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## The concept of practice frameworks in correctional psychology: A critical appraisal

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### ABSTRACT

To develop rehabilitative treatment programs for persons who have committed crimes, correctional psychologists build theoretical structures that weld theoretical ideas about the causes of criminal behavior, theoretical perspectives about appropriate targets for correctional intervention and normative assumptions about crime and the aims of correctional intervention. To differentiate the tri-partite theoretical structure with which correctional program designers' work, Ward and Durrant (2021) introduce the metatheoretical concept of "practice frameworks". In this paper, I describe and evaluate this concept, situating my analysis within the broader contexts of philosophical work on scientific theories and models and metatheoretical work on the structure of explanatory and intervention theories in correctional psychology.

### 1. Introduction

As an outsider looking in on the fields of forensic and correctional psychology, one might assume that theories or explanatory models that are successful in identifying the causes of criminal behavior would be sufficient guides for developing interventions to prevent it or its recurrence. However, in their paper, "Practice frameworks in correctional psychology: Translating causal theories and normative assumptions into practice", Tony Ward and Russil Durrant (2021) argue that etiological theories of crime on their own are insufficient tools "for constructing and delivering a range of interventions to individuals who have committed crimes." Ward and Durrant make the case that correctional psychology requires a new concept to distinguish the kind of multi-dimensional tools that clinicians and correctional program designers working in applied contexts require to effectively develop and administer interventions to individuals who have committed crimes. They dub these tools "practice frameworks", explain the components that go into their construction, and provide two illustrative examples of the kind of theoretical frameworks they have in mind.

Acknowledging that different kinds of "practice frameworks" are liable to be operative in pure and applied contexts in correctional psychology, Ward and Durrant also advocate for what they dub

"coordinated pluralism" The basic idea is that, given the diversity of individuals who commit criminal offenses and the kinds of challenges they confront, there is no one-size-fits all practice framework providing the resources necessary to develop a universally effective treatment or rehabilitation program for criminal offenders. Rather, practitioners ought to have the flexibility to draw on resources from different practice frameworks to offer those criminal offenders with whom they work treatment interventions capable of meeting each individual's particular needs.

In this paper, I describe and critically evaluate Ward and Durrant's concept of practice frameworks in correctional psychology, situating my analysis within the broader contexts of philosophical work on scientific theories and models and metalevel discussions in forensic psychology on the nature and relationship between etiological and intervention theories of crime. I begin, in Section 2, by identifying some basic conceptual distinctions between theories, frameworks, and models to ground my analysis. I then turn, in Section 3, to consider a set of insights on offer in the metatheoretical literature in correctional psychology on the structure of and relationships between different etiological and intervention theories. In Sections 4 and 5, I engage in a critical appraisal of Ward and Durrant's concept of practice frameworks and identify some challenges that relate to the meta-level tasks of evaluating and coordinating

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different practice frameworks in both pure and applied contexts in correctional psychology. I end by identifying potential strategies for responding to such challenges.

## 2. Some conceptual distinctions

There is a rich, vast and growing literature in correctional psychology aimed at understanding and critically evaluating the nature and structure of theories and practices in pure and applied contexts. Ward and Durrant are introducing the concept of “practice frameworks” into these metalevel discussions in correctional psychology with an eye towards improving correctional responses to criminal behavior. This work is “metalevel” or “metatheoretical” (e.g., Ward & Hudson, 1998) insofar as it involves theoretical discussions about the very objects of correctional psychology, which include theories, models, frameworks, theorists, researchers, and practitioners working in applied contexts. This work is also prescriptive insofar as it advocates a particular approach to relating different “theories” or “frameworks” to each other with an eye towards making correctional responses to crime more effective. This critical metalevel work goes on in parallel with routine scientific work to develop and refine theories of criminal behavior, research aimed at identifying its causes, theoretical and empirical work aimed at identifying effective interventions for responding to crime, work to develop and implement correctional interventions and research to assess the efficacy of these interventions. Given the complex structure of the domain of correctional psychology, it is worthwhile to approach metalevel discussions of the kind in which Ward and Durrant are engaged armed with some basic conceptual distinctions concerning theories, models and frameworks.

As a first pass, a scientific *theory*, in the conventional sense, consists of sets of general principles that are posited to understand the behavior of large classes of phenomena.<sup>1</sup> These principles are general insofar as they are pitched at a highly abstract level. Theories contain terms or constructs (e.g., “risk”) that are defined generally and with respect to other terms (e.g., “criminogenic need”) in the theoretical network. To make the principles and terms or constructs they contain less abstract and more accessible, theoretical terms are often defined operationally by specifying criteria of application for them (e.g., Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). This may be done by those theoreticians that have introduced a new theory and who aim to further develop it. It is not uncommon, however, in pure and applied contexts to encounter different strategies for identifying, detecting or measuring instances of the same theoretical construct. Thus, the same theoretical term (e.g., “well-being”) may be defined differently depending upon the network of concepts in which it is embedded. In other words, theoretical terms may be subject to different interpretations and different operationalizations in pure research and applied contexts. This prompts an interesting question as to whether when different practitioners use the same term (e.g., “well-being”), they mean the same thing by it, and whether theories that use the same terms but with different meanings can be readily integrated.<sup>2</sup>

