



The relational context of desistance

Beth Weaver

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Overview



- The dynamics of the relational context of desistance
 - Recurrent elements of change process
 - Intimate relationships and families of formation
- The implications for practice and service delivery with individuals and families

The Story of the Del



- Life stories of a naturally forming group of men
- Aim:
 - to explore the relational contexts in which desistance occurred (or not)
 - to understand how particular social relations (friends, partners, families etc.) influence offending and desistance
 - how individual, relational, cultural and social contexts influence onset, persistence and desistance

Desistance, intimate and family relationships



- Relationships are central to human motivation and action – need to mutually and reciprocally relate to other people.
- Interpersonal dynamics and effects are only part of the story.
- It is that bond that exists between people and the outcomes that emerge as a consequence of being in the relation that is key to understanding effects.
- These outcomes are called relational goods i.e. love, trust, loyalty
- The desire to maintain these goods emerging from a given relationship motivate and drive human action.

Meet Harry...



- Intimate relations and desistance - a partner places constraints on their partner's behaviour or people change themselves because their partner's views become more significant than their friends'.
- Bit more to it?
 - Harry disassociated from the Del when the feud broke out.
 - He was in a significant intimate relationship with Millie
 - Despite her exhortations for him to desist, he associated with a new group and continued to offend – although he gave up burglary to limit the shame for Millie.
 - Millie stood by him even though she disapproved.
- Here we see them making reciprocal and collaborative adjustments to maintain relationship
- Relationship neither causative or conditional on desistance.

....then Harry became a Dad



- Fatherhood provided impetus to initiate and sustain changes in his behaviour and lifestyle.
- Motivated by potential impact of offending on role and relationship with his son.
- Informed by Harry's values and beliefs about masculinity and good fathering.
- Here family as both a constraint on offending and enablement for a new way of living.
- Not reducible to effects of individuals on each other – but change emerges as an outcome of the reciprocal orientation of the family to maintain their relationships.

Informal social relationships and desistance



- Desistance enabled / constrained by interaction of social relations of friendships, intimate relations, family, faith communities and employment – depending on the meaning of these social relations to the individual.
- Their meaning is informed by the individual's personal priorities, values, aspirations and relational concerns.
- Desistance occurs within and through social relations and the reciprocal informal exchanges that take place between family and friends and/or through work & (for some) faith communities
- Reciprocity is about mutual helping in context of solidarity / interdependency.
- Connecting people to 'circuits of social reciprocity' can assist desistance.

Practice implications



- Crime and imprisonment can damage relationships and sever natural norms of reciprocity.
- Restorative and relation-focussed practices which engage friends and family in the change process.
- Transforming rehabilitation – where are the families?
- Families are both the context and medium of change or source of chaos, stress and trauma underpinning offending.

Practice implications ~ 2



- Working with and through families:
 - Problem-solving family work
 - Mutual aid based support groups
 - Parenting education
 - Relationship counselling
 - Family support and mediation.
- Range of techniques to create / build on circuits of social reciprocity between individuals and families using strengths-based, restorative approaches.
- Preparation for family re-entry and assistance to encourage naturally occurring processes of mutual support.
- Circuits of social reciprocity akin to circles of support model coordinated by practitioners and including, as appropriate, volunteers, key family members and friends.

Delivery



- Relational rehabilitation must start at the beginning of a sentence and continue throughout the process of release.
- Focus on supporting or building naturally occurring circuits of social reciprocity.
- Early and graduated release schemes are key opportunities overlooked by the transforming rehabilitation agenda i.e. HDCs and RoTLs
- Need to develop a better understanding of how such opportunities might be utilised to create conditions in which change can occur
 - i.e. combined with restorative and family focussed interventions

Summing up



- Informal social relationships are both context and medium through which change occurs.
- Still need to understand better:
 - The relational dynamics critical to the change process
 - How we might use these insights to more effectively support individuals and families
 - Through what mechanisms they might be most effectively delivered.
- Needs to be a much greater commitment at all levels to ensure relationally informed practices are systematically and widely available to individuals and their families.



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow