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FROM THE PRISON OF STEREOTYPE TO THE FREEDOM OF RELATIONSHIP: WELCOMING THE OTHERWISE DESPISED IN A CIRCLE OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

by

Melanie Jeanne Weaver

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A true sense of goodness is not achieved by uniting with others against a scandalous other. Rather, true goodness comes when we seek to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Adam Ericksen
The Raven Foundation

This project dissertation is dedicated to the volunteers in Circles of Support and Accountability who, I believe, exemplify true goodness.

ABSTRACT

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a community-based program designed to help people who have offended sexually during their process of reintegration after their release from prison. Former offenders with CoSA Circles have achieved significantly lower recidivism rates than those without circles. What is it about the CoSA phenomenon that makes the difference? Statistical studies confirm the favorable outcomes brought about by CoSA; a qualitative approach can help to explain how and why it works.

This qualitative, hermeneutical-phenomenological research project explored the lived experience of CoSA volunteers in an effort to understand the nature of the relationship that forms between them and their core member. It began with an investigation of the context in which CoSA operates, including a description of the CoSA structure itself and the two main public approaches to crime—retributive and restorative. The researcher's context was also summarized for the purpose of *epoché*. A theoretical background was presented that incorporated mimetic theory, first proposed by René Girard, and existing literature about sexual offenders, the community, and CoSA volunteers.

Research was conducted from a social constructivist point of view in the form of in-depth interviews with fifteen CoSA volunteers and one prospective volunteer. The research question was rooted in the notion that the CoSA relationship had previously been likened to a friendship, asking specifically how friendship was experienced. Results revealed that friendship was indeed experienced by some participants but not by all. More decisively, it was revealed that a combination of four elements proved to be both unique and essential to the CoSA relationship as it contributes to the successful reintegration of the core members: the suspension of stereotype, the solidly intentional approach to establishing the nature of the relationship, emotional investment, and ample opportunity for social interaction outside the formal structure of the circle. In conclusion, the research has contributed profoundly to the understanding of the nature of the CoSA journey, and affirmed both the responsibility and the positive role of local community members in enhancing public safety through the practice of restorative justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is an old saying that tells us it takes a village to raise a child. I am reminded of this notion of village whenever I think about all the people who have helped me produce this project dissertation. First of all, the interview participants volunteered in numbers beyond my expectations and they maintained interest and caring throughout the process. At the same time, local CoSA program coordinators were most helpful in forming this network. My project dissertation committee spent much time reading my material at several points along the way and made thoughtful suggestions that helped to keep the project academically sound. Colleagues familiar with CoSA Circles also took time to read early versions of the paper and made meaningful comments. They asked pertinent questions that often began, “Have you thought of . . . ?” Finally, my home community has been very supportive, caring for me and the process from the beginning. I wish to thank all of you who have been valuable members of my research village. You know who you are!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are many individuals in prison who have no expectation that their lives will improve following completion of their court-imposed sentence. Prison is simply a continuation of the incarceration they perceive to be life. What others have found to be life giving, they have lost and they understand this void to be permanent. For them, it is irreversible because they are deserving of this experience. The characteristic of this experience is a void in relationships with God, others and self. This phenomenon is called the lost soul experience.

—Francis Christopher Coffin

In Search of the Lost Soul: The Experience and Meaning of Estrangement

Purpose of the Study

The research presented in this project dissertation explores the lived experience of people who provide hopeful and practical assistance to high risk offenders released from prison to their community. The approach of release-day, given the lost soul experience that Francis Coffin so poignantly describes, can layer acute anxiety on top of what may have become a chronic despair. Facing the loss of a support system that prison has provided, however meager and even frustrating, one must begin to assess one's prospects and, if they are found to be overwhelmingly discouraging, one may be moved to ask for help on the outside. For some with the highest needs, information may be forthcoming and criteria met to make participation in *Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)* possible.

CoSA is a community-based program financially seeded by Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to work with people who have been formally convicted of offending

sexually, and with the communities to which they return. At the time of their release from a federal institution, the offenders with whom CoSA becomes involved are deemed to be at high risk to reoffend. Through the process of release and re-entry in a Canadian community, a small group of volunteers from the community form a circle of relationship around an offender to assist, challenge, and celebrate with this person, with encouraging results. The process has been studied in quantitative formats focusing almost always on the offenders and their recidivism rates; in contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to the volunteers who spend the most time with them.[1] Without a strong understanding of the experience of all members of a CoSA circle, it can be difficult to know how and why the program works. The research indicates that the relationship that grows between the offenders and their volunteers exhibits unique qualities that may very well enhance their chances for successful reintegration.

For more than six years I worked, first as assistant coordinator, then as co-coordinator of the CoSA program in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. This Project-Dissertation explores the lived experience of volunteers in CoSA circles. What has intrigued me most about CoSA volunteers is this: these are people who embody the capacity to hold in their hearts at the same time both the deeply troubling details of an offender's past and the promise of that same person's new, healthier, crime-free life. Their experience of walking into the future in relationship with a person who has offended sexually is worth exploring. Whereas others would shout, "Not in my back yard!" CoSA volunteers seem not to behave in the way most of society would have it, but to act according to a different paradigm. One might think they are unusually strong, have some exceptional expertise, or that they are unusual in some other way. On the contrary, their remarkable

[1] For examples, see page 8, note 8; page 79, note 173; and page 81, note 177.

contribution notwithstanding, from my experience in Calgary I have not viewed CoSA volunteers that way. Rather than looking solely to either the offender or the volunteer, I have been led to see the value of the relationship between them as the core of the CoSA success.

In the midst of professional supervision offered through corrections personnel, community law enforcement, and psychological services, I would suggest that CoSA appears to contribute a 'missing link' that has led to remarkably lower recidivism rates.[2] According to offenders that I have worked with who have achieved success in the community, it is largely the quality of relationship they have experienced within the CoSA circle that has made the difference for them. For the last several years, for example, I have attended a summer camping trip of the CoSA Calgary community. During the evenings, gathered around the campfire, former offenders have the opportunity to celebrate their achievement of freedom from official supervision by burning the documents that have been ruling their lives. One year, three of them spoke about their journey and profusely thanked their volunteer circle members to whom they all referred as friends; this brought me to wondering, in turn, how the volunteers experience their CoSA relationships. From that moment, the intention of this study was to explore the nature of the 'missing link' through volunteers' lived experience of the circle. I believe an understanding of this aspect of the CoSA project will be of interest to direct stakeholders in the aftermath of crime as well as others who seek alternative responses to the common social practices that ostracize people and treat them as though they were disposable because of things they have done.

[2] See page 8, note 8.

In order to pursue this deeper understanding of the relationship between CoSA volunteers and core members, I embarked on a qualitative, hermeneutical-phenomenological study of the lived experience of CoSA volunteers, one aspect of CoSA for which little information has been available. The why and the how of supporting a person who has offended sexually can be described, debated and experimented with, but only sitting down with willing volunteers for in-depth interviews could reveal the essence of the CoSA experience from their point of view. It has been argued that relying on the "community" as opposed to the state in matters of restorative justice is "naïve or even dangerous."[3] However, as an adjunct to the Canadian criminal system, CoSA has already demonstrated that, fears of incurable social dysfunction notwithstanding, the community level is the very place that justice can be restored, and ordinary community members can help make it happen. Exploring the experience of CoSA volunteers from a variety of Canadian centres promises to fill in this information gap and also shed much needed light, both on the nature of the CoSA phenomenon, and also on why and on its impressive results[4] in the reintegration process of former offenders.

[3] Lode Walgrave, *Restorative justice, Self-Interest and Responsible Citizenship*, (Portland, OR: Willan Publishing, 2008), 6.

[4] See page 8, note 8.

Orientation to the Study

On November 3, 2003, the large-print, front page headline in *The Calgary Sun* was blatantly inflammatory: "'MONSTER' FREE: Pervert set loose on Calgary's streets." At times it seems that nothing can pull a community together better than a good controversy, especially when everyone unites around a common enemy, and that enemy is wide open for dehumanizing insults. This story followed a similar front page column in the same paper, on September 28, 2003, about a different person and regarding another community in the nearby town of Okotoks, Alberta: "WHAT ABOUT OUR CHILDREN? Angry town demands pedophiles be kept off their streets." It continued on page 3 with a story and pictures revealing that on that day, more than 100 parents had gathered, carrying signs with messages like, "A pedophile <u>always</u> knows when to strike," and "Pedophiles—Finding your reception a bit chilly? GO TO HELL." Clearly, it was not an occasion for differing opinions.

The public vilification in the media of people who have offended sexually effectively slants a complex situation in a specific way. Clearly, the offender has much work to do to achieve genuine reintegration through sincere acceptance of responsibility, a credible change of heart, and a resolute commitment to no more crime. It is reasonable to expect the community to experience a level of skepticism about the offender's intentions and abilities to live safely and responsibly until the person proves that s/he has changed. A prudent strategy for the public, then, would be to take active steps to satisfy everyone's need to ensure successful reintegration. Although such a strategy is in place in Canada, supervised by local police and parole offices, the general public, influenced by

sensational headlines, finds itself subject to a fear-mongering environment encouraged and reinforced by the media.

In the atmosphere of public fear, degrading terms such as *sex offender* emerge in the form of what Howard Becker calls 'master status.' [5] Becker builds on the work of Everett C. Hughes, who suggested "that people carry in their minds a set of expectations concerning the auxiliary traits properly associated with many of the specific positions available in our society,"[6] and further that "the expected or 'natural' combinations of auxiliary characteristics become embodied in the stereotypes of ordinary talk, cartoons, fiction, the radio, and the motion picture."[7] For Becker, then, specific positions in the form of 'master status' can refer to a negative connotation of deviance, such as *criminal,* that assumes auxiliary traits like, in his words, "likely to commit other crimes" and "without 'respect for the law'." Likewise, the term *sex offender* carries with it stereotypical traits such as, "will never change;" "is always looking for the next victim;" or, "is a [sub-human] monster." Unfortunately, these stereotypes often become accepted as truths, with no regard as to whether or not they describe the person authentically.

During the few weeks that the previously noted headlines were drawing the attention of the paper's readership, and pulling people together in public protest, a different kind of community-building was ongoing in Calgary. What was comparatively un-newsworthy was the story of another group of people, a relatively small gathering quietly making it their business to offer a friendly welcome to some of the most despised

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[5] Howard Becker, "Outsiders," Excerpt. Pennsylvania State University, http://www.personal.psu.ed/exs44/406/becker_outsiders_from_weitzer.pdf (accessed August 24, 2012).

[6] Everett C. Hughes, "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status," in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 50, No. 5, (March, 1945), 354.

[7] Ibid., 355.

among us. Their chosen purpose was then, and continues to be, to unite around recently released, high-risk individuals, otherwise publicly rejected, to support their return to community. Generally, the people they work with have completed their prison sentences, are most likely to have been convicted of a sexual offence, and have little or no other pro-social support. The focus of this study was to consider the seeming peculiarity of these committed people who volunteer through Circles of Support and Accountability.

Given that the media have so often contributed to the public vilification of former offenders who offended sexually, one might wonder why on earth anyone would choose to help these targets of wide-spread hatred. As a CoSA participant, however, this is not the response I have heard most often. More frequently by far, people have said to me, "I'm glad you're doing it, because I couldn't." I have often wondered, then, what people imagine goes on in CoSA. Beyond any questions of why to help or why not, CoSA volunteers are living out what so many people feel unable even to contemplate.

Most public attention paid to the phenomenon of se xual offending has focused on the victims, the legal system, the wide-spread rejection of offenders trying to re-integrate, and recidivism rates. In contrast, relatively little attention is given to the reality that a number of people who have offended sexually are living safely and responsibly, yet inconspicuously, in our communities. Many have re-established themselves with family or other support, and some have benefitted from the help of CoSA. In 2008, research on the then fourteen-year-old Canada-wide program demonstrated that: "Offenders who participated in COSA had an **83%** reduction in sexual recidivism in contrast to the matched comparison group . . ., a **73%** reduction n in all types of violent recidivism .

. ., and an overall reduction of **72%** in all types of recidivism."[8] Such impressive statistics notwithstanding, public angst apparently continues to rise, and calls for more restrictive conditions in the community are frequent. Understanding the experience of CoSA volunteers through their own stories could possibly help to normalize a seemingly impossible situation that, when aired publicly, can inflame a community with fear; as well, it may counteract the sense of hopelessness that often permeates the topic of sexual offending.

Zygmunt Bauman has argued that, from the days of Emile Durkheim, a general tendency among sociologists has been to emphasize the coercive power a society holds over its individuals, effectively dominating not only how they act but also how they think. He further argues that, when something peculiar happens, the traditional sociological approach would be first to examine the social factors, gleaned largely through reviews of statistics and demographics, in order to gain an understanding of what happened.[9] In contrast, Bauman appeals to theorists who have found that, particularly when specific events are laden with issues of morality and immorality, social determinants of individual behaviours cannot always be found. When people have behaved in a way contrary to everyone around them, for example, studies have shown that some did so simply because it was in their character. Nechama Tec has argued that

[8] Robin J. Wilson, Franca Cortoni, and Monica Vermani, *Circles of Support & Accountability: A National Replication of Outcome Findings*, 2008 N^{o} R-185, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada, May 2007. http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r185/r185-eng.shtml (accessed April 12, 2011). The findings in this report are consistent with an earlier evaluation of CoSA: R.J. Wilson, J.E. Picheca, & M. Prinzo, *Circles of Support & Accountability: An evaluation of the pilot project in South-Central Ontario*, Research Report R-168, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada, 2005, http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r168/r168-eng.shtml (accessed April 19, 2013). See also Quaker Peace and Social Witness, *Circles of Support and Accountability in the Thames Valley: The first three years April 2002 to March 2005*, Forest Institute, London, UK: Forest Institute, 2005, http://forest.edu/mhcc/in-the-news/circles-of-support-3years.aspx (accessed April 18, 2013).

[9] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 3.

such people maintained a level of individuality in the face of social pressures, for example, or a high level of independence that allowed them to act solely according to their personal beliefs and values rather than to collective values.[10] Or, as Hannah Arendt argues, they may have made conscientious judgments about specific circumstances that allowed them to maintain their personal integrity, independent of any established system of values that would operate in an automatic way.[11]

My interest in Bauman's observations lies not in the status of morality in the topic at hand, but primarily in the recognition that individuals, such as CoSA volunteers, swim against the stream of social pressures. This hints at the possibility that focusing a study on broader social factors such as demographics can lead to glossing over aspects of human life that can only be discovered through deepening our understanding of the experiences of individuals. An alternative strategy would be not to seek statistical generalizations, but to explore and clarify the phenomenon of the unique. Such is the essence of hermeneutical phenomenology.[12]

The premise of the study, then, was that revealing more of the volunteers' experience would contribute to our knowledge of the CoSA phenomenon and the reintegration processes of people who have been convicted of sexual offences. I began by examining the context in which CoSA volunteers work. The underlying framework

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[10] Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland*, (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986), 188. Cited in Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, 5.

[11] Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," lecture, (1964, Folder 1, 10-11), Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mharendt_pub&fileName=05/051950/051950page.db&recNum=10&itemLink=/ammem/arendthtml/mharendtFolderP05.html&linkText=7 (accessed February 16, 2013). Referred to in Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, 210.

[12] Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, (London, ON: The Althouse Press, 1990), 154-155.

for this initial undertaking was mimetic theory, originally proposed by René Girard[13] and later expanded upon by others, which shows how mimetic desire lies at the root not only of violence but also of social harmony, and how it plays a part in CoSA.

What was already known was that, without CoSA, the only official kinds of support available to people who have offended sexually upon their return to the community is most likely to be correctional supervision by parole officers or police and any psychological treatment they or the court impose. These are always complicated not only by the rejection of former offenders in the wider community, but also by *their* potential for mistrust of what they view as 'the system' set against them. What was also known was that CoSA adds something to the mix that contributes remarkably to lower recidivism rates.[14] What remained relatively unexamined, then, was the relationship between supportive community members such as CoSA volunteers and offenders (core members) who are highly motivated to reintegrate successfully. This study focused particularly on the CoSA relationship from the point of view of the volunteers; I argue here that more information is needed in this area, especially of a qualitative nature, for a full understanding of how CoSA works.

[13] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977).

[14] See page 8, note 8.

Key Terms

The following phrases will be used in the way explained here within the context of the study:

Circle of Support and Accountability (CoSA): a group of four to seven community volunteers committed to enhancing public safety by supporting community re-entry through covenanting, meeting and walking daily with a released former high risk offender. The circle's mission: to substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting high risk released individuals in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive and accountable lives.[15]

Core Member: typically, a person who has been convicted of a sexual offence, completes his/her sentence in a federal institution, is deemed to be at high risk to reoffend, is released into the community with little or no pro-social support, has demonstrated motivation toward safe and responsible living, and has asked for help with his/her reintegration process. Until recently, all CoSA core members in Canada have been male, and at this time I understand that only one female in Canada has been working with a circle. Thus, for my purposes I sought to interview only volunteers for male core members.

[15] Correctional Service of Canada, "Circles of Support and Accountability: A Guide To Training Potential Volunteers," http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/cs_guide_final-eng.shtml (accessed April 18, 2013).

CoSA Volunteer: a person who lives in the community in which reintegration is taking place, who may or may not have specific expertise related to social challenges, and who commits to working for one year or more with a released offender in a circle with a few other community members.

CoSA Community: I will use this term to denote the wider community of all local circles, including core members, volunteers, staff and 'friends' of CoSA, all of whom will gather together at various social activities, which may include church services and other celebrations.

The CoSA Relationship: For the purpose of this study, I will use this term primarily to denote the particular relationship between a CoSA volunteer and a core member, with the understanding that there are various ways in which all members of a circle relate.

Restorative Justice: an option for doing justice after the occurrence of an offence that is primarily oriented towards repairing the individual, relational and social harm caused by that offence.[16] Specific to Correctional Service of Canada, restorative justice is: "a non-adversarial, non-retributive approach to justice that emphasizes healing in victims, meaningful accountability of offenders, and the involvement of citizens in creating

[16] Walgrave, 21.

healthier, safer communities."[17] The subtle differences between these two definitions will be discussed later.

Dissertation Outline

In committing to help a former offender, a CoSA volunteer steps not only into the life of an individual in need, but also into a new turn in a complex story that has been developing for years. Chapters Two and Three are designed to provide a background to aid in understanding this story. In Chapter Two, I set the stage for readers with extensive summaries, first of the 'world' of CoSA, then of two prevalent ways the public has historically reacted to the topic of crime in general and people who have offended sexually in particular. Finally, I relate my own life journey that has led me to become involved with CoSA. In Chapter Three, I outline a theoretical background that offers some means of explanation, albeit not nearly complete, of the context in which crime may happen and the obstacles challenging reintegration after a completed prison sentence, the point at which a CoSA volunteer enters the scene.

In Chapter Four, I relate the methodology that framed my research of the lived experience of CoSA volunteers. In Chapter Five, I present the data collected and discuss the material as it contributes to our understanding of the essence of the CoSA relationship. Finally, in Chapter Six, I summarize my findings, with implications for the CoSA phenomenon and for future study.

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[17] Correctional Service of Canada, "Restorative Justice," http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rj/indes-eng.shtml (accessed January 9, 2009).

What This Report Is Not

There are many important and fascinating directions in which a study of the CoSA phenomenon can develop. Several of these are very relevant to CoSA volunteers, and emerged as side topics during the interviews; indeed, I understand that they are also of interest to readers of this report. For the purposes of this focused study, though, it was not possible to follow these discussions in a satisfactory way, although I feel it is important to acknowledge them as important but not covered here.

Firstly, this report is not an evaluative assessment. The participants spoke eloquently about the CoSA program; they think highly of it as an important social avenue for creating safe communities, and celebrate the model CoSA embodies for a restorative approach to justice in Canada. They respectfully expressed concerns about aspects they deem to need improvement, at the same time recognizing that "the bottom line" of *no more victims* is all important. Some expressed their concern for the continuing need to draw more volunteers. CoSA has already attracted evaluative studies in response to its apparent success in the reintegration process of former offenders,[18] and this report will leave such activity for others to pursue.

Secondly, it is not an anecdotal account. Max van Manen has outlined several functions that anecdotes serve in human science discourse, one of which I find particularly relevant to this study: they "may be encountered as concrete demonstrations

[18] See pages 20-21, and 81.

of wisdom, sensitive insight, and proverbial truth."[19] Probably the most important feature of the interviews for me was the story telling that happened. However, because each story involved both the interview participant and their absent core member, I am precluded from relating them in detail because of my overriding commitment to confidentiality, which I explain more clearly in Chapter 4 under the section *Ethical Concerns*. Consequently, I have taken a more general approach to the stories I heard. Some involved circumstances common in CoSA circles, and I have limited myself to relating the common features in order to protect those involved from identification.

Thirdly, it is not focused equally on the offender, the victim, and the community. The primary feature of restorative justice programs is, of course, the practice of bringing together victims, offenders and community members for dialogue aimed at repairing the harm created by crime. Such encounters that include all three at the same time, however, do not necessarily fulfill the intent of restorative justice that seeks to address the harms of crime for all stakeholders. In the case of sexual assault, for instance, a level moral playing field may not exist for all parties. Meetings between victims and offenders are often prohibited through the imposition of peace bonds; they may be considered an inappropriate approach where the power differential appears to be insurmountable and there is potential to re-victimize the victim. Another way is required, then, to help the offender to embrace accountability, personal transformation, integration into the community, and thereby to turn away from a lifestyle of crime.[20] CoSA Circles, operated across Canada by Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC) and other agencies,

[19] Van Manen, 120.

[20] Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002), 8-9, 17.

endeavor to provide people who have offended sexually with just such an opportunity. On the surface, this may lead to criticism of CoSA for not fulfilling the premise of restorative justice whereby victims would be directly involved. Chris Penner-Mayoh, once a coordinator of CoSA South Saskatchewan, has offered a response:

> Restorative justice on the other hand defines crime as a harm that has taken place that involves a number of stakeholders . . . When considering CoSA, the conflict we are dealing with really isn't the index offense [the particular offense which led to the conviction and incarceration of the offender]; the past crimes of the offender can be dealt with in a VOM [victim-offender mediation] process if all parties are interested. Rather, the conflict we are dealing with is the reintegration of the offender. This is a fundamentally new conflict and therefore involves different stake holders, primarily the offender and the community . . . This is where CoSA steps in with what I believe is a legitimate restorative justice process of engaging the primary stake holders to find a creative solution and seek harmony where harmony has been disrupted. That said, CoSA organizations have a responsibility to consider the victims as we do our work. We need to be responsible in our decision making processes, and always remember the impacts of our core members have had on the lives of their victims. To this end, many CoSA organizations have included the voices of victims groups on their steering/advisory committees.[21]

In Canada today, police services, the courts and CSC deal with all forms of sexual assault on behalf of victims. In 2007, CSC introduced their National Victim Services Program which provides "victims of federal offenders with timely information about the

[21] Unpublished. Penner-Mayoh distributed his statement among interested parties in CoSA as part of the ongoing dialogue regarding its commitment to restorative justice. A copy is available at the CoSA Calgary office.

offender who harmed them,"[22] including the offender's whereabouts as well as information about court dates and proceedings. In the justice system and in the courts, victims have been increasingly empowered in recent years. Victim-offender mediation (VOM) processes are included in MCCC's and other organizations' programs. With all of that in mind, I have confined the content of this paper to the context of CoSA's restorative justice approach to healing broken relationships between people who have been convicted of sexual offences and the communities to which they return after incarceration.

Finally, it is not a discussion of the religious/non-religious aspects of CoSA. The original circle members in 1994 were motivated by their faith background,[23] but today such a foundation cannot be assumed. In a 2005 evaluation of CoSA Calgary,[24] which is managed by Mennonite Central Committee Alberta, religious language appeared in many of the volunteer responses; in other projects, there seems to be no apparent connection with faith-based groups. In the Fall of 2010, at a national conference of CoSA projects, at which I was in attendance, towards the end of the three days it seemed an 'elephant in the room' was exposed with the question, "Are we a faith-based program or not?" Correctional Service of Canada, as a federal government department considering a larger funding role in CoSA, must treat the dual religious/secular nature of CoSA with care. While the volunteers interviewed did shed much light on the topic from both sides, I have chosen not to pursue this important question directly in the present inquiry.

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[22] Correctional Service of Canada, "Victim Services at CSC," http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/victims-victimes/index-eng.shtml (accessed April 23, 2011).

[23] See page 11, note 15.

[24] Community Justice Ministries (MCCA), "Circles of Support and Accountability: Qualitative Evaluation," Spring 2005, unpublished. A copy is available at the CoSA Calgary office.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Context in which CoSA Works

> Part of the tragedy of modern society is our tendency to turn over our problems to experts . . . it certainly applies to the harms and conflicts we call crime. In doing that, we lose the power and ability to solve our own problems. Even worse, we give up opportunities to learn and grow from these situations. Restorative responses must recognize that the community has a role to play in the search for justice.
>
> —Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*

What is CoSA?

Circles of Support and Accountability began in 1994[25] after new legislation was passed in Canada to ensure that an incarcerated offender deemed to be at high risk to re-offend would be detained until the last day of his or her sentence; ironically, they were then left to re-enter a community without any official form of support or monitoring such as parole or a half-way house. First in Hamilton, and then in Toronto, small groups from local churches offered support to two such men who had both offended sexually, not only helping them to re-enter successfully but also appeasing the anxieties of their wider communities. From these two groups, CoSA emerged as a viable way of facilitating the release of high risk offenders; volunteers in the community offer the offenders positive, pro-social, ongoing support as they attempt to work through their challenges to live safely

[25] See page 11, note 15.

and responsibly and with no more victims. By 2007, CoSA had more than twenty similar projects in every region across Canada and provided a model for new, similar programs in Great Britain, the United States, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. Today, CoSA groups are also active in Europe.

Correctional Service of Canada recognizes its responsibility for an offender's successful release into the community, through various sorts of community supervision. CSC is a principal sponsor of CoSA programs as part of its duty to people who complete their sentences and do not qualify for regular support such as parole or halfway houses. CoSA also represents CSC's commitment to the principle of restorative justice. Historically, basic funding has come from CSC's regional chaplains' budgets according to each chaplain's personal commitment.

In November 2006, Public Safety Canada and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, along with the National Joint Committee of Senior Criminal Justice Officials, sponsored a conference entitled, "What Works in the Community Reintegration of High-Risk Offenders." A major conclusion drawn at the conference praised CoSA: "well-trained, dedicated Circles of Support and Accountability are the best method for the safe supervision of high-risk offenders."[26] Shortly afterward, at a national meeting of restorative justice program personnel sponsored by MCC Canada, the need was recognized for a model for living justice as reality, the power of story-telling in which the process of re-humanization in restorative and transformative justice triumphs over the de-humanization so characteristic of our traditional, retributive prison system,

[26] Jennifer Millenor, "Community Reintegration of High-Risk Offenders: *What Works* Conference 2006," Correctional Service of Canada (December 28, 2007), http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/ne/2007/123-eng.shtml (accessed May 23, 2011).

and the dearth of much needed, germane academic literature. Meanwhile, in 2008, the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) (a division of Public Safety Canada) and the Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC) initiated a five-year national demonstration project intended to include a comprehensive evaluation of CoSA that will yield a recommendation on whether or not to fund the program as a regular budget item. Little by little, CoSA's reputation has grown as a credible process of successful reintegration of high-risk offenders, particularly those who have offended sexually.

Forged in the philosophy of restorative justice, Circles of Support and Accountability seek to increase public safety, not by excluding former offenders from the community, but by helping them to live within it safely and responsibly, and healing relationships at the community level. At the centre of CoSA circles is a covenant relationship between offender and volunteers in which, when things go wrong, it is understood that the wounded relationships are directly re-coverable, in contrast to broken rules in a contractual agreement that often require an external, more legal process for repair . The approach of CoSA is mutually consensual rather than one-sidedly hard line. In this environment, the circle of volunteers both facilitates and calls the offender to account in his/her journey of re-entry to the community, with the understanding that *no one is disposable* and the bottom line of *no more victims*.

There are three main components, or *layers,* of a Circle of Support and Accountability. Firstly, at the centre of each Circle stands one core member, a federal offender who has made a decision to live without crime and make no more victims. The offender usually does not know how to do this, and asks for help. Challenges include mental issues, addictions, public rejection, and institutionalization, the result of spending

years in prison. Most have finished their sentences and are placed under police supervision upon release through a peace bond (section 810 of the Criminal Code),[27] while some arrive on statutory release under the supervision of a parole officer and may obtain temporary residence in a halfway house.[28] At times, the media will notify the public of their arrival with a statement of release from local police, at the discretion of the local police chief. In some cases core members can remain quietly indoors for the few days after public notification with little trouble, however, public attention can make finding work and housing extremely difficult if not impossible.

Secondly, volunteers come from all walks of life in the community, four or five forming a circle around one core member. They are provided training and ongoing support from CoSA staff. In some CoSA projects, much training is front-loaded before the offender is released; in others, there is basic training received before release, and more advanced training is acquired in the day-to-day events of the process. They commit to meetings once per week at first, with daily contact in between them, and gradually less often as the core member establishes him/herself. Often by necessity, a circle may be "forever," but it is most active in the first eighteen months after release. Volunteers offer support over time through the process of integration by walking with offenders through every facet of living in the community, including celebrating milestones and triumphs, challenging risky thoughts and behaviours, advocating for them with landlords, employers and community services, and frequent, joyful socializing.

[27] See http://www.lawyers.ca/statutes/criminal_code_of_canada_assault.htm (accessed April 19, 2013)).

[28] The practice of statutory release is currently threatened with elimination under the Canadian government's "tough-on-crime" strategy.

CoSA volunteers are committed to the principle of restorative justice, which stands to both complement and challenge the essentially retributive criminal justice system in Canada. They seek to model an enduring community in which all members are honest and mutually accountable. Over time, the effect of the circle is that they overcome the structures of violence that have long marked social life in North America by adopting structures of blessing that can reconcile their core member with the community in which they all live. The context within which they work is a difficult one as they strive to assist in the reintegration of the offenders into communities of distrusting neighbors, landlords, employers and law enforcement officers. In spite of numerous obstacles, they have shown a remarkable ability to help their core members live safely and responsibly.

Thirdly, the circle maintains regular contact with community stakeholders that include local police, community corrections personnel, chaplains, psychological and/or other professional support that may be accessed by the core member, voluntarily or by order, and community agencies helping with housing and other needs. As professional services are required, the circle supports the core member in accessing them, interrupting the habitual inclination to resist them. The circle is also available to mediate community concerns with agencies, employers and landlords. Each local CoSA program meets regularly with community stakeholders through the formation of a committee, which may be called a steering, an advisory, or a stakeholders' committee, as a way of being in regular contact and consultation with each other. However the committee is set up, it is agreed by all that the expertise and involvement of every community stakeholder is crucial to the ability of CoSA to enable its core members to reintegrate successfully.

Reintegration is always a bumpy ride, on the one hand filled with new life, anticipation and celebration, and on the other hand fraught with ambivalence, challenge and disappointment. It is a journey marked by frequent pauses for regrouping in order to move forward again. The goals of CoSA are relatively simple: to help the core members learn to live safely and responsibly; paramount is each core member's steadfast personal commitment to make "no more victims." Maintaining a pattern of frequent communication, the group works together to create the environment in which safe, responsible living can become the norm.

At times, core members have reminded me of the Israelites who, having left their days of dehumanizing slavery in Egypt behind, found themselves in the middle of a wilderness for many years. The wilderness offered little in the way of signposts for direction, comfort, safety, or a proper diet. Things could and did get rough for them. When they were chronically hungry, they began to remember how "good" it had been in Egypt, with plenty of meat, fish and vegetables to eat every day. As much as they had been powerless there, here on their own in the desert they could likewise feel their current hardships draining their strength with each passing day (Numbers 11.4-6). When at last they were nearing the Promised Land, their overwhelming fear of the current inhabitants overrode their courage for entering it to the extent that they were ready to give up their efforts completely in defeat (Numbers 13.21-14.4). Although to some degree they trusted their leaders, Moses *et al*, their sense of struggle and desperation grew until they began to cry out, "Wouldn't it be better to go back to Egypt? . . . Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt!" (Numbers 14.3-4).

It is in the milieu of this utterly human moment of hope coupled with disillusionment, promise with pain, courage with fear, freedom with limitation and responsibility, and advancement with retreat, that CoSA stands present to former offenders. In the hours I have spent working with inmates inside the Bowden Institution, I have become familiar with people who are readying themselves for release. They have become resigned to the conditions of the prison, where it is expected and enforced that they obey all rules and do what they are told. They make few decisions, and it could be argued that they live a rather slave-like existence[29] with food, clothing and shelter provided. Meanwhile, they struggle with their own, inner demons that have imprisoned and enslaved them, preventing them from living socially acceptable, safe and responsible lives. Day and night, they dream of freedom from all these things. While they make their preparations, CoSA staff are busy gathering community volunteers in Calgary who will help them when they come. When they do begin to settle back in the community, the notion of *home* can get somewhat confused, and the urge to return to the *safety* of prison life looms large. At the same time, their new, chosen lifestyle can seem like anything but home; a large part of their challenge is to resist the temptation to return to former risky environments and lifestyles. They look to their circle to guide them through their obstacles in the right direction.

In many ways, the ministry of CoSA may resemble congregational ministries, Christian and others. However, in the circle social boundaries are unique because of the presence of personal relationship commonly held in check in religious ministries and other helping professions. I have often felt that CoSA volunteers, consciously taking

[29] Vicky Pelaez has also used the notion of "slavery" in prisons to question the practice of prison work programs that pay prisoners extremely low hourly wages, her example being twenty-five cents per hour. See page 59, note 117.

every necessary precaution for safety, show great courage in moving more deeply into relationship with people who are seriously challenged in social matters. Sometimes a volunteer joins a CoSA program against the loving advice of friends and family members who tend to worry about him or her, an inevitable consequence of a "get tough on crime" attitude that can characterize a community. Nevertheless, I began the study suspecting it is exactly this relationship phenomenon that provides the safe space in which core members can find their way to successful reintegration.

Within the covenant relationship, the glue that holds the CoSA group together is a four-point understanding of the notion of 'friendship' as Jean Stairs has expounded on it.[30] Firstly, it is a matter of giving each other attention; Circle members make themselves available as much as possible to walk with the former offender whenever needed, particularly through challenging times. Secondly, it is a relationship of freedom; all participation is fully voluntary, with no "supervisory" roles. Thirdly, it is a reciprocal relationship in which the core member and the others all regularly give to and receive from each other. Lastly, the group stands in solidarity with the common vision of seeking justice. CoSA volunteers welcome a former offender fully; in the words of Jayson Bessemer, current co-coordinator of CoSA Calgary, "Our program *is* friendship."[31]

Another way of looking at CoSA is that a circle can look very much like a concept Parker Palmer has developed, called the *Community of Truth*.[32] The subject at

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[30] Jean Stairs, *The Embrace of Friendship*, Queens Theological College Restorative Justice Occasional Papers (May, 2003), 5-7.

[31] Personal communication.

[32] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 101-104.

the centre of the Circle is the journey of reintegration of the former offender into the larger community. The Circle of "knowers" includes the core member, CoSA staff and volunteers, all united, sharing commitment, accountability, mutual support, responsibility, and knowledge, etc., equally. There is no supervisor or authority within the circle, but the circle enhances the core member's motivation and ability to cooperate with external, community authorities such as the police or employers. CoSA staff provides leadership in preparation of the core member prior to release and in the gathering and training of volunteers, but when the Circle actually forms, the leadership of staff becomes much more subtle in the role of acting as a resource. The knowing, teaching and learning in the Circle often resemble chaos more than order; at times it seems like the group is going in different directions, taking steps both forward and backward. In the short term, it may look like nothing much is happening in the circle, but in the long term, reintegration is gradually taking place.

Two Public Responses to Crime

During the cold, Canadian winter months of 2009, my husband and I escaped for a few weeks of warm sun in the State of Arizona. We were fully enjoying all kinds of activities, but from time to time we felt deprived of our daily dose of news from home, and we had to settle in for the occasional local television newscast. Most reports seemed to be of the usual fare, but one peculiarity surprised me. Every time we watched, we saw an update on the capture, court case, or release into the community of a sexual offender. Because of my work in Canada with people who have committed sexual offences through

their process of release from federal prison, I was soon drawn to watch the news every day to see if I was just exaggerating it in my mind. Unmistakably every day, as regularly as the sports and weather features, a report was given on the latest news of the *sex offender du jour*. Then, fast forwarding two years to more recent days, while watching CNN and keeping my eye on the running news script at the bottom of the screen, I noticed a headline saying that an un-named *sex offender* in a certain state had been released. Again, a curiosity gripped me as I wondered why anyone would take much interest in such an unspecific headline.

Public attention to the punishment, release and whereabouts of people convicted of sexual offences is but one of many kinds of response to what we in western society have come to know as the *culture of fear* in which we live—we need to know where our 'enemies' are. Zygmunt Bauman makes this connection,[33] noting further that our present-day fear is generalized in a three-fold loss: of security that the world is steady and reliable, of certainty that we can make useful and profitable daily choices, and of safety from threats to our person and our property.[34] The challenge is, according to Bauman, the three areas have become so blurred, producing similar effects, that our ability to understand the direct causes of our fear can be an exercise in mistaken but easily accepted conjecture; uncertainty has become a way of life that cannot be cured with clear and appropriate information.[35] We suffer a climate of impotence in the face of the elusive concept of some fundamental threat to our security/certainty/safety that compels

[33] Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999), 9-15.

[34] Ibid., 16-18.

[35] Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 18.

us to focus on a convenient, common enemy, such as a person who has offended sexually, in order to seek fast and welcome, if temporary, relief from our distress.

Zeroing in on people labeled as *sex offenders*, on one level, may be understandable. A sexual offence is considered to be among the most heinous of crimes—even worse than murder. In the case of murder, the suffering of the victim is completed, and survivors are left to begin their healing; in contrast, the harm caused by a sexual offence may never be finished since the victim, along with loved ones, is left to suffer indefinitely. In addition, there is a perception that these people will never change their offensive behaviours, which adds to the public's fear of them. These factors serve to place offenders of sexual crimes at the bottom of any social hierarchy, even, as I have observed, in jail where they are never safe.

Accordingly, at the community level, laws have been enacted to limit the movements of people who have offended sexually after their release from prison—through the use of sexual offender registries. More particularly, in some American states, it has been reported that even harsher interpretations of the law have been taken by local judges, such as forcing them to live homeless in the streets[36] or under urban bridges.[37] On a practical level, these latter tactics are controversial at best because, rather than improve public safety, they may actually diminish it by driving offenders into an emotional breakdown or increased drug use,[38] leading them to avoid registering with the state as they are required, or sending them underground where they cannot be monitored

[36] "Calif. Law Puts Sex Offenders on the Streets," National Public Radio, (February 23, 2008), http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=19308775&ps=rs (accessed April 11, 2011).

[37] "Sex Offenders Forced to Live under Miami Bridge," National Public Radio, (May 20, 2009), http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104150499 (accessed April 11, 2011).

[38] See "Calif. Law Puts 'sex offender's on the Streets," (see page 29, note 36).

at all. Canadian measures seem less drastic— reports have not emerged that people who have offended sexually are being officially forced to live under bridges—however, post-release supervision has become the norm in this country, including a national registry for people who have offended sexually. Here, the government has taken steps to increase both prison sentences, which means the construction of several new prisons, and also post-release restrictions that directly and negatively affect the reintegration ability of people convicted of sexual offences.[39]

Years ago, Canada began a trend toward getting "tougher" on crime. One example is found in CSC's mandate to help an offender to prepare for reentry into the community, and then to facilitate the actual event.[40] Once, this was accomplished almost always through a cascading system of progress from maximum to medium and then minimum security institutions, pre- and post-release treatment programs, and a parole system that included the opportunity to live in temporary halfway house accommodations. However, the legislation in 1994 increased the number who would remain incarcerated until the last day of their sentence which, ironically, rendered them ineligible for any of the above community supports and left them completely on their own after release. The offenders most likely to complete their sentences in prison were those who had committed sexual offences.

Typically, people who have offended sexually bear the full brunt of the Canadian Government's continued, proclaimed trend towards getting "tough on crime." Irving

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[39] Correctional Service of Canada Review Panel, *A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety: Report Of The Correctional Service Of Canada Review Panel*, Public Safety Canada, (October 2007), http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/csc-scc/cscrprprt-eng.pdf (accessed April 14, 2011).

[40] Correctional Service of Canada, "2013-14 Report on Plans and Priorities (RPP)," http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/rpp/rpp2013-2014/rpp-2013-14-eng.shtml (accessed April 18, 2013).

Kulik has outlined some of the challenges this strategy imposes on post-incarceration circumstances. In 2010, writes Kulik, in spite of the fact that, "Since 1970, more than 400,000 Canadians have received pardons, 96 percent of these are still in force, indicating that the vast majority of pardon recipients remain crime-free in the community," Bill C-23A *Limiting Pardons for Serious Crime* was enacted; the bill severely limits the long-standing, successful pardon process in Canada by increasing the cost of a pardon by thirteen times and doubling the period of ineligibility from five to ten years after release. Both these measures together make application all but impossible "for many who have demonstrated that they have changed their ways and require a pardon for work and travel." Even more than that, for sexual offences eligibility is entirely excluded, ensuring that housing, employment and reintegration attempts for these offenders will be harshly obstructed for the rest of their lives.[41]

Government policies do not necessarily correspond either to actual crime rates or public opinion. Canada's government promises to become harder despite statistics that consistently show crime rates are going down[42] and remain relatively low on public opinion priority scales.[43] It has been argued that the Canadian Government's 2007 position outlined in *A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety: Report Of The*

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[41] Irving Kulik, "Pardons: Background and Context for CCJA's position," Canadian Criminal Justice Association *Justice Report* 26, 2, (Spring 2011): 10.

[42] Anthony N. Doob, "Thinking About Crime: Goals for the Near Future," [presentation at the annual meeting of the Congress of the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, Halifax, Nova Scotia, October 29 2009].

[43] Julian V. Roberts, "Fear of Crime and Attitudes to Criminal Justice in Canada: A Review of Recent Trends 2001-02," Public Safety Canada, November 2001. http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cor/rep/2001-02-fer-crme-eng.aspx#Executive (accessed April 11, 2011).

Correctional Service Of Canada Review Panel, a policy aimed at prison practices, is costly, inhumane, and ineffective in fighting crime.[44] (In turn, that criticism, based largely on the principle of human rights, was criticized for the relative, evolving and ideological nature of such a principle.[45]) At any rate, government policies currently leading to changes in law apparently continue to defy statistical realities. The ongoing discussion begs the question: where does Canada's "tough on crime" policy come from?

In 2004, Canada's minister of public safety responded agreeably to the Canadian Professional Police Association's complaint that our criminal justice system was too light on crime, promising to take a serious look at it. Dan Gardner, a contributing writer to the *Ottawa Citizen*, understood her statement to indicate a plan guided by comparisons with the United States' "tough on crime" policies implemented much earlier.[46] Noting that the American model had failed to affect recidivism rates and propelled state budgets into crisis, and that the Americans were consequently reversing their policy to something closer to the Canadian model, Gardner suggested it would be absurd for Canada to make a move toward the American version of "get tough on crime." As recently as July 21, 2011, CBC Canada aired the Statistics Canada announcement that, "The national crime rate has been falling steadily for the past 20 years and is now at its lowest level since 1973";[47] the same article also noted Simon Fraser University criminologist Neil Boyd's

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[44] Michael Jackson and Graham Stewart, **"**Fear-Driven Policy: Ottawa's harsh new penal proposals won't make us safer, just poorer—and less humane," Literary Review of Canada, (May 2010) http://reviewcanada.ca/essays/2010/05/01/fear-driven-policy/ (accessed April 11, 2011).

[45] John Winterdyk, "A call for reflection: Sampson et al. vs. Jackson and Stewart or 'The CSC *Roadmap* vs. 'A flawed compass,' Canadian Criminal Justice Association *Justice Report* 25, 1, (Winter 2010): 23.

[46] Dan Gardner, "Does hard time prevent more crime? The U.S. incarceration binge has created the hangover that experts predicted," *Edmonton Journal*, September 6, 2004.

[47] CBC News Canada, "Crime rate falls to lowest level since 1973," (July 21, 2011) http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/07/21/crime-rates.html (accessed August 9, 2011).

comment that the figures undermine the federal government's tough-on-crime agenda.[48] Regardless, to date the Canadian government has not changed its hard line policy; it continues to argue for an American style strategy.

Katherine Beckett and Theodore Sasson trace America's tough on crime policy directly back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s: "Throughout this period, phrases like 'crime in the streets' and 'law and order' equated political dissent with crime and were used by conservatives in an attempt to heighten opposition to the civil rights movement. Conservatives also identified the civil rights movement—and, in particular, the philosophy of civil disobedience—as a leading cause of crime."[49] Astutely building on pre-existing fears regarding the pace of social change, including white angst about racial reform, and slipping the crime issue into the larger social concerns, opponents of social reform also began to have success in discrediting welfare programs.[50] Gradually, public perception of the poor changed from thinking they were needy to judging them to be undeserving and even dangerous.

For years, American Conservatives continued to argue that welfare programs caused higher crime rates even though research investigating such claims found the

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[48] Similar statistics relating to sexual assault are unavailable, partly because of changes in sexual assault law in 1993, and also, "Given that only a small proportion of sexual offences are formally documented, the prevalence of sexual assault in Canada has been difficult to quantify." Shannon Brennan and Andrea Taylor-Butts, "Sexual Assault in Canada," Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada (December 17, 2008) http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/85f0033m2008019-eng.htm (accessed August 9, 2011).

[49] Katherine Beckett and Theodore Sasson, "The Origins of the Current Conservative Discourse on Law and Order," in *Defending Justice: An Activist Resource Kit* (Political Research Associates: 2005), 44-45. Also available at http://www.publiceye.org/defendingjustice/pdfs/chapters/toughcrime.pdf (accessed April 18, 2013).

[50] Beckett and Sasson, 46.

opposite to be true.[51] In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan pushed his own version of the function of government: "Public assistance for the poor is an illegitimate state function; policing and social control constitute its real 'constitutional' obligation."[52] Politicians actively pursued the media to bring public attention to their anti-crime policies until eventually public perception of crime as their most important issue grew from nine per cent to thirty-two per cent by 1993.[53] Beckett and Sasson conclude that America's tough on crime policies were largely politically manipulated in spite of their being out of sync with the realities of sociological research that demonstrated both that severe punishment is not a significant deterrent for crime and that welfare spending decreases rather than increases crime.[54] Tougher approaches to crime advanced in the political arena by the Conservative Government in Canada have also had an effect on the public's view. On April 19, 2010, Jane Taber reported on a poll of 1,555 Canadians that indicated their outlook was changing: over ten years, those who support a crime *prevention* approach as the main goal of the criminal justice system had fallen from forty-four per cent to thirty-six, while those who support *punishment* as a priority had risen from twenty-two per cent to thirty. Taber attributed these changes significantly to Canadian the government's policy.[55]

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[51] Ibid., 52.

