Desistance, reflexivity andrelationality: a case study.

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Abstract

This paper presents the analysis of a single life-story drawn from a larger study examining theindividual, relational and structural contributions to the desistance process. The emphasis here is on the contributions of key social relations in 'Evan's' narrative of change. How people relate to one another, and what these relationships mean to them both as individuals and together, are critical aspects of understanding the role of social relations in desistance. This paper concludes by considering how penal practices might generate and sustain the kinds of social capital and reflexive, relational networks relevant to desistance.

Key words: Desistance – Relationships – Reflexivity – Reciprocity -Supervision

Introduction: Mapping the terrain: socio-theoretical perspectives on desistance

Contemporary desistance studies tend to conceptualize the process of giving up crime as being somewhere on a continuum between structure and agency, that is as being influenced to various degrees by external factors (such as housing, finances, employment, relationships) and/or internal or subjective factors (such as changing motivations, aspirations, self-perceptions and self-efficacy), with different theories proposing that one or the other is of particular significance – often at a given time, or in a given situation. Other studies have further sought to identify the temporal process wherein one or other *becomes* more or less significant in the desistance process (see Farrall and Bowling 1999; LeBel et al. 2008 for example). Across these divergent conceptualizations of the desistance process, while there is a more or less implicit or explicit recognition of the individual as a reflexive subject, limited attention has been given to what processes of reflexivity entail (notable recent exceptions include Farrall et al 2010; King 2012; Vaughan 2007) or to how this reflexivity contributes to identity formation. Such theories therefore fail to consider *how* individuals' reasoning and actions are variously shaped, enabled or constrained by the relational, cultural and social contexts within which they are embedded. For example, theories that stress individual agency are limited in their capacities to explain what triggers reflexivity (see for example Giordano et al 2002; King 2012), and structural theories similarly fail to illuminate *how* social structures shape individual's decisions (see for example Laub and Sampson 2003). This preoccupation with the individual or the structural obfuscates what it means to be human, which is to be a reflexive individual immersed in a relationally and emotionally textured world.

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While there is consensus across desistance research that social relations, such as friendship groups, intimate relations, families of origin and formation, employment and religious communities have a role to play in variously constraining, enabling and sustaining desistance, no study has yet adequately analysed the dynamics or properties of social relations, or their relationship to individuals and social structures. This may be, in part, because the methodological focus of desistance studies has generally been on individuals rather than groups. While there has been considerable attention to 'gangs' (Aldridge et al 2007, Bannister and Fraser 2008; Deuchar 2009; Fraser 2010, Klein et al 2006; Pyrooz et al 2010, 2012), there has been scant research revealing the experiences of people who co-offend and on their subsequent processes of desistance. This methodological focus on the individual actor precludes an analysis of the role of social relations in shaping and affecting offending and desistance, and thus of how individual, relational, cultural and social contexts influence onset, persistence, and desistance. Indeed, the literature discussing the role of peers in relation to onset and persistence (see for example Farrington 1992; Haynie 2001, Haynie 2002; Warr 1993, 2002) and desistance (see for example Calverley 2012; Giordano et al. 2003; Graham and Bowling 1995; Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998) rather polarises peers into either 'anti-social' pressures or 'pro-social' influences, with each category assumed to represent different people or groups. Discussion principally surrounds the would-be-desister's decisive (Paternoster and Bushway 2009) or developmental (Giordano et al. 2003) disassociation from 'negative' influences and either re-connection with pro-social former associates or development of new pro-social relationships (see for example Giordano et al. 2003; Knight and West 1975), with further explanations principally deriving from social learning, differential association (Akers 1973; Sutherland 1947; Warr 1993) or social control theories (see for example Sampson and Laub 1993). These studies are usually refracted through the lens of the individual desister (see for example Warr 1998; Cromwell et al. 1991) or more infrequently from the standpoint of the individual situated in a structural network of relations in a given context (see for example Haynie 2001).

To extend criminological understanding in this area, the study from which this case-analysis is drawn analysed the life-stories of six men who formed part of a naturally forming group called 'The Del'. In taking not the individual but the social relation as a central unit of analysis, this study explored the relative contributions of individual actions, social relations and social systems to the process of desistance. While the study included an analysis of the role of the group(as a social relation in and of itself) in shaping and affecting offending and desistance, the focus of this paper will be on the role of social relations in variously enabling, constraining or sustaining desistance.

Re-conceptualising the relationship between social relations, agency and structure in the desistance process

So far, the relational context of desistance has been under-explored and under-theorised[1]. Although there are numerous studies oriented to revealing the effects of certain relational forms on desistance, explanations proffered generally refer to differential association (Warr 1998) or the acquisition of social bonds or ties that operate as mechanisms of informal social control that exhibit constraining effects on an individual's behaviour (Laub et al. 1998; Sampson and Laub 1990; 2003). Moreover, despite the widespread recognition of the role of familial or intimate relationships in the desistance process, the majority of accounts of the desistance process retain an individualistic focus and where such accounts recognize the role of relationships, these are dehumanized insofar as they are relegated to the domain of conditioning structures and the dynamics of their particular contributions are rarely

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[1] Although see Giordano et al. (2007) who focus on the interpersonal effects of intimate and friend relationships.

disentangled further. Indeed 'most people, like most social theorists, think of social relations as a product of the Self or as an external constraint impinging on it.' (Donati2011: xv).