A scientific *model* is a tool that is partially informed by a scientific theory, but typically independent from that theory. Models have been conceived of as “mediators” in the philosophical literature insofar as they mediate between scientific theories and the world (e.g., Morrison & Morgan, 1999). They are eclectic given that their construction may draw on many different sources—empirical results, anecdotes, narratives—and they bring these elements together to achieve specific explanatory, predictive or intervention aims. As philosopher of science Marcel Boumans (1999) aptly puts it, “model building is like baking a cake without a recipe” – you may begin with some knowledge about

making cakes (e.g., basic ingredients, that it requires stirring the batter, a cake pan, and baking in an oven) and general ideas about the desired goal (e.g., what the cake ought to look like), but similar to making a cake with no recipe, there is no rule book for constructing a model; it is at the discretion of the designer. This freedom may be both a benefit, insofar as it provides the designer with flexibility in designing a model, but it may also be a limitation if models of the same phenomenon/phenomena proliferate without making clear contact with each other, due to, for example, differences in how the components of a model are arranged and thought to interact or differences in how specific theoretical constructs are defined.

The meaning of the term “*theoretical framework*”, in contrast to “*theory*”, may itself differ depending upon the context in which the term is used. If one is in the earliest stages of developing a scientific theory, the basic outline of the theory that serves as a guide for research in route to developing a more detailed theory may be referred to as a “*theoretical framework*”. In contrast, in scientific research studies, it is not uncommon for practitioners to appeal to only a subset of the components of a dominant theory in a field as a basis to formulate a research question, structure a research study or develop or implement an intervention. These components are understood to constitute a “*theoretical framework*” to guide research, develop interventions and/or interpret experimental results (see for example, Kivunja, 2018). On a third understanding of “*framework*”, as Ward and Durrant (2021) understand the term, it is a structure into which components from different theories or models may be “plugged”, which then serves the function of grounding and informing treatment interventions.

Although Ward and Durrant refer variously to “*practice frameworks*” and “*practice theories*”, as if the concepts of “*framework*” and “*theory*” are interchangeable, *practice frameworks* on their definition exhibit features some philosophers of science have attributed exclusively to *models* (e.g., Boumans, 1999; Morrison & Morgan, 1999)—namely, they *integrate* information from different sources, they are hybrid, eclectic and there is no rule book for their construction even if one has a rough idea of what kinds of elements go into them. As I explain in the next section, etiological and treatment theories and models in correctional psychology are also described by practitioners as having this complex and hybrid structure.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. The metatheoretical structure of correctional psychology

The scientific study of crime includes theories aimed at understanding, explaining and predicting criminal behavior as well as theories designed to guide the development of correctional responses in the form of treatment and rehabilitative programs for criminal offenders. It is not unusual, however, for the two types of theories to share components in common, given that scientists interested in identifying the causes of crime also desire to prevent it. Different psychological, social, environmental and biological risk factors may be appealed to in order to explain why an individual committed a crime, but they also may be used to predict the likelihood that they will engage in offending behavior in the future and to inform the structure of clinical and programmatic treatment intervention programs. To take one example, the principles of risk, need and responsivity, which are used as a basis to classify criminal offenders, feature in the *General Personality and Cognitive Social Learning Theory of Criminal Conduct (GPCSL)* (e.g., Fortune & Heffernan, 2019), which is an explanatory theory of crime, but also serve as the basis for Andrews and Bonta’s development of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model of offender rehabilitation, which is a treatment model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; see also Polaschek, 2012). As Devon Polaschek (2012,

<sup>1</sup> This basic understanding of scientific theories is consistent with how Ward and Durrant understand them as “systematically linked set[s] of ideas that are used to guide action, or to explain or group together phenomena in a domain.”

<sup>2</sup> I will return to this point later in Section 5.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps these observations simply leave open the question of when something should be called a model versus when it should be called a theory or a framework. It may not matter, and we should be open to the possibility that these different kinds of things may share elements and features in common.

2) notes, it is not uncommon for “promising crime theories” like the RNR model, to be translated “into effective correctional service practices.”

