

Faith and Service: Pathways to Identity Transformation and Correctional Reform

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Over the last several decades, a significant body of evidence has emerged that consistently documents how religiosity (i.e., various measures of religious commitment) is associated with reductions in delinquent behavior among youth (Baier & Wright 2001; Johnson & Jang 2012; Johnson, Thompkins, & Webb 2006). Importantly, the salutary effect of religion remains significant even when accounting for other factors that might also prevent illegal behavior (Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li 2001). Similarly, research has found that highly religious low-income youth from disadvantaged communities are less likely to use drugs than less religious youth from the same poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Jang & Johnson 2001).

There is also evidence that religious involvement may lower the risks of various kinds of delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans, Cullen, Burton, & Dunaway 1996). Additionally, one study found that religious involvement may have a cumulative effect throughout adolescence and may significantly lessen the risk of later adult criminality (Jang, Bader, & Johnson 2008; see also Jang & Johnson 2011). In

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other words, uninterrupted and regular church attendance may further insulate youth from crime and delinquency. Indeed, a number of studies find that religion can help prevent high-risk urban youth from engaging in delinquent behavior (Freeman 1986; Johnson, Larson, Jang, & Li 2000a, 2000b). Similarly, Wallace and Foreman (1998) found that youth who attend church frequently are less likely to engage in a variety of harmful behaviors, including drug use, skipping school, fighting, and violent and nonviolent crimes. It is not an exaggeration to state that youth exposure to religious and spiritual activities can be a powerful inhibitor of crime and youth violence. These findings are consistent with other empirical evidence linking religiosity to reductions in criminal deviance among adults and young adults (Duwe & Johnson 2013; Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, & Burton 1995; Johnson 2011; Johnson & Jang 2012; ; Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard 2005).

The religion-crime literature has grown over the last several decades and has benefited from publication of rigorous systematic reviews and several meta-analytic studies that utilize demanding methodological tools to evaluate objectively the state of research in his area. Taken together, these review studies confirm that increasing religiosity is associated with lower rates of crime (Baier & Wright 2001; Johnson & Jang 2012; Johnson, Li, Larson, & McCullough 2000; Kelly, Polanin, Jang, & Johnson 2015). Consequently, a systematic review of the literature confirms that religion matters in consequential and beneficial ways when it comes to crime reduction (Jang, Bader, & Johnson 2008; Jang & Johnson 2005; Johnson, Jang, Li, & Larson 2001; Ulmer, Desmond, Jang, & Johnson 2010), lower rates of recidivism for ex-prisoners (Duwe & Johnson 2013; Duwe & King 2013; Johnson 2002, 2004, 2011; Johnson & Larson 2003; Johnson, Larson & Pitts 1997;), and in helping alcohol and drug abusers to desist (Johnson, Lee, Pagano, & Post 2016; Lee, Pagano, Johnson, & Post 2016). Regardless of the sample, the data set utilized, or other study differences, church attendance and religious experiences remain important factors linked to lower levels of deviant behavior and higher levels of prosocial behavior (Johnson & Jang 2012; Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard 2005; Lee, Pagano, Johnson, & Post 2016; Lee, Poloma, & Post 2013). Simply put, we know that higher religiosity is consistently associated with less crime and delinquency.

Why Faith Matters in Crime Reduction

To know that religion is linked to less crime is obviously important, but it would be shortsighted to stop there. Research is needed to answer the more difficult question of *why* religion matters. Unfortunately, questions like the following rarely have been studied by scholars: Why are at-risk youth from disadvantaged communities who regularly attend church less likely to violate the law? Why does religiosity or religiousness help reduce the likelihood of

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adult criminal activity? Why do inmates who participate in Bible studies at a high level have significantly lower recidivism rates than comparable prisoners who do not participate? If graduates of faith-based prison programs outperform their secular counterparts when it comes to prisoner reentry, what is it about these programs that helps ex-prisoners successfully navigate the transition back to society?