If, however, we understand the human as relationally constituted, then we can no longer elide the relational context within which people are immersed; a context which requires a more nuanced understanding of the properties of social relations. The relational sociologist, PierpaoloDonati argues, contrary to current socio-theoretical preoccupations with the agent or the structure, that it is the social relation which is the key to understanding social reality and social changes. The social relation is conceptualised by Donati as those bonds maintained between people that constitute their reciprocal orientations towards each other; it is the 'reality in between', that which exists *between* people, which 'are both the product of concrete human beings and also that which helps to forge them' (Donati 2011:61), 'which depend on the[m]..., but at the same time goes beyond them and exceeds them' (2011:26).
The conceptual key to Donati's approach is that it is concerned exclusively with *rel-azione*, that is, reciprocal interaction or 'action which emerges out of mutual interaction' (Donati 2011:124) (rather than with *rapporto*, such as the statistical relations established between independent variables at the empirical level (Archer 2011)). Social relations cannot, however, be reduced solely to interpersonal relations which are non-emergent because they can be 'personalised', that is, reduced to the influences of one person on another. Understanding *how* social relations work requires an examination of 'the *effect* of their interaction (the behaviour that none of the actors 'brings' to the relation, but which results from their mutual conditioning of each other) (Donati 2011: 126) [emphasis added]. There are two components to this that need to be recognized -the 'refero' ('a reference to',) and the 'religio' (the structural or 'bond between'. To explain, its symbolic referent (the 'refero') refers to the pre-established assumptions and meanings associated with specific types of social relations i.e. the institution of marriage. The religio refers to the specific kind of bond generated between individuals-in-relation; the way that particular people in a certain relation imbue it with meaning i.e. within a given marriage.

Each relation, involving two or more people, has, therefore, irreducible properties arising from the reciprocal orientation of those involved. It is the practice of reciprocity (or exchange) that generates and re-generates the bond of the relationship as individuals-in-relation orientate themselves to the maintenance of the 'relational goods' (such as trust, care, mutual concern) that being in the relation produces andwhich are wholly reliant on the endurance of their bonding.Donati's relational paradigm provides an account of social integration based upon people's reciprocal orientation to relational goods (at all levels).

In developing his relational theory of reflexivity, Donatiprogresses Archer's (2000, 2003) concept of the 'internal conversation' (personal reflexivity) to address the relation between the internal reflexivity of the person and the social networks he/she belongs to which have their own reflexivity (relational reflexivity) [2] .Put simply, the process of reflexivity is relational insofar as it is shaped by the relational networks in which it emerges. These sets of relations affect what does and can satisfy an individual and what can be sustained, to which the individual brings his personal reflexivity to bear with regard to his participation in this relational context. Donatifurther argues that individual action is guided not only by individual concerns but by the good of the relationships which matter most to them. In this context, compromises by individuals-in-relation are deliberated over and decided upon in order to sustain these relationships and maintain the emergent relational goods. The resultant reciprocal adjustments or modifications to their behaviours made by individuals-in-relation,

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[2]For a more in-depth discussion of Donati's theory of relational reflexivity, please see Weaver (2012).

for example, are the outcomes of relational reflexivity. In this way, social relations can motivate individuals to behave in a way that they might not otherwise have done.

Evan's story

'Evan's' story is part of a wider study exploring the individual, relational and structural contributions to the desistance process through an analysis of the life-stories of six menwho formed part of a naturally forming group of friends called 'The Del'. These friends (in their forties at the time of interview) offended together but their lives to a greater or lesser degree diverged following a violent and enduring feud which effectively divided the group and heralded the fragmentation of the group in its original form. The data was collected using a qualitative, retrospective, life-story method and analysed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analytic method[3] (Smith et al 2009). Each life-story was analysed individually prior to a cross-case analysis being undertaken, although it is the individual analysis of 'Evan's' story that is presented here.

Data from offenders has been integral to the emergence of "desistance studies", less so in the strand of it that derives from "criminal careers research" more so in the strand influenced by narrative theory, which requires detailed attention to offenders' life experiences. Whilst single-case studies are not without their methodological limitations as an immediate source of criminological analysis '…the deep exploration into the life narrative(s) of a single individual can generate at least as much insight … as getting to know a little bit about 200 or 2000 human beings in a large-scale survey'(Maruna and Matravers 2007:437). Indeed, understanding both the intricacies and the key elements of individuals' life-stories can illuminate 'how meanings are variously shaped and reacted to/acted upon through diverse social interaction'(Goodey 2000:475) to a degree rarely illustrated in the desistance literature. In seeking to provide such a nuanced analysis of the relational dynamics of desistancethis paper discusses the role of Evan's extant friendships, new social networks (through his immersion in a faith based community) and intimate relationships in supporting desistance over time under the superordinate theme '*Religiosity, Reflexivity, Relationality and Desistance'*. The role of employment, as a social relation, in Evan's narrative of change is elaborated under the final superordinate theme '*The Meanings and Outcomes of Work.'*

Brief Biographical Overview

The majority of Evan's offences were acquisitive in nature, and included safe-breaking, housebreaking, theft, fraud and shoplifting. In total, he surmised that he acquired in the region of 100 convictions although he speculated that his offending total was '*probably at least twice that amount'*. Evan's convictions primarily resulted in custodial sentences of varying lengths. In total, between the ages of 14–28, he spent twelve years in prison serving short prison sentences. Evan considers his conversion to Christianity, aged 29, to be the principal mechanism triggering and sustaining his desistance from offending. He therefore considers himself to have desisted from offending approximately 14 years prior to interview (aged 43). He currently works as an evangelist in London where he resides with his wife, Evie, to whom he has been married since he was aged 31. Although they have no children, Evan has two children, David (born 1982) and Jake (born 1990) from two previous relationships (with Jane and Monica).

