



The Multi-Trajectory Theory of Adult Firesetting (M-TTAF)

Theresa A. Gannon ^{a,*}, Caoilte Ó Ciardha ^a, Rebekah M. Doley ^b, Emma Alleyne ^a

^a University of Kent, UK

^b Bond University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 June 2011

Received in revised form 12 August 2011

Accepted 12 August 2011

Available online 22 August 2011

Keywords:

Firesetting

Arson

Theory

Assessment

Treatment

ABSTRACT

The assessment and treatment of adults who set fires deliberately are underdeveloped relative to other areas of forensic-clinical psychology. From a scientist–practitioner perspective, all clinical assessment and treatment should be guided by a theoretical and empirically based understanding of the presenting clinical phenomena. In this paper, we critically review current typologies, motives, and theories regarding the etiological features of deliberate adult firesetting. Then, using a theory knitting perspective, we synthesize the prime parts of this information into a comprehensive multifactorial framework of deliberate firesetting. The resulting Multi-Trajectory Theory of Adult Firesetting (M-TTAF) is an integration of current theory, typological, and research knowledge into a comprehensive etiological theory of firesetting along with its maintenance, and desistence. In addition to this overall theoretical framework, we summarize five associated prototypical firesetting trajectories (or patterns of characteristics leading to the firesetting behavior) that stem from our theoretical work. We examine this new theory according to key evaluative components associated with theory construction and conclude by highlighting the M-TTAF's potential application in future research and practice innovation with adult firesetters.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1.	Introduction	108
2.	Theory development	108
2.1.	Theory foci and explanation	108
2.2.	Components of a successful theory: Theory evaluation	109
3.	Existing theoretical explanations of firesetting	109
3.1.	Typological classificatory systems	109
3.2.	Single factor theories	110
3.2.1.	Social learning theory	110
3.3.	Multi factor theories	110
3.3.1.	Functional Analysis Theory: Firesetting as the only viable option (Jackson, 1994; Jackson, Glass, & Hope, 1987)	110
3.3.2.	Dynamic Behavior Theory (Fineman, 1980, 1995)	111
4.	The Multi-Trajectory Theory of Adult Firesetting (M-TTAF)	112
4.1.	Key phenomenon addressed by the M-TTAF	112
4.2.	M-TTAF structure	112
4.3.	Tier 1: A description of the M-TTAF's broad etiological framework	112
4.3.1.	Developmental context	112
4.3.2.	Psychological vulnerabilities	112
4.4.	Tier 2: A description of the M-TTAFs trajectories	116
4.4.1.	Antisocial cognition	116
4.4.2.	Grievance	116
4.4.3.	Fire interest	117
4.4.4.	Emotionally expressive/need for recognition	117
4.4.5.	Multi-faceted	117

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury, CT2 7NP, UK.

E-mail address: T.A.Gannon@Kent.ac.uk (T.A. Gannon).

5.	Appraisal of the M-TTAF	118
5.1.	Key theoretical criteria	118
5.2.	Relative strength of the M-TTAF	118
6.	Conclusions	119
	Acknowledgment	119
	References	119

1. Introduction

Arson is a crime that results in both personal and economic devastation. Latest available US figures show that, in 2007, around 309,200 intentionally-set fires were recorded by fire departments causing 483 deaths, 7550 injuries, and leading to over 1 billion dollars of property-associated economic costs (Hall, 2010). Interestingly, however, there is a distinct lack of etiological theory or clinical treatment associated with the serious social issue that arson presents. Thus, there is a strong need for a comprehensive theoretical framework to guide professionals in their clinical work and subsequent treatment of firesetting. Existing research and reviews examining firesetting tend to focus almost exclusively on child and juvenile firesetters (e.g., Kolko, 1985; Lambie & Randell, 2011). However, only around half of all intentional firesetting that comes to professional attention is committed by juveniles (Cassel & Bernstein, 2007). Thus, adult firesetting is a prevalent and comparatively unexplained issue for consulting professionals (see Geller, 1992a, 1992b, 2007 for general reviews).