[52] Ibid., 53.

[53] Ibid., 56-57.

[54] Ibid., 60; the argument is also supported in Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 10-14.

[55] Jane Taber, "Canadian outlook on crime hardening, poll suggests," *The Globe and Mail*, (April 19, 2011), n.p.

A harmful side effect of the get-tough-on-crime policy was the establishment of the word *crime* itself as the symbol of the principal problem arousing public concern, accentuating the punitive side of the criminal justice system. The effect of the trend toward punishment of the increasingly alienated offender was that the specific harms created by crime were left to be dealt with by individuals directly involved, out of the public spotlight, as though they were not a social issue. On the contrary, I argue that addressing the harms of crime is an important social issue if communal relationships broken by crime are to be repaired. To this end, a complementary approach is required on the other side of the criminal justice coin such as that exemplified in the principle of restorative justice.

The present-day practice of restorative justice in Canada and the U.S. is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition.[56] One of the most commonly quoted biblical stories to raise a question of a community's response to restorative justice is that of the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32), particularly through the perspective of the older son who rejects him. His final reply to his father's exhortations to celebrate the return of his brother is left to the imagination of Jesus' hearers and today's readers. Jesus does introduce here, at minimum, a sense of ambivalence toward the notion of restoration that often runs counter to popular sentiment.

A passage from Hebrew scripture rarely cited in discussions of restorative justice is the story of Jonah. Jonah, who resists God's call to go to Nineveh to "cry out against their wickedness" and thereby to motivate their move toward repentance (Jonah 1.2).

[56] Evan Heise, "The Roots of Restorative Justice in the Christian Faith Tradition," *Restorative Justice: A Christian Perspective*, (Kingston ON: Restorative Justice Program, Queens Theological College, 2001), 19.

The image portrayed of Nineveh is like that of a prison, set far from one's community and filled with a sinful environment. The scene reflects Lode Walgrave's description of the tension between individual self-determination and common self-interest.[57] Although Jonah eventually agrees to go, his ambivalence persists in his anger over the event that, upon his preaching there, Nineveh repents and saves itself. God questions Jonah's attitude by appealing to his compassion, but again, as in the story of the prodigal son and his brother, we are not told Jonah's final response.

These two stories point to the sense of ambivalence that permeates the circumstance of reintegration after a lengthy prison sentence, and suggest that compassion lies at the root of restoring relationships between offenders and their communities. One theory relevant to the situation will include Paul Tillich's notion of creative justice that demands the acceptance of the one who is unacceptable.[58] A second relevant theory would be Martin Buber's notion of *I-It and I-You*, the former a relationship of emotional indifference and remoteness and the latter one of empathic connection; Buber finds that relationships can fluctuate between the *I-It* and *I-You* postures.[59]

As noted previously, Correctional Service of Canada is mandated to manage Canadian offenders all the way through the retributive imprisonment stage to the social reintegration process after release. At the time of its audit published in May 1996, CSC spent a mere seven per cent of its budget on treatment programs targeted at the factors

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[57] Walgrave, 79-80.

[58] Paul Tillich, "Love, Power and Justice," in *Restorative Justice: A Christian Perspective* (Kingston, ON: Restorative Justice Program, Queens Theological College, 2001): 25. A full citation appears in the bibliography.

[59] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Touchstone), 1970.

that contribute to criminal behaviour and intended to help ensure public safety.[60] Nevertheless, it does promote a plan that inversely parallels the punitive side of corrections, that of restorative justice. On its website one can find a link to its restorative justice page,[61] with a variety of publications and resources for celebrating Restorative Justice Week during the third week of November every year. In March 2008, Public Safety Canada published *A Little Manual of Restorative Justice.* CSC's attention to victim services and treatment programs would also accommodate its commitment to restorative justice, but these services and programs are limited. Victims' participation is tightly restricted. Treatment programs are woefully underfunded and inadequate for offenders who finish their sentences incarcerated to the last day; for these, supervision in the community is managed by local police in concert with CSC's release plans.

On its website, CSC clearly defines what it means by restorative justice: a non-adversarial, non-retributive approach to justice that emphasizes healing in victims, meaningful accountability of offenders, and the involvement of citizens in creating healthier, safer communities. This definition suits the specific purposes of CSC its own commitment to restorative justice. Restorative justice, however, is an ancient concept that has been observed in many cultures, including North American indigenous communities, and has experienced resurgence in western society. It seeks to give equal attention and care to the three groups affected by crime, the victim, the offenders, and the community. CSC's different intention for each participating group—healing for one,

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[60] Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Correctional Service of Canada—Rehabilitation Programs for Offenders" in *Report of the Auditor General of Canada* (1996 May), http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_199605_10_e_5041.html#mp (accessed April 24, 2011).

[61] Correctional Service of Canada, "Restorative Justice," http://www.csc.scc.gc.ca/text/rj/index-eng.shtml (accessed April 10, 2011).

accountability for another, and vague involvement for the third, distorts the true intention of restorative justice, which is to achieve healing, accountability and equal participation for all three. It is apparent, here, how restorative justice challenges the traditional, retributive approach to criminal justice.

Lode Walgrave compares several definitions of restorative justice and settles for: an option for doing justice after the occurrence of an offence that is primarily oriented towards repairing the individual, relational and social harm caused by that offence.[62] I believe Walgrave's reading is closer to the principle of restorative justice because it does not define specific actions, nor does it separate roles for the three participating components. It recognizes that harm caused by crime reaches beyond the particular suffering of the individual victim. While other definitions may emphasize the deliberative aspect of restorative process, Walgrave insists the concept must be seen as outcome-based, with goals that include the facilitation of remorse, compassion, apology and forgiveness. Ultimately, what Walgrave describes is an approach to justice that is fundamentally distinct from the overwhelmingly punitive systems we now have.[63]

Everywhere, restorative justice finds itself in the position of challenging the predominance of the for-the-most-part retributive criminal justice system. Walgrave has proposed the possibility of successfully designing a restorative criminal justice system that includes a restorative program of law enforcement.[64] So far, such a system does not exist; it may never exist, but Walgrave insists it is worth striving for. Meanwhile, there

[62] Walgrave, 21.

[63] Walgrave, 18-24.

[64] Ibid., 138-168.

are many non-governmental agencies, MCCC among them, that operate restorative justice programs, unencumbered by the need to provide a punitive response to crime.

A government committed to a tough stance against crime cannot at the same time make a truly credible effort to implement an effective restorative justice program within the confines of its own environment. For example, the present Canadian government purports to support restorative justice but introduced Bill C-9,[65] legislation that proposes to decrease the use of conditional sentences and replace them with increased incarceration. MCCC submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.[66] It outlines how conditional sentences, if done successfully, would invite the participation of victims at a far deeper level than the normally passive, and at times reactive, role they are allowed in the courtroom, and would contribute to victims' sense of having been respected and kept safe in the long term. In contrast, to increase incarceration is a superficial strategy that offers no more than a temporary period of safety while the offender is in jail. The brief also mentions the widely acknowledged reality that incarceration actually reduces community safety. It makes evident the incongruence of programs that on the one hand draw a hard line against crime, and others that seek to restore relationships by redressing the harm caused by crime.

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[65] Parliament of Canada, *Bill C-9: An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment),* (May 12, 2005, Revised September 27, 2007), http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/Bills_ls.asp?lang=E&ls=c9&Parl=39&Ses=1&source=library_prb (accessed May 2, 2011).

[66] Mennonite Central Committee Canada, "Brief to the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness: House of Commons, 38th Parliament, 1st Session, On Amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada (Conditional Sentences), Bill C-9." A copy is available at the CoSA Calgary Office.

My Story

In 2004 I was first introduced to CoSA Calgary, which had been up and running for about two years. Three circles were active, and a fourth was in preparation. Meanwhile, at the time I had a sense that my life too had been on a path of preparation and I was ready just then to become involved. And so we met, CoSA and I, destined to become life-long friends.

As with so many meaningful circumstances, I can trace my journey into CoSA all the way back to childhood events. One of my earliest memories as a young girl was my tendency to side with 'the little guy.' Where this came from I do not know. When my parents would go out on Saturday nights, I was allowed to stay up with my older brother to watch television—our favourite entertainment being *Wrestling*. I was always excited when the dwarf tag-teams were on and thrilled when they won their match, besting their much bigger opponents through wily maneuvers that triumphed over brute strength. Little did I realize my alignment with 'the little guy' would emerge as a life-long theme.

As one grows, new concepts come into play. For me, big/little proved a precursor of the strong/weak dichotomy. At church, I learned that *we Canadians*, who were relatively wealthy, powerful and enlightened, had to help *the others* in poorer, weaker, uneducated countries—a calling I did not question at the time. Simplistic as the notion was, it encouraged my budding identification with 'the little guy.'

Gradually, big/little and strong/weak broadened into my developing concept of a world divided into good/bad. By the age of ten, I was hearing the message loudly and clearly: *we North Americans* were good; *the Russians* were bad. However, this idea did

not sit so well with me. I just could not imagine that all those millions of Russians were really bad, or evil, but there seemed no variance from such a generalization. Judging from everything I know about my parents, I am sure it was they who planted the seed of doubt in my heart; just as I knew that bad resided along with good in Canada, I instinctively believed that goodness was also integral to the lives of the Russian people.

In adolescence, I became aware of the practice of exclusion fueled by hatred, most strikingly in the public condemnation of certain people based on sexual orientation. When we were teenagers, my brother confided to me the dark secret of his good friend who visited our house frequently, which was that this person struggled in terms of gender identity. Not only were such people socially excluded and vulnerable, but the very possibility of alternate orientation and/or other gender issues was flatly denied by some of the adults I knew, including parents of my friends. I caught my first glimpses of social injustice based on exclusion, denial and hatred; inwardly, I felt the rise of an enduring impulse to find ways to oppose it.

When I was twenty-two, I was introduced to the phenomenon of community hatred toward people who found themselves in serious conflict with the law. My twenty-five-year-old brother was killed on the highway by an eighteen-year-old inebriated driver. The horror of our cruel loss was in full swing the next morning when the boy turned himself in to the authorities. Already overcome with unbearable grief, as well as feeling both pain and anger over what I understood to be an accident that was devastating for everyone, I was further shocked by the utter hatred for the boy that erupted in my community, a hatred that did not make sense to me. This was the time I discovered my

personal ability to forgive. Having not forgotten the image of that boy sitting in a jail cell, about ten years later I joined a visiting team in our local correctional facility.

Many years later, I experienced again my capacity to forgive when my car was stolen by a fifteen-year-old girl and an older boy. Because of her age and the fact that this was her first offence, the girl was eligible for the provincial alternative measures program that would allow her to avoid a criminal record by doing some restorative activity like community service. Given the opportunity to meet with her, I first planned to turn the offer down—why would I care what happened to her? But quickly, before I could decline, I was overcome with an entirely different realization—I had a *responsibility* to her as a member of my community, both to listen to her story and to tell her mine, and so I did. With this introduction to restorative justice, I soon became a part of the South Calgary Youth Justice Committee, and later a member of the board of the Calgary Youth Justice Society.

Not long afterward, I met people involved with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Calgary CoSA; the rest is history. In my first conversation with the director of Community Justice Ministries (known today as Restorative Justice Ministries), the division of MCC Alberta that manages CoSA, I heard the predominant words of its guiding principles: no one is disposable. I remember that the phrase actually made my spine tingle; it awakened within me the sentiment that had been abiding unspoken in my being for a very long time. This, for me, was a watershed moment. From that day on, I knew consciously that, as a matter of communal responsibility, I was committed to the restoration of broken communities, the return of exiles, whether they be smaller, weaker, or simply different—if they sought to be reintegrated, I would support them.

Certain training experiences helped to prepare me for understanding the CoSA process and, later, for taking on this study of volunteer experiences. Firstly, for three years (1999 to 2001), I was a candidate for ordination in the United Church of Canada. Secondly, I completed the Pacific Jubilee Program at the University of British Columbia in Spiritual Direction (2005). Thirdly, I completed two units of training for hospital chaplaincy. From these undertakings I was able to develop my skills in pastoral care and active listening, which largely enabled my work with CoSA Calgary. After retiring in July 2010, I have remained in touch with the CoSA project on an occasional volunteer basis, staying in touch with the community, attending general gatherings, and offering help where I can.

Anyone who works with CoSA needs to find a way to both acknowledge that a horrific harm has been committed and at the same time accept that a person can change, even against formidable odds. I am unable to explain where the ability to bring the two together comes from, but clearly it is part of my personality. There are two personality models which offer insight as to how I find myself suited to the work of CoSA: Theological Worlds and the Enneagram.

W. Paul Jones has set forth a detailed description of five "theological worlds" in which human beings find meaning in life, with the purpose of interpreting the plurality of understandings that characterizes our world today. According to Jones, each world has its own rhythm of movement back and forth between two polar extremes: separation and reunion; conflict and vindication; emptiness and fulfillment; condemnation and forgiveness; and, suffering and endurance.[67] With the help of a Theological World

[67] W. Paul Jones, *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 18-19.

Inventory questionnaire and further self-reflection, I found that I reside mainly in World One, between separation and reunion. World One struggles with anxiety over feeling on the outside of what looks like an arbitrary world over which one cannot have much effect. Certain aspects of World One cast a light of understanding on how I experience my role in CoSA. For example, a person in World One sees broken relationships very much as "the way things are;" this is simply how the world works. World One does not respond in blame and anger, though, but rather with a deep longing to be reunited.[68] Then from time to time, in this world that seems in so many ways to be beyond our control, we experience special moments that come like tiny pores in the fabric of everyday life, offering glimpses into the great, cosmic mystery of life. Through these special moments, we are given hope that we belong after all to a world of meaning. Not only does this concept approximate my experience of CoSA, it also elucidates what I see as the process of CoSA, in which former offenders can catch glimpses of a world in which s/he belongs and can contribute safely and responsibly to community life.

A clear path to a founder of the Enneagram of Personality proves itself elusive. Ideas relating to the Enneagram have been traced back to the Fourth Century. During the last half of the Twentieth Century, the Enneagram gained popularity among several enthusiasts and a model of nine personality types has emerged. My personality exhibits a preference for the number Five on the Enneagram model, characterized by such various labels as *thinker* or *observer*. 'Being' a Five gives me the same kind of feeling as Theological World One: looking in from the outside. As an observer, I prefer thinking to doing, which gives me the sense of distance I need to maintain objectivity in the CoSA

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[68] Jones, *Theological Worlds*, 48.

environment where emotions have the potential to take a group off track.[69] According to Richard Rohr's description of the number Five, the challenge for me lies in the group dynamics; because we Fives need to ponder things, we are often not well equipped to participate fully in the heat of a moment. Our value is in considering the bigger picture, as in the long journey in CoSA toward reintegration. As a Five, though, I have a strong Six wing which helps me stay connected with the events that are happening before me.[70] Further, according to Eddie Fitzgerald and Éilís Bergin, when I am at my best, I become involved in social justice issues such as I find in CoSA.[71]

Both my One-ness and my Five-ness make me sensitive to the difference between inter-personal events and the wider social environment; as much as I am comfortable in the former, I am even more confident in analyzing the latter. Accordingly, I am likely to come quickly to forgiveness of an individual but often hold disdain for what I see as shortcomings in the social sphere. Likewise, I accept that individuals need to spend some time in prison for grave mistakes they have made, but I also believe the current North American prison trends send a provocative message to our society. The American "get tough on crime" policy has resulted today in an unusually high prison population and a fast-growing prison industry.[72] With the Canadian Government's plan to erect several new prisons to accommodate all the new prisoners that their criminal justice policy will create, I fear we will not be far behind.

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[69] Markus Becker, "Empirical Studies of the Enneagram: Foundations and Comparisons," in *Experiencing the Enneagram,* ed. Andreas Ebert and Marion Küstenmacher, tr. Peter Heinegg, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 40.

[70] Richard Rohr, "Brief Summary of the Nine Types," in *Experiencing the Enneagram,* 21.

[71] Eddie Fitzgerald and Éilís Bergin, *The Enneagram Paths to Wholeness: Subtypes, Wings and Arrows,* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 33.

[72] See page 59, notes 116 and 117.

Both concepts of Theological Worlds and the Enneagram remind me that others not only have very different formative memories from childhood but also have diverse views on the criminal justice system, offenders, and community. One might anticipate that the work of CoSA is simply about Theological World Four, condemnation and forgiveness, or Enneagram One, with an emphasis on right and wrong. On the contrary, the reality is that no type is ever completely absent from human life; we all have them all, but an individual tends to exhibit one or two more compelling tendencies. Consequently, it is prudent to note that I conducted this study from a highly subjective frame of reference. Far from thinking that I understand the experience of CoSA volunteers, though, I wonder with fascination what underlying influences they bring to the circle. Are there common threads?

My view of CoSA is a very personal one. It is limited by the filters of my own personality, my life experiences and my relatively narrow background with the CoSA project in Calgary, only one of approximately twenty across Canada. My perspective is also coloured by several assumptions I bring to the topic, which may or may not correlate with those of the volunteers: the power of privilege in modern society excludes and incapacitates people who are marginalized by circumstances they did not create; no human being is disposable; human beings can change profoundly, even their more deeply seated behaviour patterns; no one achieves success in life without the support of a social network; non-violence is a viable life-style choice. I recognize a parallel between my vision of CoSA and David C. Korten's vision of what the world needs in order to find its way into a positive human future, which, of course, he introduces with his own personal

story.[73] His vision includes this hopeful premise: "Leadership of Earth Community emerges through processes of mutual empowerment that encourage every person to recognize and express their capacities for leadership on behalf of the whole . . . from outside the institutions of Empire."[74]

My personal perspective on CoSA has important implications for my task of reaching an objective conclusion on *The CoSA Relationship* from the point of view of its volunteers. With this in mind, I resolved to limit all information analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6 strictly to what I gained from the volunteers.

[73] David C. Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc., 2006), 6-20.

[74] Ibid., 316.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Background

> A couple did not know what to do about the jealousy of their three-year-old son toward the new baby. They were enlightened by a book of child psychology.
>
> One day, when the little fellow was in a particularly bad mood, the mother said, "Take this teddy bear, son, and show me how you feel about the baby."
>
> According to the book, he was supposed to punch and squeeze the teddy bear. But the three-year-old grabbed the teddy bear by the leg and, with obvious delight, went over to the baby and hit her over the head with it.
>
> —Anthony de Mello, *Taking Flight: A Book of Story Meditations*

The topic of sexual assault, including its lead–up and its aftermath, is a complex matter for which a great variety of theoretical explanations has emerged. In this chapter, several theories have been selected as resources that can shed some light of understanding on the process of moving out of the circumstance of sexual crime into a place of leading a responsible, productive and accountable life. These theories include sociological and psychological explorations, as well as a brief summary of research on the experiences of volunteers in community-based restorative justice programs, including CoSA.

Mimetic Theory, Violence and Religion, Scapegoats and Blessings

I have found that René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and rivalry relates well to the context in which the work of CoSA takes place. Described as an anthropological view of religion and a theory of violence, it makes clear how individual, social and religious activities are deeply intertwined. According to Girard, violence finds its roots in the mimetic desire that emerges in the evolutionary advance of hominization. Originally, the mimicry of animals is based merely on their needs and appetites. With the increasing complexity of social organization, the first threshold of mimesis is reached in which human desire is "grafted" onto animal mimicry.[75] One person, observing what is possibly a utilitarian value another places on an object, becomes desirous of it, not directly because of its usefulness, but rather because of the model of valuing which the first person presents. In turn, the first person is likely to observe and respond to the mimetic desire of the second, adding his/her own mimetic desire to the value of the object; they become mimetic models for each other. In such a circumstance, we see the emergence of acquisitive mimesis as a reciprocal phenomenon fundamental to human culture.[76] An "intrinsically good" characteristic, mimetic desire is what children exhibit in imitating the models around them to acquire their language and culture. At the same time, because we are often not even aware of our own borrowing behaviour, it can be responsible for both the best and the worst of us, particularly when we become

[75] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, tr. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1978), 283-284.

[76] Ibid., 18.

competitive.[77] In the event of unchecked mimetic rivalry that leads to actual combat, Girard argues that animals can and do avoid "fighting to the death" by way of their instinctual inhibitions that control the use of their natural weapons such as claws and teeth; for humans, however, the stakes are much higher. In our use of stones and other artificial weapons, we cannot rely on instinct to temper our behaviour, but must devise external prohibitions to prevent the annihilation of all through unchecked acquisitive mimesis.[78]

Acquisitiveness, or coveting, is identified by Girard in the form of mimetic desire as the most widespread human desire. He finds support for his argument in the tenth and crowning commandment, "Thou shall not covet . . ." (Exodus 20.17), toward which the previous four commandments build, all of which seek to limit the effects of mimetic desire.[79] Without such limits, reciprocal mimetic desire can lead to mimetic rivalry, which in turn will lead to envy, opposition, conflict, and violence. Mimetic rivals try to prevent each other from having the initial object of desire but, ironically, serve only to intensify their "double desire" until they become obstacles to each other. At this point of development, Girard introduces his concept of scandal, a paradoxical obstacle "almost impossible to avoid," in the sense that, "the more this obstacle, or scandal, repels us, the more it attracts us."[80] Eventually, frustrations of envy, jealousy, resentment, and hatred build, to the fascination and growing involvement of others until, original object(s) long

[77] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, tr. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 15-16.

[78] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 87.

[79] Girard, *I See Satan* , 8.

[80] Ibid., 16.

forgotten and now beside the point, a second threshold is reached that results in a fury of reciprocal acts of vengeance, and ultimately a contagion of violence throughout the community.[81]

As individuals move from common desire for an object into direct conflict with each other as rivals and mutual obstacles, the efforts of each to maintain his/her own unique stance are thwarted by the scandal effect; they are at once antagonistic and attractive to each other. Initially a divisive situation, mimetic acquisitiveness now turns into a unifying force.[82] No longer so different, through their behaviour the rivals become identical, increasing in numbers as others are drawn into the mimetic activity. The scandal effect multiplies, gaining in momentum and power, with an impact such that scandals themselves move into mimetic competition with each other. A vicious circle develops in which small scandals grow into larger ones and absorb the weaker ones until the weakest stands alone, increasingly polarized against all others. Again, a new threshold is crossed at this moment of crisis, as the entire community fuses and mobilizes together against one.[83]

It is a time of rampant violence that threatens not only the well-being but the very existence of the community. What began with interaction between individuals has grown into a mimetic frenzy of antagonistic doubles spread universally, in which all are potential victims. Any slight, new accusation, no matter how groundless, has the power instantly to engulf the whole group in a corporate sense of conviction against one

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[81] Girard, *I See Satan*, 17.

[82] René Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1996), 13.