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[3] A fuller account of the methodology and results are available from the author on request. See also Weaver (2012).

The role of extant and new social networks in supporting desistance

Evan made a prudential decision to distance himself from the ensuing intra-group enmities that the feud between members of the Del gave rise to, which was assisted by his imprisonment during this period for three and a half years. Following his release from prison, aged 22, Evan sought out and acquired temporary, short-term employment in a local power station. At this stage, the impetus for his pursuit of employment was both prudential and instrumental. It represented an alternative yet licit means of acquiring the economic capital he required to maintain the *'party lifestyle'* he enjoyed. This did not so much reflect a desire to desist as a desire to avoid further imprisonment; '*I was very consciously thinking let's be careful'*.

Participation in work enabled Evan to abstain from acquisitive crime and to sustain his first significant relationship with 'Monica', whom he met at this time. This consolidated his desire to avoid re-imprisonment and its potential effects on their relationship. What turned out to be this hiatus in his offending emerged as an outcome of Evan's reflexive evaluation of the effects of continued offending and imprisonment, mediated through the lens of his shifting individual and relational concerns, which were progressively oriented towards the maintenance of the relational goods emerging from his relationship with Monica (discussed below). However, within several months, and following the conclusion of his employment and his temporary separation from Monica, he *'got involved in the drug scene'* and his poly-drug use progressively spiraled into a chronic addiction that endured for a further seven years. In this sense, Evan's early attempts to desist correspond with Bottoms and Shapland's (2011) model of the desistance process whichrecognises that despite taking action towards desistance, failure to maintain these changes in the face of obstacles or temptations may lead to relapse.

Evan developed new friendships through his involvement in the 'drug scene' most of whom were similarly experimenting with various 'Class A[4]' drugs. Evan temporarily desisted from acquisitive crime and diversified into drug dealing as a means of subsidising his own drug use, which was, at that time, his ultimate concern. Drug dealing presented as a viable course of action that would enable him to realise this concern, one that carried less risk of apprehension than housebreaking, for example, and which enabled him to maintain his lifestyle while avoiding imprisonment.

Over time, however, as his drug use escalated, and he consumed more than he was selling, he reverted to acquisitive crime to fund his increasingly chaotic drug use and the cycle of repeat imprisonment that had characterised his earlier life resumed. As the extract below illustrates, during his mid-twenties, Evan engaged in a reflexive process in which he compared and measured his own progress and behaviour against his friends' desistance from crime and normative developmental transitions. Resonating with Maruna's (2001) notion of a 'condemnation script', Evan felt powerless to influence his conditioning structures and exercise control over his behaviour. Such is the nature of addiction that it can progressively lead to a sense of diminished agency and self-efficacy (Tieu 2010). Reflecting Archer's (2010, 2012) concept of fractured reflexivity his internal conversation reinforced to him that positive change was unlikely. In this context, then, the internal conversation does not lead to a purposeful course of action and only intensifies personal distress leading to (albeit temporarily) passive agents who feel unable to effect change in their conditioning structures.

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[4] The Misuse of Drugs Act distinguishes three categories of drugs: Class A, B, and C. Class A drugs are those considered to be the most dangerous, and carry the harshest punishments

Evan: I thought [prison] was an occupational hazard, this is what I did. This is who I was. The majority of my friends have got themselves jobs, and by their 20's, marrying, settling down…I used to wonder, where have I gone wrong? …and I would say to myself why am I still doing time? Why am I still doing crime? And I would think maybe this is who I am meant to be… I didn't know anything else and by this time I am 26 / 27… I thought this is me, this is what I've to be, this is it, this is my sort of destiny in life and I'm going to be a criminal.

Evan's narrative of this era is characterised by his involvement in chaotic poly-drug use, acquisitive crime and frequent short prison sentences. His continuing substance use led to a significant deterioration in his physical and mental wellbeing, and he became increasingly isolated. Peter and Jay (two of Evan's friends from the Del) had become 'born again' Christians and they persistently tried to engage Evan by sharing their experiences of personal transformation through their conversion to Pentecostal Christianity and by offering him support[5]. At this stage, Evan tolerated their interventions but he was not receptive to their testimonies.

Evan: [Peter], [Jay] and Tom would always talk to me in the street and show me some compassion and care because by this time I'm an addict and not many people want to know addicts. Most of my old friends would just steer clear of me. By this time I'm a mess Beth. I'm 9 stone. I'm out my face all the time and they would constantly show me some friendship and take me for a meal and talk to me.