There are several reasons for this research oversight. The main reason is that scholars for many decades have tended to overlook the study of religion. This reason is precisely why David B. Larson, the prolific health and spirituality scholar, so often referred to religion as the “forgotten factor” when it comes to research in the social and behavioral sciences. Another reason for this blind spot is that the data that would make it possible to address adequately *why* religion matters is either rarely available or has yet to be collected. Ironically, in spite of the dire need for efficacious approaches to a host of crime-related problems, coupled with published studies documenting the salutary effect of religion on crime, there often remains a reluctance to consider faith-based approaches. This reluctance points to the critical need for more thoughtful data collection and rigorous analysis of variables that would help us better identify the possible mechanisms and pathways that might accurately gauge *why* religion matters.

Faith Enhances Protective Networks of Support

Although we know that church attendance matters in positive ways, we do not have extensive research that clarifies why it is important for crime reduction. We can, however, draw upon research on church attendance across a variety of other related subjects to help us consider some possible explanations for why religion matters for crime reduction. For example, when people attend churches they tend to get connected to different social networks. Whether through classes, retreats, small groups, mission trips, church-sponsored volunteer work, or any number of related group functions, these activities connect people to multiple networks of social support that have the potential to be meaningful. Research documents that social support in congregations has been linked to better coping skills (Krause 2010), increased life expectancy (Krause 2006a), stress reduction (Krause 2006b), and better self-reported health (Krause 2009). In fact, according to Harvard scholar Robert Putnam, churches are enormous repositories of good will:

Houses of worship build and sustain more social capital—and social capital of more varied forms—than any other type of institution in America. Churches, synagogues, mosques and other houses of worship provide a vibrant institutional base for civic good works and a training ground for civic entrepreneurs. Nearly half of America’s stock of social capital is

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religious or religiously affiliated, whether measured by association memberships, philanthropy, or volunteering. (Putnam & Feldstein 2004)

Houses of worship can become an effective training ground for good works and civic engagement. More recently, Putnam argues that people with religious affiliations are more satisfied with their lives mainly because they attend religious services more frequently and build social networks with people who share their faith and religious experience, thus building a strong sense of belonging to a community of religious faith (Putnam & Campbell 2010). So compelling are these faith-based networks, Putnam argues, they generate unique effects that cannot be explained in any other way. That is to say, these faith-infused networks of support—in and of themselves—are powerful independent predictors of beneficial outcomes (Lim & Putnam 2010).

Involvement in religious practices and related activities may foster the development of and integration into personal networks that provide both social and emotional support (Jang & Johnson 2004). When such personal networks overlap with other networks, it is reasonable to expect that these networks will not only constrain illegal behavior, but also protect individuals from the effects of living in disadvantaged areas (Krohn & Thornberry 1993). In other words, an individual's integration into a neighborhood-based religious network actually weakens the effects of other factors that might otherwise influence deviant behavior. Thus, religious networks can buffer or shield individuals from the harmful effects of negative structural contents.

It makes sense, therefore, that those who regularly attend church and participate in religious activities would be more likely to internalize values modeled and taught in such settings. These faith-filled networks may encourage appropriate behavior as well as emphasize concern for others' welfare. Such processes may contribute to the acquisition of positive attributes that give attendees a greater sense of empathy toward others, which in turn makes them less likely to commit acts that harm others. Perhaps this influence is why research confirms that religiosity can help people to be resilient even in the midst of poverty, unemployment, or other social ills. Churches and communities of faith provide instruction and the teaching of religious beliefs and values that, if internalized, may help individuals make good decisions.

This influence may explain why church-attending youth from disadvantaged communities are less likely to use illicit drugs than youth from suburban communities who attend church less frequently or not at all. In a similar vein, preliminary research has examined intergenerational religious influence and finds parental religious devotion is a protective factor for crime (Petts 2009; Regnerus 2003). Taken together these findings suggest that the effect of church attendance is compelling in and of itself. Either through the networks of support they provide, the learning of self-control through the teaching of religious moral beliefs, or the condemning of inappropriate behavior, regular church attendance may foster each of these possibilities.

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There is additional research documenting that religion can be used as a tool to prevent at-risk populations, like those raised in poverty, from engaging in illegal behavior (Freeman 1986; Johnson, Larson, Jang, & Li 2000b). For example, youth living in poverty tracts in urban environments, or what criminologists call disadvantaged communities, are at elevated risk for a number of problem behaviors including poor school performance, drug use, and other delinquent activities. Yet youth from these same disorganized communities who participate in religious activities are significantly less likely to be involved in deviant activities. In other words, youth from “bad places” can still turn out to be good citizens if religious beliefs and practices are regular and important in their lives. In this way, religiously committed youth, on average, display resilience from the negative consequences of living in impoverished communities (Jang & Johnson 2001).

Whereas criminologists have tended to focus on the effects of living in communities with profound disadvantages that may predispose youth to delinquent behavior, we are now beginning to understand the effects that religion or religious institutions may play in providing “advantages” for those that live in these same communities. Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone, and Ruchkin (2003) investigated the relationship between exposure to violence and later problem behavior using the social and health assessment. They found that several measures of religiosity reduced the effect of exposure to violence and victimization on illegal acts. The authors also found that even among youth exposed to high levels of violence, those who reported higher levels of religious practices had fewer conduct problems over time. Additionally, those experiencing high levels of victimization but also indicating higher levels of religiosity were less likely to report an increase in conduct problems (Pearce et al. 2003). These findings are part of a growing body of research that has documented how “protective factors” reduce involvement in crime and delinquency (Crosnoe, Erikson, & Dornbusch 2002; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin 1995; Stacy, Newcomb, & Bentler 1992; Wills, Vaccaro, & McNamara 1992).

The role of religion and religious institutions is especially critical in communities where crime and delinquency are most prevalent. For example, research has shown that the African American church likely plays a key role in reducing crime among Black youth from urban communities (Johnson, Larson, Jang, & Li 2000a). Therefore, though rarely recognized by scholars or policy experts as a provider of informal social control, the African American church likely is an important protective factor, especially in major urban environments. An important study by Evans and colleagues found that religious activities reduced the likelihood of adult criminality as measured by a broad range of criminal acts. The relationship persisted even after “secular” or nonreligious controls were included (Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, & Burton 1995). Further, the finding did not depend on social or religious contexts. It would be a mistake to continue to overlook the important role these religious congregations play in the lives of so many disadvantaged youth (Johnson

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2006; Johnson, Larson, Jang, & Li 2000a). In summary, the protective effects of religiosity (i.e., most often measured by regular church attendance) tend to buffer the impact of a wide variety of risk factors that otherwise make crime, delinquency, and substance use more likely.

Faith, Crime Reduction, and Prosocial Behavior

We have made the argument that church attendance can protect individuals from crime and delinquency. Is it also possible that religious practices can help individuals already involved in deviant or illegal behavior? In other words, is it possible that participation in specific kinds of religious activity can help steer individuals back to a course of less deviant behavior and, more importantly, away from long-term criminality? Developmental and life course perspectives provide a theoretical framework for the potential role that religious experiences can play as critical “turning points” in the life course. From this expansive literature we know that turning points change behavioral trajectories from antisocial to prosocial (Petts 2009; Sampson & Laub 2005). Stated differently, can religious beliefs, practices, activities, and networks help provide effective antidotes to help offenders desist from illegal or inappropriate behavior? For example, preliminary studies addressing faith-based approaches to prison treatment have shown that inmates who regularly participate in volunteer-led Bible studies or who complete a faith-based program are less likely to commit institutional infractions (Hercik 2005) or to commit new crimes following release from prison (Duwe & Johnson 2013; Duwe & King 2013; Johnson 2004; Johnson, Larson, & Pitts 1997).