I am interested in engaging in two tasks in this section. On the one hand, I want to relate Ward and Durrant's (2021) initial claims motivating the need for “practice frameworks” in correctional psychology to ideas on offer in the “metatheoretical” (Ward & Hudson, 1998) literature about the tri-partite structure of etiological and intervention theories in correctional psychology (e.g., Polaschek, 2012; Ward & Hudson, 1998). As I aim to show, this analysis provides additional support for the idea that etiological and intervention theories serve as inappropriate guides for treatment interventions beyond those reasons that Ward and Durrant (2021) identify in their paper. Second, I want to use this metatheoretical discussion as a basis for characterizing what a correctional program designer confronts when they look to the theoretical literature on the causes of criminal behavior and/or theoretical literature on correctional interventions for guidance as to how to develop an intervention program for criminal offenders. As correctional psychologists have argued, the theoretical terrain is complex with new explanatory and etiological theories emerging all the time, and this points to the importance of training practitioners who are engaged in designing treatment and rehabilitative programs how to understand the relevance of this literature to their practical aims (“theoretical literacy” Ward, 2021; Ward & Durrant, 2021). A further aim of this section is to point to the possibility that, not only as Ward and Durrant suggest, are there a plurality of practice frameworks on offer in the correctional psychology literature, but also, practice frameworks may themselves vary in detail depending upon whether they are being constructed by high-level theorists or implemented by correctional program developers working in applied contexts. As I explain in Section 5, this is a feature of practice frameworks that both theorists and practitioners should keep in mind when attempting to coordinate different frameworks in pure and applied contexts.

### 3.1. Etiological theories of criminal behavior

Consider a hypothetical scenario, a practitioner working in the correctional system is interested in developing a treatment program for sex offenders in her care.<sup>4</sup> The interventions that she has attempted previously with this group, which have included individual and group level therapy, have only been successful in a couple of cases and she wants to try something new. She begins by investigating the literature on etiological theories of crime. What she finds is a plurality of different theories and different explanations of sexual offending (e.g., Ward et al., 2006; Ward & Hudson, 1998; Ward et al., 2019). Yet, it is not merely the plurality of theories and explanations that makes it difficult for her to be able to identify a precise causal node (e.g., risk, well-being) at which she might aim to intervene to treat her clients; there are different types of theoretical structures that she encounters and the level of detail or abstractness at which a given theory or hypothesis about the causes of crime is pitched may be difficult to decipher, making the move from translating that theory or hypothesis into a workable treatment intervention difficult.

More specifically, according to Ward and Hudson (1998), theories of sexual offending may be guided by different strategies for theory construction and the theories that result may be understood as situated at one of three different levels of detail or abstraction. At the top-most level (Level I), investigators aim to develop multifactorial theories that can account for the “onset, development, and maintenance” of different types of sexual offending. These theories are ultimately intended to be

“integrative” etiological theories insofar as they point to different kinds of causal mechanisms (e.g., biological, behavioral, developmental, sociological) implicated in sexual offending in order to explain it. It is not uncommon, however, for such theories to begin with only “a loosely associated set of constructs with which to approach empirical problems”, which only later come to be better defined and integrated into a multifactorial theory in which their “relationships with each other are spelled out” (Ward & Hudson, 1998, 48–49). Depending upon what stage of development an integrative etiological theory or explanation is in (i.e., if the constructs are only loosely related versus tightly integrated), and the educational and training background our practitioner has, it may be challenging for her to readily appeal to it to construct a treatment intervention, though it may serve as a kind of rough guide.

Ward and Hudson (1998) describe the second or “middle” tier as consisting of theories that focus on a single factor to explain sexual crimes. Theories at this level “clearly describe” “the various structures and processes constituting the variable of interest” as well as “the relationship” among these different structures and processes (Ward & Hudson, 1998, 48). These theories serve as a basis for the construction of comprehensive or multifactorial theories of sexual offending one level above (Level I). For a practitioner working with sex offenders in a correctional setting, however, it will not be clear, if looking at a single etiological theory at this level, how to translate it into practical measures. Moreover, given that it is widely accepted that a theory positing a single causal factor to explain criminal behavior is inadequate, single factor theories will not serve as an adequate guide for our practitioner to develop more effective correctional interventions for her clients.

The third and bottom-most tier (Level III) consists of what Ward and Hudson (1998, 48) refer to as the construction of “descriptive models of the offense chain or relapse process”—“micromodels” that “typically specify the cognitive, behavioral, motivational and social factors associated with the commission of a sexual offense.” These models “explain the actual offending behavior of sexual offenders”, but at best what they do is identify the explanatory targets of single-factor theories (Level II) and multi-factorial (Level III) theories (Ward & Hudson, 1998, 48). Given models at this level are primarily descriptive, our hypothetical practitioner will not gain much guidance about how to structure an effective correctional intervention for sex offenders on the basis of such models.

### 3.2. Correctional treatment theories

Even if explanatory theories of crime offer little guidance as to how to design a rehabilitative treatment program for sexual offenders, we might anticipate that our practitioner will have better results consulting theories that are designed specifically to inform correctional interventions. In fact, in the correctional psychology literature, she will find a number of different theoretical frameworks associated with etiological models that point to modifiable causal factors that may serve as targets of her treatment interventions (e.g., Ward & Durrant, 2021). For example, Beech and Ward's (2004; see also Beech & Ward, 2016; Ward and Fortune, 2016) risk-responsivity model, which is a component of a broader etiological theory of criminal behavior, emphasizes the role that psychological risk factors (e.g., intimacy deficits) play as vulnerabilities that might result in a sexual offender reoffending. In contrast, Bonta and Andrew's (e.g., 2017) Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model of offender rehabilitation “outlines both the central causes of persistent criminal behavior, and some broad principles for reducing engagement in crime” (Polaschek, 2012, 2). Both etiological models contain features that ought to make them viable candidates for aiding our practitioner in developing an effective treatment intervention program for those sexual offenders with whom she is working. Specifically, she could design an intervention program directed at reducing psychological or other risks that increase the probability that her clients will reoffend. She might aim to identify their specific needs and develop treatment programs that “engage” them in ways that “help them learn

<sup>4</sup> Given that the relevant literature has focused on sexual offending, I want to consider things from the perspective of a clinician or treatment program designer who aims to use a therapeutic approach to this form of criminal behavior, but following Ward and Durrant (2021), I take the general lessons to be applicable to other forms of criminal behavior).

and change” using “behavioral and cognitive-behavioral techniques” aimed at promoting “prosocial behavior” (Polaschek, 2012, 3).

Ward and Durrant (2021) and Devon Polaschek (2012) identify different but complementary reasons why these and other intervention models in correctional psychology are insufficient to guide the development of treatment interventions. According to Ward and Durrant (2021), correctional treatment theories, although “they typically contain a set of treatment aims, a specification of possible change mechanisms and an analysis of how program components are likely to bring about change in the problems being addressed”, fall short of providing guidance insofar as they tend to be pitched at too general of a level making it unclear how to translate them “into concrete treatment aims and interventions”. In her critique of the RNR model of correctional rehabilitation, in contrast, Devon Polaschek (2012) claims that any evaluation of the merits and failings of a criminal justice intervention theory must be sensitive to the level of generality and abstraction at which that theory is pitched (see also Ward, 2021). The metatheoretical structure of intervention theories in correctional psychology, she claims, is similar to the multi-level structure Ward and Hudson (1998) attribute to etiological theories of crime (as described in the previous section).

Polaschek (2012) argues that the multi-level structure of intervention theories in correctional psychology complicates the task of translating these theories into practical interventions. According to Polaschek, at the top-most level are “multi-factorial rehabilitation theories that are” like the etiological theories Ward and Hudson (1998) place at Level I, “broad in focus and lacking sufficient detail to directly shape the design of specific interventions” (Polaschek, 2012, 5). Moreover, Polaschek claims that these models are “integrative hybrids” (see e.g., Ward, Melsner, & Yates, 2007) that are “informed partly by aetiological theories, but also incorporate[] the underlying values and assumptions of intervention, therapy strategies, change processes, programme context and setting, and implementation issues, all in an abstract ‘high level’, way” (Polaschek, 2012, 5). Thus, intervention theories situated at this level will serve as an inadequate guide for our practitioner to implement them into an effective treatment program for sexual offenders.

One level down (Level II) exist approaches to intervention that “vary by offender characteristics” and are directed at specific offenses, categories of offenses or types of offenders. For example, at this level our practitioner will encounter models that provide insight on the appropriate kinds of treatment responses for sexual offenders and other models that are aimed specifically at treating violent offenders. These theories are hybrids because they “comprise elements of theory, research, and practice resources, but at an intermediate level of abstractness and detail” (Polaschek, 2012, 6). Ward and Durrant (2021) also emphasize that intervention theories tend to be designed to respond to specific types of offenses and offenders, rather than focusing on other crime related phenomena that may be more appropriate targets for rehabilitative interventions such as relationship conflicts, mood disturbances, and related factors that may be predictive as to whether a criminal will reoffend. Theories at this level, thus, will also provide inadequate guidance for developing effective treatment interventions for those individuals in our practitioner’s care.

At the bottommost level of Polaschek’s meta-theoretical representation of intervention theories, our practitioner will encounter “intervention theories for specific rehabilitation programmes”, which describe “the programme, its processes and content, therapist characteristics, intended client group, etc.” (Polaschek, 2012, 5). Theories at this level are descriptive with respect to particular therapeutic contexts, much like their etiological counterparts at this level that describe specific criminal behaviors. Although these theories on their own may show how a particular intervention theory was implemented in a particular setting, they do not provide guidance as to how to translate that intervention to other different local settings, such as that setting in which our practitioner is working.