Evan was released from another short prison sentence on Hogmanay (New Year's Eve) 1993/94; these co-occurring events, both of which can generate reflection and self-examination, combined to create the conditions which triggered Evan's rumination over the direction in which his life was heading. At first reading, the extract below might appear to resonate with Paternoster and Bushway (2009) who suggest that a perception of 'the positive possible self' can influence a desire to change, but reason that the 'feared self', 'what one does not want to become rather than a sense of what one wants to become' (ibid: 1116) provides 'the initial motivation to change the self' (Paternoster and Bushway 2009:1103; see relatedly Harris, 2011). However, Evan's motivation to initiate change ultimately emerged from his desire to realise a hoped-for self, triggered by his association with and observations of change in his friends. As with his earlier reflexive self-evaluations, however, at this juncture, despite his anticipation of an imminent 'feared self', Evan felt powerless to initiate such change.

Evan: 1993 must have been the worst year of my life because…I was using any kind of drug to get high…I was just losing it completely, totally, and really in a mess. I wasn't really caring, my appearance was gone, I was lying, stealing, anything to get a fix. I remember I got out from another prison sentence on Hogmanay, 1993 going into 1994. Everybody was partying and I'm sitting there with a can of beer thinking what am I going to do in life? … I'd began to lose a few of my friends from overdoses and I'm thinking I'm either going to be next or there's going to be a long prison sentence. And I was thinking those things through, but the drugs were controlling my life.

The structure of Evan's narrative (above and below) reflects those of Pentecostal conversion narratives in general (Cartledge 2010; Rambo 1993; van Klinken 2012). In the pre-conversion phase a traumatic event or series of crises (Rambo 1993) compounds a sense of existential loneliness and lost-ness, a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the person they have

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[5]In Pentecostal Christianity, new converts are encouraged to testify about what they have experienced – both as a means of consolidating their faith and to encourage others to convert (Anderson 2004).

become and an isolation from the person they feel they are or would like to be, often characterized by, or narrated as, a fear of dying (van Klinken 2012). There is a cumulative effect of events (which for Evan further included the death of his best friend to an overdose four days prior to him committing himself to Christianity) and interactions with people (primarily Jay and Peter) which precede conversion. The traumatic events or 'crises' (Rambo 1993) create an 'openness to change' (Giordano et al. 2002:1000), or 'quest' for meaning, aided by 'encounters' with an advocate of the faith and 'interactions' with the religious community which precedes the individual's 'commitment' and its 'outcomes' (Rambo 1993; see also Cartledge 2010).

Indeed, Evan's association and interactions with Jay and Peter in the context of these cumulative events and experiences imbued Christianity with plausibility as 'a hook for change' (Giordano et al. 2002: 992) through his observation of the effects of their transformation following their conversion to Christianity. The recognition of change in a credible person is particularly influential where an individual can identify with the change agent(s) and internalize the benefits of responding to this influence (Kelman 1958) in the hope of achieving similar outcomes. Jay and Peter's continuing compassion, support and recognition of him as someone of worth had the effect of triggering a process of personal reflexivity through an appraisal of *their*behaviour and how different they and their lives had become, which created in him an increasing openness to their encouragement that he accompany them to church. This is distinct, then, from more cognitive or individualistic accounts of the desistance process that place explanatory weight on the *individual's* agentic role in fashioning an alternative identity, and which suggest that social relationships 'are not accessed until after offenders *first decide to change*' (Paternoster and Bushway 2009: 1106, italics in original). In the context of his experiences of powerlessness, hopelessness, loss, suffering and social rejection, Evan was particularly receptive to the empowering Christian message that through God he could be forgiven, find hope and a new direction. The *'compassion and care'* conveyed by this community of believers made him feel that he could belong amongst them.

> Evan: It was the 29th of January 1994 [aged 29]…a preacher spoke… about Jesus… and he says that he came so that we could be forgiven…and he came so that he could give us direction and hope. And I thought that's what I need… I looked at Tom and [Jay] and [Peter] and I looked at their lives. I had examined their lives, I had watched their lives and I knew they were different… they weren't just saying something; I had seen it had an impact on their life so… I went to church the next day and…a big massive guy…gave me a massive hug. He says 'John welcome to the family of God' and I felt I had come home. I felt I would belong somewhere.

Religion traditionally encapsulates particular beliefs, values, attitudes and practices that, in conjunction with the relational ties formed through religious institutions and communities, creates a new world for the convert to inhabit (Rambo 1993). The reflexive practical reasoning involved in the process of change, or conversion, from *becoming* to *being* a Christian, heralded a re-prioritization of Evan's ultimate concerns. This process of reflexivity, through which projects (courses of action) and practices (a way of being in the world) (Archer 2007) are decided on, realized and sustained, is relational in so far as it is shaped by the relational networks within which it emerges (Donati 2011). In the first year following Evan's conversion and subsequent release, Peter and Jay assumed what might be construed as an informal 'circle of support'[6] in terms of socializing Evan into Pentecostal Christian values,

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[6]The term 'circle of support' is an allusion to a specific restorative practice operating across the world, variously named Citizen Circles (in Ohio) or Circles of Support and Accountability for example (i.e. Armstrong

beliefs and practices and providing an informal helpful and encouraging environment to reinforce his fledgling Christian identity. In so doing, they role-modeled Pentecostal Christian identities and generated the relational goods (of love, friendship, devotion, caring) through which this process of re-socialisation was enabled. It is through these relations of reciprocity, which recognise the dignity of the human person, that those participating in it find a shared intrinsic commitment to '[their] communal experiential basis as beneficiaries of worth [in reference to the relational goods these relationships produce] unobtainable in any other way' (Archer 2010: 10 [this author's insertions]). Moreover, drawing on Maruna and LeBel's (2009: 66) research which suggests that when a person is voluntarily involved in a helping collective he/she is 'thought to obtain a sense of belonging', or solidarity, through the 'sharing of experience, strength and hope', it might be inferred that through the experience of supporting Evan, Jay and Peter also benefited from the reinforcement of their Christian identities and evangelistic roles that their mutual recognition of each other's transformations implied.

