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WOMEN AND JUSTICE ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?

REHABILITATION AND DESISTANCE THROUGH EDUCATION? A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A 'HOOK-FOR-CHANGE'.

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THE EVOLUTION of behavioural and attitudinal reform is different for every person who embarks upon the desistance journey. However, a commonality appears to be that those who have the greatest success in sustaining desistance are people who utilise something termed a 'hook-for-change' (Giordano et al., 2002, cited in McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Succinctly, a 'hook-for-change' functions as a catalyst that initiates the desistance process for people who have previously been involved in offending behaviour. It is a foundation for which successful desistance is built.

My first 'hook-for-change' was academic education.

Fortunately, I have always been very captivated and intrigued by various forms of knowledge throughout my life. As a young boy, I voraciously read about subjects of all kinds. I studied maps, atlases and foreign language books to quench my insatiable thirst for insights into distant lands. I can name just about any capital/major city from the top of my head as well as being able to instantaneously point to places on a map because of poring over these maps and atlases. I used to sit and read the dictionary in class, looking for obscure words I hadn't heard of before.

Knowledge has always been important to me.

I continued to purchase books and visit the local library during my 'offending years', which some thought peculiar for a person who behaved like I did (perhaps revealing their own stereotypical biases vis-à-vis the idiosyncrasies of those who offend). The irony is that people have persistently told me throughout my life that I am intelligent but 'never used it for the right reasons' (by which I assume they mean 'legal reasons'). In fact, my nearest library was located within the stomping ground of a rival gang and yet I risked my physical

safety in order to feed my over-active and deeply analytical brain. I am unsure whether this says something about my recklessness or more about my insatiable desire for knowledge. I also ended up forming a relationship with a girl from this same area, further complicating matters.

My Dad died suddenly as I was about to turn 14, resulting in me becoming deeply immersed in offending behaviour. I never spoke of his death with anyone (even family members) and now wonder if my offending behaviour was my own way of speaking about it? In other words, I suspect that the suppressed, unexpressed rage and emotional damage in relation to my Dad's death mutated into a pathology that found expression through criminal acts.

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In effect, this one event became my 'hook-for-crime'.

The commission of criminal actions achieved applause and reverence from my peers, which only fed my desire to appear powerful and indestructible when, in reality, I was the complete opposite - powerless and concealing a fractured heart and a psychically damaged soul. Looking back in reflection, I wonder if my *raison d'être* at that time (gang-focused offending and reputation building) was fuelled by the projection of my subconscious, latent rage and anguish vis-à-vis my Dad's death on to those people from rival areas who conducted themselves in a fashion similar to myself?

The beauty of hindsight . . . and insight.

Sadly, the degree of my criminality mushroomed to the extent that I was incarcerated for four years at the age of fifteen. My behaviour, while contained within the institutional setting, still caused concern as I continued to dig a deeper hole for myself. The way I saw it back then was that I may have been the one digging the hole but the culture around me and my limited life chances handed me the shovel. As you can imagine, I did not pursue formal education during this spell in custody but still did much reading.

I was still wading through the turbid sludge of vengeful thinking and criminality.

Upon release, I picked up where I had left off in the community vis-à-vis criminality. By the time I received my current prison term at the age of twenty-one, I knew I had to do something before I ended up with a life sentence or worse.

An education

That is where my 'hook-for-change' (education) came in.

Now that I have only just completed my criminology degree, I am fortunate enough to have developed an extreme interest in reading academic research papers (I literally have stacks of them in my cell). These are the skills I hope to use as another 'hook-for-change' to extract myself from the "fissures and ditches" of what Wacquant (2010, p.199) called the "organizational mesh of the dualizing metropolis".

According to Wacquant (2010, p.199)

"Welfare revamped as workfare and the prison stripped of its rehabilitative pretension now form a single organizational mesh flung at the same clientele mired in the fissures and ditches of the dualizing metropolis. They work jointly to invisibilize problem populations – by forcing them off the public aid rolls, on the one hand, and holding them under lock, on the other – and eventually push them into the peripheral sectors of the booming secondary labor market".

But how can the neoliberal 'Leviathan' (Wacquant, 2010, p.201) expect the marginalised and disenfranchised people caught up in the carceral/welfare nexus to conform to the "obligations of citizenship" without conferring upon them the "rights of citizenship?" How do we initiate the 'responsibilisation' of those in government and society to accept their own role, as McNeill (2017) argues, in the desistance process?

Perhaps this is a major hindrance to desistance?

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) reported that 80% of prisoners were unemployed pre-incarceration (Scottish Government, 2015) with it being eight times more difficult for an ex-offender to obtain employment post-release. The greatest factor in being refused employment was given as declaration of a criminal record (Scottish Government, 2015). If those returning to the community post-incarceration cannot find legal ways to support themselves then doesn't this spell recidivism? Isn't successful prisoner re-entry paramount in the desistance process?

It is clear that people like myself who choose desistance do have a major role to play. But I cannot do it all on my own. As McNeill and Weaver (2010) argue, those who commit to desistance can only do so much by themselves. Sooner or later,

society has to accept and absorb people back into the fold of daily life through employment and other forms of social participation in order for them to transcend desistance to the extent that it is not a matter of simple desistance but true reformation.

At what point does desistance become a part of you?

Motivation, capacity, opportunities

Upon admission to HMP Low Moss in 2012, I met the most amazing and wonderful teaching staff that I have ever met in my life. I told them how much I wanted to leave my past behind but was frustrated by obstacles at every turn such as zero prospects of employment and being marginalised by the well-earned stigma that I had created for myself as an ignorant, angry and psychically damaged young man. I told the teachers that it was my wish to matriculate into Glasgow University upon release.

This group of teachers became a 'hook-for-change' in their own right.

The teachers (some of whom have since left Low Moss) ignited my motivation, helped me see that I possessed the capacity to sustain change as well as putting in place the opportunities that would be the silver bullet required to neutralise the proverbial werewolf of my past offending activities. By positively reinforcing my motivation, my teachers made me feel like a valued person rather than an offender, which led to the realisation that I had the capacity to foster a lifestyle transplant whereas before I was hesitant about the whole process. Perhaps the real reason for my hesitation was that I had no opportunities to provide the bridge from persistence to desistance. These teachers showed me the way to that bridge. I love them for the warmth, acceptance and altruistic kindness they showed me (if any of you are reading this - you know who you are).

The 'hook-for-change' is crucial in maintaining the desistance process. Without something or someone to catalyse change, then how can someone truly desist? Without a 'hook-for-change', what would the 'final destination' for desisters look like? Perhaps the final destination of desistance is the "promise of equal opportunity, social justice, individual freedom and citizenship rights for all" (Garland, 2001, p.67).

Wouldn't you agree?

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