Polaschek (2012, 5) emphasizes the importance of correctional

program designers understanding where a given intervention theory that they are consulting is located within this multi-tiered framework because doing so “provides clearer expectations about how to judge” the “quality” of the theory “relative to [its] intended purpose and [its] inherent strengths and weaknesses” for achieving specific treatment aims. Using the RNR model as her target, Polaschek claims that the most detailed treatment of the model in the scientific literature would require our practitioner to gain an understanding of “the complexity of the material” associated with the model even if she only sought to implement the most basic principles of the model (Polaschek, 2012, 8). Polaschek also emphasizes that “the theoretical resources needed to translate” the RNR model “into intervention design, individual clinical formulations, treatment plans, and change monitoring” are still lacking (Polaschek, 2012, 8). In other words, the burden of translating the theory into practice falls upon the practitioner herself, when our practitioner may lack the relevant educational background and training to engaging in such translational work. Polaschek also claims given that “[o]ur scientific understanding both of treatment targets and treatment change processes remains unsophisticated”, rather than further efforts being directed at building “integrated models” they should instead be directed at single-factor intervention theories situated at Level II in her proposed framework (Polaschek, 2012, 9). At the time of Polaschek’s writing certain types of criminal offending had not been the focus of sufficient theoretical work and in instances in which Level II intervention theories for some forms of criminal behavior were absent from the theoretical literature, therapists and program designers lacked adequate guidance as to which intervention theory to choose.

A final relevant issue that Polaschek discusses is the potential for important components of criminal intervention theories to be “lost in translation” when a practitioner goes to translate a model like the RNR model into practice in the form of a correctional intervention (see also Ward & Maruna, 2007). Some models are not as clear or understandable or their level of clarity may vary depending upon the theoretical backgrounds and educational training of those who appeal to them. This might prompt “students of correctional psychology” to appeal to “summaries of” a given “model”, which are at best “social constructions” that may potentially abstract away important aspects of the model rather than revealing what its originators intended in introducing it (Polaschek, 2012, 11). Additionally, sometimes “inferences are made about” a model “based not in the published literature, but on observations of interventions intended to operationalize it” (Polaschek, 2012, 11). In other words, despite the resources that a given model offers for effecting and targeting interventions, a program designer may operationalize that model in terms of a single intervention, even though the model itself affords more avenues for intervention.

In summary, the metatheoretical literature in correctional psychology (see also Prujean, Ward, & Vandeveld, 2021; Ward, 2002, 2021; Ward & Birdgen, 2007; Ward, Haig, McDonald (forthcoming); Ward & Heffernan, 2017; Ward & Hudson, 1998; Beech & Ward, 2016) is suggestive that our practitioner will not be well served with respect to her aims of developing better treatment approaches for her clients who have committed sexual offenses by looking at the theoretical and etiological literature in correctional psychology alone. Something more is needed, and Ward and Durrant (2021) are introducing the concept of “practice frameworks” to open a new area of theoretical work to fill this gap.

#### 4. Practice frameworks

Previous metatheoretical discussions aimed at facilitating progress in treating crime historically have called upon theorists to structure their conceptual-theoretical practices in ways that better facilitate the translation of etiological and treatment theories into practice. Yet, a primary motivation for Ward and Durrant’s (2021) article on “practice frameworks” is that there remains a disconnect between the conceptual tools and translational resources that etiological and treatment theories offer and those that correctional program designers require. Ward and

Durrant claim that they additionally need “practice frameworks”—a concept that they introduce to distinguish a novel type of conceptual-theoretical tool that they believe is implicitly at work in correctional practices but has not yet been explicitly recognized.

What is a “practice framework”? In basic terms, if we think of correctional program designers as *builders* of correctional treatment or rehabilitative programs, a practice framework is the supporting structure for the development of these programs. Consider again our practitioner who is trying to modify the type of treatment intervention she is using with her clients who have committed sexual offenses. She has specific goals in mind for the treatment, for example, certain kinds of changes in the psychological states and behaviors of her clients. These goals are informed by normative assumptions and value judgments that she may or may not explicitly recognize (see e.g., Day et al., 2019). For example, she has specific beliefs about which kinds of behaviors are ethically appropriate (e.g., being an upstanding citizen) and which kinds of behaviors are morally unacceptable (e.g., committing sexual offenses) as well as which kinds of personality traits are good and which are bad. She also likely values the well-being of her clients and may understand that concept as pertaining broadly to their mental or physical health. She may also value the well-being of the community at large as equally important. She will begin with a host of other kinds of assumptions, likely shaped by her educational background and previous training. For example, she will take a particular ontological stance towards her clients insofar as she may view them through a sociological or psychological rather than a biological lens. Given that these kinds of assumptions will dictate how she conceptualizes what crime is, why it occurs and where she will go to look for causes, Ward and Durrant take core ethical and normative assumptions and knowledge-related values and assumptions as fundamental tiers of practice frameworks (Levels 1 and 2). These two levels inform decisions about which intervention strategies are best suited to achieve specific treatment aims and the targets or “objects” at which correctional interventions should be directed. Practice frameworks, according to Ward and Durrant, emerge as normative assumptions are wedded to etiological theories of criminal behavior and correctional treatment theories.