> Evan: for the first year [post conversion] ... they were always with me night and day, people like Peter and Jay... we would meet together... they almost sort of mentored me and gave me good advice… These guys put a lot of time into me, encouraged me and supported me until I almost could stand on my feet myself in a sense, until I could walk as a Christian and make the right choices and the right decisions; they were very influential in the early days.

Having this circle of support following his conversion was particularly important to Evan whose relationship with Monica and his former networks concluded because he had become a Christian. Evan described this series of rejections as a significant challenge, whilst simultaneously recognising the challenges that living in a criminal milieu without participating in it would have represented in the early stages of desistance and recovery. Evan developed new social relationships through his association with and involvement in various faith-based organisations and institutions. The contribution of these new social relationships in enabling Evan's participation in employment, and the contribution of employment in supporting his process of change are discussed further under the superordinate theme *'The Meanings and Outcomes of Work'*. The following subtheme discusses the dynamics of Evan's involvement in his families of formation and intimate relationships and the individual and relational factors which variously influenced his experience of these roles and relationships.

The role of intimate relationships and families of formation in supporting desistance

This section explores differences in the role of Evan's two significant intimate relations in constraining or sustaining change at different stages in his life and the constraints that a range of factors exerted on the impact and significance of his experience of becoming a father, prior to his conversion, at the ages of 17 (in 1982) and 25 (in 1990).

It is likely that a coalescence of factors will affect the dynamic experience of parenthood (see for example Arendell 2000; Hauari and Hollingworth 2009; Marsiglio and Pleck 2004) including age, gender, maturity, one's experience of being parented, the status, nature and dynamics of the relational context within which a given form of parenting occurs, and individual personal, cultural and socio-economic contexts - all of which variously constrain or enable the realisation of this role and social identity. Evan's first son, David, was born when Evan was seventeen years old, the outcome of a very brief relationship with David's

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et al 2008). Essentially, the circle is comprised of volunteer community members who provide a network of social support to an individual to help prevent re-offending and enable reintegration.

mother, Jane. At this stage in his life, Evan's lifestyle cohered around socialising with his friends and engaging in acquisitive crime, interrupted only by the imposition of frequent short prison sentences, all of which necessarily curtailed Evan's level of involvement with his son. At this stage, Evan's ultimate concerns surrounded the acquisition of money and the pursuit of this lifestyle, with which both intimate relationships and fatherhood were incompatible. Although he had seen David as a baby, by the time Evan was released from his three and a half year prison sentence, aged 22, his son was aged five.

> Evan: I had seen him once or twice when he was a baby but I had been in prison for the last three or four years … I lived for the weekend and… I wasn't going to be nailed into that relationship. I didn't have any real concern for [Jane]… so that probably had an effect on me not taking responsibility for [David].

For Evan, then, becoming a father at this time, in the context of his relationship with Jane (or lack thereof), engendered no reflexive re-orientation of his ultimate concerns, nor did his subsequent abstinence from offending influence his inclination towards assuming parental responsibilities towards his son, which were overshadowed by his disinterest in Jane. Rather, Evan's disengagement from offending at this time was motivated by his aversion to further imprisonment and was enabled by his participation in temporary employment which restricted his perceived need to engage in acquisitive crime. His relational commitments to Monica, in turn, further diminished the desirability of offending behaviour, and its consequences. Moreover, spending time at work and with Monica had a significant impact on his formerly routine social activities and the social spaces he occupied, which further enabled his abstinence from crime. While, then, these self-initiated changes to his 'conditioning structures[7]' had the effect of enabling his abstinence from offending, it was Evan's reflexive re-prioritisation of his individual and relational concerns, which motivated his pursuit of a different lifestyle, underpinned by his desire to maintain the relational goods emerging from his relationship with Monica, to which they were mutually oriented. Evan observed that this was his first experience of stability and normalcy and maintaining this significant relationship became his ultimate concern.

> Evan: It was the first time in my life I'd had any stability and I felt I had found my soul mate. I'd found somebody I could really express love [with] and [who] I really cared about and really wanted to be with …That went on for 7 month … then the bombshell came when she told me at Christmas time that she wanted me to move out.

In the context of the termination of both his employment and this relationship, Evan responded by immersing himself once more in *'the party lifestyle',* through which he was introduced to recreational drug use. What this seems to suggest then is that Evan's initial abstinence from offending at this stage was contingent on the maintenance of this relationship, which had triggered a re-prioritisation of his ultimate concerns and which, in turn, underpinned the ensuing changes he initiated in his projects and practices. While the separation between Monica and Evan was short-lived it had an enduring effect on their interactive dynamics and on the nature of the bond between them which, for Evan, diminished the salience of this relationship in the context of his shifting constellation of concerns.