Several studies have shown that prison visitation is associated with reduced recidivism and may benefit inmates during the difficult transition back to society (Bales & Mears 2008). To understand better the connection between visitation and recidivism, a recent study examined whether visits from community volunteers—specifically clergy and mentors—had an impact on recidivism by examining 836 offenders released from Minnesota prisons (Duwe & Johnson 2016). The results indicate that visits from clergy and mentors significantly reduced all three measures of reoffending (rearrest, reconviction, and new-offense reincarceration). The salutary effect on recidivism grew as the proportion of community volunteer visits increased. The findings suggest that community volunteer visits may be consequential for prisoners during reentry and should be recognized as a programming resource, especially for high-risk offenders with low social support.

In the first major evaluation study of a faith-based prison, which was launched in 1997 in Houston, Texas, Johnson and Larson (2003) found that inmates “graduating” from the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI), an 18- to 24-month-length faith-based prison program operated by Prison Fellowship Ministries, were significantly less likely to be arrested than a matched

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group of prisoners not receiving this religious intervention (8 percent to 20 percent, respectively) during a two-year postrelease period. There was no difference in recidivism rates when all IFI inmates were compared to all members of the matched sample. Johnson and Larson (2003) found that the presence of a faith-motivated mentor was critical in helping ex-prisoners to remain crime free following release from prison. A separate outcome evaluation reported similar results from Minnesota's InnerChange Freedom Initiative, a faith-based prisoner reentry program that has operated within Minnesota's prison system since 2002 (modeled after the InnerChange Freedom Initiative in Texas). Duwe and King (2013) examined recidivism outcomes among a total of 732 offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2009. Results from the Cox regression analyses revealed that participating in the faith-based program significantly reduced the likelihood of rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration.

These "positive criminology" approaches can draw on secular as well as faith-based models. In the Minnesota Department of Corrections, mentors who visit offenders in prison are associated not only with faith-based programs such as the InnerChange Freedom Initiative but also with community service agencies that are not necessarily faith-based. For example, in the Twin Cities (i.e., Minneapolis and St. Paul) metropolitan area, organizations like Amicus—which recently merged with Volunteers of America—Minnesota—have provided volunteers with opportunities to mentor offenders in prison since the 1960s (Duwe & Johnson 2016). Programs like IFI, Amicus, and the Salvation Army are doing important positive criminology work. Decision makers interested in cost-effective approaches to crime desistance among offender populations should give careful consideration to these promising approaches.

Hallett, Hays, Johnson, Jang, and Duwe (2017) found evidence of a link between religiosity and identity transformation for prisoners at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as "Angola," which is America's largest maximum security prison. But how does religiously motivated self-change happen? What are the causes and pathways for this change? Drawing on data from recent studies and in-depth interviews with prisoners at Angola, the authors described how and why faith matters in identity transformation for prisoners and how this transformation subsequently influences prosocial behavior. Indeed, criminologists have spent far less time studying prosocial behavior than antisocial behavior. This relative neglect is unfortunate because when it comes to prosocial behavior, there is much more encompassed than merely obeying the law and desisting from criminal behavior. We need to know why people do commendable things such as supporting charities, doing volunteer work, and intentionally serving others.

Recent scholarship has examined the relationship between increasing religiosity and higher levels of prosocial behavior. On average, these studies find that religiosity is a source for promoting or enhancing beneficial outcomes like

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well-being (Blazer & Palmore 1976; Graney 1975; Markides 1983; Musick 1996; Tix & Frazier 1997; Willits & Crider 1988), hope, meaning, and purpose (Sethi & Seligman 1993), self-esteem (Bradley 1995; Ellison & George 1994; Koenig, Hays, Larson, George, Cohen, McCullough, Meador, & Blazer 1999), and educational attainment (Jeynes 2007; Regnerus 2001). For example, the more actively religious are more likely to give to charities (both religious and nonreligious) and to volunteer time for civic purposes (Brooks 2006). A national survey revealed that religious experience was consistently associated with benevolence directed toward the “near and dear” (friends and family), as well as at the level of the community and beyond (Lee, Poloma, & Post 2013). A metareview of a very large number of published studies utilizing diverse samples and methodologies leads to the consistent conclusion that the effect of religion on physical and mental health is remarkably positive (Koenig, Larson, & McCullough 2001).