As we learned in Section 3.2, correctional treatment theories are themselves often hybrids that arise as correctional psychologists who have developed etiological theories of crime work to translate them into treatment theories (e.g., Bonta and Andrews' translation of the RNR model (Bonta and Andrews, 2017)) sufficient to shape correctional program development. However, correctional treatment and rehabilitation theories are insufficient hybrids not only because of the reasons Polaschek (2012) identifies, but also, Ward and Durrant claim, because neither correctional treatment nor etiological theories make explicit the values and normative assumptions on which they are based. Given how fundamental normative assumptions and values are in science in general (e.g., Douglas, 2009) and in correctional psychology in particular, Ward and Durrant claim that we need a metatheoretical concept to capture the actual tools that are involved in the move from theory to practice in correctional psychology—namely, practice frameworks.

It is important to point out that Ward and Durrant (2021) indicate that practice frameworks exist in both pure and applied contexts. Although my strategy for characterizing practice frameworks has been from the perspective of a practitioner involved in the development and delivery of a specific treatment program for sexual offenders, theorists working in basic science may construct and build practice frameworks that are the focus of research, and correctional program developers and clinicians who work directly with criminal offenders may construct practice frameworks that guide program design and are informed by basic and applied research. In both pure and applied cases, developing a practice framework requires (a) *translational work*—translating components of etiological and treatment theories in ways conducive to their practical application in the form of correctional programs, (b) *normative work* that includes making value judgments about individuals who commit crimes and criminal behaviors more generally explicit as well as

identifying the goals and values of correctional practices and (c) *constructive work* to “bridge” theoretical ideas about the etiology of criminal behavior, theoretical ideas about potential loci at which to intervene and normative assumptions together.

Ward and Durrant consider two so-called “practice frameworks” in detail: *Restorative Justice* (e.g., Walgrave, 2008) and *The Good Lives Model* (e.g., Ward, 2002) (See also Ward et al., 2021). Importantly they note that neither of these theories was introduced into the correctional psychology literature as a practice framework and that they are simply doing the work to translate these two theories into practice frameworks. They are thus engaged in the kind of translational work that they believe researchers who are interested in positively impacting the development of correctional and treatment programs for criminal behavior should be engaged. For our purposes, we need only consider one of the two theories that Ward and Durrant translate. I will consider the *Good Lives Model*, which is directed at enhancing the well-being of individuals who commit crimes.

The Good Lives Model, introduced (Ward, 2002) and developed by Ward and colleagues (Laws & Ward, 2011; Ward, Gannon, & Mann, 2007; Ward & Maruna, 2007), is based on a set of normative assumptions, namely that all human beings have dignity, are entitled to a basic set of rights and that they should be allowed to be self-determining. The model also assumes that risks to an individual's dignity, their rights and their capacity to be self-determining exist and that there are certain kinds of goods that, if an individual has those goods, will promote their dignity and their autonomy and position them so that they are not stripped of their rights. Additionally, the model assumes that human beings have teleological aims – they seek out goods that will enable them to actualize their capacity to be self-determining. Given certain inequalities that exist among persons, then, insofar as goods are not distributed equally, offending behavior may itself be causally explained as an attempt to secure goods that one lacks that stand in the way of one's ability to be self-determining or to live a good life. Correctional interventions on this model are “formulated collaboratively” by a correctional program designer and the individual who has committed an offense. Together, they develop a “good lives treatment plan” for the individual that is based on that individual's perspective on what “constitutes the good life” for them. Therapeutic interventions are directed at encouraging the individual to engage in behaviors that promote their well-being—actions that will enable them to attain “future-oriented secondary goods” by “satisfying primary goods in socially acceptable ways” (Ward & Durrant, 2021, 7). If we consider again our practitioner who is aiming to improve her approach to treating individuals who have committed sexual offenses, she might find value in the Good Lives Model and identify with the basic set of normative assumptions at its core. Specifically, she may believe that her aim should be to promote the well-being of her clients and recognize that they are autonomous agents who should have the right to be self-determining. She also may suppose that achieving well-being requires the attainment of certain primary goods and understand that she must collaboratively work with her clients to determine what having a good life means to them and to develop an action plan to help them attain basic goals in socially acceptable ways so as to eventually achieve a “good life”.