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[7]Conditioning structures essentially shape situations of action through the constraints and enablements they engender - from the accessibility of resources to the prevalence of beliefs to the sets of relations in which people find themselves - such that some courses of action would be impeded and discouraged, while others would be facilitated and encouraged (Archer 2007; Donati 2011).

> Evan: something happened and I think I lost trust … so that was [1988] and by this time I had started dabbling in drugs and by September had mainlined… I felt the relationship was never really the same again and I was playing away from home, taking drugs, selling drugs and I was clubbing Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

Evan remained in a relationship with Monica for several years thereafter, but the nature and form of the relationship had been altered by his experience of betrayal and loss, and while the relationship was of significance to him, it was no longer his relationship of ultimate concern. He was associating frequently with others who were similarly involved in recreational drug use and its attendant social scene, which, as previously explained, ultimately heralded his resumption of offending. The diminution of the relational goods he had been motivated to maintain thus influenced the meaning and significance of this relationship, which irrevocably diminished the satisfaction he had initially derived from this relationship (Donati 2011).

In 1990, Evan and Monica had a son, Jake. In this markedly different relational context, Evan's involvement with Jake was thus more intense than his involvement with David. However, by this time, Evan had developed an addiction to Amphetamine, which, resulted in increasingly frequent periods of imprisonments, diminishing his capacity to parent and to personify this role identity. While as previously discussed, he engaged in an internal conversation (personal reflexivity) at this time, particularly during periods of imprisonment, his concerns acknowledged but were not altered by being in a new role position in relation to either Jake or Monica.

> Evan: I loved [becoming a father] but I knew I was an addict… I did try and make a go of it but I was losing it… the drugs were controlling my life…

Ultimately, Monica terminated the relationship with Evan, following his conversion to Christianity. Monica did not share his faith, and the alteration in his attitudes, expectations and behaviours, and the disjuncture between their ultimate concerns, compounded by the cumulative effect that his addiction and frequent imprisonment had exerted on the nature of the bond between them, contributed to the demise of the relationship.

A year after his conversion, Evan met and married Evie, to whom he remains married. Evie is also a 'born-again' Christian, and as such she shares his religious commitments to be of service to others. The recognition and reinforcement of Evan's transformation that his relationship with Evie implied, and her encouragement to realise these generative concerns contributed to his personification of his religious identity. While, then, his relationship with Evie was not causative of desistance, their reciprocal attachments and mutual support of each other is of critical significance to his emotional well-being.

The Meanings and Outcomes of Work

The desistance promotive meanings and outcomes of work
As previously observed, Evan's first significant experience of participation in employment occurred following his release from a three and a half year prison sentence at the age of 22. At this stage, the economic outcomes diminished any perceived need to engage in acquisitive offending, which, in the context of his relationship with Monica, enabled behavioural and lifestyle changes. However, as previously observed, the maintenance of these changes was primarily contingent on his commitment to this relation of concern. Despite his temporary abstinence from offending, at this stage, he experienced no significant pro-social shift in his

values or in his personal and social identity, that altered his attitude to offending, which only occurred later - following his conversion to Christianity.

Evan's faith is expressed through the nature of his work, which, since his conversion to Christianity has been oriented to supporting individuals and communities in need. Evan conceptualises his work as an expression of his faith, in terms of a life lived in service to others, informed by the Christian relational ethics of subsidiarity and solidarity referred to previously. For Evan, it is the meaning and outcomes of the work that is of enduring significance in consolidating his new, 'born-again' identity and thus his subjective well-being. While Evan's faith imbued the nature of this work with meaning, participating in this work contributed to and enabled the realization of his religious identities. His participation in these works, then, can be construed as an outcome of both his conversion and of desistance; both of which shaped his generative commitments.

Within two months of his conversion to Christianity, Evan began volunteering for the Prison Fellowship with which he continued for the next two years. In the early stages, his involvement in a 'helping collective' with other volunteers, enabled the generation of new social relationships and provided 'a sense of belonging', or solidarity, through the 'sharing of experience, strength and hope' (Maruna and LeBel 2006: 66).

> Evan: We used to do things like have barbecues and away days for families of prisoners ...and some of their friends. And you got the volunteers who came together as well ... we would try to support [each other].

As a prison mentor Evan shared his story of personal transformation. McAdams (2008) conceptualizes the life-story as a narrative of personal identity, which is realized in the telling. In particular, the Christian testimonial provides an opportunity to bear witness to one's experience of transformation to others, which, for Evan, also facilitated a shift in his social identity.

> Evan: I began to go into prisons...to share... how God had changed my life – and it was offering hope to some of the guys and... I got that little bit more respect 'cos' they knew I had been in their shoes... [I] enjoyed it because I felt I was being effective, people were listening to me and I came back feeling... I had helped someone.

His involvement in this 'generative' role (Maruna 2001) thus not only reinforced his own process of change but was oriented to supporting others as he had been supported. However, during this period, Evan married Evie and, in *this* relational context, the constraints of not generating an income surfaced. vanKlinken's research (2012) suggests that Pentecostal Christian males redefine masculinity through the exercise of self-control, self-discipline, the resistance of temptations and the assumption of responsibility for oneself and for others. Thus, in the process of being born again[8] 'not only a new moral subject but a new male gendered subject is created, inspired by an alternative understanding of masculinity' (van Klinken 2012:225). This is connected to notions of leadership, whether within the family or in ministry and, in a domestic context, are associated with being the principal provider (van Klinken 2012) which, as the extract below suggests, marked some continuity with his internalised beliefs surrounding cultural norms of masculinity relating to gender roles.