[83] Girard, *I See Satan*, 23.

member. This individual will suddenly carry alone the entire weight of the conflict as the community unites against him or her.[84] As Girard sees it, the wrongfulness of the individual is largely an arbitrary accusation afforded weight, not actually by the action of which the person is accused, but by the force of unity that crops up suddenly in the community; reciprocal violence has evolved into collective violence. Thus, now perceived by all to have caused the discord, the single individual becomes the scapegoat who bears the brunt of the general malaise of the community, and who must be expelled in order to bring back a sense of peace and equilibrium.[85]

It is, indeed, the elimination of the scapegoat that restores the well-being of the community. But relief is temporary at best, for it will be only a matter of time before mimetic desire leads to new rivalry, reciprocal and collective violence, and the scapegoat effect. Girard observes that there are countless repetitions of this mimetic cycle throughout human history, in ancient myths, Greek tragedies, biblical texts, and historical accounts of persecutions, such as that of the Jews charged with the cause of the Black Death in the 14th century, right through to the present day.

Girardian thinker Adam Ericksen outlines a modern example of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism based on the proverbial story of "keeping up with the Joneses."[86] A man desires to own the same material possessions that his neighbour has, but cannot afford them. In his mind, rather than addressing his real challenges, he enters into mimetic rivalry with the neighbour, blaming the other for his own inabilities; he

[84] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 79.

[85] Ibid., 81-82.

[86] Adam Ericksen, "How I Scapegoated the Joneses," Video, n.d., The Raven Foundation, http://www.ravenfoundation.org/resources/mimetic-theory-101/ (accessed February 16, 2013).

engages in gossipy, arbitrary criticisms of his rival around the neighbourhood, resulting in the collective ostracization of the one 'offending' neighbour; peace is restored when the rejected neighbour sells his house and moves away. The man's peace is temporary, lasting only until he is gripped again by a new mimetic rivalry.

The mimetic cycle is recognizable by a marked similarity in the descriptions of events that include what Girard calls "stereotypes of persecution."[87] The first stereotype, or common event, is seen in the loss of differentiation in a time of disorder as reciprocal rivalry heats up in terms of negative exchanges between people in conflict; their conduct begins to all look the same. These mimetic disturbances result from a great variety of triggers, from natural disasters to simple human quarrels—anything that works to cause the whole community to suffer.[88] People refuse to accept responsibility but look to blame society or other people.[89]

The second common event, then, is that, in a search for someone to blame, even in the case of a natural disaster, accusations settle arbitrarily on a few people or one individual deemed to be responsible. Proof of culpability is left as an unnecessary detail.[90] These accusations are consistently made of disturbing, violent crimes committed against either the most powerful or the weakest members of society: sexual crimes, or any crimes that break the strongest of social taboos.

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[87] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, tr. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), 20-31.

[88] René Girard, "Python and His Two Wives: An Exemplary Scapegoat Myth," in *The Girard Reader*, 119.

[89] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 21-22.

[90] Ibid., 23-24.

The third common event is in the choice of victims (scapegoats), more for their susceptibility to persecution than for their true culpability,[91] so that a "distortion of persecution" is revealed.[92] Here, in times of chaos, the normally coercive power of the social group over the individual is inverted so that the power to accomplish major social disruption is ascribed to one individual or a small minority. Perhaps the most impressive detail of this inversion is that the person chosen is generally poorly integrated because of physical difference, such as a disability, some form of social marginalization, or because of their foreign-ness, or cultural difference; in other words, the person is considered to be socially disposable. The scapegoat can be identified by what Girard calls these "preferential signs of victimage" that "tend to rouse the hostility of a crowd."[93]

The fourth step in Girard's "stereotypes of persecution" is two-fold: escalation culminates in the elimination, by murder or expulsion, of the scapegoat by the fused community, the ultimate violent deed; finally, communal order is restored immediately after the scapegoat/victim has been dispatched—a short-lived accomplishment if not almost illusory. It is worth noting here that Girard attributes victimhood to the scapegoat because of the arbitrariness of choosing a socially disposable group or individual for murder or expulsion.

Interestingly, the new order was at one time also accredited to the victim/scapegoat, who was then believed to be the source of both disorder and order; in archaic times this, along with the marginal, or socially external, status ascribed to the

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[91] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 25.

[92] Ibid., 29.

[93] Girard, "Python and His Two Wives," 119.

victim, gave the victim an air of divinity,[94] from which, according to Girard, religion was spawned. In the effort to hold the harmful effects of mimesis in check, we see the appearance of surrogate victims in sacrificial rituals performed to promote social cohesion.

Girard traces appearances of the mimetic cycle in myths, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Christian gospels in order to demonstrate the differences of interpretation among them. In myths, the mimetic crisis and collective violence are followed by the sacred revelation of the victim as divine.[95] However, the persecutors never see the arbitrariness of their choice of victim; they always believe murder is justified because they believe the victim is guilty,[96] then the victim is divinized because peace has been restored. In contrast, in the biblical texts, mobs are blamed overtly for persecuting innocent victims.[97] In the Hebrew Scriptures, only the mimetic crisis and collective violence appear; although the innocence of the victim, and therefore his/her wrongful murder, is revealed, s/he is not divinized because God can never be victimized.[98] Finally, in the Gospels, where Jesus becomes the surrogate victim, the mimetic crisis and collective violence are clearly identified, as well as Jesus' innocence.[99] Jesus, however, is a sacrificial victim of his human persecutors caught up in mimetic violence, not a sacrifice required by God;

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[94] Girard, "Python and His Two Wives," 119.

[95] Girard, *I See Satan*, 106.

[96] Ibid., 109.

[97] René Girard, "Violence and religion: cause or effect?" in *The Hedgehog Review* 6, no.1 (March 22, 2004) http://www.mimetictheory.net/bios/articles/Girad_Violence_and_religion.pdf (accessed April 9, 2010).

[98] Girard, *I See Satan*, 106-107.

[99] Ibid., 106-107.

essentially, he goes to his death because of his steadfast refusal to resort to violence.[100] What makes the Gospel story truly unique, then, is that, through Jesus, God fully reveals the whole truth of the mimetic cycle, rejects it, and openly subverts it by way of the Resurrection.[101] The divinity of Jesus, though, is not considered part of the mimetic cycle because it was ascribed to him long afterward, whereas in the earliest occurrences of the mimetic cycle the attribution was made immediately after the expulsion.

Through the influence of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the scapegoat mechanism has been exposed; although it still occurs today, it no longer can do so with religious sanction.[102] In modern times, in fact, even though we still experience violence in our societies, under the influence of the Christian Gospels, an unprecedented concern for victims[103] has emerged with the relatively recent development of the idea of social justice.[104]

Girard does not argue against Emile Durkheim's idea that the primary unifying factor of a society is religion, but believes he did not take his theory far enough to properly account for the role of violence as both a formidable obstacle and a transfiguring resource through the scapegoat effect.[105] One way of interpreting social disruption, for

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[100] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 180-183; 205-207.

[101] Girard, *I See Satan*, 131.

[102] Ibid., 157.

[103] The word *victim* commonly conjures up images of people adversely affected by such things as natural disasters or crime. What may be more difficult to feel concern for is the notion of scapegoat as victim, due to the all-against-one nature of the mimetic cycle as Girard has characterized it (see pages 51-52). It can be challenging to think independently from one's group when it has fused together in opposition to the scapegoat who then becomes the new victim.

[104] Girard, *I See Satan*, 161-162.

[105] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 306.

Durkheim, is to look at the way law functions in society: an act is a crime "when it offends strong and defined states of the collective consciousness,"[106] defined as such solely by society's condemnation of it.[107] In ancient times, repressive law and punishment exacted revenge in order to restore social cohesion; in more modern times, restitutive law has begun to signify an approach more defensive, or protective, of society.[108] Whatever attitude is adopted, the interplay between crime and punishment is an important component in the maintenance of collective life. The difficulty for Girard is that Durkheim generally places the guilt of crime solely in the hands of the individual and the resolution of it in the hands of the innocent society, as though crime was an idiosyncratic aberration, unconnected from the social realm. In contrast, Girard's mimetic interpretation of social disorder and violence in the context of society and religion reveals an inversion of roles so that "the victim is innocent, and the mob is guilty."[109] Whereas Durkheim sees religion as the source of society,[110] Girard sees the surrogate victim as the source of religion. He sums it up:

> All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim . . . Durkheim never fully articulated his insight . . . I will add that religion is simply another term for the surrogate victim, who reconciles mimetic oppositions and assigns a sacrificial goal to the mimetic impulse. At the moment when differentiated unity is urgently needed and apparently impossible to

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[106] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1933), 80.

[107] Ibid., 81.

[108] Ibid., 86.

[109] Girard, "Violence and religion: cause or effect?"

[110] Emile Durkheim, *Readings from Emile Durkheim*, rev. ed. Edited by Kenneth Thompson, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 117.

> obtain—that is, during an outburst of reciprocal violence—the surrogate victim comes to the rescue.[111]

In the case of historical persecutions, much of the circumstance of myth is left behind: where once the story of the mimetic cycle was more complex, requiring a more "daring" attitude toward guilt, in historical times it became simpler; the victim simply could not defend him/herself against a prejudicial trial. Distortions in the persecution became weaker so that the dire effects on the whole society were disappearing. In medieval and now modern times, mimetic rivalry, violence and contagion are seen time and again, but persecutors have ceased to worship their victims and have continued to hate them beyond the act of expulsion.[112]

A second look at the rise of tough-on-crime strategies in North America reveals elements of mimetic activity that leads to a scapegoat effect as it has been proposed by René Girard; several of what Girard calls stereotypes of persecution[113] are apparent. Initially, in the United States, the strategy sprouted in the time of considerable, unsettling disorder, in other words, during a period in which there was a lack of differentiation during the civil rights movement that challenged the long-standing social order based on the disenfranchisement of African Americans and segregation. Secondly, the American strategy led to accusations against proponents of the civil rights movement not just as law breakers but as *street criminals*, a politically loaded terminology, instead of the political dissenters that they were. This was a rhetorical if not arbitrary strategy that singled out

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[111] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 306-307.

[112] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 43-45.

[113] See pages 53-54, note 87.

crime as a key component of political discourse on race relations.[114] Thirdly, when anticrime grew into a principal focus of American politics, it was aimed at the members of the population who were most easily accused of being linked to crime—the poor, vulnerable, and socially marginalized. In keeping with such a mimetic wave, an inversion of the coercive power of society occurred as the emerging ills of American society were attributed to the street crimes of a weak and disenfranchised minority. A significant effect of this managed process, as previously mentioned, has been the establishment of the "largest prison population in the world,"[115] with one per cent of the American adult population either incarcerated or under community supervision at any given time[116]—an unmistakable act of expulsion—and the construction of prisons as one of the fastest growing industries in the United States.[117] While it is presumed that each person in prison is guilty of some crime, the overall reality that the socially marginalized are over-represented in the prison system is a clear sign that the scapegoat mechanism is quietly at work.

In distinctive ways, the tough-on-crime strategy has affected directly the lives after release from prison of people who have offended sexually, particularly in steps three and four articulated above.[118] We can see in Canada that they leave prison to find themselves among the most marginalized socially and therefore vulnerable, ripe

[114] Beckett and Sasson, 44.

[115] Ibid., 44.

[116] Adam Liptak, "U.S. prison population dwarfs that of other nations," Global Research, (April 24, 2008) http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?aid=8801&context=va (accessed October 21, 2010).

[117] Vicky Pelaez, "The Prison Industry in the United States: Big Business or a New Form of Slavery?," Global Research, (January 31, 2013) http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-prison-industry-in-the-united-states-big-business-or-a-new-form-of-slavery/8289 (accessed April 18, 2013).

[118] See page 54.

themselves for violent victimization. These are people who have already completed their full sentences and ostensibly paid the price exacted by the state in their conviction. They then return to provocative newspaper headlines,[119] peace bonds, that is, community supervision by local police under Section 810 of the criminal code, and placement on the national registry for sexual offenders. The peace bond, specific to Section 810, is not ordered because of any new crime committed, but because of a claim that "any person"[120] fears they will offend again at some time in the future, effectively backed by the hostility of the community. The former offender is required either to enter into a recognizance with conditions, for example curfews, drug and alcohol restrictions, and/or movement restrictions, or immediately be jailed again for up to a year. I argue that there is a punitive aspect of the imposition of these restrictions that threatens to bear the markings of the scapegoat effect.

For these people who have offended sexually, their expulsion does not end with their prison term. Their rejection at times exceeds what is really needed to maintain public safety. The conditions placed on the former offenders are designed to assist them in acquiring responsible and accountable behaviour patterns. However, I have seen people breach a condition in a minor way, mistakenly miss a curfew by a few moments for example, and be sent back to jail for several months, with no crime committed. In these cases, apartments and jobs were lost, setting in place formidable obstacles to the reintegration process for which the conditions were designed. I argue that this kind of punitive action perpetuates the cycle of mimetic violence in which conflict evolves from common desire for an object (punishment of crime) into direct conflict between people

[119] See page 5.

[120] See page 22, note 27.

caught up in the scandal effect; at the same time, the public is repulsed by the former offenders but also cannot let go of them. Excessive enforcement of conditions falls under Vern Neufeld Redekop's definition of violence as "that which takes away from the well-being of someone."[121] It does violence by preventing former offenders from achieving their plans for successful reintegration, humiliating them, taking away any sense of security through losing their apartments and their jobs, and leaving them fearful for their own lives; at this point, the cycle of violence is directed back from the community toward the individual, who suffers the experience of the scapegoat/victim.

When managed judiciously, of course, the conditions imposed under Section 810 can lay a foundation for the embrace of enduring safe and responsible behaviour patterns. Fortunately, dealing with the imposed conditions as well as the aftermath of the offender's grave mistake is an important part of where CoSA volunteers can help their core member come to grips, in a positive and pro-social way, with a hostile community. They help him find purpose in his conditions, deal constructively with the role of police and/or parole in his life, and internalize the positive behaviour patterns to which the conditions point. Together with their core member, they work toward the ultimate purpose of interrupting and stopping decisively the cycle of violence, and thereby contributing unequivocatingly to public safety.

The preceding summary of René Girard's mimetic theory of religion is but a cursory look at a comprehensive study that spans more than forty years. Clearly, he has been motivated by his refusal to accept common assumptions that such wide-spread characteristics as human violence and ritual sacrifice are devoid of meaning and have no

[121] Vern Neufeld Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict Can Open Paths to Reconciliation*, (Ottawa, ON: Novalis, 2002), 162-163.

explanation. On the contrary, Girard offers a rational explanation based on common human activities that stretch back to prehistoric times. As John Dominic Crossan once wrote, "We live in story like fish in the sea."[122] Girard has examined virtually every kind of story from human life available, from ancient myths and dramas to biblical texts and historical accounts, to demonstrate universal sequences that result in both violence and ritual sacrifice. He has found that human violence, far from being simply an individual aberration, is actually a communal by-product of mimetic desire and rivalry; sacrificial rites were devised to stem collective violence. As a Christian thinker, he roots the power of religious practice and interpretation in the reality of human experience for the benefit of both religious followers and social scientists. One favourable aspect of his theory is that so much of it makes common sense; in a tribute to Girard on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1993, his friend and colleague, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, comments, "If one simply pays attention one can observe these factors at work in the human world."[123]

One of the main reproaches of René Girard is that his theory follows too much of a reductionist course. For example, some are sceptical about the notion of all religious phenomena arising from a single origin in a (pre-historic and therefore non-provable) "founding murder".[124] Similarly, philosophers ask questions like, "should one found sacrifice upon mimesis—for example, found it upon an anthropology of mimetic violence

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[122] John Dominica Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*, (USA: Polebridge Press, 1988), 31.

[123] Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "A Tribute to René Girard on his 70th Birthday," http://www.mimetictheory.net/bios/articles/Jamerton-Kelly_contagion01.pdf (accessed November 29, 2010).

[124] René Girard, *Things Hidden*, 39-40; 43.

and rivalry (in the manner of Girard) . . . ?"[125] But Girard's purpose has not been to put forward an ontological argument; he has simply organized social patterns widely repeated throughout humanity's story into a theory that offers a powerful way to think about the roots of violence. As mentioned previously, Girard takes issue with traditional views of violence, that it is a divine attribute, or simply biological human nature, or restricted to certain people, or accidental,[126] instinctual aggression, or scarcity of needed objects.[127] Conversely, he argues, "Violence is not originary; it is a by-product of mimetic rivalry."[128] Mimetic rivalry, in its turn, is a by-product of mimetic desire. It is only at the point of analyzing mimetic desire that Girard enters the realm of ontology, connecting it with the process of hominization.[129] As for mimetic rivalry, violence, and other features of his theory, these result from human decisions rather than from simply being human, and therefore, humans are capable of making other decisions, such as those made by the non-violent Jesus.

Girard receives kinder treatment from anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians who accept much of his work but generally regard it as incomplete.[130] For

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[125] Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), 204n156.

[126] Girard, *I See Satan,* 184.

[127] Girard, "Mimesis and Violence,"10.

[128] Ibid., 12.

[129] Girard, *Things Hidden,* 283-284.

[130] Rebecca Adams, "Loving Mimesis and Girard's 'Scapegoat of the Text': A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire," in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*. Studies in Peace and Scripture, Volume 4. Ed. Willard M. Swartley, (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 277; Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 55; Jim Fodor, "Christian Discipleship as Participative Imitation: Theological Reflections on Girardian Themes," in *Violence Renounced*, 258; Willard M. Swartley, "Discipleship and Imitation of Jesus/Suffering Servant: The Mimesis of New Creation," in *Violence Renounced*, 218.

his part, Girard tends to see other theorists' unquestioning work as seemingly dancing all around human violence but never actually explaining it.[131] When theorists do attempt to explain human violence, they may actually touch on mimesis without actually naming it.[132]

Some theorists openly recognize areas in which Girard has contributed valid ideas regarding communal conflict. Zygmunt Bauman allows that Girard helps to make sense of the rise of "tribal hostility," particularly in the notion of the force of unity that is suddenly triggered in a diffusion of fear, dissent and competition, when hatred turns to focus on a single, common victim.[133] One example he cites from present times is the volatile public response to the release of a paedophile from prison in Britain.[134] Where Bauman feels Girard is lacking, though, is in his insistence on unanimity within the community, as though there is no other choice; on the contrary, in situations of fear and anxiety the people who might be drawn in do have other choices such as maintaining a sense of humour.[135] I would argue that this perceived "short-coming" of Girard's theory is not due to inadequacy on his part, but rather emerges out of differences in views of *community*.

According to Emile Durkheim, a society, although made up of a group of individuals associating in a stable way, represents a way of life that cannot be observed

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[131] For examples, see Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 306; *I See Satan*, 11.

[132] For example, see Carol Lee Flinders, *The Values of Belonging: Rediscovering Balance, Mutuality, Intuition, and Wholeness in a Competitive World*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFransisco, 2002), 22-23; 129.

[133] Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 14-15; 54-55.

[134] Ibid., 9-11.

[135] Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 55.

within the individuals separately; the society, therefore, is more than the sum of its individual parts and endures from one generation to the next.[136] For example, in his study of suicide, Durkheim gives an example of what happens when society is confronted with a state of pathology caused by a "disturbance of equilibrium."[137] Girard, then, analyzes the root causes of another type of pathology in a community that results in human violence, based on the disturbance of equilibrium when established social differentiations give way to uncharacteristic uniformity in times of conflictive, mimetic contagion.[138] Bauman claims that such previous conceptions of community no longer hold up:

> Durkheim suggested that God was from the beginning not much more than the community in disguise; but now the community—large or small, imagined or tangible—is too weak to play God. Itself vulnerable, erratic and blatantly short-lived, it cannot claim its eternity with any degree of credibility.[139]

In fact, Bauman argues that in the post-modern trend towards an ever "expanding individual freedom,"[140] what may once have seemed to be a pathological disturbance of equilibrium is becoming the norm. From time to time a single issue will bring mutually concerned people together, whether to attend a public protest or a Weight Watchers meeting; although it is a togetherness that may induce feelings of community, it is merely temporary and in no way genuine; outside of the single-purpose gathering, individuals are

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[136] Durkheim, *Readings,* 12.

[137] Durkheim, *Readings,* 99.

[138] René Girard, "Stereotypes of Persecution," in *The Girard Reader*, 110-111.

[139] Bauman, *In Search of Politics,* 39.

[140] Bauman, *In Search of Politics,* 16.

unconnected the rest of the time and singly responsible for their own plight.[141] In our now powerful global market economy, the outdated concept of community has been effectively disregarded in favour of human collectivity that merely gathers self-oriented individuals, as exemplified in 'the shopping mall.' The communal experience reflects nothing more than an episodic endorsement of each individual's desires. In turn, the life of each individual is increasingly made up of a sequence of separate, instantaneous experiences with little sense of continuity.[142] Similarly, Lode Walgrave brings forth the question as to the very existence of community. He argues that although local networks of shared values and mutual solidarity obviously exist and function, they are impossible to generalize through time or over geographical distances, and remain a "loose" concept.[143] All of these discussions indicate that Girard's mimetic theory is best valued for its contribution to a continuing development of understandings regarding, in Durkheim's words, "social facts,"[144] rather than a complete and definitive explanation in itself. In my experience of CoSA, the circle attempts to create for the core member the sense of an enduring community that has likely been lost in the seemingly erratic nature of post-modern society.

A number of theologians have found elements of Girard's theory on which to build, in spite of his apparent contradiction in espousing both the exclusivity and uniqueness of Christian revelation and the problematic universality of the role of mimetic

[141] Ibid., 46-47.

[142] Ibid., 76-77.

[143] Walgrave, 76.

[144] Durkheim, *Readings,* 54.

desire and its effects on human life.[145] Even the negative aspects of acquisitive mimetic desire serve as a starting point for further theological study in terms of its more positive, non-acquisitive aspects. Willard Swartley launches a new analysis of major New Testament texts, focusing on their language of imitation.[146] Building on Swartley's work, Jim Fodor takes Girard's theory beyond a matter of human will to remind Christians of the role of prayer, contemplation, and dispossession, grounded in God as Trinity, in moving toward a positive enactment of mimetic desire.[147] Rebecca Adams offers a feminist point of view, arguing that a simplistic approach to imitation of the Christ really only perpetuates systemic issues of power and victimization.[148] For Adams, violence is not seen only as a product of mimesis itself, but also of the dualistic way of thinking that brings people into rivalrous opposition and makes objects of human beings.[149] In essence, she inverts Girard's theory, which she views as a theory mainly of violence, to propose a theory of loving mimesis, in which the model's love for the subject converts the subjectivity of the subject into the object of desire. In this way, she transcends Girard's notion of the appropriative and rivalrous nature of mimetic desire.[150]

I believe Adams' idea about loving mimesis informs our understanding of CoSA. Possibly the most effective function of a Circle in facilitating new life lies in celebrating milestones and victories. A good number of core members have never experienced a

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[145] Fodor, 263 (see page 64, note 130).

[146] Swartley, 221-234 (see page 64, note 130).

[147] Fodor, 256.

[148] Adams, 287 (see page 64, note 130).

[149] Ibid., 295.

[150] Adams, 294.

birthday party; one core member in his fifties that I knew had never been inside a movie theatre before going with his Circle. Often, several core members with their Circles will gather, on almost any grounds: Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter dinners, summer picnics, camping trips, bowling events, all of which have been glaringly absent in their prior experience. It is in these communal gatherings that core members are able to practise their newly acquired social skills that will help them manage themselves in living safely and responsibly. In this way, CoSA Circles embody Adams' theory of loving mimesis, in which the model's (that is, circle of volunteers') love for the subject (core member) converts the subjectivity of the core member into the object of desire, thereby dispensing with the appropriative and rivalrous nature of mimetic desire to empower the core member in socially healthy ways.[151]

Like Adams, Vern Neufeld Redekop sees the mimetic cycle as more than just an explanation of violence. He has developed the concept of "mimetic structure of blessing" based on his analysis of the Oka/Kanehsatà:ke Crisis that occurred in Canada during the summer months of 1990.[152] He begins with the notion of deep-rooted conflict that threatens the satisfaction of the identity needs of an individual or group. He defines an identity group as "any group with the capacity to impart a sense of identity to its members, even though not all members of the group relate to it in a primary way."[153] Redekop applies a positive spin to what Bauman sees as lack of continuity in modern community with his claim that throughout an individual's life, various groups at various

[151] Ibid., 287.