Ward and Durrant claim that the concept of “practice framework” may be used to identify diverse kinds of frameworks (like the Good Lives and Restorative Justice frameworks (see also Ward et al., 2021) on the Evidence-Based Practice Framework) on offer in the literature in pure and applied correctional psychology. According to them, each framework corresponds to a specific cluster of problems (“niche”) to which individuals who commit crimes may be subject. Each framework is associated with different targets for treatment or rehabilitative interventions. For example, the Risk-Need-Responsivity model is aimed at reducing those psychological and environmental risk factors that may leave a person vulnerable to reoffending. Narrative practice frameworks, in contrast, may point to therapeutic strategies that enable a person who has committed an offense to develop a richer self-

understanding that may enable them to understand why they committed a crime or to understand themselves apart from that crime. Desistance frameworks will instead focus on how to reintegrate individuals who have committed offenses into familial and social networks. As Ward and Durrant emphasize, individuals who commit criminal offenses often struggle with a host of different kinds of problems that cannot be addressed within the confines of a single practice framework. Thus, practitioners should be prepared to bring multiple different practice framework perspectives to bear in a “coordinated way” when developing correctional treatment interventions while recognizing that sometimes aspects (e.g., concepts, values, causes) of these practice frameworks may overlap (e.g., Ward & Durrant, 2021). It is important to note that building bridges between different practice frameworks either in theory or in practice is a different kind of work than simply taking a single theory or model and translating it into a practice framework. I will revisit this point in the next section (Section 5). However, I want to end this section by briefly considering how our practitioner might come to coordinate perspectives from two practice frameworks in order to treat her clients.

Although the Good Lives Model is directed at ensuring an individual's well-being, as our practitioner collaboratively begins to work with her clients who have committed sexual offenses to develop a “good lives plan”, it may become clear that some of her clients fail to know who they are – i.e., they may be unable to collaborate in formulating a good lives plan for themselves because their identity and concept of self is not clear to them and without it they cannot begin to think about what a good life might be for them. This is when our practitioner might consult the theoretical literature and discover a narrative approach to treatment, which makes different kinds of assumptions and valuations about persons, posits different ideas of what kinds of factors play a role in the cultivation of a personal identity, and specifies different therapeutic strategies that may enable an individual to discover or recover their narrative identity, which is the normative goal of treatment intervention in this practice framework. Our practitioner may thus aim to coordinate the normative, etiological and intervention components associated with narrative identity theory with elements of the Good Lives Model in her correctional treatment program.

## 5. Practice frameworks: an appraisal

In light of the descriptive work undertaken in the previous sections of the paper, I now want to turn to a critical appraisal of Ward and Durrant's (2021) concept of practice frameworks. On the one hand, I aim to identify some reasons why the introduction of this metatheoretical concept is fundamental for advancing effective treatment or correctional responses to crime. On the other, I aim to point to some pragmatic and conceptual hurdles to implementing multiple different practice frameworks in a “coordinated way” in applied contexts. I will argue, however, that these hurdles are not insurmountable.

As I understand it, historically in correctional psychology, theorists who have put forward explanatory theories of crime have sought to use those theories as a basis for identifying where in the causal nexus to intervene to ensure individuals who have committed crimes do not reoffend. However, explanatory and correctional theories historically have been formulated without explicit statement of the normative assumptions and values at their core. So, as a first pass, one important contribution of Ward and Durrant's metatheoretical concept is that it calls on theorists in correctional psychology to make the values and assumptions at their heart of their theories explicit. If theorists respond to this call, to the extent that etiological and treatment theories are rewritten as practice frameworks that make explicit the relationships between treatment strategies, the values and assumptions on which they are based and the goals of treatment, it may go some way to addressing Polaschek's (2012) concerns about difficulties with implementing correctional treatment theories in practice.

Ward and Durrant also illustrate the nature of the kind of

translational work in which other theorists ought to engage with their translation of the Good Lives and Restorative Justice Models. They thus provide exemplars that may serve as guides for other theoreticians to explicitly translate other etiological or intervention theories into practice frameworks. It may be that some theories will not be so easily cast in a practice framework mold, and this may be revealing as to the efficacy of those theories for use in practical contexts.

Ward and Durrant (2021) also regard it as fundamental for correctional program designers to make the components of the practice frameworks they use in applied settings explicit. If we interpret this as a normative prescription, practitioners working with individuals who have committed crimes need to ask themselves a relevant set of questions that correspond to the multi-level structure Ward and Durrant attribute to practice frameworks. Such questions include: (1) What are my values, normative commitments and the ultimate goal of the treatment interventions I am offering? (2) What am I assuming about those individuals with whom I am working who have committed crimes? What model am I using to conceptualize these individuals and what kinds of causal factors do I regard as fundamental for explaining their behavior and human behavior more generally? and (3) With respect to which causal factors should I aim to intervene in order to best treat them? Encouraging practitioners to engage reflectively about the structure of the practice framework(s) they use and urging them to make the components of that structure explicit can only serve to promote the development of more effective interventions for responding to crime.

