice cannot be overstated in this work, a connection that bears heavily on social policy. In particular, Maruna and Immarigeon question our justice system’s one-sided focus on achieving desistance by increasing the risk of punishment as theoretically incomplete. Not only can this approach backfire, as evidenced by the array of consequences of imprisonment, it also ignores the more constructive paths to desistance. Indeed, increasing legitimate opportunities, strengthening social bonds, garnering community support, and providing effective mentoring can also foster desistance, processes that should play a larger role in the policy discourse. In short, Maruna and Immarigeon deliver what they promise, a volume designed to break down the entire range of factors linked to desistance and build them into a more coherent, accurate and logical framework under

which we can approach offender reintegration.

As the book highlights a number of practical and theoretical concepts, this volume can likewise be recommended to a wide audience. Those interested in the theoretical pathways leading to desistance as well as the practical effects of incarceration on subsequent life chances should read this book. Students (graduate or undergraduate), policy makers, and practitioners alike can glean useful information and guidance from the essays therein. Moreover, it is a must read for those with an ethnographic bent who are interested in first-hand accounts from the inmates themselves. But overall, the book is tailored to two groups of readers, groups that transcend categories such as level of education, field of employment, or academic discipline. It is tailored to those who want to learn and those who want to make a difference. As such, the chapters in equal part teach and advise - a unique achievement in a field that tends to favor one at the expense of the other. Finally, and not least important, Maruna and Immarigeon have produced a volume that is easy (and fun) to read, whose concepts flow logically from one to the next, and whose lessons impart on the reader a real sense that despite its challenges, successful reentry can be realized – that all along we have had the tools to do so.

References

- Giordano, P.C., S.A. Cernkovich and J.L. Rudolph. (2002). "Gender, Crime and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology*, 107:990-1064.
- Hughes, T.A., D.J. Wilson and A.J. Beck. (2001). *Trends in State Parole, 1990-2000*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Irwin, J. (1970). *The Felon*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Langan, P.A. and D.J. Levin (2002). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994* (NCJ 193427). Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Laub, J. and R. Sampson. (2003). *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- (2001). "Understanding Desistance from Crime." In M. Tonry (ed.) *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. Vol. 28. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1-70.
- LeBlanc, M. and R. Loeber. (1998). "Developmental Criminology updated." In M. Tonry (ed.) *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. Vol. 23. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 115-198.
- Lemert, E.M. (1951). *Social Pathology: Systematic Approaches to the Study of Sociopathic Behavior*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Maruna, S. (2001). *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives*. Washington, DC: APA Books.
- Travis, J. and C. Visher. (2005). *Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.