Studies also suggest that being involved in or exposed to altruistic or prosocial activities and attitudes—something that is central to the mission of many churches and other faith-based organizations—appears to reduce the risk of youth violence. Based on an objective assessment of the research literature, we know that participation in religious congregations and other measures of religiousness can have a significant buffering or protective effect that lessens the likelihood of delinquent or criminal behavior among youth as well as adults. Additionally, we know that increasing measures of religiosity are associated with an array of prosocial outcomes. In this way, religion not only protects from deleterious outcomes like crime and delinquency, but also promotes prosocial or beneficial outcomes that are considered normative and necessary for a productive society. If congregations can be viewed as institutions dedicated to improving the plight of at-risk populations, it may be that faith- and community-based organizations represent key factors in helping ex-prisoners transition to society.

Faith and Service: Keys to Rehabilitation and Recidivism Reduction

As noted previously, the emerging subfield of “positive criminology” (Elisha, Idisis, & Ronel 2012; Ronel, Frid, & Timor 2013; Ronel & Segev 2014) has generated research findings suggesting that positive and restorative practices may be more efficacious than the predominantly punitive approaches currently in use. Such positive and restorative programs may include efforts to foster social support and connectedness, enhance meaningful service to others, promote transformative spiritual experience, and develop noncriminal identity change. Both traditional and more contemporary restorative justice practices attempt to shift the self-centered lifestyle of irresponsibility that is often characteristic of those involved in crime and drug abuse toward a stance of *active responsibility* in all aspects of living (Braithwaite 2005).

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Correctional practices can be explicitly designed to promote such a virtuous orientation (Cullen, Sundt, & Wozniak 2001). It is unlikely, however, that one could find very many correctional facilities that openly embrace and prioritize the goal of virtue. By establishing a Bible College in 1995 and encouraging the formation of inmate-led congregations, however, Angola provides a concrete example of a prison designed to promote virtue. John Robson, former director of the Bible College at Angola, argues that this faith-based program is helpful because it:

. . . de-institutionalizes the dehumanization of punitive justice [because it gives a person] the responsibility of making the *right choices* for the *right reasons*. Whereas dehumanization within a punitive system demands simply making choices for the wrong reasons—because they fear punishment. (Quoted in Hallett, Hays, Johnson, Jang, & Duwe 2017, 13; emphasis in the original)

Robson's observation appears consistent with Braithwaite's (2005, 291) crucial distinction between the *passive* responsibility inherent in the phrase "serving time," and the *active* responsibility central to restorative justice processes that focus on "taking responsibility for putting things right into the future." In other words, when the state "warehouses" an offender this may not directly engage an experience of active responsibility linked to a "redemption script" (Maruna 2001, 85–87). Such scripts support a "coherent and convincing" narrative and related identity transformation that mark the transition from a selfish offender to a responsible and prosocial "new person." From this vantage point, those convicted of crimes are not simply a set of *risks* to be managed or a bundle of *needs* to be met, but a holder of *strengths* to be deployed in mutually beneficial relationships (Maruna & LeBel 2004). The "wounded healer" (e.g., a former addict whose "dark past" with addiction provides the shared experience and credibility needed to help other addicts) is perhaps the most powerful monitor to others.