Despite the obvious benefits of the “practice frameworks” perspective, it is relevant to ask whether there are any notable hurdles to (a) the successful implementation of practice frameworks and (b) the successful bridging of different practice frameworks in a coordinated way in applied contexts. As Ward and Durrant (2021) claim in their paper, the practice frameworks that they are considering (Restorative Justice and Good Lives Models) are pitched at a very general level and they are also theories that adopt a single normative-explanatory-intervention perspective rather than being “integrated” with other theories presumably existing on the same level. This prompts a question as to whether practice frameworks may be conceived of as conforming to a three-level structure, much like etiological (e.g., Ward & Hudson, 1998) and intervention theories (Polaschek, 2012) of crime do, and whether this may have implications for implementing practice frameworks and/or developing or coordinating a plurality of such frameworks in correctional settings. We might imagine that one level up from the Good Lives and Restorative Justice Models in the practice framework hierarchy, we might find practice frameworks aimed at building bridges between different practice frameworks like those we encounter one level down (Level 2). At the bottommost level, we may find descriptive accounts of practice frameworks that have been implemented in a specific correctional setting either individually or in a coordinated way. If this rough picture captures anything accurate about the metatheoretical structure of practice frameworks, it may have implications for the ease of relying on the theoretical literature to translate practice frameworks from theoretical to applied contexts. It means that theorists and practitioners on the ground ought to be sensitive to the nature of the kind of practice framework(s) they are appealing to in order to develop a treatment intervention and/or what theories or components they are “plugging into” a practice framework or building bridges between or among. I take this to be in part what Ward and Durrant mean when they claim that there will be “a plurality of practice frameworks” on offer in the correctional psychology literature and this “means that practitioners need to be theoretically literate and appreciate the need to match the model to the problem” and “be aware of the hybrid nature of practice frameworks and the implications of this complexity when it comes to evaluating competing approaches” (Ward & Durrant, 2021, 6).

Given the potentially complex structure of practice frameworks, then, a relevant question is whether it is possible for a single practitioner to attain the level of theoretical literacy requisite to effectively implement one or to coordinate multiple different practice frameworks in

correctional settings. It is important to note that it is already difficult for a practitioner to get a handle on the meaning of a whole host of theoretical constructs that correctional psychologists deploy. For example, terms used to pick out causal variables (e.g. “risk factors” (Fortune & Heffernan, 2019; Ward & Durrant, 2021; see also Mattu & Sullivan, 2021; Sullivan, 2019)) may be only loosely defined within a given theoretical framework and different theorists who use the same terms may mean different things by them. Flexibility in defining theoretical terms is a common feature of the theoretical landscape in correctional psychology but such conceptual pluralism makes it difficult for practitioners to readily grasp the meaning of theoretical terms or to understand how different theoretical frameworks (in this case, practice frameworks) that contain the same terms may be related to each other. So, while Ward and Durrant place the burden of theoretical literacy on practitioners working in applied contexts, it is important to emphasize the kind of rigorous and coordinated conceptual-theoretical work that theoreticians promoting different practice frameworks must engage in order to ease the practitioner's burdens. What Polaschek (2012) claims with respect to correctional treatment theories is also applicable to practice frameworks; if translating and implementing them in practice puts too much of a conceptual burden on correctional program designers, important aspects of these frameworks are likely to be “lost in translation”.

Such problems, however, are not insoluble if we interpret Ward and Durrant's call for “coordinated pluralism” to apply to theoretical, educational, and practical contexts in correctional psychology in which practice frameworks are developed, taught, and applied (See also Sullivan, 2017) on “coordinated pluralism” in psychiatric research). Specifically, theoreticians should aim for conceptual clarity and lay the groundwork for links to be made between different practice frameworks informed by different perspectives, interests, and knowledge bases. Theorists hailing from different theoretical perspectives also should engage in collaborative work to illuminate points of divergence and convergence among different practice frameworks. In order to ensure the theoretical literacy of future practitioners who aim to work in applied contexts, students in correctional psychology programs should be exposed to different practice frameworks and collaboratively trained in how to bring them collectively to bear in developing effective treatment or rehabilitative programs. One component of such training could be to provide students with hypothetical scenarios of individuals who have committed criminal offenses that forces them to collaboratively learn to link together different practice frameworks to develop effective treatment interventions. Such training will best prepare correctional psychology students aiming to work in applied contexts with the skills requisite to develop “coordinated” approaches to treatment that appeal to resources from a plurality of different practice framework perspectives. Ideally, teams of practitioners working in applied contexts who are specialized in different practice frameworks will work collaboratively to develop correctional treatment programs; if individual offenders with whom they are work present with problems that cannot be addressed within the confines of a single practice framework, these practitioners may collaboratively bring a set of practice frameworks to bear that offer more suitable options for treatment or rehabilitative interventions. Such “local” coordinated pluralism may thus enable the realization of a more “precision treatment” approach in correctional psychology.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I described and evaluated the concept of practice frameworks in correctional psychology, situating my analysis within the broader contexts of philosophical understandings of theories and models and metatheoretical work in forensic psychology on theories, frameworks and models. I explained why I think Ward and Durrant's introduction of the concept in the metatheoretical literature in correctional psychology is important for progress in developing effective correctional responses to crime and I raised and responded to some questions

pertaining to the feasibility of implementing a “coordinated pluralism” approach to practice frameworks in applied settings.

## Declaration of competing interest

No conflicts of interest.

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