In this paper, we first examine the basic elements required for general theory development and appraisal. Then, we briefly introduce the key characteristics associated with deliberate firesetting and firesetting recidivism before critically examining the typologies, motives, and etiological theories associated with this behavior. This information is then synthesized into a comprehensive multifactorial framework of deliberate firesetting and we examine this new theory according to key evaluative components associated with theory construction. The resulting Multi-Trajectory Theory of Adult Firesetting (M-TTAF) is an integration of current theory, typological, and research knowledge into a comprehensive etiological theory of firesetting. In describing this theory, first we present the overall theoretical framework. Then, we summarize associated prototypical firesetting trajectories (or patterns of characteristics leading to firesetting behavior) that stem from our theoretical framework.

We intend this newly constructed theory to account for deliberate adult firesetting rather than deliberate firesetting confined to childhood or adolescence (e.g., Lambie & Randell, 2011). Our theory is also intended to account for both male and female adult firesetting, and firesetting that occurs in the context of mental health problems or psychiatric co-morbidity. Finally, we have chosen to construct a theory that accounts for 'firesetting' rather than 'arson.' This is because arson is a legal definition of intentional firesetting that varies across jurisdictions. Given that individuals who set intentional fires or hold a problematic relationship with fire are often not convicted for arson (Dickens, Sugarman, & Gannon, in press; Rice & Harris, 1996), we believe it essential that any new theory constructed should be able to explain the true variety of intentional firesetting seen by consulting clinicians in the course of their practice.

2. Theory development

In other areas of forensic-clinical psychology, such as general violence or sexual offending, theory construction and proliferation have become commonplace (see Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1996; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson, Deuser, & DeNeve, 1995; Anderson & Dill, 2000; Finkelhor, 1984; Ward & Beech, 2006; Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006; Ward & Siegert, 2002). Good etiological theory provides the foundation with which to chart the

interrelationships between an offender's presenting clinical problems and core psychological factors (i.e., case formulation; Gannon, Collie, Ward, & Thakker, 2008), thereby providing professionals with a unified description that may be used as a fundamental guide for assessment and treatment purposes. It should be noted that Ward and his colleagues (e.g., Ward et al., 2006; Ward & Hudson, 1998) transposed and synthesized much of the scientific theory, method, and appraisal work into the forensic realm when they examined the nature and focus of theory as applied to sexual offending. Thus, many of the arguments and commentary outlined below make reference to the scientific theory and appraisal work utilized by these researchers. Our definition of the term 'theory' throughout this paper is consistent with that of Kukla (2001) referred to by Ward et al. (2006) in which organized ideas or laws are used to explain and depict aspects of our world—i.e., psychological manifestations—that are not directly observable.

2.1. Theory foci and explanation

Within sexual offending, Ward and Hudson (1998) have meaningfully conceptualized theory as existing at one of three main foci or levels: *single factor*, *multi factor* or *micro theories*. Single factor theories are those that focus on the explanation of a lone factor and its causal relationship with offending (e.g., social learning theory). Multi factor theories, however, unite various single factor theories into a comprehensive overview of offending, providing an account of how the factors unite and interrelate to facilitate offending behavior. Finally, micro theories explain the cognitive, behavioral, and volitional factors associated with an offense process derived from both subjective data (i.e., offenders' statements) and objective data (e.g., police reports).

A relatively underdeveloped form of theory not specifically detailed by Ward and Hudson (1998) is *taxonomic classification*. Here, heterogeneous offenders are subtyped into groups based on shared motivating factors, personality characteristics, demographic details, or some combination of these. Such taxonomies represent unilateral classificatory systems that—if sufficiently explained and reliable—may play a valuable role in assessment and treatment strategies as well as guiding more detailed theory development.

One further area of theory-foci discussed by Ward and Hudson (1998) and Ward et al. (2006) relates to the conceptualization of proximal versus distal factors. *Distal* factors, as the label suggests, refers to factors or vulnerabilities that may be located as stemming from an individual's more distant developmental experiences (e.g., attachment to parents, child neglect or abuse) or even inherited genetics (e.g., personality predispositions). *Proximal* factors, on the other hand, refer to factors that trigger or act together with existing vulnerability factors to culminate in offending, e.g., *psychological states* (i.e., internal factors), and *events or situations* (i.e., external factors) (Ward et al., 2006). To illustrate, the strong negative affective state associated with being rejected by a partner is likely to interact with a person's pre-existing vulnerabilities (e.g., poor coping and an interest in fire) such that a person will choose to enact inappropriate and dangerous coping mechanisms (e.g., setting fire to a partner's apartment). Thus, any comprehensive explanation of criminal behavior must account for the presence of such vulnerability factors and explain how these

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/94784>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/94784>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)