[152] Redekop, 255.

[153] Ibid., 14.

times will play different identity roles. The Oka/Kanehsatà:ke Crisis was a complex, deep-rooted conflict, sparked into crisis by a land dispute over the expansion of a golf course that threatened the identity needs of a variety of at least thirteen groups that became involved: the First-Nation groups of Kanehsatà:ke, Kanehsata'kehró:non, and Mohawks; the towns of Oka and Chatauguay; the ethnic groups of French-Canadian, English-Canadian and Québecois, not just in the local geographical area, but across Canada; and the officials of the Quebec government, the Sûreté du Québec (Quebec police), the national Ministry of Indian Affairs, the RCMP (National police), and the Canadian Army. During the crisis, self-identification with any one of these groups was quite fluid, and conflict occurred both within and among them all.[154]

Redekop relates the story of the crisis in terms of mimetic language, including desire, rivalry, violence, doubling and scapegoating.[155] Throughout the summer of 1990, violence escalated until it looked as though nothing but tragic results were ahead. A normally peaceful Canada was brought to "the very edge of massacre, bloodbath, and rampant violence across the country."[156] In the end, violence was averted through several movements in the opposite direction: a peace camp was set up at Oka to offer nonviolent support for the Mohawks; no shot was fired in the climactic hours by the Canadian army that was well trained in peacekeeping tactics; support was offered for the suffering on all sides by neutral supporters. As much as mimetic structures of violence intensified the crisis, mimetic structures of blessing relieved the violent contagion.[157]

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[154] Ibid., 228.

[155] Ibid., 227.

[156] Redekop, 251.

[157] Ibid., 250-251.

From his analysis, Redekop formulates his theory of mimetic structures of blessing, essential to his image of a spectrum that includes, at its opposite ends, both deep-rooted conflict and reconciliation at the same time. Viewed in this way, his concept does not simply allow but actually encourages people to make positive, non-violent choices.[158]

A CoSA Circle forms an identity group for the core member according to Redekop's definition. It cultivates a framework for nourishing what Redekop calls a "mimetic structure of blessing."[159] In the embrace of the Circle, a core member transcends the deep-rooted conflict that has characterized his/her life, and grows into a life of reconciliation, exemplifying the contrast between mimetic structures of violence and blessing:

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[158] Ibid., 256-257.

[159] Ibid., 255-283.

Former Life	New Life
Deep-rooted Conflict	Reconciliation
Mimetic Structures of Violence	Mimetic Structures of Blessing
* closed, confining	* open, creative
* acquisitive	* generous
* ever fewer options	* ever increasing options
* death oriented	* life oriented[160]

The Offender and the Community

The sole reason for the existence of a CoSA circle is the core member, a former federal offender whose index crime (*id est* the reason s/he went to prison) is of a sexual nature, and who has asked for help in starting a new life without crime. In Canada, there are several identified groups that deal directly with the situation of the release of a person who has offended sexually from federal prison. In terms of sexual assault itself, there is no community of former offenders; each leaves the prison as an individual on his or her own. If the person does return to his/her home community, there may be a group of family and friends who now need to deal with the return after two or more years of being away; the federal or provincial government makes the laws that apply to their rights and restrictions. The criminal justice system monitors their first months of freedom, involving parole officers, the courts and/or local police forces. Finally, there are ordinary citizens who react to the news in a variety of ways. Each of these stakeholders has its own particular perspective on what needs to happen. Volunteers on a CoSA agree to

[160] Redekop, 256.

attend to the needs of their core member in concert with the requirements of the community, all to ensure public safety for everyone.

Most of what I know about people who have offended sexually comes from my more than six years of experience in working with them through CoSA Calgary. There is also a good deal of research on what causes the phenomenon of sexual assault and how it can be treated. Rehabilitation programs in the criminal justice system traditionally focus on behaviour, thoughts, and beliefs, with significant, if not outright, success; in a somewhat contrasting approach, Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger argue convincingly that relationships along with emotions are the main elements in both causation and cure.[161] In my experience, it is attention to emotion and relationship that is most effectively at work in CoSA. I believe it is the complementary commitment to both approaches that holds the promise of a former offender's success in the community.

At the centre of the matter in hand are the people who offend sexually. Like any other human being, these people learn about life as children through mimetic behaviour, by watching and engaging with the models around them. They may or may not have grown up with a traditional family group, but whatever their circumstances, the adults around them had significant influence on their development.

Typically, when family-of-origin situations are studied, the focus is placed on the dysfunctional aspects of the group. In contrast, psychiatrist Robin Skynner began his

[161] Thomas M. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, "Shame, Anger and the Social Bond: A Theory of Sexual Offenders and Treatment," *Electronic Journal of Sociology* (1997), under "Introduction," http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.001/sheff.html (accessed April 11, 2011).

study by researching the characteristics of families who live healthily and successfully.[162] He found they were abundant with good will and self-confidence with no need to control each other. They enjoyed each other with lots of fun, energy, wit, jokes and good humour. Everyone was involved in decision-making, including the children. Everyone knew where the others stood and they maintained an atmosphere of trust, confidence and mutual support, each taking responsibility for his or her own feelings, so that they were able to handle big changes with ease. Skynner estimates that this group comprises about twenty per cent of the general population of developed countries.

From there Skynner studied the other two ranges, including the sixty per cent group to which he refers as the people in the middle who live between the most and least healthy families, the group to which most of us belong.[163] For these, life brought its struggles, but they tended to function adequately. They experienced a certain degree of stability and consistency, but also feelings of fuzziness regarding themselves and their relationships. Deep down, they lacked confidence to the extent that they feared slipping back into this fuzziness. Consequently, they protected order and clarity with a rigid suppression of strong, disturbing feelings, walling themselves off and keeping a distance from their emotions, which in turn had the effect of leading to sharp divisions, particularly between the sexes; often a hierarchy existed in which one parent held the "reins" of decision making. Uncomfortable feelings were held in check in favour of finding more socially acceptable ways of expressing them, for example through acts of altruism or humour. Thus, an idealized picture of one's own family emerged, for

[162] Robin Skynner and John Cleese, *Life and How to Survive It*, (London, UK: Methuen-London, 1993), 7-34.

[163] Ibid., 39-52.

instance, “We’re never jealous in our family.” Communication was more careful and controlled. Adjustment to change was slower, and achieved with more difficulty, than in the very healthy group.

According to Skynner, unhealthy families make up the remaining twenty per cent of the population.[164] One of the more striking differences was that the people in this group did not maintain healthy boundaries between one’s own personality and emotions and those of the others. Relationships generally were controlling and engulfing, demanding and possessive. There was a lack of respect for another’s separate identity; people would try to read each other’s minds and felt they had the right to probe into each other’s affairs. There was little room for independent thought and no tolerance for failure to follow the family’s “party line;” to break from the family party line was to be considered a traitor, with no recognition of middle ground. This need to control each other, oddly perceived within the family as an expression of “love,” was an attempt to prevent separation; even the most destructive families were trying to preserve something considered good. One was allowed to be a little different perhaps, but not to separate. This involved repressing one’s own negative feelings, which led one to project those suppressed feelings on others. These families engaged in a game of “pass the parcel” in which one got rid of one’s problems and weaknesses by passing them on to someone else. Patterns developed in which the one who was least able to pass the parcel carried the blame for everything, and became the family scapegoat to suffer emotional expulsion. Family members were ill-equipped to adapt to big changes.

Among the approximately twenty-two CoSA core members with whom I worked during my time in Calgary, all of whom are men, without exception their stories of

[164] Skynner and Cleese, 35-38.

childhood, whether in families of origin, foster families, or reform schools, largely reflect memories of the third group, rife with similar unhealthy circumstances, including prolonged neglect, abuse or both. A clue to the remnant of their childhood reality is evident in a tendency I have observed frequently among them to manipulate, not circumstances but other people. Secondly, none has ever told me a story of a kind person who offered gentle guidance for dealing with the adverse circumstances and calamitous changes that life brings. For these people, there were no caring family members, neighbours, teachers or doctors emerging to model successful, responsible living. Here I believe I see the 'losers' in what David C. Korten refers to as the "five-thousand-year era of empire" in which people have had to learn to live with hierarchy, violence and desperation.[165] We may like to think that we rose above our own dire circumstances and so should others, but empire and privilege are designed to keep some down in failure—I strongly believe it is largely a matter of luck who ends up on which side of 'the tracks,' and there will always be people who just cannot cope well. If I can think of my life as successful, I cannot claim to have gotten here on my own steam, I had so much help. Some did not, and how they turned out is everyone's, that is, the system's legacy.

Gabor Maté states that healthy emotional input from parenting adults is necessary for the healthy development of the orbitofrontal cortex (frontal lobes) of the human brain, and that adverse experiences which interfere with such healthy input in a young life will lead to deficits in one's personal and social life later.[166] These deficits appear in the form

[165] Korten, 21.

[166] Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*, Electronic Edition: (Knopf Canada, 2009), 186-187.

of a reduced ability to anticipate consequences or to inhibit inappropriate behaviour. Picking up on the inappropriate behaviour of people who have offended sexually, Scheff and Retzinger offer an explanation reminiscent of that of Skynner: the lack of respect for another's separate identity with little room for independent thought results in an interplay of extremes between controlling and rejecting (Skynner); the lack of a secure bond that would give a sense of solidarity is linked to either a demanding, suffocating relationship or a distant and rejecting one (Schiff and Retzinger). For Schiff and Retzinger, the one master emotion at play in determining the nature of social relationships is shame.[167]

Schiff and Retzinger argue that in modern, western society, shame holds an extremely negative sense of disgrace and profound emotional pain; hence, it has become a severely repressed emotion in modern times. This repression both results in and is reinforced by our strong, cultural leaning towards individualism. Virtually dealing with life in isolation, one becomes ashamed of one's shame and hides it, which throws one into continuous loops of shame. For some who are field dependent, which is, influenced by group opinion in making judgements, they will be overtly experienced loops of shame-shame that would lead to withdrawal. For others who are field independent, that is, who do not yield to group opinion, they will be covert loops of shame-anger that undermine the route of self-awareness and lead to striking out.[168]

When either of these manifestations fall in the normal range of human experiences, they will be short-lived, lasting only a few seconds. However, if they persist

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[167] Schiff and Retzinger, under "Shame as the Master Emotion."

[168] Ibid., under "Causation of Sexual Assault: A Theory."

over time, they will take on a cloak of pathology, as in the case of sexual offenders.[169] Ashamed of their sexual desires, they feel humiliated, powerless, rejected and angry. Ashamed that they are angry and angry that they are ashamed, they sink into a shame-anger loop that leads to compulsive violence. They project their feelings of rejection and humiliation on their victim, and attempt to humiliate and dominate in return.[170]

Restorative justice engages mimetic desire in a way that everyone seeks the same thing without rivalry—the well-being of the community and every individual that lives in it. A Circle of Support and Accountability helps the former offender in two ways relevant to the work of both Skynner and Schiff and Retzinger: first, by serving as a mimetic model of the elements of successful living as described by Robin Skynner; second, by confronting negative attitudes and behaviours. Part of a core member's strategy of relapse prevention includes learning to recognize apparently insignificant decisions that have the potential to cause the person to slip back in his/her crime cycle. The Circle offers a safe platform on which issues of shame, as they signal a threat to social bonding,[171] can be brought into the light and dealt with in a healthy way. As Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger argue, repressed shame can be detected by paying attention to visual, verbal and nonverbal cues.[172] Over time, the Circle learns to pick up such cues and help the core member to circumvent the old pattern that in the past might have led to another crime. As examples from my working experience with Circles, one core member would unexpectedly miss one or more meeting(s), another would arrive

[169] Schiff and Retzinger, under "Shame as the Master Emotion."

[170] Ibid., under "Causation of Sexual Assault: A Theory."

[171] Ibid., under "A Theory of Social Bonds."

[172] Ibid., under "Shame as the Master Emotion."

looking disheveled, another would speak of being bored, and another would speak of loneliness. In each of these Circles the participants, including the core member, learned to recognize and challenge these maladaptive indicators.

In the preceding study, we can see the core of mimetic desire in childhood by which some first learn unhealthy relationships, and the ensuing development of mimetic, rivalry and scapegoating in adulthood. In the case of sexual offences, the original object of desire is not the victim *per se* but what the victim is presumed to have—the opposite of shame, that is, *honour*, *pride*, and *respect*. In rapid, compulsive progression to violent mimetic rivalry, the wrongly perceived cause of the offender's shame, the innocent victim, becomes the scapegoat, paying the price for the offender's distress over lacking honour, pride and respect. Working to counteract former violent behaviour patterns in the spirit of patient and trustworthy community building, CoSA volunteers provide a new healthy model for a core member motivated to change his/her life patterns.

The CoSA Volunteer

With the rise in acceptance of restorative justice as a movement complementary to the more traditional, retributive approach to justice in Canada's correctional system, an increasing interest in the offender-community dynamic is emerging, and with it a budding focus on the community volunteers that take part in restorative justice programs. To date, the primary intention behind researching volunteers has been primarily to enhance Canadian communities' ability to attract and retain an adequate number of volunteers to cope with the expected growth in restorative justice projects in the future. Such is the

focus of a study conducted by Karen A. Souza and Mandeep K. Dhami.[173] Souza and Dhami engaged in a quantitative study of seventy-six volunteers in a variety of restorative justice programs in British Columbia to identify their characteristics, their motivation, skills, training, and their satisfaction with their roles. A profile emerged in which they found that volunteers tended to be Caucasian women in their 50s with a university education who were working or had worked in helping professions such as counseling, social work or teaching. Their motivations for becoming involved in restorative justice included an association with religion, a dissatisfaction with the traditional criminal justice system, personal values such as forgiveness and healing and, for younger people, related career exploration. A general commitment to volunteerism, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and volunteer appreciation all contributed to satisfaction in their work. In their conclusion, Souza and Dhami suggest further research is needed to identify factors involved in volunteers' original decisions to become involved in restorative justice programs as well as what influences them to continue service and increase their level of commitment over time.

Aside from Souza and Dhami's study, there has been little attention paid to CoSA volunteers in North America, but related research projects are now emerging in Europe. Among published reports, some articles, written by volunteers themselves,[174] offer advice to new and prospective volunteers. Other professionals such as educators and prison

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[173] Karen A. Souza and Mandeep K. Dhami, "A study of volunteers in community-based restorative justice programs," in *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 50, no. 1 (January 2008), http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-7877582/A-Study-of-volunteers-in.html (accessed January 14, 2008).

[174] John Charlton, "Restorative justice and CoSA," in *Restorative Directions Journal* 1 no. 1 (May 2005): 12-13; Don Chisolm, "Working with Released Offenders: Points to Ponder," *Restorative Directions Journal* 1 no. 1 (May 2005): 37.

chaplains offer historical views and current social and religious justifications for the restorative approach,[175] all of which may be instrumental in attracting prospective volunteers, but add little to our understanding of personal volunteer experience.

An exception to the usual information sought in research came in the form of a plenary address made by a CoSA volunteer at the Fall, 2008 meeting of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. Linda Rathjen answered the typical questions—who she and the other circle volunteers are, what her motivation and experience are, et cetera.[176] But in the opportunity to tell her story in her own words, her listeners learned so much more—they learned *what the experience was like for her*. Rathjen told several stories: about the first time the circle met their core member while he was still in prison; the first day of release; the mix of fear and humour when a well-endowed woman walked past the circle on day two; details around the opening and growing of their intentional friendship, as well as some of the challenges and disappointments along the way. These are the stories that open a window to the CoSA volunteer experience, that give valuable information on how CoSA works, and how it works well.

In 2005, CoSA Calgary engaged in an evaluation of the program in which volunteers were interviewed.[177] Comments regarding their motivations were personal, such as wanting to expand on their volunteer and occupational experience, as much as

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[175] Rod Carter, "A Justice That Restores," in *Restorative Justice: A Christian Perspective* (Kingston ON: Restorative justice Program, Queens Theological College, 2001): 4-5; Evan Heise, "The Roots of Restorative justice in the Christian Faith Tradition," in *Restorative Justice: A Christian Perspective* (Kingston ON: Restorative justice Program, Queens Theological College, 2001):19-22.

[176] Linda Rathjen, "Calm in the Eye of the Storm: Circles of Support and Accountability," plenary address given at a conference the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers in the Fall of 2008, reprinted in *The Forum* (Spring 2009), 8-11.

[177] Community Justice Ministries, "Circles of Support and Accountability: Qualitative Evaluation," Spring 2005, Mennonite Central Committee Alberta. A copy of this evaluation is available in the Calgary CoSA office.

social, as in “giving back to the community.” In describing their experiences as volunteers, they used words like satisfaction, challenge, disappointment, commitment and warmth—all words that inspire questions about the stories that prompted their use. It was clear that some were involved as followers of the Christian tradition, using phrases like what “real Kingdom ministry should be,” working “where God has called me,” and “body of Christ is alive.” All of these comments, taken out of context, might have been referring to any volunteer program. In order to understand them as meaningful in the CoSA context, one needs to listen to the personal stories behind them, stories that reveal the volunteers’ experience of the circle.

Chapter 4: Methodology

> The task of prophetic ministry is to evoke an alternative community that knows it is about different things in different ways. And that alternative community has a variety of relationships with the dominant community.
>
> —Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

Theoretical Approach

I have approached my research from the philosophical point of view that the experiences of CoSA volunteers, and the meanings they draw from them, can enlighten the field of knowledge of the essence of the CoSA phenomenon. I have identified strongly with the paradigm John Creswell and others have called social constructivism[178] in that I have sought the complexity of views of CoSA volunteers from several projects across Canada through the lens of hermeneutical phenomenology.[179] The philosophical assumptions I have embraced in the phenomenological approach are: we embark on a "search for wisdom" rather than empirical science; we suspend all presuppositions in order to access the *experience of the participants*; the reality of the experience under study is inseparably related to the consciousness of the one having the experience; the

[178] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, second edition, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007) 20-21.

[179] See page 9, note 12.

reality of the experience “is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual,” precluding the philosophical notion of the subject-object dichotomy.[180]

Design

Seeking the Essence of the CoSA Relationship

When people learn about CoSA for the first time, it often seems to be clouded in a discomfiting mystery in terms of how or why such a program might 'work.' In my personal experience, some might almost imperceptibly recoil, protesting that they could not do it. Even among people who are attracted to one session of orientation, some have reasons not to advance further into CoSA's world: we cannot just forget about the victims (that is, CoSA puts too much emphasis on offenders); it looks like a tremendous "waste of human resources" (that is, a really good program would have four or five people helping a hundred offenders). I have even seen eyes simply glaze over with incomprehension at the mere mention of such a strange endeavour.

Nevertheless, people familiar with CoSA recognize that it contributes effectively to lower recidivism rates among high risk offenders with sexual crimes in their pasts. The secret of its success cannot lie merely in the practical matters of reintegration such as housing, employment, or relapse prevention plans, as there are several community offices and agencies that assist in these areas. The one, remarkable difference between CoSA and the other organizations is that CoSA is intentionally all about relationship. If we seek

[180] Creswell, 57-59.

to know more about why CoSA is successful, it is necessary to explore the nature of the CoSA relationship.

The Research Question

The purpose of the study, then, was to contribute to our knowledge of the essence of the CoSA relationship. Much of what I knew beforehand about CoSA circles and the volunteers I learned through observation and participation as a co-coordinator of the project in Calgary. On the surface, regular meetings are about attending to the practical, daily details, from crisis to celebration, of working through the task of re-integration. On a deeper level, as the core member develops a new life of safe, responsible behaviour, relationship is developing. From a training perspective, we call it an intentional friendship—both volunteers and core members are encouraged to enter into a relationship of openness and honesty so as to foster mutual trust.

Greatly encouraged by the comments I had heard from core members, I anticipated that CoSA volunteers also do indeed experience friendship with their core members to some degree, and that they understand what I mean by terms like friendship and volunteering, friend and volunteer. The research question I chose to pursue was:

How does a volunteer in a Circle of Support and Accountability experience friendship within the circle?

A brief discussion of the two terms 'volunteer' and 'friendship' demonstrates their similarities and differences. They both, for instance, evoke a sense of positive feelings of good will toward ‘the other,’ but in different ways, as these two quotes illustrate: “Those

who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer" (Author unknown);[181] and "Friendship is one mind in two bodies" (Mencius, a Chinese philosopher).[182] On the one hand, volunteering is very much a 'doing' phenomenon, involving working on behalf of other(s) as an altruistic, uni-directional behaviour. Friendship, on the other hand, is more of a 'being' phenomenon involving an interpersonal, reciprocal relationship of mutual understanding and compassion. Etymologically, the word volunteer is rooted in the concept of will, while friendship is rooted in the concept of love. A third concept that lies perhaps somewhere between the two is expressed in the term 'friendly,' which denotes a favorable disposition, an inclination toward approval, kindness, and supportive action. This suggests that as a volunteer, one could be quite friendly in one's doing without crossing over into the full status of being a friend.

I was assuming that both concepts have an archetypal quality to them in that 'everyone' knows what they mean and how they differ from each other. At the same time, I wanted to discover the individual meanings that the volunteers have drawn from their own unique experiences as both friend and volunteer within the CoSA concept. Embedded within the central question were a few subsidiary questions: How does the relationship between core member and volunteer develop over time? How has the volunteer been affected by the CoSA experience? How do the roles of volunteer and friend intersect within a CoSA Circle?

[181] The Quote Garden, http://www.quotegarden.com/volunteer-apprec.html (accessed April 19, 2013).

[182] Good Reads, http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/34156-friendship-is-one-mind-in-two-bodies (accessed April 19, 2013).

The Interview Questions

With this in mind, as John Creswell,[183] Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricial Leavy[184] have suggested, I intended that the interviews be semi-structured, that is, I asked the same four questions of each participant. I left them as open ended as possible within the allotted interview time restrictions, giving them the opportunity to choose how to express their experience. In the interviews, I asked four questions (see Appendix B-1). The first two asked for pre-reflective stories:

1. *Please describe the circumstances that led you to become involved in CoSA.* I expected that this would give some information as to the participants' 'personhood' before CoSA. With the focus on the period just before becoming a volunteer, I would also hear the language the participants use to talk about volunteering alone.

2. *Please talk about one of your most memorable experiences in CoSA; what happened, and how did you experience it?* Here, I intended to give the opportunity for the participants to talk about the stories they most wanted to tell, what was most meaningful for them.

The third and fourth questions asked for some reflection on the participants' experiences:

3. *Would you say that, since your relationship with your core member began, you yourself have changed? If so, how?*

4. *How would you say friendship and volunteering intersect in a CoSA Circle?* For the first time, I was asking the participants to consider directly how, if at all, the notions of

[183] Creswell, 43.

[184] Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006) 126-128.

volunteering and friendship intersect in their personal experience; this was the place I, as researcher, truly became an 'outsider,' as I have no volunteer experience in CoSA. To offer a starting point, the participants were shown a pictorial version of four possible answers (see Appendix B-2), and asked if any of the pictures were meaningful for them, and if so, how.

After several interviews, I realized that I was experiencing some difficulty in connecting with the answers I was hearing from the participants. The problem was that the original research question, how does the volunteer experience friendship, seemed to be based on a misguided assumption, since not all of the participants did feel that they had experienced friendship. However, the answers they gave to the interview questions were revealing much information about the nature of their CoSA relationship. They did all experience friendliness, and did not argue strongly against the notion of friendship. I continued to ask the same questions, more consciously open to the general nature of the relationship as they were describing it.

Ethical Issues

The most immediate ethical consideration was for the protection of the welfare of participant interviewees. This was firstly accomplished through adequate explanation (deemed to be so by the interviewee) of the research and its purpose as well as the interview process, through the introductory letter (see Appendix A-1) and the informed consent form (see Appendix A-2), which was signed by each participant at the beginning of each interview. Thus, the use to be made of the material gleaned, assurance of

confidentiality, assurance of the right to stop one's participation at any time for any reason, assurance that recordings will be destroyed, and empowerment of the interviewee to give informed consent were all made clear and agreed to.

A second ethical consideration arose from the "backyard" nature of my relationship to the research. As a former staff member and co-coordinator of the CoSA program in Calgary, I was actively involved in the recruitment, screening, training, and ongoing support and supervision of volunteers; also, my colleague and I shared facilitation of circle work in a hands-on fashion. This factor demanded my vehement attention to 'bracketing' my own previous experiences, opinions and assumptions, which I accomplished in personal journaling, consultations with colleagues, and follow-up contact with interviewees.

A third ethical consideration, already mentioned in my assurances, deserves separate attention. I was deeply concerned with issues of confidentiality, not only for the volunteers but also for the core members with whom they had been working; unintentional disclosure of confidential material can be dangerous for a person who has offended sexually. It was very important for me to assure participants of confidentiality regarding any information they would share. The purpose of my research was not primarily to seek out quotable personal quotes but rather to gather experiences in a more general way, however, in the case that some unique phrase proved helpful for understanding, permission to quote the speaker was sought specifically; otherwise, story details were generalized or altered in minor ways in order to maintain confidentiality. I alone handled the interview recordings, transcripts, and analysis materials. In the case

that there was any doubt about using material from the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to be consulted later personally.

Because of the nature of the CoSA relationships, volunteers can find themselves in a vulnerable position; just as when things go very well everyone shares in the celebration, when things go wrong, such as a breach of conditions in community supervision or in the case of a new offence, everyone shares in the disappointment. This can lead to feelings of discomfort, anxiety, fatigue, guilt, self-doubt, or a misplaced sense of responsibility. The personal wellbeing and dignity of participants was of prime importance during the interview process; I relied on my ministry training to have equipped me to deal with such matters with compassion and support. Finally, the study was undertaken with the understanding that, in light of the above considerations, its benefits will include deep attention to the largely unheard voices of CoSA volunteers and a meaningful contribution to the advance of knowledge regarding the reintegration process of former offenders.

Procedure

Data Collection

Data collection took place in three phases, beginning with an initial introduction in personal or by email. Secondly, for the personal interviews. I traveled to the area of each CoSA site to meet with them in their own surroundings. Thirdly, I requested permission for follow-up contact by telephone or email for clarification of data as needed.

Personal interviews with CoSA volunteers comprised the primary strategy for data collection. In order to gain access to participants, I needed the help of program coordinators to pass my invitation on to them. By phone and email, I contacted four coordinators, in different cities in three provinces, to begin recruiting participants according to the criteria I had chosen;[185] in each case, the coordinator responded willingly. I also made three attempts to contact a CoSA coordinator in the State of Minnesota in order to broaden the sample, but did not receive a response. Meanwhile, back in Canada, in some cases, the coordinator forwarded both my introductory letter and the informed consent form to prospective participants, who in turn contacted me themselves. In other cases, the coordinator selected willing participants and pre-arranged the interviews on my behalf. Either way, all participants received the introductory material well before their interview times. Each participant had an opportunity for questions, then signed a copy of the informed consent form at the time of the interview.

Participants included fifteen CoSA volunteers who have been on at least one continuing circle for a minimum of one year, ensuring that they knew well the CoSA experience. Of these, seven were male and eight female, six were under the age of thirty, four were between the ages of thirty and sixty, and five were over the age of sixty. Three were involved in circles in Alberta, four in Manitoba, four in Eastern Ontario and four in central Ontario. Nine were currently on their first circle, and six had served on more than one, three of whom on four or more. Five had served on CoSA circles for one year, four for two years, three for five or more years, and two for more than ten years. Some came to CoSA with previous experience in helping professions such as ministry or counseling,

[185] For the letters sent to the coordinators, see Appendix A.

some had previous experience working with incarcerated individuals, some were familiar with legal matters, and some had previous volunteer experience.

In addition to these fifteen participants, I did interview one person who was in the training process to prepare for a first circle experience. This person had contacted me to arrange an interview time, neither of us realizing that my intended selection criteria were not being met. Both of us had traveled long distances to meet; we went ahead with the interview, and the participant contributed valuable information regarding the process of choosing to be a CoSA volunteer.

How and why these people joined CoSA varied. Several heard about CoSA in their school programs, some through their church communities, and others through circumstances in their personal lives. They may have learned about CoSA through a person-to-person invitation, from a public presentation, or through their own reading practice. Some were attracted to the program because of their personal beliefs in ideas such as giving someone a leg up, second chances, or the innate ability of every person to lead a healthy life. Others were attracted because of its social value, such as its different approach to crime and rehabilitation, (in the words of one) "its greater promise for reintegration and a healthier society," attending to a neglected area in our society, preventing new victimization, or simply helping people who want to change. For some, it was as simple as "a need to help others." Whatever brought them into the CoSA world, they were all enthusiastic about sharing the story.

In the interviews, participants generally found the first and fourth questions to be rather straightforward and relatively easy to answer. The second and third, however, often did not draw direct responses. For the second question, I found it helped to engage

the participants in a conversational style to evoke memories that were important to them. Responses to both the second and the third questions revealed the reality that CoSA volunteers are not used to being asked for questions directly about themselves and their experiences, as typically the CoSA focus is on the program itself and the reintegration process of core members. For these, I found Creswell's idea of an "evolving design"[186] with occasional updating to be helpful. In like manner, as interviews progressed, I adapted my wordings, especially in the third question, including references to changes over time that they had perceived in the relationship.

Data Analysis

I transcribed each of the sixteen recordings personally. I then engaged in a spiral process of listening to all of the recordings, skimming the transcripts, reading the transcripts more carefully, extracting significant statements as regards the interview questions, and noting emerging units of meaning and themes, and then repeating the entire process in order to deepen my understanding of what the participants had told me. In this pattern of pausing and reflecting, following the suggestion of Hesse-Biber and Leavy,[187] I was able, then, to begin the integrated, fluid process of looking for significant statements, meaning units, and themes. The final step was to reassemble the thematic elements into an expression of the essence of the CoSA relationship.

[186] Creswell, 45.

[187] Hesse-Biber and Leavy , 358.

Eventually, a number of themes relating to the experiences of the participants began to emerge. I continued with this process until I became more certain of which themes would lead to a vision of the essence of the CoSA relationship. As my certainty became more established, I checked back with resources I had accessed previously[188] in order to seek similarities and contrasts with my own research material, and consulted with colleagues, and further with research participants, to help me discern more accurately what the participants said unadulterated by pre-conceived assumptions.

In data analysis, I made use of two organizational models for reflection. Firstly, I focused on the colloquial language used by the interview participants in describing their lived experience of volunteering on a CoSA circle. This idea came to me from Don Cuppit,[189] whose theory of religion began with gathering as many idioms as he could and then determining the most commonly used, which in his case turned out to be 'life' and 'it all.' Cuppitt notes[190] that ordinary language pays no attention to words that have been officially assigned to the religious experience, but rather it is fluid, imprecise and ultimately practical in expressing people's existential confidence in life. Similarly, I believed that attention to the colloquial language of the participants would lead me towards the theory of the unique that I sought, to hear what individuals were saying about their experience—what it is like to volunteer on a CoSA circle; what the nature is of the relationship between volunteer and core member.

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[188] See "The CoSA Volunteer," pages 73–75.

[189] Don Cuppitt, *The Way to Happiness*, (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2005) 1- 13.

[190] Ibid., 16-19.

Secondly, Max van Manen[191] has outlined four "existentials" that are helpful themes for reflecting on the phenomenon of volunteering on a CoSA circle. The first is "lived space," or *spaciality*. Circle meetings can take place in a variety of spaces, from restaurants and food courts to churches, offices, and private homes. I was looking for indications whether or not the space in which meetings take place has an influence on the experience in terms of volunteering or friendship. The second is "lived body," or *corporeality*. This is of particular interest in CoSA because a core member's crime is likely to have involved inappropriate bodily contact; how this kind of consideration influences CoSA relationships will be of valuable interest to the study. The third is "lived time" or *temporality*. While the core member is busy confronting past experiences and making changes for the future, I believe what the volunteer is experiencing over the course of a year or more on a circle will be of key interest in deepening our understanding of the process. The final theme is "lived human relation," or *relationality/communality*. This, of course, is the issue: what is it like to welcome, even befriend, a person who has offended sexually and is trying to rebuild a safe, responsible lifestyle? These four existentials would provide the basic structure for my reflections and writing.

The final step was writing a narrative that included both a "textural description" about what happened and a "structural description" about setting and context that, when brought together, led me to the essence of the experience of relationship between volunteers and core members within CoSA. From there I drew several relevant conclusions.

[191] van Manen, 101-106.

Validation

On the one hand, the sample selection was specific, limited to volunteers in four local CoSA projects out of the approximately twenty that operate across Canada. On the other hand, within the specific sample, participants were balanced in terms of gender, age category, number of circles served, and length of experience. Triangulation was an elusive prospect, with few additional sources of data available. Nevertheless, I believe that my previous training in ministry, chaplaincy and spiritual direction gave me the interpersonal communication skills necessary to make a genuine connection with participants from which substantial, verisimilar data could emerge. As researcher, I remained oriented to the 'world' of CoSA as a phenomenon of relationship in which such notions as volunteering and friendship are relevant and significant. When I began my experience with CoSA, I originally applied to be a volunteer, but at the same time CoSA Calgary had just received new funding to hire another staff member. As it turned out, I never did become a volunteer because I was asked to apply for the position and was hired. Consequently, as CoSA staff I bring 'insider' experience to the position of researcher, but I am ultimately an 'outsider' regarding the volunteer experience. My long-term involvement with CoSA in Calgary has given me the advantage of knowing the CoSA culture well and recognizing important data for the purpose of the study. At the same time, it has carried the potential for disadvantage in that I embarked on the study with built-in biases and preconceived assumptions. In the spirit of *epoché,* that is, 'suspension of judgment,' I outlined some of these in Chapter 2. Others came clear to me as my research progressed; overall, I have openly noted places where I experienced

personal growth in understanding alongside what I was hearing, and have further revealed my orientation through the quotes that lead off chapters 1 - 5. Accordingly, I confined the content of Chapter 5, where I seek to outline a description of the essence of the CoSA relationship, to information gleaned directly from the participants.

Parts of my personality, for example my tendency to move quickly from the personal to the social, and to forgive easily so to look favourably on people, might have challenged my ability to hear well what the participants were saying, and had to be held in check through the interview process. Because I had my own answers to the interview questions, it was important to 'bracket' my experiences and give participants as much freedom as possible to tell their own stories through open-ended questions. Maintaining a self-reflective journal throughout the process helped me differentiate between my own story and that of the volunteers. To ensure the reliability of my interpretations, I consulted along the way with three colleagues external to yet familiar with CoSA, sharing findings during the writing stage, for assessing both the integrity of my work and the desired level of resonance with intended readers. Similarly, as my preliminary analyses began to take shape, I shared rough drafts with research participants who expressed an interest, seeking their reflections and suggestions on accuracy and language**.** This proved very fruitful, as they all offered useful comments and suggestions that helped to improve my writing.

Chapter 5: Presentation of Data

> Everybody just wants to feel good. Consciously or unconsciously, every living thing moves through time trying to feel more complete, more satisfied, than the moment before. From the tiniest germ's struggle for survival to the wisest being's search for enlightenment, life on Earth is a matter of doing our time according to our very best guesses . . .
>
> We *could* live our lives as a continuing process of adventure and discovery—that is, staying sharp enough to find the secret of making every choice a good one; one that helps rather than hurts us. But instead, we tend to bury ourselves in work or play in order to avoid facing the mystery. Or we may try to do *easy* time via booze or drugs. And many of us freak out or lash out, through self-destructive behavior ranging from mere rudeness to mass murder.
>
> Robbing a bank or killing somebody may sound like a crazy way to go about feeling good, yet that's what lies at the root of it. The robber hopes to steal some contentment; the murderer tries to destroy his own unbearable pain of separateness. And let's face it: Societies and governments have done much the same, on a far bigger scale . . .
>
> And here we are again . . .
>
> Whoever and wherever we are, in or out of prison—we're *all* doing hard time until we find freedom inside ourselves.
>
> —Bo Lozoff, *WE'RE ALL DOING TIME: a guide for getting free*

It was gratifying to feel the enthusiasm of the volunteers who responded to requests for interviews. I had asked for only three people from each site, but in two places four came to speak with me and I actually spoke with five people from one location. All participants were fully forthcoming in relating their experiences. I was struck by their unwavering support for the CoSA program and by the high regard, to a person, in which they held their core members. Even with all the challenges and flaws they had

encountered in CoSA environment, they expressed their unfailing belief that they were participating in the most successful avenue for reintegrating former offenders and reducing recidivism rates.

In moving from particulars toward higher levels of abstraction,[192] I expected to find, not a single image of the experience of CoSA volunteers, but an intricate fabric of surprises and unusual angles alongside some of the common experiences that might be expected when we speak of volunteering and friendship. Because of my extensive experience with CoSA, as previously mentioned, I engaged in detailed journaling throughout the interview process, as well as in my early analysis, in order to separate my own answers to the questions from those of the participants. I found that there were two major areas in which I had held preconceived assumptions that needed to be set apart from what I was hearing. The first was my basic assumption that the CoSA relationship is a static phenomenon. I believe this may have taken shape when I was discerning my research topic, and I heard core members referring so often to their volunteers as friends; this caused me to wonder how the volunteers would describe their relationships with their core members. Thus, my starting point was designed around a static image that was coloured by the notion of friendship. In contrast to where I was beginning, though, what I found among the interview participants collectively was a very dynamic image in which the relationships varied greatly over time. As it turned out, the temporal development of the relationship became a major theme of my data analysis.

The second matter was possibly not so much an assumption, but a question: did the demographics traditionally thought of as influential play a significant role in the experience of the CoSA relationship? I imagined that I might have been able to guess

[192] Creswell, 46.

how each demographic category would give rise to predictable statements, but I was mistaken. For each of the general themes that were emerging, I checked the data for demographic categories among the participants, and found, somewhat to my surprise, that, for the most part, they did not play a significant role in the participants' experiences, except for one area.

Generally, the four existential themes that I had chosen to help me sort through the data worked well in bringing to light the major themes of the CoSA experiences being explored. The one exception was in the area of corporeality. When CoSA coordinators are gathering people to volunteer on a circle, much care is taken to not include anyone who would fit in to the target group of the particular core member; for example, a young woman would never be placed on a circle where the core member had previously committed offenses against young women. In the basic training, prospective volunteers are taught to exercise great care in their choices regarding such things as sharing telephone numbers and addresses, meeting people one on one, and other possibly inappropriate behaviors; usually in the beginning, sharing of personal information is strongly discouraged. Generally speaking, attention to corporeality would be a clear but conceivably subtle undercurrent in preparing volunteers for participation in a circle. I believe then, it was in keeping with the character of CoSA that corporeality itself did not emerge as a significant theme. One participant, however, a gentleman in the over-sixty age group who had served on several circles, did refer to sharing an embrace with his core members as one way of describing how they progressed from an apprehensive stance toward a mutual friendliness. For this person, concerns for personal safety were

not an overwhelming influence in their interactions. Otherwise, I found no discernible correlation between demographics and circle experiences.

Interview Results

From the transcripts of the sixteen interviews, 355 significant, 'raw' statements were extracted that related to the general nature of the CoSA phenomenon. Then from these, 272 were further selected out for being specifically pertinent to the CoSA relationship between volunteer and core member. While each of these statements was made as part of a participant's direct response to specific questions being asked of them, the contents of comments and statements were also founded on meanings participants had assigned to the experience of the relationship. In the endeavour to grasp the essence of the relationship, it was necessary to relax direct attention to the interview questions and focus on the data presented as it was grounded in the consciousness of each participant. With this in mind, the idea in each statement was reformulated as a 'piece' of meaning in order to draw out themes pertaining to the essence of the relationship as the participants were experiencing it. By way of example, Table 5.1 lists six of the spoken statements and the meanings taken from them.

The meaning pieces were gathered into groups of similarity, refined and merged into unique units, and then finally, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, regrouped into theme categories. Table 5.2 contains two examples of established themes; in the first, the last three meaning pieces in Table 5.1, which noted three different emotional perspectives, led off the theme of *Emotional Investment*; the second example demonstrates how several

diverse and sometimes seemingly contradictory meaning pieces fell under the common theme of *Spaciality*. One theme that did not emerge directly from the scrutiny of meaning pieces was that of *Naming the Relationship*, although a considerable amount of time was dedicated to this discussion; in this case, I worked directly from quotes. Overall, the labels suggested in those discussions and the reformulated statements of meaning were gathered into seven main themes, some of which included multiple sub-themes.

Table 5.1 From Spoken Statements to Meaning Pieces

Original Statement	Reformulation for Meaning
"Because it's no longer just an intellectual idea on my wish list . . . finally I'm engaged . . . and helping one particular person who has obviously benefitted from our involvement with him over the last couple of years."	The relationship transforms intellectual knowledge into personal experience.
"A few of us went fishing . . . we didn't talk, we just fished. And it was just relaxing, and just really meaningful to be there with this calm, running stream."	The relationship deepens significantly in events that happen outside of regular circle meetings.
"And it was really cool because he was able to advise me, like, he was able to help me . . . usually, if you think of volunteering with core members, you're trying to help them with their problems."	Over time, the relationship takes on the characteristic of reciprocity.
" . . . because he recently went through a full treatment program, and he invited me to his graduation. And I felt quite honoured, that he invited me."	Volunteers respond emotionally to significant experiences.
"They are so incredibly scared when they leave prison—you just want to try and make things a little bit easier for them . . . I've met enough . . . people who weren't generally accepted by society . . . you really have to get to know several people who have done these terrible things and realize how vulnerable they are."	Volunteers feel empathy for the emotions of core members.
"But eventually he started to come around and even said please. We felt that was a small victory to be celebrated. So we do, as is usual in circles, we celebrate the small victories."	Volunteers experience delight when core members make changes toward positive attitudes away from negative postures.

Table 5.2 Regrouping Meaning Units into Themes

Emotional Investment	*Spaciality*
• Volunteers respond emotionally to significant experiences • Volunteers feel empathy for the emotions of core members • Volunteers experience delight when core members exchange positive attitudes for negative postures • Volunteers worry about their core members' futures • Volunteers care deeply, even through troubled times • Volunteers sometimes feel drained by circumstances, but remain faithful • Volunteers take pride in their involvement • Occasional feelings of betrayal do not cause the volunteers to leave • Volunteers admire their core members for their positive characteristics	• Certain places, certain events are out of bounds • Being alone with a core member is sometimes disallowed • The relationship deepens significantly in events that happen outside of regular circle meetings • Outdoor activities are particularly meaningful • One-on-one meetings are significant experiences • Group activities reveal the potential good of core members, counteracting stereotypes • Group activities engender and enhance a sense of community

Theme 1: Temporality

'Lived time' played a key role in the stories of people's experiences in CoSA. All fifteen participants currently serving on one or more circles had been involved for at least a year, some for several years. Thus, many of their statements had chronological significance. As many as five 'stages' in their relationships became apparent, four of which will be summarized here, and the fifth in a later section.

a) Anticipating the Stranger: It was clear that the volunteers had not entered the CoSA program without careful consideration. Several spoke of a certain level of anxiety in the beginning: "I was kind of nervous… I was a little bit worried;" or, "I was quite reluctant initially." Some entered the scene with more related experience than others;

even among those who had worked with offenders before, there was some recognition of a new set of circumstances. As one experienced person put it, "Most of these guys were sex abusers coming out—that was different." Whether they were experiencing mild uncertainty or a stronger sense of apprehension, explanations for their feelings were vague, such as in, "it's these people that are coming out of jail," or "CoSA works with the most high risk offenders." Exactly what it was about 'these people' was left unsaid, as though the speaker was assuming that I understood.

Whatever the quality of anticipation, participants spoke of their intentions to join the circle with a sense of openness. When asked if, in the beginning, he would have guessed that he would later be bringing his core member to his home, one interviewee responded, "Well I try not to anticipate too many things ahead of time, to go into things with an open mind." Others spoke of their commitment to accept the core members simply "where they're at."

b) Approaching the Stranger: Starkly different backgrounds often challenged the formation of relationship. Early on, the realization of this may have imposed an awkwardness on the situation; one participant, for example, commented that some core members come out of prison "with a hard shell." However, as time passed the walls of stranger-to-stranger would begin to fall. On the part of the volunteers, they began to notice how utterly vulnerable the core members were. Feeling deep compassion for core members' fears, at the same time they detected in them a sense of both hope and joy: in community activities, said one, "they're hopeful human beings, could be joyful, and happy and talking, and wanting to do something." Also, another related her unexpected

observation about CoSA itself, "It didn't really feel like any sort of formal volunteer program."

Some began to experience a conflict with images they had encountered previously, for example, "I had trouble reconciling the photos on the front pages of the newspaper with the group of people I spent time with that week." In moving away from initial misgivings, then, some were able to name them: "I expected a certain stereotype and my core member does not fit the stereotype at all." Seeing their core members' growth in positive, social environments inspired corresponding good feelings in the volunteers.

Observations of their core members continued to draw the participants into relationship with them. They may have had to spend a short time in jail for breaches of conditions, but they were not returning to lives of crime. Their history continued to be a matter not forgotten, but ceased to be a source of fear or rejection. Finally, the volunteers were attracted by the core members' strong motivation: "they are people who are wanting to change, or wanting to move on in their life, you know, and . . . if that's what they want to do, I'm going to be there to help them."

c) Building Relationship: Eventually, positive relationships developed with gratifying rapport: "It sort of became a fairly easy relationship." Holding things in common, such as love of animals, nature, music and faith matters, even senses of humour, encouraged mutual bonding. Often the first signs of established relationship were based on the core member's learning to trust his volunteers; "[Core member] has grown to trust us over time." This development was consistently portrayed by participants as being more important to them than the reverse; remarkably, not one

participant mentioned trusting the core member as a primary need or step toward relationship. Along with the building of trust, as core members improved in social skills, a level of reciprocal caring was cultivated. Participants talked about ways in which their core member heard and cared about their own stories of such things as illness, obligations, or plans. They spoke directly of times when they had been cared for by their core members, for example, “He sent me a text saying good luck tomorrow." Social activities such as anniversary dinners, milestone celebrations, camping, and bowling, were hailed often as significant relationship-building events. Participants' descriptions of their more established relationships will be summarized under the section *Theme 5: Describing the Relationship*.

d) Long-lasting Relationship: The interviews made clear that the CoSA relationship has every possibility of continuing long after the formal circle has stopped meeting regularly: "It was totally finished. And there has still been, even to this day, there's still contact." People who were in circles whose formal structure was coming to an end suggested they would like to continue on with the relationship. One person told me enthusiastically, in spite of the fact that circumstances were changing, "I like this circle . . . I like doing it, so I'm going to continue!" Some individuals speculated that their core member would always need a circle, either from the point of view of "unfortunately," or " . . . I really like that it’s a possibility." While not every circle lasted indefinitely, participants spoke of them as though the possibility of reconnection was always assumed.

Theme 2: Spaciality

Participants indicated that it matters where meetings happen and who attends them. Spaces for the weekly, formal circle meetings are chosen carefully, in places where privacy can be maintained, often either in the CoSA office or in a church. In these meetings, much of the 'business' of reintegration is dealt with, reviewing everyone's week, challenges and victories, probing and celebrating what is happening in the core member's life.

Several interview participants indicated that their relationships had deepened significantly in events that happened outside of regular circle meetings. One person commented, "I have more of a circle discussion with individuals when we're [running errands], or when we're mopping the floor, or when we're walking down the street to get a cup of coffee than actually sitting in the formal group." Outside the formal meetings, being alone with the core members is sometimes disallowed, but for those who are allowed to meet one-on-one, these are meaningful experiences. One spoke of one-on-ones: "There were a couple of times when I had one-on-one talks with [core member] . . . just that sense of being able to give [core member] . . . something of more substance that he could relate to . . . those are two really memorable, particular moments."

Commonly, group activities away from the meetings were also personally significant to volunteers. They would bring "a sense of community, and fellowship" with the capacity to reveal the potential good of core members, counteracting the standard stereotypes. Certain places and certain events were out of bounds, such as those where

alcohol is served, where there would be children, or other places that would be deemed inappropriate. Outdoor activities such as bar-be-cues were particularly meaningful.

Two other kinds of meetings away were cited as particularly important to the relationship. One might happen when volunteers support their core members by attending court appearances, and even visiting a core member doing some time in jail. Lastly, when the relationship is well established, core members may be invited to the home of one of their volunteers. One participant commented on her experience of this: "He was so taken aback by the fact that we had invited him into our home . . . he said this has never happened before. Like, He got teary-eyed. That really hit home, like, it meant so much to him."

Theme 3: Emotional Investment

It was evident that participants had involved themselves emotionally in their CoSA circles, often not so much in what they said, but in how they said it, in their facial expressions, voice tones, and body language. A sense of it emerged primarily when they talked about the depth of caring that they feel for their core members. On the one hand, their caring was obvious simply in the practical level of commitment of which they spoke; there is a heavy time commitment, with weekly formal meetings as well as other times together, phone calls and community gatherings; there is also a financial commitment, in paying their own way in restaurants, and putting lots of miles on their cars. On the other hand, the emotional impact of the relationship came through in their sheer enthusiasm, as it was summed up quite movingly by one participant: "It's the caring

attitude, I think . . . you know, to be able to walk with these guys, and, uh, see them start to change, really and truly, and see that trust build up slowly, you know, to be able to trust you, and they're willing to call you, you know, and stuff like that."

Often, participants revealed positive emotional responses to circumstances. They expressed admiration for their core members' positive qualities ("He's got so much knowledge of so many different things. He never ceases to amaze me . . ."), and for their fellow volunteers ("I really admire the volunteers that have been here for years, because, I mean, it's difficult"); they spoke with pride in the opportunities they offer their core members ("So, here, we greet them at the door . . . They're not going to be in the street. And then we work with them . . . We encourage them . . . So we help them"); they exuded empathy for their core members' feelings ("They are so incredibly scared when they leave prison - you just want to try and make things a little bit easier for them"); and they felt pure pleasure when they observed their positive social development ("It was great to see the guys kind of come together, socializing a bit, and . . . the sharing and the talking").

Sometimes, particularly when things were not going well, the participants used specific words of emotion to describe their experience. They might feel sad, ("Eventually he couldn't handle [difficulty at work] and he disappeared. He wasn't in trouble. He didn't get in trouble with the law . . . I was really sad. I still am"); worried, ("I worry about him trundling along through life with some issues that may well be unresolved."); drained, ("There have been times when I've figured, this is draining me . . . However, I'm also resolute. I'm also adamant. I'm also pig-headed!"); or betrayed ("Initially I felt betrayed. But it was not a lapse, it was not recidivism, it was just bad judgment at that

point.") Ultimately, through thick and thin, through both good and bad, participants said they felt a strong sense of responsibility: "I still take the responsibility of his support . . . very, very seriously."

Theme 4: Volunteer Roles

In keeping with the common notion that the CoSA relationship is selective and intentional, there were four main ways in which participants envisioned the roles they play. The first had to do with the kind of presence they maintain, in the weekly meetings, telephone calls and emails, as well as out in the community. Participants are always aware both that they are not part of the 'system,' and also that they have no power of authority or supervision over their core members. Nevertheless, they are present to them throughout their challenging journey to reintegration. This means lots of supportive conversation around the various restrictions that are imposed on their activities, where they are not allowed to go, and with whom they are not allowed to be in touch. It also means helping them come to terms with the role the local police or parole office play in their lives, the authorities who enforce those restrictions. One participant spoke about the fine line they walk between advocacy and betrayal where the police are concerned: "You want to have good relations with them [police] because it's very important. At the same time, you don't want to get too cozy with them because then you're perceived as being part of that group and we are not part of that group." Another spoke of the benefit of keeping this balance, recalling a core member's acceptance of both support and accountability that became apparent when he called his volunteer at a time of arrest; from

the other side, the police were kind enough to wait until the volunteer arrived to speak with his core member before they took him away.

Along with the supportive presence a volunteer offers, a second role is exhibited in the many practical ways of helping. Participants talked about encouraging and assisting with budgets, mounds of paperwork, and finding employment. In some cases, participants had found themselves actually doing little things for their core members, in the hope of teaching them to do them for themselves, always keeping in mind that theirs is essentially a "helper" and "supporting" role. To these ends, they made themselves as available as possible; one participant told of a time when he was called in the middle of the night, and went out to assist with a pressing issue that was manageable with help.

Overall, the participants saw their task as generally helping their core members to develop "constructive and healthy ways of dealing with situations." Possibly the most important role in this third, more encompassing way is the role of listening; CoSA volunteers make very good listeners, and readily relate the core member's point of view in different situations. Along with listening, an important role is simply talking with the core member and sharing one's own thoughts. An example of this was evident in one participant's story of catching the core member in a lie, and sitting down with him to talk about the effects of lying as well as the advantages of truth-telling, an experience that remained a significant memory of deepening their relationship. Often, the volunteers begin to take part in the personal lives of their core members, such as in being invited to weddings, or attending family members' funerals. They may talk to them in ways that would encourage a person to come to peace with themselves, asking them to think about why they behave in certain way—for example, is it healthy or self-punishing?—or how

they "feel" about things. Usually, as one participant put it, "all you can do is make suggestions." Then, how a volunteer listens to and hears the core member's responses clearly affects their relationship deeply.

Finally, one of the most exacting roles a CoSA volunteer plays lies in challenging risky thoughts and behaviours. Some related the reality that core members often exhibit a "tendency to deny and minimize." As one experienced participant expressed it, "Our radar needs to be up to be able to say the hard things to them—and risk them leaving the circle over it. But, in reality, I find that they don't. They will hear the hard things." Some found this responsibility easier than others. Those who saw themselves as more vocal in issuing challenges sometimes felt rather alone in the circle and even experienced frustration with the difficulties of making their concerns heard. On the other hand, those who expressed their own struggle and inability to initiate challenges were appreciative of the challengers. One participant commented, "That's where I would probably come out with a fairly low rate. I'm not a great challenger. And that is one of the elements that is necessary. And yet perhaps within any one circle one needs the challenging element and ones that will agree with the challenge. I don't disagree with it but I won't personally initiate it." These experiences seemed to represent the most burdensome aspects of the CoSA relationship. Nevertheless, they were balanced with expressions, both of their belief that the volunteer role is a worthwhile effort ("Circles are messy. They don't work a text book . . . But generally speaking, I think, it's the only way we can help them"), and of their long term commitment (“I'd do it again . . . and again . . . and again”).

Theme 5: Describing the Relationship

Descriptive statements about the CoSA relationship revealed at least seven main characteristics:

a) Acceptance: "Yeah, they have so little . . . so little acceptance, and so on. Which is a shame." It was evident that the first step in beginning the relationship was acceptance of the core member "where they're at," which was a deliberate undoing of the widespread rejection so characteristic of the local community. Being accepting meant putting aside one's own reservations: "Actually I did [have reservations] because you don't, like, you know that it's these people that are coming out of jail and you don't know what kind of people you're going to meet and I wasn't sure what kind of reaction I'd have." One person suggested the importance of going into CoSA with an open mind, particularly noting that preconceived ideas usually turn out to be mistaken anyway. Generally, a sense of compassion emerged as the significant factor in overcoming early hesitations on the part of volunteers. In the end, acceptance was a mutual development that did not always come easy, and in some cases it proved difficult to build rapport with a core member for reasons not always obvious to a volunteer. Some attributed this struggle to the attempt to intermingle disparate backgrounds, the other's being so "very far removed" from one's own. Acceptance mainly entailed relating to each core member as a unique person with his own way of dealing with life, and "to just feel what they're doing and . . . being a part of what they're trying to do."

b) Accountability: A fundamental yet profoundly difficult component of a core member's reintegration process is the development of a new or renewed sense of

accountability. Encouraging accountability, though, is also a challenging prospect for a core member's volunteers who need to find supportive ways to bring it about, for, "It's the accountability factor which they don't like." One participant placed some of the problem in the way a core member interpreted the friendly environment of CoSA; the core member thought of "friendship as meaning, 'therefore not accountable to'." In some cases, participants found that age difference, particularly when the volunteer was much younger than the core member, imposed an awkwardness on the accountability factor that made it a learning process for the volunteer as much as the core member. Ultimately, an internalized sense of accountability within the core member marked one of the final, observable steps toward the achievement of full reintegration, for example, a self-regulated adherence to limitations in terms of one's presence in the community: "So, as soon as the kids came, he left and he's very, very conscious of that."

c) Depth: The CoSA relationship involves sharing life experiences that naturally bring depth to the emerging bond. Deeper feelings may arise in the weekly meetings, and even more so in other places and times; they may be better expressed in silence rather than in words. Such deepening may occur in group activities: "A few of us went fishing . . . we didn't talk, we just fished. And it was just relaxing, and just really meaningful to be there with this calm, running stream." It may also take shape in one-on-one conversations, where personal details are more likely to be shared: "[Core member] has remembered and asked about things in my life, which I appreciate." Any earlier hesitations notwithstanding, over time comfort, ease and satisfaction become part of the deepened relationship.

d) Trust: Several participants named the building of trust as the most significant experience of their relationships with their core members. The initial, intentional acceptance of core members "where they're at" would assume the core members' need to integrate trustworthiness into their being. Reversely, participants were uniformly gratified by the trust core members placed in them, as in this statement: "the most meaningful [experience] was when my core member told me that he trusts me . . . And that he would be lost without CoSA." As much as a core member must trust the process to a certain degree right from the beginning, the personal trust of true relationship was not instantaneous but nurtured over time.

e) Boundaries: Important boundaries that both core members and their volunteers maintain were mentioned frequently in the interviews. In the first order were the external boundaries placed on the core members by 'the system' in the form of restrictions that are supervised by the local police or parole office. These are intended to keep the core members, their circles, and the wider community, all safe. They may come in the form of curfews, prohibited geographical areas such as parks, disallowed behaviours, especially using drugs or alcohol, and/or being in the company of vulnerable people such as children or others. It was made clear by several participants that these boundaries were kept faithfully.

Secondarily, volunteers spoke of maintaining their own, self-imposed boundaries in terms of where, when, and in what company they meet with their core members. As one participant put it, "It's not a matter of trust so much as just safety. And it's just trying to be smart." Along with this, on a personal level, participants were careful about what topics they talk about with their core members. One person said, "I wouldn't burden him

with problems," while another felt free to share personal information as their relationship deepened: " . . . being able to share with him something of more substance that he could relate to . . . that he obviously found meaningful." While some of these boundaries are quite common, each circle represented by a participant was unique in terms of its combination of what was left open for discernment and what was restricted outright.

f) Growth: Personal growth proved to be a universal aspect of mutual development in the CoSA relationship. On one level, the participants expressed very positively their observations of growth in their core members, particularly in the matter of social skills. Often they come limited by chronic circumstances, as in one case: "His reading and writing skills aren't that great." Also core members can be ill equipped to deal with the wider community in sorting out such things as employment, housing, health care, especially if there is a lot of paperwork: in one particular case, "He gets frustrated, they don't understand him, he doesn't understand them, he doesn't know why they can't understand him." However, it was a frequent story told that growth was happening, for example, "The core member has come a long way since he was released in socializing, in doing things on his own and in becoming independent."

On another level, personal growth was evident to the participants in their core members' gradually finding the way to accept and truly own their past. These were significant moments, when a participant could see, " . . . he finally started to admit to himself that . . . he did something . . . he thought his intentions were good, but his actions were against the law." One person noted a sign of this kind of growth in the core member's new willingness to discuss more openly his current restrictions, and went on to

posit: "He, I believe, has also come to terms with the fact that there is that person inside of him that did those things."

On a third level, being a part of a CoSA circle was also an opportunity for volunteers to experience their own individual growth through self-reflection. Several cited a new understanding for the complexities of crime and its aftermath. One participant shared that deeper self-reflection emerged from observations of less positive qualities in their CoSA companions: "Seeing it in others, I can see it in myself sometimes." Another commented, "It's just made me realize how fortunate I am . . . to have the family situation that I have." Besides their own good fortune and shortcomings, participants generally acknowledged personal growth in coming to new self-understanding about their emotions, experiences of shame, gains in self-confidence, and the immensity of obstacles and challenges to anyone's efforts to make profound changes in one's life.

g) Celebration: Some of the participants' most memorable experiences in CoSA were the celebrations. From little milestones like learning basic manners to huge ones like completing a treatment program, every achievement is commemorated with joy. Birthdays and anniversaries may be celebrated in a restaurant, while holidays like Christmas might warrant a full house party. A particularly poignant memory of one participant was the burning of the core member's restriction papers: "It was an 810, and . . . we had a little ceremony where we went outside and we burnt the thing, and everybody was asked to say something." Another participant summed up quite eloquently the importance of celebration in CoSA circles: "Every little thing that seems to somebody else as insignificant, we celebrate. Because celebrating is a way of acknowledging

progress, acknowledging growth, and . . . it's a part of our everyday life that we sometimes forget . . . ah, come on, let's get on with the work. No, now we talk, we stop and celebrate. We've been at this place for one, two, three years, and we've had a lot of things happening, let's celebrate. So that is another whole element of the relationship that I think is extremely important and can't be forgotten."

Theme 6: Learnings

Participants talked about their new knowledge about crime and how the system that deals with it actually works. They gained a fresh understanding of how an offender is actually part of society; as one participant commented, "I used to think of offenders . . . which I'm sure most people do, like something so separate from the rest of society." Being part of a CoSA circle was a lesson for them not only about how helping one individual actually helps society but also about how supporting a former offender is a necessity in creating a safe society.

A principle learning of the CoSA experience concerned the stereotypes that surrounded the core members when they came to town, the common image that so frightens a community. Even though participants had revealed vague preconceived images, the notion of stereotype emerged explicitly only later, in retrospect. Several participants made notice of the discrepancy between the initial projected image and current reality: "He just does not look like he fits any stereotypes;" "Society's stereotype of what sex offenders are is out the window;" "It just really changed the stereotypes I used to have." Along with the shedding of stereotype came "more awareness of different

people and different problems" and a new perspective: "But I see the backgrounds the men have come from and what they've experienced and most of the time they've been victims as well, so it really made me see that there's a structural problem." One person offered advice that came from the CoSA experience, "There's no need to be, to have any personal apprehension . . . you really have to get to know . . ." Without the burden of stereotype, then, the relationship can be open to a level of mutuality that comes with common interests, and a conscious awareness of "give and take." Said one participant, "I've come away from it feeling that I have received as much as or more than I've given, and that's the other side of the coin."

CoSA volunteers learn that, no matter how much training one has, there is no "pattern" to CoSA, and that circles are "messy." But gradually they move from academic knowledge toward a practical education that enlightens: " . . . what it's really like to actually face them. I think that . . . instead of just reading about it, and knowing what the literature says, it's actually being able to hear it." I believe one participant spoke for many who joined CoSA because they already believed in what it represented: "It's no longer just an intellectual idea on my wish list . . . finally I'm engaged and doing it and helping one particular person who has obviously benefitted from our involvement with him over the last couple of years." In this process of practical experience and reflection, participants spoke about their individual advancement, from learning how to challenge someone constructively to solidifying future plans for their lives. Ultimately, they acquired a comprehensive education that afforded them the kind of reassurance that enhances self-esteem: "It's rewarding to know that not only am I doing a service for a sex offender, I'm doing a service for the community."

Theme 7: Naming the Relationship

Phenomenological research does not seek generalities but, rather, considers thoughtfully the unique nature of each participant's experience of the phenomenon, in this case the CoSA relationship between core member and volunteer. During the interviews, trying to describe the relationship succinctly usually led to some free conversation, resulting in a wide variety of descriptive comments. In order to gather the diverse concepts into a more intelligible mosaic, we can ponder them from three different angles.

The first window through which we can look at the phenomenon is in the colloquial language that surrounds the participants' use of the word *it*, when they are describing the CoSA relationship. *It* promises to give expression to the whole of the phenomenon in the speaker's own words outside of theoretical language. An examination of *it* statements reveals that there was no hint of consensus in giving the relationship its own name. The phrase cloud in Figure 5.1 demonstrates the high level of variation in the participants' ideas. Three individuals told of discussions within their circle programs around, "What is this that we do?" that failed to arrive at a single, agreed upon conclusion. One person suggested that trying to apply a name to it was like "trying to fit a square into a round, sort of."

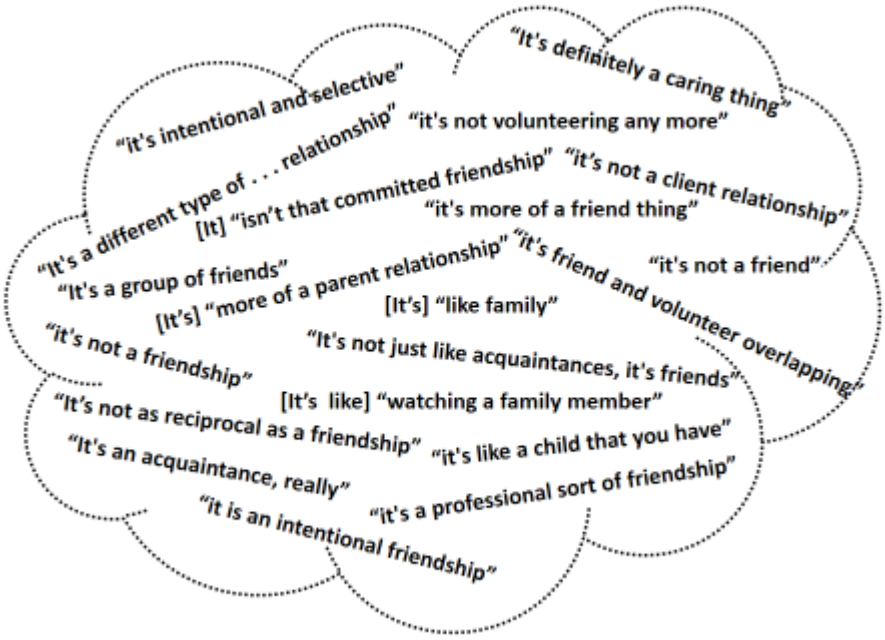
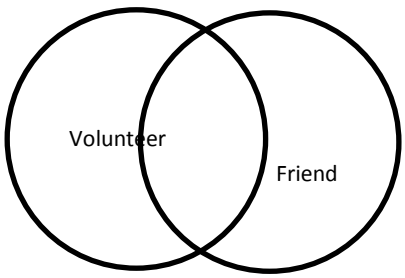


Figure 5.1 Naming the Relationship

A second window through which we can view the relationship is in the participants' responses to the interview question #4 (*How do the roles of volunteer and friend intersect within a Circle of Support and Accountability?*), which most found to be a relevant distinction. Several different depictions of the intersection of volunteer and friend in the roles they play in circles were shown to them in the form of diagrams.[193] The most popular, seen in Figure 5.2, saw the roles overlapped to a significant degree; one person commented that a circle member could never really be just one or the other.



[193] See Appendix B-2

Figure 5.2 Volunteer/Friend

In a slightly different but virtually similar manner, participants often spoke as though there were fluid movement back and forth on a continuum between the two relational elements. Table 5.3 shows spoken words and phrases organized to illustrate such movement.

Table 5.3 Moving Between Friend and Volunteer

Friendship ⇨	**⇦ Not Like ⇨ Traditional Friendships**	**⇦ Volunteer Role**
• One-on-ones • Caring • Just spending time together • A bond develops • Reciprocity • Lasting • Closeness • Trust • Commonality • Circle meeting like a group of friends • Visiting in homes • Sense of loss when relationship ends • Freedom to say "the hard things" • Mutual accountability	• Intended goal • Not as committed • Not as reciprocal • Boundaries around places and topics of discussion	• Limited to the time period of the formal circle • Challenging risky thoughts and behaviours • Don't share everything • Intentional and selective • Helper role • Accountability

Some of the phrases may appear to be somewhat contradictory, but should not be read that way; in reality, they merely reflect the point at which the speaker may have found him- or herself standing on the continuum on the actual day of the interview. At any rate,

each word or phrase was used to support a participant's experience either of friendship or of the volunteer role at the time.

The third window to the CoSA relationship emerged in a question embedded in the discussion about the friend/volunteer analysis. The effort to find a way to 'define' the CoSA relationship proved elusive. It seemed the one common descriptor at the centre of all characterizations, around which all other images took shape, was the impression of ‘friendliness,’ suggesting a conception depicted pictorially in Figure 5.3.

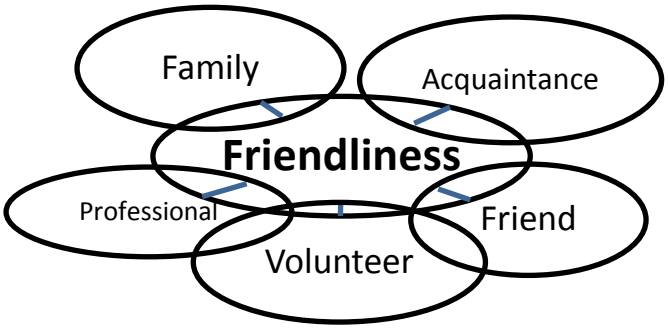


Figure 5.3 The CoSA Relationship

There came a time in each interview when I suggested that core members in the past had referred to their volunteers as friends, and I asked them directly if they had experienced friendship. Seven (47 percent) people responded 'yes'; five (33 percent) responded 'no', leaning more toward the volunteer role; three (20 percent) rejected a friendship label, and preferred to describe it as a 'family' relationship. Of the seven who responded 'yes', four were female and three were male; four had served on one circle and three on multiple circles; three were over sixty in age, two were between thirty and sixty,

and two were less than thirty. Of the five who responded 'no', three were female and two were male; three had served on one circle, and two on multiple circles; one was over sixty, one was between thirty and sixty, and three were under thirty. Of the three who talked about family relationships, two males saw their roles as more parental, and one female saw it as a sibling relationship; one had served on one circle, and two on multiple circles; one was over sixty, one was between thirty and sixty, and one was under thirty. For each participant, this question marked a point before which comments they made were pre-reflective *vis-à-vis* the notion of friendship, and after which their comments were consciously reflective. All participants consistently spoke fondly of their core members and their relationship before and after the question, but each group demonstrated different emphases on certain aspects of their experiences.