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[8]The term 'born-again' represents the 'displac[ement of] the relationship one had with the world and a former self, the person in the flesh. The moral identity is then constituted of a different kind' (Bielo 2004: 277), and expressed 'as a process of "dying to self."... [in which] the person they were in the flesh dies, and they are born again... To be born again means a separation from the old self' (Bielo 2004:277-8).

Evan: Evie was working [and] I had that sense that I need to work, know she shouldn't be working herself, I should be working know -- that's a prominent mentality for the West of Scotland, you know, you should be the provider and the woman should be the home nester or whatever know.

Recognizing his frustration, the Church leaders employed him to engage in community outreach and to attend a theological college. Over several years, Evan established a drop-in centre and a food and furniture bank for distribution to people in need and engaged other young people, who he had been mentoring, to assist him in his ministry. However, while both his participation in paid employment and the nature of the work had a significant role in, respectively, contributing to his position of provider, and in realising his religious commitments, the constraints of working in Coaston exacted particular constraints and limitations on his sense of, and opportunities for, personal progression from which he only felt liberated following his relocation to London in 2005, where he continues to reside.

Constraints and Limitations
Evan currently works as an Evangelist in London, which, in particular, he considers has enabled him to '*grow and develop and to be the person you are really meant to be'*. Despite the recognition of his transformation he received through his association with a community of believers, and despite the recognition of change he experienced from people in the community, the enduring proximity of a previously 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963) embedded in this sense of place, and in the memories of the community, constrained his sense of personal progression. While, on the one hand, he was recognised as a reformed individual, he perceived that the recognition he received reflected the distance he had travelled from his past self, which remained the dominant identity through which lens the positive social recognition he received was refracted. Moving to a new location enabled him to be recognised as the person he had become, the person he was meant to be, as an Evangelist.

Evan: I felt I was a bit restricted in [Coaston]…I tried to become transparent and say 'well you know where I have been people… I have blown it and I have done this and I've done that - however this is who I am now and this is what I do and this is what I believe'. But, since coming to London, I feel like I don't have … the baggage of the community. I have grown up in [Coaston], [and everyone knows] what is going on – it's such a small community. The issues of people are so well known. I don't have that [now]. Sometimes it smothers you. I think in London it's as if I had been given wings and I could fly in a sense – really blossom and grow and develop.

Discussion

Evan's story reveals the centrality of his conversion to Pentecostal Christianity and his internalisation of the Christian faith both to his narrative of change and to every aspect of his life. His initial conversion was supported, reinforced and sustained by his extant social relationships with Peter and Jay, his intimate relationship with Evie, and his participation in new Christian relational networks, which enabled the expression of his faith and generative commitments and which contributed to the transformation in his personal and social identity. Desistance for Evan was thus enabled through the reciprocal exchanges that take place between *informal relationships* and the social relations that manifest through work and faith.

Both intimate and friend relationsare freely chosen, they create obligations and are causally influential in that they can encourage or discourage certain actions of individuals-in-

relationthrough their mutual orientation towards the maintenance of the co-indivisible relational goods they produce.Such social relationsincorporate shared expectations of reciprocity (or exchange) which implies (differing degrees of)interdependency. It is through these means that the social relation has the capacity to influence the individuals participating in it; it is this context that affects what can and does satisfy the individual and in which compromises or courses of action are negotiated, decided and sustained.

Intimate and friend relations, however, diverge in effect because the chains of meanings, (the refero), or relational characteristics i.e. the norms, expectations and relational rules that define these social relationships differ (Donati 2011). Characteristically the obligations they carry are less binding than those relating to kin ties; kin relationships, even intimate relationships,traditionally tend to be more structured and role-governed than friend relations (Pahl 2000), and intimate relations tend to be more conditional than kin and friend relations.In all instances, the presence and significance of the emergent relational goods of love, trust, loyalty and solidarity, for example, manifest in specific expectations and behavioural obligations towards each other.In terms of the religio, or the bond generated between people (Donati 2011), those intimate relations that exerted the most influence for Evan were those in which the relation was characterised by a symmetry in affective concern, to which each party oriented themselves to the other in such a way that enabled both parties to realise their individual and relational concerns. While his relationship with Evie exemplifies this, his relationship with Monica perhaps illustrates the contingencies and conditionalities of this type of social relation. The nature, form and meaning of the social relation and its emergent effects are not static; for Evan, his relationship with Monica initially motivated him to maintain employment which enabled an alternative offence-free lifestyle, without the risk of imprisonment that might otherwise jeopardise the relationship. Their brief separation however irrevocably altered the nature of the bond between them and, thus, the relational goods this relationshipproduced.