We now review recent findings on youth recovery that support recent work in positive criminology. Positive criminology highlights traditional rehabilitative and restorative practices, but it also draws attention to a topic that has been somewhat neglected in the literature, which is "cultivating spirituality as a pathway for challenging self-centeredness" (Hallett et al. 2017, 4; see also Ronel & Elisha 2011; Ronel, Frid, & Timor 2013; Ronel & Segev 2014). We begin with a discussion of spirituality and then turn to other factors that are important for adolescent recovery.

Lee, Pagano, Veta, & Johnson (2014) explored changes in belief orientation during treatment and the impact of increased daily spiritual experiences (DSE) on adolescent treatment response. A sample of 195 adolescents referred by the courts to a two-month residential treatment program were assessed at

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intake and discharge. Forty percent of youth who entered treatment as agnostic or atheist identified themselves as spiritual or religious at discharge. Increased daily spiritual experiences was associated with greater likelihood of abstinence, increased prosocial behaviors, and reduced narcissistic behaviors. This study was the first to include detailed measures of spirituality and religiosity as independent variables at baseline and over the course of treatment for a sample of adolescents following the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program, and was the first to determine which aspects of religiosity/spirituality help teens stay sober and engage in service to others (Lee et al. 2014). This study is consistent with recent research attempting to disentangle the effects of religion and spirituality in a 12-step context on care-for-self (e.g., sobriety) and care-for-others (e.g., prosocial behaviors). Indeed, it has been suggested that AA's effectiveness depends on the extent to which those working the 12 steps become more spiritual or religious during the treatment process (Zemore 2007). Increased DSE was associated with greater likelihood of abstinence during treatment and increased care for others. The findings indicate a link between sobriety, spirituality, and service to others and suggest the utility of incorporating spiritual approaches to treatment modalities for young people.

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) affects millions of youth in the United States and is the most common co-occurring anxiety disorder with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use disorders (Buckner et al. 2008; Zimmerman et al. 2003). This fact is especially important because treatment for those struggling with AOD use disorders tends to take place in group settings rather than one-on-one counseling sessions. As might be expected, addicted youth with SAD are less likely to participate in therapeutic activities that carry the risk of negative peer appraisal. Peer helping, however, is a low-intensity, social activity in the 12-step program that has been found to be associated with greater abstinence among those seeking treatment (Pagano, Friend, Tonigan, & Stout 2004; Pagano, Kelly, Scur, Ionescu, Stout, & Post 2013; Pagano, White, Kelly, Stout, & Tonigan 2013).

In another recent study focusing on this very issue, Pagano, Wang, Rowles, Lee, and Johnson (2015) examined the influence of SAD on clinical severity at intake, peer helping during treatment, and outcomes in a large sample of adolescents court-referred to residential treatment. Pagano et al. (2015) found that 42 percent of youths reported a persistent fear of being humiliated or scrutinized in social situations, and 15 percent met current diagnostic criteria for SAD. This study found evidence of an association between SAD and earlier age of first use, greater lifetime use of heroin, incarceration history, and lifetime trauma. SAD, however, was associated with higher service participation during treatment, which was associated with reduced risk of relapse and incarceration in the six-month period posttreatment. Findings confirm the benefits of service participation for juveniles with SAD, which provides a non-judgmental, task-focused venue for developing sober networks in the transition back into the community.

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Another recent study examined the relationships among a specific combination of “spiritual virtues” (helping others and the experience of divine love) and outcomes related to criminal involvement, sobriety, and character development among adolescents (Lee, Pagano, Johnson, & Post 2016). One hundred ninety-five adolescents with substance dependency court-referred to residential treatment were assessed at intake, discharge, and six months following treatment. Lee et al. (2016) found evidence that higher service to others predicted reduced recidivism, reduced relapse, and greater character development. Moreover, experiencing divine love enhanced the effect of service on recidivism. The results suggest that inclusion of the twin spiritual virtues (love and service) might improve treatment for youth involved with alcohol, drugs, and certain forms of self-centered crime such as theft, burglary, and vandalism (Lee et al. 2016). Perhaps treatment approaches focusing on love and service provide a prosocial setting that is necessary for improving character development, reducing AOD use, and decreasing crime.