Pre-reflectively, participants who answered 'yes' to friendship were more likely to describe their relationships in terms that reflect the 'being' nature of friendships. One person even referred to his core member as "my friend" right from the start. Words and phrases used included: "common interest," "compassion," "rapport," "conversations," and "emotional knowledge." One person talked about a time when the core member was away, and they tried to let him know, "We think about him and we miss him." When talking about activities, there was a clear emphasis on the *togetherness* aspect: "fun activities," "organizing events together," and "taking pictures."

During the pre-reflective period of the interview, people who said "no" to the question about friendship, as well as those who preferred "family," also used 'being' words and phrases: "sense of community and fellowship," "felt really good," "quiet place of stillness," "looking very thoughtful," "we just kind of talked," "presence," and "good

rapport." Also, they used 'togetherness' phrases such as, "working shoulder to shoulder." Conspicuously, however, they used far more action verbs, consistent with the 'doing' nature of volunteering, which connoted a more one-sided perspective: "walk alongside," "working," "trying to help them," and "doing something worthwhile." They also introduced two new notions absent in the pre-reflective 'yes' group; these were notions that suggested a different shape to their experiences. The first notion stepped back from friendship just a bit: "not too personal," and "accountability" [on the part of the core member]. The second notion indicated the prominence they placed on the purpose, or outcome, of the relationship: an emphasis on preventing re-offence, on trying to instill understanding, on the core member's employment situation, on the volunteer's contribution to society, and on victories accomplished by the core member.

Once the direct question about friendship was asked, responses became more reflective. The 'yes' group continued to use words and phrases that fit easily with the 'being' concept of friendship: "we're all one," "hanging out," "talking casually," "being a part of what they're trying to do," "caring," and "intimate." They also began to add more descriptive, circumscribing phrases such as "conscious friendship" and "mutual co-mentoring." In addition, they spoke of the limitations imposed on their activities by their core members' official conditions as well as their own boundaries. One person talked about how the core member's past fluctuated in conscious importance, depending on the activity and place at the time. Another spoke of inviting the core member home, but "Not when our grandchildren are there, though." Some spoke simply about it not being the same as with their other friends. Participants in this group who had served on multiple circles indicated that they had formed friendships with some but not all core members.

Reflectively, the 'no' group also expanded on their perceptions of the relationship. They agreed that it could rightly be described as 'friendly,' although the notion of friendship assumed a closeness that had not developed for them. They spoke of the strong commitment and conscientiousness on the part of the volunteers, the sense of reciprocity they had experienced, and the positive relationships they had developed. Two indicated that their experiences were essentially limited to their specific circle meetings. Two suggested that it would take more time to forge a friendship: "I've just been in my circle for a year, so I don't know him quite that well yet;" the other imagined that perhaps after the formal circle was completed a friendship could ensue. They re-emphasized boundaries that made their relationship different from what they shared with their regular friends, and outcomes, such as the expectation that the core member would go on eventually to form his own new community. One person suggested that their vastly different backgrounds made friendship a difficult thing to achieve.

The 'family' group had their own way of responding to the 'friendship' question. One person suggested, "We wouldn't do stuff with them that we do with friends." Another felt there was a veil of professionalism, albeit a sheer one, that continued to colour the relationship. Yet another felt that the idea of friendship could colour a person's interpretation, for instance, weaken a core member's commitment to the serious boundaries set out in the circle's covenant. Together, they emphasized the strong sense of responsibility involved, on the part of the volunteers, in modeling safe and responsible living. One participant commented, "I'm called to a high spiritual standard and I try to live up to that standard . . . I almost see it as more of a parent relationship than as a friend . . . I think that's probably a better analogy." This group used words and phrases such as,

“friend is there," "not a pal," "healthy authority," "loving consequences," "frustration," and "joy."

In general, all interview participants exhibited deep caring, enthusiasm and joy when describing their CoSA relationships. The viewpoints of each of the three groups characterized above are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but delineated as they were, the groups did provide unique impressions of their experiences, summarized in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Impressions of Participants' Experiences

	'Yes' Group	**'No' Group**	**'Family' Group**
Interaction	Mutuality	Reciprocity	Healthy Authority
Emphasis	Togetherness	Outcome Orientation	Volunteer Responsibility
Boundaries	Boundaries modify friendship	Boundaries inhibit friendship	Boundaries lend structure to the relationship

Discussion: The CoSA Relationship as Experienced by the Volunteers

According to van Manen, the task of qualitative, phenomenological research is two-fold: to discover elements of the phenomenon, here the CoSA relationship, that are both uniquely different from other relationships and essential to the CoSA relationship itself.[194] One way to reflect on the essential aspect is to ask the question, what elements are necessary so that without them it wouldn't be the CoSA relationship? In the interviews, participants compared their experiences as CoSA volunteers to other experiences of volunteering, as well as friendship, family, acquaintance, and professional relationships; all of the themes presented in the previous section have relevance in CoSA as well as the other relationships, but some are unique in CoSA's particular circumstances. All contribute to the CoSA experience, but only some are essential to it.

Much of what the participants talked about reflects ideas found in the literature reviews in Chapter 3. For example, as people who volunteer on a Circle of Support and Accountability do so with conscious attention, they transcend any social notion of the "repressive law and punishment" approach to crime,[195] taking it one step further, accepting what they see as society's responsibility to restore social cohesion ("As a community—it's something that should be done"). They do this by responding 'yes' to an offender's request for help in returning to the community upon release from incarceration. It also appears that their sense of individuality and personal conscience influences their

[194] van Manen, 106-107.

[195] See page 57.

ability to offer the 'yes' response ("You gotta believe in it to do it").[196] Their attitude recalls Rebecca Adams' concept of "loving mimesis"[197] that dispenses with the common, rivalrous pattern that characterizes a society in its attempts to expel whoever is perceived as unacceptable and disposable; rather, their intended object of desire, expressed directly in support of the other, is the successful reintegration of their core member in the community.

What is it like to volunteer on a CoSA circle? Interview participants spoke of several aspects of their relationships with core members that distinguish them from other common associations such as families, friendships, and acquaintances. First of all, the introduction to CoSA, whether through invitations by friends, speeches at church or school, or through one's own initiative, brings a prospective volunteer to a brink that is otherwise easily and usually avoided in a community's general population. Like Jonah, who was called to feel compassion for the penitent people of Nineveh, or like the brother, who was called to welcome home the returning prodigal son,[198] a prospective CoSA volunteer is called to greet an otherwise dislikeable character—a returning prisoner, who once committed sexual offence(s). Unlike the stories of Jonah and the brother that end before their choices are revealed, however, the CoSA story only begins when a volunteer makes and acts on a decision to step right over the brink into relationship.

Fully aware of the other's troubled and criminal past, a volunteer chooses to focus on and join in with his hopes for a safe, responsible future, making his desired goal the volunteer's also. This decision is remarkable because of the commonly forceful impact of

[196] See page 9.

[197] See pages 67-68.

[198] See pages 35-36.

social resistance to any reception of such people into a community's 'back yard.' Equally remarkable, as it came up early in the interviews, is the virtual silence surrounding the initial decision, especially regarding any hesitance other than vague references to "these people that are coming out of jail" and an "open mind."

This silence suggests some form of resistance or rejection of the 'master status' of *sex offender* and the stereotypes that go along with it.[199] None of the interview participants spoke of such stereotypes at first but acknowledged them more easily later, allowing that some common images of the person returning from prison were merely stereotypes that did not fit. As van Manen has noted, the initial silences speak more loudly than words[200] about something very important to the relationship. I am suggesting here that the refusal at first to give voice to stereotypes about prospective core members, hence the suspension of stereotype, is not only a unique stance to take, but a crucial prerequisite to the establishment of the CoSA relationship. The suspension of stereotype interrupts the dehumanizing accusations[201] of a mimetically charged public and does away with notions of expulsion. It affords the Circle an opportunity to form an identity group around the core member and so model the community to which he can eventually feel he belongs.

A second essential aspect of the CoSA relationship worth noting is the intentional approach that permeates its development in seemingly every area. Early conscious attention among volunteers to time commitment (weekly involvement, usually for one or two years), boundaries (spaciality, topics of discussion, exchange of information), and

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[199] See page 6, and notes 5, 6, and 7.

[200] van Manen, 113.

[201] See page 5.

roles (presence, listening, helping, challenging) carry a hint of professionalism that is mitigated by their deliberate attention to mutual acceptance and accountability, which would not arise naturally without intent. The often challenging practice of accountability is further balanced by the intentional celebration of even the smallest achievements in the path to reintegration.

The pattern of intention in a CoSA circle inverts what might be anticipated in a traditional path of friendship. For example, friendship usually gets started in the form of an attraction, a draw perhaps like a common interest. As Bauman argues,[202] common interest is a primary, stimulating factor in the bringing together of people, but not necessarily a reliable or long-lasting influence. In contrast, the intentional forming of relationship in CoSA precedes the discovery of common interests, which then in turn serve to deepen an affinity that has already begun to emerge. Similarly, whereas friendship may begin with a natural trust based on common interest, the CoSA relationship begins with a basic trust based on intentional acceptance that deepens later when an atmosphere of mutuality takes root. The benefit of CoSA's unique order of things is that it leads to a sound and potentially long-lasting relationship of mutual satisfaction between parties who, left to their natural inclinations, most probably would not have chosen to spend time together.

Thirdly, the CoSA relationship involves emotional investment. Participants did not speak about it explicitly, but, rather, exhibited it naturally in the ways that they spoke in a combination of both words and body language. It was obvious in the enthusiasm with which they spoke about gaining new understandings and perspectives. This may be an expected component of a friendship, but in CoSA it appears to be essential. However,

[202] See page 66, notes 140, 141, and 142.

it is not just a matter of joy sparked by victories and accomplishments. The deep caring of the volunteers helps them to feel empathy rather than discouragement, to maintain confidence in the face of disappointment, and to not require quick results. Their emotional investment differentiates the CoSA phenomenon from other more professional helping programs that focus more exclusively on cognitive issues. It clearly demonstrates the true depth of the CoSA relationship.

Finally, it was related as significant to several of the participants that activities away from the formal structure of their CoSA programs led to a considerable deepening of their relationship. Whether they were going for a walk, camping, attending a party, a bar-be-cue or a funeral, these were the occasions that encouraged quiet conversations and communal reflection. This suggests a fourth, two-sided, essential feature of the CoSA relationship.

On the one hand, there is a formal structure to CoSA circles. Core members are supervised in the community by parole officers or police through court-ordered conditions; all circle members are bound together by a mutually agreed-upon covenant; regular meetings form the main activity. The core member proves he is trustworthy to the authorities, his circle members, and the community through his commitment to this structure. On the other hand, there is a good-sized component of CoSA that lies outside the formal structure in the social gatherings away from the meetings. Participants placed great, meaningful significance on these activities. This may be the factor that makes friendship possible, that kind of friendship spoken about that has lasted over time for some participants. It is reasonable to make the connection that the experience of the CoSA relationship outside of its formal structure is also highly important to the core

member, for this is likely what enables him to *experience himself* as both a trusting and a trustworthy member of his community. Further, it can serve to explain two already noted observations: that the experience of CoSA is remarkably different from the other relationships that are in place to support his process of reintegration; that the circle, the local authorities and CSC all acknowledge CoSA as one of the most, if not *the* most, successful programs for reintegration.

These four unique and essential facets of the CoSA relationship, suspension of stereotype, pattern of intention, emotional investment, and interaction outside the formal circle structure, all combine, under seemingly formidable circumstances, to make possible the experiences of volunteer, friend, and family member that were so eloquently described by the interview participants of this study. Apparently factors such as age, gender, and amount of experience on circles did not have an appreciable influence on how volunteers perceive their relationship. Alternatively, their choice was most probably based on their own nature or personal judgment.[203]

Ultimately, interview participants presented an image of the CoSA relationship as a relationship of belonging, chronologically progressive from an unlikely pairing to an enduring fellowship, fuelled from the beginning by an intentional atmosphere of friendliness. In the beginning, the community imposes the stigma of stereotype on the core member but then, conversely, members of the public themselves are also influenced by the stereotype and driven to fear and rage. It is possible, too, that the core member not only suffers the stereotype imposed on him, but also carries with him a stereotype about the volunteers that he is about to meet. The first step toward relationship, then, is the suspension of stereotype, followed by acceptance of the other simply as the other is.

[203] See page 9, notes 10 and 11.

With a relatively heavy time commitment, the setting of practical boundaries, and a clear adoption of roles, the initial posture of acceptance grows into a mutually trusting, accountable relationship, where common interests and achievements, great and small, can be celebrated with joy. From different perspectives, both the core member and the volunteer escape from the 'prison' of stereotype to enter a new experience of freedom in relationship together. For volunteers, the relationship is a learning experience that deepens their understanding of the criminal justice system, the challenging process of making profound personal changes, and, perhaps most memorably, the complexity of their own life journeys.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A qualitative, hermeneutical-phenomenological study of the lived experience of volunteers in Circles of Support and Accountability was undertaken in the in-depth interviews of fifteen CoSA volunteers and one prospective volunteer in four Canadian cities. The research found that the relationship between CoSA volunteers and their core members is a relationship of belonging that develops over time, beginning with a suspension on both sides of the stereotypes that act in one direction, to not only threaten the wellbeing of former offenders but also preclude their membership in the community to which they return. The relationship depends on an intentioned commitment to well defined boundaries and roles, acceptance, accountability and celebration of every successful milestone. It unfolds over time differently from other, more common relationships. For example, potential advantages such as common interests, which often play a role in starting other relationships, are not obvious at first, but emerge later to deepen the already growing relationship. Eventually, a sense of mutuality emerges that makes depth, trust, and emotional investment possible.

The CoSA relationship comprises an unconventional approach that apparently fills gaps left by other more professional relationships in the core member's life. These gaps are filled primarily by the four features found in the study to be essential in CoSA: the suspension of stereotype, the solidly intentional approach to establishing the nature of the relationship, emotional investment, and ample opportunity for social interaction outside the formal structure of the circle. This enterprising way of forming relationship

effectively introduces the core member to his own potential for long-lasting friendship, helps to prepare him for safe and responsible living in the wider community, and contributes to lower recidivism rates.

The findings suggest that the CoSA relationship, through its unique character, exerts a significantly positive influence on the reintegration process of people released from prison who have committed sexual offences. These results find corroboration in the literature of Scheff and Retzinger[204] that call for a focus on relationship and emotion. They also reflect much of Linda Rathjen's plenary address,[205] in which she related the same themes reported by the participants of this study: acceptance and trust, challenge and celebration, conscious attention and deep learning.

The study affirms the value of qualitative research in matters of comprehensive personal change. Quantitative research can supply statistical information about topics like recidivism rates, resources accessed, and demographic information. It may also suggest impersonal predictions as to what percentage of offenders will or will not reoffend. In contrast, a qualitative study can offer a closer perspective on what practices encourage positive changes in a person's life. It can shift from a generalized, impersonal environment toward a deeply personal setting. It can open a revealing window on the reintegration process itself, thus giving us an enhanced understanding of the why's and how's of individuals' experiences. This study, in particular, has been able to present encouraging evidence that what might have seemed impossible becomes both imaginable and achievable.

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[204] See page 72.

[205] See page 80, note 176.

Existing studies of the CoSA phenomenon have focused relatively little on the lived experience of its volunteers, settling mostly for their generalized comments. In the regular details of a Circle at work, there is little time or opportunity to check on 'how it's going' except as the stories that come to light pertain primarily to the progress and well-being of the core member. Accordingly, the data gleaned from this study will be of particular interest to CoSA's coordinators and funders who seek to gain a more balanced insight into both what is happening and how they can support the process.

Local groups such as correctional personnel and police units are charged with ensuring public safety through the supervision of returning former offenders. Likewise, psychological services and community organizations offer specific supports to an individual in the process. These resources are usually bound to very specific policies and practices that render impossible the gaining of firsthand experience of the all-important, day-to-day social life of a CoSA core member. The results of this study will benefit these service providers by offering a meaningful glimpse into the particular contribution that CoSA makes, and possibly encourage them to welcome, uphold and benefit from the program as it works in concert with their own efforts.

There are many people in our society who suffer from such ills as non-belonging and outright ostracization for a variety of reasons, for whom CoSA will embody a non-violent, life-giving model for living positively in community. For that reason, an enhanced understanding of the CoSA relationship as it is presented in this study can also benefit people who seek to help those who struggle to find a sense of enduring community in what may seem to be an erratic environment of isolation and estrangement.

In short, through the voices of the interview participants, the study carries the embedded message that CoSA is a program worth sustaining, expanding and following.

Although the relational and emotional aspects of the reintegration process that have been historically under-studied are dealt with prominently here, the relatively narrow scope of the study suggests a need for further qualitative research into the CoSA phenomenon; specifically, it cries out for additional attention, along with that paid to the volunteers, to the personal experiences of the core members themselves who have not been represented here, and even more explicitly, the possible inclusion of female core members. Future research, then, could be in the form of: a narrative study of two participants, a core member and a volunteer on the same circle; an ethnographical study of two or more full circles; either of these that includes a female core member. A benefit of these more inclusive approaches would be the possibility of gathering personal, anecdotal data that did not appear here, but can add significantly to the desired understanding. They could also provide an opportunity to explore the diverse aspects of personal faith that may influence the experiences of participants. The more we know about how CoSA works, the more equipped we are to contribute to public safety for all community members.

The story of CoSA begins with the utter despair suffered by people who have committed sexual offences and are now facing their formidable day of release from prison. From there it moves into the restorative relationship forged between an offender (all of whom related to this investigation were male) and the CoSA volunteers living in the community to which he returns. This study has explored the CoSA relationship from the point of view of the volunteers, and ultimately revealed why and how they have

contributed to the success of the CoSA program as a recognized asset to the process of community reintegration. It has contributed profoundly to the understanding of the nature of the CoSA journey, and affirmed both the responsibility and the positive role allocated to local community members in concert with the work of the criminal justice system. Incomplete in itself, the research invites further qualitative study of the CoSA phenomenon as it contributes to the advancement of public safety through the fostering of healthy and life-giving relationships in Canada and elsewhere.

APPENDICES

Appendix A-1

Letter to Coordinators

Name, Position Date
Address

Dear ___ ,

I am a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry degree at St. Stephen's College (University of Alberta) in Edmonton, Alberta, conducting a study of the lived experience of volunteers in Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). The purpose of my research is to contribute to the understanding of volunteers' experience of their relationships with core members. For this purpose, I am seeking your help in accessing adult CoSA volunteers who are currently active in a circle that has been meeting for at least one year and who will voluntarily agree to be interviewed by me.

It is important to the ethical integrity of the study that participation is voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. With this letter I am also sending details of the interview process and the informed consent form I will be asking participants to sign at the time of the personal interview.

I will be interviewing about ten participants, and would appreciate interviewing three volunteers from your CoSA project. Primarily I am flexible in finding participants, but would also be happy to be able to balance them in terms of:
at least one male, at least one female
at least one over 45 years of age, at least on under 45
at least one on their first circle, at least one who has experienced more than one circle

Could you please help me find three volunteers, provide them with a copy of the attached consent form, and request that they contact me by email at ___ to arrange the preliminary phone call by [date to be determined]?

I have scheduled my research such that interviews will be completed by March 31, 2012. I appreciate very much your help in this regard. I look forward to hearing back from your volunteers in the near future.

Sincerely,

Melanie Weaver

Appendix A-2

Informed Consent Form

I am a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry degree at St. Stephen's College (University of Alberta) in Edmonton, Alberta, conducting a study of the lived experience of volunteers in Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). The purpose of my research is to contribute to the understanding of volunteers' experience of their relationships with core members. For this purpose, I am seeking CoSA volunteers who are currently active in a circle that has been meeting for at least one year and who voluntarily agree to be interviewed by me.

The interview process will include an initial telephone conversation for introductions, at which time the participant can ask any questions he or she has, a personal interview that will last no more than two hours, and possibly a follow-up telephone conversation for clarification of information.

The personal interviews will be recorded and transcripts made in order to achieve the highest degree of accuracy. These recordings and transcripts will be available to myself alone and destroyed at the end of the project. Data collected will be used for research purposes and publications may also result from this research. No comments or responses from individual participants will be attributed to any specific individual. No real names will be used at any time in any publication. I will take every possible step to ensure the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of all information. Participants will not be asked to provide information beyond their personal comfort level, and may withdraw their participation at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact myself,
Melanie Weaver, ___
or my supervisor,
___

I thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Expected benefits include a meaningful contribution to the advance of knowledge regarding the successful reintegration of former offenders, and particularly the important role that CoSA volunteers play in this process.

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ , understand that as a participant in the study described above, to be conducted by Melanie Weaver, my participation is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. I acknowledge that the research procedures have been adequately described, that strict confidentiality will be maintained, and that any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

. . .
.
Signature of Participant Date

Appendix B-1

From the Prison of Stereotype to the Freedom of Relationship:
Welcoming the Otherwise Despised in a Circle of Support and Accountability

Interview Questions:

1. Please describe the circumstances that led you to become involved in CoSA.

2. Please talk about one of your most memorable experiences in CoSA; what happened, and how did you experience it?

3. Would you say that, since your relationship with your core member began, you yourself have changed? If so, how?

4. How would you say Friendship and Volunteering Intersect in a CoSA Circle?
(to be accompanied by the pictorially rendered choices; see Appendix B-2)

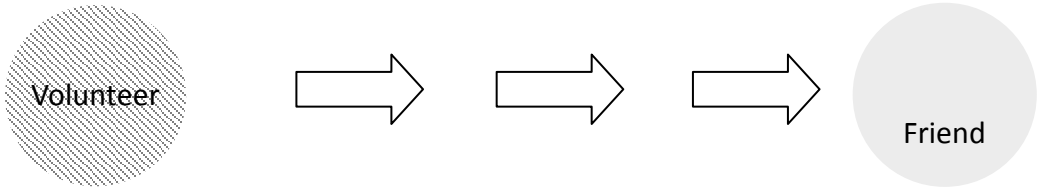
Appendix B-2

How Do Friendship and Volunteering Intersect in a CoSA Circle?

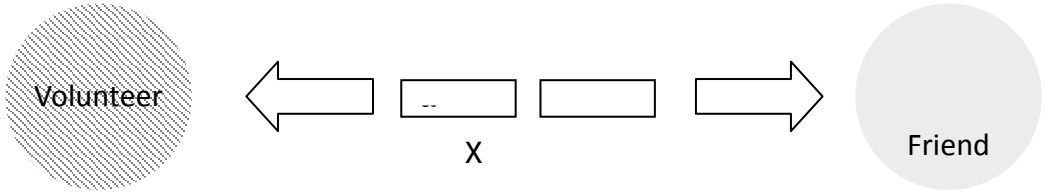
1: Not at all

2: Do they overlap?

3: Does one replace the other over time?



4: Do they lie on a continuum?



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