While Evan's intimate relations were variously of import to him, it was his oldest friendships (with Jay and Peter) from the days of the Del which were particularly influential in his process of change. The Del comprised sibling and friendship groups and this can mean that friend relations can operate more like sibling relations and vice versa (Pahl 2000) in terms of both the refero and the religio. The relationships between these men thus suffused friend relations with the norms and expectations associated with kin relations, and vice versa, which formed a strong social bond. When we think of the nature of the bond generated between people (i.e. the religio) those friend-relations which were most causally influential were characterised by fraternity, which denotes a particular type of friendship based on mutuality and reciprocity (Pahl 2000).The expression of fraternity forms a strong social bond, particularly where the means or manner of relating manifest as solidarity and subsidiarity[9], however informed. Consistent with the reciprocal character of friendship (Cairns and Cairns 1994, Pahl 2000), Evan benefited from the support, recognition and reinforcement of his efforts to change that their mutual recognition of each other's efforts implied. Moreover, that Jay and Peter within had *become* positive influences is what imbued their influence with credibility and which, in turn, generated hope in him that he too could realise related outcomes. Where once these relationships and reciprocities contributed to their collective involvement in offending, later these particular friends also supported each other to pursue constructive changes in their lifestyles and relationships.

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[9]Subsidiarity is a way to supply the means – a way to move resources to support and help the other without making him or her passive or dependent. It allows and assists the other to do what must be done. Subsidiarity cannot work without solidarity (sharing a responsibility through reciprocity which implies interdependence).

While key social relations have the capacity to influence, enable or constrain processes of change, it cannot be said that one social relation rather than another exerts particular desistance-promotive effects. Rather, as Evan's story has revealed, it is the meanings and significance of the social relation to individuals-in-relation, and the emergent effects of their interaction, which can be influenced by their interface with other social relations, that are critical to understanding the outcomes. It is also misleading to suggest that social relations are causative of or conditional on behavioural change. Social relations can only exert influence where the individual is receptive because of their individual and relational concerns and their desire to maintain the relationship so as to maintain emergent relational goods that cannot be produced outwith the relation (Donati 2011).

Implications for practice

If, as the foregoing analysis suggests, desistance is enabled and sustained through the informal exchanges that take place between *family* and friends and the social relations that manifest through work and, for some, faiththen it can be inferred from this analysis that focusing on the means and processes that enable the (re)connection of the individual to such 'circuits of social reciprocity' (Donati 2009:227) might be a useful starting point for considering how practitionersmight support desistance.What this essentially implies is thatpractice might become less individualized in focus and more oriented to promoting supportive, reflexive relational networks premised on reciprocity, or mutual helping, to support each person to realise his/her ultimate concerns and fulfill his/her reciprocal obligations. However, as Evan's story makes clear, while informal social relationships have a vital contribution to make in triggering, enabling and sustaining processes of change, opportunitiesto engage in the kinds of activities that enable the expression of a changed self are important too. Indeed, participation in 'employment is part of the idea of what is acceptable' (Owens 2009: 50) and communicates in itself, that one has a place in the world and a role to play – be it in society or even in one's own family – as a reliable partner and provider for example.In this vein, there is scope for justice services to map out and connect with the natural resources that reside in communities (faith-based or local)to support people to access and sustain opportunities for generativeengagement and social participation. In turn creating resources for employment could be enabled through the developmentof mutual and social cooperative structures of employment(on which see Weaver and Nicholson 2012).

Enhancing or building on existing circuits of social reciprocity between individuals and families and supporting processes of relational reflexivity requires the progression ofpractices that will enable practitioners toconnect to and constructively reinforce positive social relationships and/or to support and enable people to relinquish negative social relationships and access alternative ones.Examples might include, offering parenting classes, relationship counseling, and, where appropriate, assistance with family reunification, mediation and rebuilding, and problem-solving family work (on which see Trotter 2010) or developing and facilitating mutual aid based support groups (Weaver forthcoming). Indeed, mutual aid based groups can provide the conditions and resources for social recognition that Evan valued in the Prison Fellowship.It is equally true, however, that many people have severed ties to family and friends; while a peer mentor might perhaps be a valuable source of advice, guidance and support to an individual it is also worth considering the development of larger, more formalised circuits of social reciprocity based loosely on the circles of support model, to support desistance and aid social participation. Of course - this could be extended to those with families, and include core family members and other members of their informal support network in the circuit, as well as community volunteers,and the circuit could equally operate as a support toits members. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delineate the myriad

of multi-dimensional potential approaches[10] that might enhance prospects for desistance, the development and support of informal social relationships and support networks and opportunities for social participation seem key. This would imply a more appreciative, rather than correctional approach to practice, oriented to promoting strengths, resources for social recognition and sustainable, long-term supports.

Conclusion

This paper began by mapping out the socio-theoretical terrain which desistance studies tend to occupy and suggested that a focus on social relations might offer new insights through whichto understand processes of desistance and the kinds of practices that support it. In so doing, this paper has drawn on Evan's story and Donati's relational sociology to illustrate the role of social relations in variously enabling, constraining or sustaining desistance.

This paper has discussed the role of friendship groups, intimate relationships and families of formation, faith communities and employment in, differently, triggering Evan's reflexive evaluation of his ultimate concerns – resulting, variously, in a diminution of the desirability of offending, suspension of offending, and later in consolidating and sustaining his commitment to desist. In particular, both the manner of relating and individuals-in-relation's reciprocal and mutual orientation towards the maintenance of the emergent relational goods emerged as significant in understanding the relational contributions to the change process.Viewed through this lens, the kinds of desistance-promotive practices that this implies are those that can (re)connect people to circuits of social reciprocity, enhance / build connections between people and which canfoster personal and relational reflexivity and create opportunities for social participation.

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[10]For a more in-depth discussion on how practitioners might work co-productively with individuals, families, groups and communities see Weaver (forthcoming).

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