Social support has long been recognized as vital in bringing patients out of social isolation as well as enhancing sobriety. Recognizing that few individuals, if any, recover from addiction on their own, recovery supports have been a dimension of treatment planning in the American Society of Addiction Medicine’s guidelines since its inception in the 1950s. Current alcoholism treatment approaches focus on providing help to clients (e.g., skill acquisition, social support, or pharmacological treatments), and the benefits from receiving social support have been well documented, especially for youth (Nicholson, Collins, & Homer 2004). Moreover, because addiction is a socially isolating disease, social support for recovery is an important element of treatment planning, especially for youth struggling with AOD disorders. A supportive social network that includes members from AA appears especially important for sustained periods of abstinence (Rynes & Tonigan 2012).

A study by Johnson, Pagano, Lee, and Post (2015) examines the relationship between social isolation, giving and receiving social support in Alcoholics Anonymous during treatment, and posttreatment outcomes among youth court-referred to addiction treatment. Based on prior research, Johnson et al. (2015) hypothesized that social isolation would be associated with greater likelihood of relapse and return to criminal activity. Because of the emphasis on service in the 12-step program and associated long-term benefits on abstinence (Pagano, White, Kelly, Stout, & Tonigan 2013), they also hypothesized that giving help would alter AOD use and criminal activity more than receiving help from others in AA. Adolescents (N=195) aged 14 to 18 were prospectively assessed at treatment admission, treatment discharge, 6 months, and 12 months after treatment discharge. The influence of social isolation variables on relapse and severe criminal activity in the 12 months posttreatment was examined using negative binomial logistic regressions and event history methods. As expected, juveniles entering treatment with social estrangement were significantly more likely to relapse, be incarcerated, and commit a violent crime

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in the 12-month period following treatment. Giving help to others in AA during treatment significantly reduced the risk of relapse, incarceration, and violent crime in the 12 months after treatment, whereas receiving help did not (Johnson et al. 2015).

In sum, these recent studies of youth struggling with addiction point to the significance of faith and service to others in maintaining sobriety as well as reducing the likelihood of recidivism for other kinds of criminal behavior. These studies confirm that these twin virtues of faith and service may combat narcissism and social isolation, which are factors known to be highly predictive of drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents and young adults. Faith and service also enhance social connectivity, which also enhances responsible behavior and accountability.

Finding Positive Criminology at Angola

In the previous sections of this chapter, we have shown how and why religion matters in consequential ways for juveniles, drug and alcohol addicts, adults, prisoners, and ex-prisoners. In this last section, we connect the mounting body of empirical evidence documenting the positive impact of religion on a variety of outcomes to the research we have conducted on prisoners at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Just as empirical evidence shows that church attendance is a significant protective factor that insulates individuals from a host of harmful outcomes for the general population, our findings suggest that church attendance in one of 29 different inmate-led churches at Angola is also protective for prisoners. The overlapping networks of social support found within these churches and the Bible College have helped to build much-needed social capital within the prison. Additionally, just as research consistently shows that church attendance is associated with crime reduction and prosocial behavior, we have found that church attendance at Angola has similar effects. Our surveys, as well as in-depth interviews, with prisoners at Angola confirm that participation in the Bible College and attendance at churches within the prison generate many prosocial impacts. For example, the following excerpt from an in-depth interview with one prisoner reflects the tendency towards prosocial behavior:

How can I meet the needs of the people? Because that's why Jesus came. He came healing. He came feeding the hungry. He came meeting the needs of the people because he's in the people business. And so my ministry is centered on meeting people's needs.

Interviews with prisoners and numerous observations during our fieldwork confirm that faith and service to others within the prison provide a powerful combination that helps to reform prisoners, many of whom are serving life

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sentences with no hope for parole. Many prisoners we interviewed now view their criminal past recast as a gift and an opportunity to serve others. The time wasted on crime, deviance, addiction, and other self-centered behavior is now reformulated as a valuable experience to help others avoid the same missteps. The following quote is indicative of the prevalent attitude of service, which involves a cognitive process Paternoster and Bushway (2009) called “crystallization of discontent,” among Bible College students, graduates, and members of churches:

A lot of things that I've done or been a part of in the past, I'm not proud of, but I know I can't change it. A lot of people that I've hurt, I wish that I could change it, and I know that I can't. So the man that I used to be and the man that I am now, it's like Clark Kent and Superman, you know? But I know that everything that I've done then has been a testimony to everything that God is doing now. So I'm okay with that. . . . So now, the thing that I try to do now, is try to help other guys from maybe making the same mistakes that I've made.

Like addicts who through faith and service are able successfully to recover and maintain sobriety by experiencing an identity transformation, we find this transformation to be the case with many prisoners at Angola that have been influenced by the Angola church, the Bible College, or a combination of both. The following excerpt from an inmate interview points to identity transformation (Farrall 2005; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph 2002; Jang & Johnson in press):

Once you go through the Bible college, it gives you that, it gives you something sort of to grope, to latch onto, so you can be able to start . . . it's a ladder, like, it's a process. So now you put yourself in a position, you are in a position now, the Spirit of God will work with you one way or another at some point going through the four years of college. I've got a purpose, you know? I may not be going home, but I got a purpose. I still have a purpose. I still can serve a purpose while I'm here. I can still serve a purpose for my family, you know? I still communicate with my family and let them know who I am, the different me, the new me. That's when the transition starts.

We also found that participation in both the Bible College as well as involvement in one of Angola's 29 churches has helped inmates develop responsibility and accountability within the prison. The following quotes from two different inmates reflect this prosocial development:

We have such a higher level of accountability living in this fishbowl. Everything is seen. In here we live in a glass house. If something goes on, everyone

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knows about it in no time's sake. So if you confess to be a Christian . . . you have to walk what you talk, because if you don't, everybody knows you're just faking change. So you have to walk what you talk about, and that's a difficult thing to do in here.

Conclusion

Research is beginning to help us understand the importance of religious influences in not only protecting people from harmful outcomes, but in how faith promotes salutary and prosocial outcomes. This beneficial relationship is not simply a function of religion's constraining function or what it discourages—opposing drug use or criminal behavior—but also through what it encourages—promoting behaviors that can enhance purpose, well-being, or educational attainment. Research is beginning to confirm that religious institutions can play an important role in promoting the health and well-being of those they serve, even in prison. And new research will allow us more fully to understand the ways in which religion directly and indirectly impacts crime, delinquency, prisoner rehabilitation, as well as provide insights for rethinking prison reform.

As policy makers consider strategies to reduce crime and drug addiction and to reform our correctional system, it is essential for such deliberations to consider seriously and intentionally the role of religion and religious institutions in implementing, developing, and sustaining multifaceted approaches. From after-school programs for disadvantaged youth to public/private partnerships that bring together secular and sacred groups to tackle social problems like mentoring offenders and the prisoner reentry crisis, it is apparent that any effective strategy will be needlessly incomplete unless the power of religion and religious communities, and the networks of social support found within them, are integrally involved. Indeed, a better understanding of the mechanisms associated with prosocial behavior will assist in the development of future prevention and intervention strategies. Unraveling the role of religiosity, religious institutions and congregations, and the ways in which they promote prosocial behavior should be a priority for academic researchers as well as federal and private sources of funding.

To that end, our research on young offenders struggling with alcohol and drug addiction and prisoners at Angola is helping us to understand the contours of correctional programs seeking to counter the harmful effects of self-centered behavior and social isolation. We also explore whether those programs promote self-control, desistance from crime, identify transformation, and prosocial behavior.

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